

## **STRATEGIC ALTERNATIVES: THE RISE AND (SOMETIMES!) DECLINE OF THE THIRD REICH**

by Mark Saha

Look for Mark's suggested **THIRD REICH** playing aids on the Readers Response Page of this issue.

The first thing to be said about *THIRD REICH* is that everyone should get hold of a copy, or at least get hold of a friend who has a copy -and get in on all the excitement at game tables these days as soon as possible. Gentlemen, make no mistake about it - the Third Reich is on the move again! That paranoid madman Hitler, once a harmless obscure Austrian artist (notice we didn't say he was a good artist!) has come to power once more and is changing the face of Europe as he swings wildly at enemies both real and imaginary; while the jackal Mussolini sits cackling on the sidelines waiting to pick at the spoils; and Winston Churchill desperately seeks Roosevelt's aid in restoring sanity and order to the continent; and Stalin spends sleepless nights tossing in bed in a cold sweat, worried sick about the survival possibilities of Number One!

Strange, isn't it - how very few people actually want to *fight* a way, but almost anybody would give his eye teeth for a chance to *run* one! Well, Avalon Hill - those wonderful folks who have made so many other amazing things possible - now give you the opportunity to do just that. And not just any little old war. No pikers, they; what they have selected is no less than the Second World War. At last, here's your chance to indulge in all those secret fantasies: Be a madman! Be a jackal! Be a Bolshevik! Be Winston Churchill! Be ... well, you get the idea.

### **Getting Started**

The main thing is to get into the game, into actual play at the game table, as soon as possible. That's what this twofold article is about; first some practical hints on how to get a smooth and fast paced game into motion pronto, and then some hard tactical/strategic advice on how to stay in the game as long as possible after that ' (Nothing is more pathetic than a *3R* addict who has driven over a hundred miles for a session -only to bungle or bust himself out of the conflict in the opening moves - and spend the rest of the day cooling his heels in the library, perhaps checking movie ads in the local paper, while the war rages on in the next room with his services and advice most decidedly no longer in demand.)

The first thing you should do upon pure use of a copy of *THIRD REICH* is stop by your local Xerox operator and

have three copies made of the charts on the gameboard; since there are two groupings of charts, this will require six Xerox shots. Next, cut out the charts and mount a complete set on each of three 11" x 17" poster board cards. This way, players sitting at all sides of the table have a complete set of charts before them - the player at the south edge using the actual gameboard charts.

Next, the game rules; these have been criticized for a number of reasons, but in fact they are quite good. Actually, far above average. What bogs down most *3R* games that I have seen or participated in is not the rules but the fact that All made a very poor selection of rules modules summarized on the back cover of the rules book. Consequently, "first time" players find themselves scrambling through the booklet for clarification of every trivial rule or sequence of practically every phase of their turn ("Anybody know how you make an air attack on a naval base?" etc.) I've urged AH to remedy this by running an intelligent selection of rules modules on pages 16/17 of *THE GENERAL*, so this entire page could be removed from the magazine and used as a much needed play aid (*not* a rules substitute!).

It goes without saying that all participants of a *THIRD REICH* session should have read the rules at least once before showing up for the game. This is a courtesy you owe to the other players. But in addition to this, until/unless AH runs the rules module suggested above, the owner of the game should buy a deck of oversized 5" x 8" index cards and type out some of the more frequently used rules for handy reference. For example, a separate card for air attacks on enemy air bases, on enemy naval bases, air interception of enemy aircraft and enemy fleets; naval interceptions; amphibious assaults; the Malta/Gibraltar/Axis Forces in Africa rules; Supply; partisans. Rules for movement and combat are probably not necessary as they become second nature very quickly. So will most of the above rules; you'll find yourself chucking these cards away fairly quickly after a couple of games, but for getting started and helping new players they can definitely make the difference between a fast and exciting game, and a bull session. Finally, most important, one card should be a carefully typed out Turn Sequence Card. This avoids many problems and speeds up your game more than anything else, simply by reminding a player of all the options available to him during a turn, and the exact sequence in which they must be carried out (See Turn Sequence Module). Notice that there are sequences even within a phase; for example, that air attacks on naval bases may be made only after all other combat. Also, notice that the German must commit his Murmansk convoy

