



Designer's Preview: D.A.K.

by Dean Essig

DAK is the largest project and greatest effort I've ever undertaken. The design and testing of this game spanned numerous years, four continents, five languages, and seven countries. The Research Group (linked by e-mail) was able to dive into original records to find minute details in five countries with amazing speed using native speakers in four of the five languages (the French research done by Joseph Vanden Borre in Belgium was unable to be supplemented in the following e-mail work—fortunately, Joseph's work was excellent and French was not one of the primary languages in which records of this campaign were kept).

It was a joy to work with such a team.

The result is a game loaded with information, so much so that the game specific rulebook was found, at the last minute, to require not one, but three booklets! Our first cost overrun. Of that vast number of pages of text, only about the first 15 are actual rules, the next 15 are various options and the rest is scenarios, historical and designer's notes, Orders of Arrival, other tables, and the various items one expects in the finished game (lists of abbreviations, counter manifests, and so on). The "Arabic for Desert Foxes" section will bring some of the place names on the map to life. The Historical notes are a potpourri of information which came to light in the research for the game, rather than a summary of the campaign. Here you find such things as the proposed plan for the Malta invasion, the organization of various units, list of dummy tank formations, and so on. Included is an excellent article by Steve Rothwell on the development of British Armored Doctrine showing the long journey the British army had to take to develop a good combined arms doctrine. Lastly, a relatively extensive annotated bibliography is included to direct players to some of the best books on the subject (the more bizarre and rare sources used are not listed for obvious reasons).

The package contains 20 scenarios. All the major battles are done in scenarios which cover only their action as well as in ones allowing the different major events in the campaign to be used as start points for campaign games. Two very small scenarios covering part of Operation Compass are provided as training aides (since they do not make for good competitive struggles). The Brevity Scenario (being just that, brief!) can also be used for training purposes. Of the large battles, both Crusader and Gazala can be played as stand-alone two-map games that are interesting for both sides. The various Alamein battles can be played, but of them I think only the 1st Alamein one is of much interest to both players. 2nd Alamein is only marginally interesting to the Axis player, and that interest will be the result of a few lucky breaks at the beginning of the battle. 3rd Alamein is best done solitaire and then only to see how fast the Commonwealth can destroy the Axis.

I enjoy the Italian invasion scenarios. They play fast and the difficulties facing the Italians makes an interesting challenge. One day, I'll figure out how to take Mersa Matruh with them.

Between the Random Events tables, Variable Allied Withdrawals and Variable Allied Returns, no two campaigns of DAK will be the same. Also, the Axis player can change the dynamics of the game by drawing air units away from Malta suppression and sending them into direct play. This will affect his cross-Med shipping some, but will have to be a risk he wants to take. Of course, the Ultra Rare Random Event of Malta being invaded may change things quite a bit...but don't count on it happening!

DAK introduces to the OCS leaders and Kampfgruppen. Leaders are added here as they had a much more direct role to play and more noticeable effect here than in the denser fronts of the war. Besides, you can't have a game this detailed about North Africa without a Rommel counter, now can you? Kampfgruppen add more flexibility and free up units to be more dispersed (from centralized supply) than before.

While I was hesitant at first, I eventually designed in a system of trace supply for most units at most times (as in the other OCS games, but without the required Railroad network). I did this by allowing units to trace on the 'better' roads. While I approached this solution with some trepidation, play showed it to be too smooth to worry about and free of the anomalies (and the work!) the earlier 'pay for everyone' system exhibited. At the time it wasn't my solution of choice, but the results proved me wrong and I'm glad they did.

I am very happy with the way the artwork turned out. Our resident color-challenged playtester gave a thumbs up to the color schemes chosen (he could perceive the differences) and I aimed at a more subtle scheme than used in the past. The result is the most pleasing product I've ever done. The large box is graced with an excellent piece of work commissioned by us from David Pentland in Ireland. It is well worth consideration as a print purchase.

I am very pleased with the way DAK turned out, and from the volume of sales we have, apparently you are looking forward to this one as much as I was. You won't be disappointed, I assure you!