

THIRD REICH: THE EARLY YEARS

by David Bottger

Introduction

In its three years, *THIRD REICH* has attracted relatively few articles on tactics and strategy. Aside from a Series Replay in Vol. 11, No. 6 of the *GENERAL*, the article on Russian play and a few pathetic (to be frank) efforts in other magazines, writers have shied away from in-depth analysis of play, while lesser simulations have spawned pages of print.

Strange, yet understandable, that a game of *THIRD REICH*'s rich tactical and strategic variety would receive such treatment. Strange, because *THIRD REICH* strikes a fine balance between the usual wargame, which deposits players in a situation not of their own making with victory conditions not of their own choosing, and the current flood of "monster" games, most notably GDW's *Drang Nach Osten/ Unentschieden* and SPI's *War in the East, West and Pacific*, where broad strategy lies buried under the avalanche of counters and mapsheets. *THIRD REICH* stands out as a true strategic-level wargame, allowing its players to conduct the war as they choose, working only under the broad limitation of their nations' economic abilities. So it is strange that so few would explore the myriad options of the game.

But understandable, too, that players would be hesitant to advise on a game where all plans are good and bad, depending on how the rest of the "World" responds. *THIRD REICH* defies the perfect plan. Perhaps for that reason, it discourages articles from players who only write when they have "cracked" a game-system,

This article is written, then, not to exhaust discussion but to stimulate it. I trust many will disagree with my opinions and advice. I hope that some of them will be sufficiently outraged to reply in these pages.

The scope of the game and the limits of my experience require that this article cover only the early years of the campaign game, from Fall 1939 to Winter 1940. Among poor players, the game can end by then. Among better players, these early turns can put one side at a disadvantage it may never overcome. The early campaigns, from blitzkrieg in Poland to preparation for Barbarossa, illustrate many of the tactics which will help determine the outcome in Russia, North Africa and on the drive to Rome and Berlin.

1939

The Conquest of Poland

In *THIRD REICH* (hereafter *3R*), as historically, the German player must conquer Poland quickly. Failure to occupy Warsaw in Fall 1939 will not only cost 15 BRP's for an offensive option next turn, it will delay the Axis timetable for the conquest

of the Low Countries and France. Not surprisingly, then, the Allied goal is to delay the fall of Poland as long as possible.

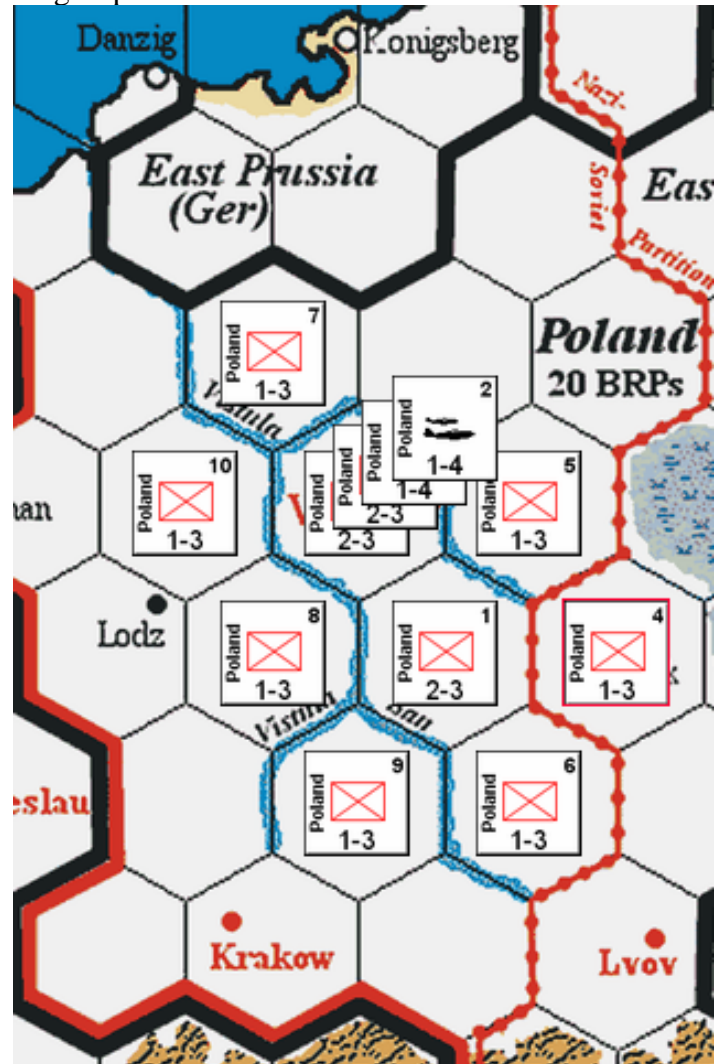


Figure 1: TAHGC Defense

Allied strategy in Poland essentially consists of the deployment of Polish units. This problem has already been the subject of some discussion, notably the contest solution appearing in Vol. 12, No. 5 of the *GENERAL* and the more sophisticated analysis by Robert Beyma in Vol. 13, No. 4. As Beyma demonstrated, the set-up suggested as best by AH will inflict, on the average, 7.59 BRP casualties on Germany (figure 1).