interception force during his Movement Phase; the Allied player assembles any such convoy during the Allied Build Phase; and the convoy actually sets sail and its fate is decided during Strategic Redeployment. Also included are items many people forget; such as that Declarations of War must be made during Declaration of Strategic Options; air units may stage during Movement Phase and fly during Combat Phase (!); and that any loans of BRPs to allies are made during Strategic Redeployment.

So you can see that a good tight Turn Sequence Card is a very handy thing to have. Finally, while typing up these cards, it's a good idea to include the Rules Booklet number of each rule on the card, so you can quickly consult the booklet if further clarification is necessary. But is all this work REALLY worthwhile?

That's a good question. And I have a good answer, yes! It would be worthwhile even if you end to play *THIRD REICH* only once. If you are not going to play the game only on the first session you'll be hooked, and it's assembling these play aids that you need do only once, and you'll be glad you did for years afterwards!

Because, gentle friend, as you are about to discover, *THIRD REICH* is a game so deep and rich with strategic possibilities as to become a virtual bottomless pit of twists and counter twists. What works in one game can burn you in the next. There are no "perfect" strategies to my knowledge, although there are certainly some good ones. We can't discuss them all here but enough can be said to allow you to survive your first games long enough to learn something. After that, you'll start licking your chops as increasingly subtle wrinkles suggest themselves - and you're on your way!

### The Strategy of Europe

A major war in Europe is always a highly complex and confusing political and military event. First time *THIRD REICH* players usually have the same impression when they sit down at the gameboard. Indeed, they often feel that if only they didn't have so many options available - so many different courses of action - they might have a better idea of what to do! Fortunately, certain fundamentals of geography and politics that dominated the actual war are also built into the game; and, while players need not deal with these realities in the same way as their historical counterparts, a knowledge of what is going on is essential to your making intelligent decisions.

The first thing to remember about *THIRD REICH* is that the key to victory or defeat for either side is Russia. If Germany can conquer Russia fairly early in the game, the Axis will almost certainly win a decisive victory. If

Germany can be enticed into enough sideshow "adventures" so that the invasion is postponed until Russia is too strong (and you can't do this to a good German player unless he's got something else up his sleeve), or if the invasion fails to topple Russia, or even fails to force Russia to sue for peace, the Axis is probably going to lose. The Italian player also realizes this, so he usually avoids excessive demands on German resources and causes the British as much trouble as possible in the Mediterranean while this "main event" is in progress in Russia.

The second thing to remember about Russia is that she is very weak and easily defeated early in the game. But she grows in strength very quickly, and sometime around 1942 has become so powerful that a German invasion is no longer pleasant to contemplate. Which means the German usually wants to invade Russia as soon as possible (again, unless he's got something up his sleeve). The very first game turn would be ideal, except that it leaves a hostile French and British army on the continent in his rear - and uncontested Murmansk convoys of aid to Russia! So the usual German scenario is the historical blitz: smash France, seize Norway - and hit Russia with everything but the kitchen sink! This is not the only German strategy, nor necessarily the best; but it is very common and quite playable, and understanding the fundamental logic behind it can guide other players in making decisions.

### England

Let's start with England. Surprisingly, I find this one of the most challenging and difficult positions to play in the entire game. England probably has more different options, alternate courses of action, open to her than any other country. She can: (1) Delay the fall of France, (2) Discourage the Germans from attempting to invade England, (3) Invade Norway, (4) Seize the Mediterranean, (5) Send Murmansk convoys, (6) open a Lend Lease route in Persia; and ... some very bizarre things we'll discuss later.

The point is that England can do almost ANYTHING she wants, but she cannot do EVERYTHING! And this is what proves the undoing of most English players; they grab wildly at the plethora of options and opportunities, and in trying to do everything accomplish nothing.

Actually, what England should do - indeed, must do! - is very simple. England must try to prevent the Germans from accomplishing what they must do - namely, conquering Russia! Understand this, and as England it becomes much easier to order your priorities. First, you should definitely throw in enough force to delay the fall of France as long as possible. Why bother, if the country is

going to fall anyway? Because every single turn you delay the fall of France you also postpone the German invasion of Russia. And since Russia is growing stronger all the time, that one extra turn delay could be the one to decide the issue in Russia, and hence the war.

This same reasoning dictates a swift and hard British invasion of, and struggle for, Norway. Even if you fail to take it, the German struggle for control there will again delay or weaken an invasion of Russia. And finally, when Russia is invaded, England must send maximum BRP 4id possible to the Soviets every single turn! The first year of invasion is the most crucial; if Russia survives that, she has a good chance of surviving the second; and if she survives that, she's in the game to stay!

It goes without saying that England must keep her own home guard in order during the above, to avoid being invaded herself! But there is something else she must also do that is a little more subtle. Namely, she must deploy very carefully in the Mediterranean. Why? Because the above operations are going to make very heavy demands upon her fleet. Therefore, after the first two game turns, all BEF forces in North Africa should be as self supporting as possible, and prepared to "go it alone" on defense for at least a year. Because, should the Italians cause a crisis here, England could not put the situation right without pulling fleets from the priority Norway/ Murmansk operations. And if England did not "put the situation right," and the Mediterranean collapsed, the catastrophic blow to British Resources would bring an even more drastic curtailment of aid to Russia. So the best way to avoid this double bind is for the British to dig in and hold at Gibraltar and Suez, and not go adventuring. America enters the war in 1942, and this massive reinforcement of fleets and resources will allow a "heating up" of the Mediterranean at that time - while still supporting Russia.

All this may seem like rather obvious advice, but you would be surprised at how many British players I've seen open the game with an aggressive North African campaign - while Russia collapsed!

### Other Sleeves

Hopefully, the above example of a German strategy and British counterstrategy illustrates how players may use a fundamental understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and needs of other countries in formulating an intelligent policy and course of action for their own. Especially, it should be born in mind at all times that Russia is the key. Never forget this.

However, you will notice I've qualified almost everything I've said with the remark "unless the player has something else up his sleeve". This is what makes THIRD REICH so truly remarkable as a game. The variations are endless. You can try pretty much anything you want, providing you are willing to take the consequences. Here are a few examples NOT recommended until you've experienced a few sessions; but should give you an idea of the possibilities.

(1) Britain, France, and Russia ALL declare war on Turkey on the first turn of the game! Note: this would not constitute a state of war between Germany and Russia. These allied units cannot attack together according to the rules (no units may stack with Russians), but they can factor together in assaulting the same targets. Russia may use amphibious invasion without fear of interception as Turkey's fleet is based in the Mediterranean. Obviously, France would fall very quickly - and all French units in Turkey would return to France for either Vichy or deactivation. The Germans would also get Norway. But the 30 BRPs for Turkey should probably go to Russia, and England could open a Persian Lend Lease route. The Suez would be strongly defended, and Britain need only garrison Gibraltar and protect against a homeland invasion. This would be an interesting situation.

(2) Germany could deliberately delay an invasion of Russia. Instead, she attempts to overrun all of Europe. Absolutely essential to this plan would be the conquest of England - make that British player cool his heels in Canada for the rest of the game! The vast resources of Spain, the Mediterranean, and East Europe would all fall to the Axis. Russia would probably think twice about declaring war if England fell quickly; but surely the Russkies would seize Persia to guarantee Lend Lease from the United States. Thus, this game would be decided with a massive RussoGerman war; a battle of superpowers, and since the Russian front is the most incredibly tactical of the entire game, the better tactician would probably win. But Russia would have to be very aggressive; with all those Axis objective points, Russia would have to take Berlin to win. However, if she could seize a non-Russian port in the Baltic, the Yanks could bring their fleet in and start landing troops too!

(3) The best story I've heard so far - and this is authentic - is a September 1939 first turn British decisive victory. This was accomplished by Roy Easton at UCLA's Galaxy gaming club. The Italian, it seems, was greedily deploying

for some exciting adventures in Greece, Yugoslavia, and North Africa. The Italian peninsula was conspicuously weak in defense. So, first turn, Britain declared war on Italy, made an amphibious invasion with armored exploitation - and took Rome! The Italian counterattack, or what little there was of it, failed; and all Italian force5 disappeared from the map. The German, shaken to a point beyond description by this instantaneous collapse of the Mediterranean, Italian peninsula, and his own southern flank, resigned. I understand he was not very happy with his jackal partner!

### What's Best?

Which brings us full circle; because "what's best" in this game means what's best for you; in this specific game session, against these particular opponents, in this unique situation. That's the real challenge of five-man *THIRD REICH* (which I regard as the best version), recognizing that you are dealing with four other individuals of differing personalities, experience, and gameboard capabilities. Sometimes, you find, you can attempt the most absurd things - and get away with them! Other times, a sound tactic or strategy simply falls apart for no reason. Especially when other people do not react, as you would expect, in their own best interests! So you have to learn to be flexibility.

For example, Germany cannot simply decide that she is going to overrun all of Europe before attacking Russia. England will usually be too strong to invade. But if the British player gets careless, and the opportunity presents itself, the Germans can now consider the possibility. Indeed, the British player often leaves his island with less optimum defense (but still defended, mind you!) on the assumption, "Germany can't afford to gamble on a Sealion invasion, he's got to get into Russia!" So that works both ways.

Another example is French/British/Russian first turn declaration of war against Turkey. We tried it, Germany intervened! We didn't expect this, and it meant Germany had to declare war against Russia in winter 1939! (Italy, intimidated by a strong British fleet, remained neutral!) We were eventually driven out of Turkey and Germany managed to push into the Caucasus, an alarming event. However, Germany found herself in a three front war in 1939; France did not fall, although Paris changed hands a couple of times (it was a near thing!); and the Persian Lend-Lease route was obviously lost, but Germany simply had no forces to spare to take Norway! Murmansk convoys were uncontested. Eventually, the game worked out to the Allied strategic advantage after all; but for a

while everything was in mid-air (nobody knew what was going on or who was winning!) as the fall of Paris would have sent the Allied dominoes tumbling. It certainly wasn't the scenario we expected for planned. Incidentally, it was a good thing we Xeroxed the United States BRP card, since France never fell.

Thus, in conclusion I can only advise new players that they should open a *THIRD REICH* game with a definite policy of for their nation (such as British support for Russia) and a tentative plan for carrying that policy out under normal circumstances. Beyond that, remain flexible. Keep a hawk eye out for opportunities for mistakes by other players (and they will arise!); then, decide whether you wish to exploit that opportunity. If yes, then bring your full tactical and strategic wargaming skills to bear, and exploit it to the hilt! Whatever happens, however it works out, I can only say that it will rarely be quite what you expected!

### Tactical Hints and Dirty Tricks

- (1) Only a 9-factor fleet can Sea Escort a land unit during Strategic Redeployment. Therefore, always take every opportunity, especially by air power, to chip and enemy fleet down to 8.
- (2) Deployment of that one French armored unit in 1939 is especially crucial, since it is the only unit with a Zone of Control. Do NOT put it behind the Maginot Line; best is along the Belgian frontier, but in any case in front of Paris. The German can, with luck, take France on the first turn of the game if you misplace this unit.
- (3) *Always keep close tabs* on your opponents' BRP levels. If they have moved first this turn, and their BRP level is now below yours, explore the possibility of judicious expenditure of your own BAPs this turn to preserve your higher level. This would allow you to go first next turn; i.e., in affect to move twice in a row!
- (4) Remember, a good opportunistic way to eliminate land units land units is to intercept a fleet in transport and chip it down below its present cargo capacity, which eliminates the passenger! Fleet/air exchanges hyou might otherwise be unwilling to make are often worth it when you count the land units!
- (5) The Russian should learn to take full advantage of the fact that the German, cannot call an Offensive Option on the Eastern Front in winter. This means that even during the first year invasion of Russia,

when Russia is presumably weakest and probably moving second, she can safely counterattack in fall without fear of pulling herself out of position for a massive German winter riposte. It is also tempting to attack in winter when the German is not doubled on defense, but remember the German *can* counterattack since his next turn is Spring. This does not mean the Russian shouldn't do it, but only that due caution should be observed.

The Russian can best exploit his Winter advantage when he moves first (which can happen at any time in the game according to BRP levels); because then he is attacking an undoubled German, and the German cannot counterattack!

- (6) An attack at 1 to 1 is not always such a bad thing. Study the CRT carefully. You only lose with a "6". And a CA result isoftentoyour advantage; since the defender must counterattack at basic odds, this often works out to 1 to 2 against him!
- (7) When you are winding down after a game of *THIRD REICH*, especially say on the morning after, sit down and read the rules over again. Not only will you find them fascinating reading in light of what transpired before, but many new wrinkles, by-passed opportunities, and illegal moves will be discovered!

Make note of these on your own personal index cards and as game sessions continue, play will increase in speed, accuracy, and fun!

- (8) The Variant Situation Option (9.8) is fun to play and worthwhile because, at least we find, it adds an element being decisive (but it can be!) HINT: Sometimes you draw a chit not really beneficial in the present game situation. Thus, it may sometimes be to your advantage NOT to play the chit so as to keep your opponent in doubt and force upon him a caution based uipon a chit he THINKS you have!
- (9) Allied players should note at the start of Campaign Game, Italy and Germany combined outnumber Allied BRPs by only 5 points. Therefore, Britain/France should always consider carefully the possibility of getting two moves in a row on the very first game turns (Fall/Winter 1939)! They can do this by buying nothing at all if the German spends 6 points; and, if he spends more, by simply limiting British/French purchases below such levels.

However, it should be pointed out that (a) this will not always be possible because of German gains and (b) even when possible is an extremely dangerous tactic. Dangerous because the Allies

cannot possibly hotdontothis BRP lead so early in the war; and, when they lose it, Germany then gets two moves in a row! And since Germany has the initiative, he can probably put it to better use.

But the point to remember is that the opportunity is there! If, for example, you can see an opportunity to take Berlin with a double move, or seize Rome and garrison it, this may be well worth the hazards of an Axis double move when the BRP lead is lost.

- (10) Basic Game rules give each country a standard 1 SR value for simplicity. But variable SR is both more realistic and interesting tactically. Advanced Auto 9.2 (page 25) gives the more accurate capacities. Why not simply write these on the BRP cards? for example, "SR 6" at the top of the British card?
- (11) Moving first in a complete turn has both advantages and disadvantages. If your opponent moves first, watch carefully and take note of what fleets and planes have performed operations. These cannot now be used during your move. Often, amphibious assaults, etc., that you would otherwise not dare attempt become impossible to intercept because your opponent has nothing available.

By the same token, when you move first, be: sure to leave enough naval force especially to counter any threat. Late in one 3R game, I was invading France as British/American player; I had the initiative at that time, but also had fleets in the Mediterranean. Every fleet irt the English Channel area performed some mission or other. The German, in his turn, made a sacrifice amphibious invasion on French beaches in my rear. He landed only a 3-3 unit, but it was on a BH marker, and removing the threat it represented was time consuming and annoying. Simple precautions would have precluded this. It was excellent German play, because at that stage of the war he was playing. for time anyway. And succeeded.