However, Beyma's article is subject to criticism in two respects. First, I believe he errs in directing his attacks against the alternative Polish defense he analyzes. In this defense (figure 2), he moves the 1-3 from Brest-Litovsk to the hex northeast of Warsaw, preventing a direct attack on the city. He then correctly notes that the best German assault on this set-up is to attack the 2-3 southeast of Warsaw at 2: 1, followed by a 3:1 exploitation against Warsaw itself. But I do not agree that the 2:1 should be performed by a 4-6 armor and 4 air factors, as he suggests. In the event of any kind of exchange, this attack forces the German to lose expensive air factors so that the armor can occupy the breakthrough hex.

I prefer to make this 2:1 attack with a 3-3 infantry, a 4-6 armor and 1 air factor. With these units, a full exchange will cost only 6 BRP's (infantry



Figure 2: Alternate Defense

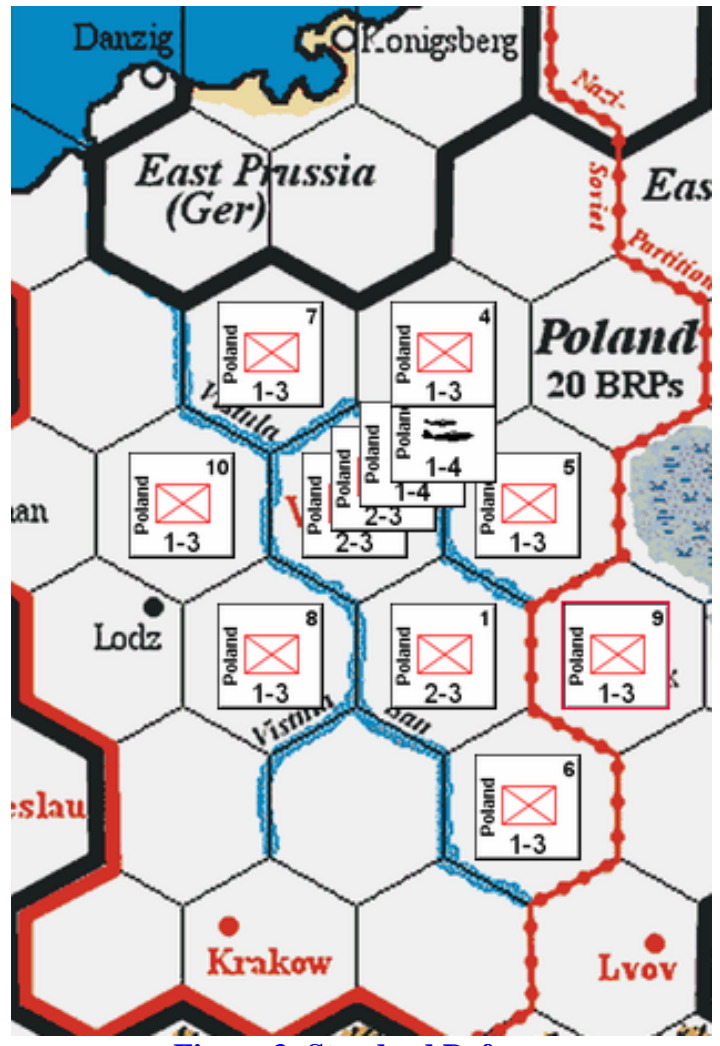


Figure 3: Standard Defense

eliminate only the infantry. Using Beyma's equation, my 2:1 followed by the same 3:1 attack will cost:

$$\text{Expected losses} = 0.1875 (6+3) + 0.03125 (14) + 0.96875 [0.1714 (16) + 0.1143 (8)] = 6.67 \text{ BRP's}$$

The second criticism of Beyma's analysis is that he uses an obviously inferior Polish defense (figure 2) for comparison to AH's defense. What I call the standard defense (figure 3) provides a much better comparison. The proper attack on this defense is a 2:1 across the river on the 2-3 southeast of Warsaw, then a 3:1 on the capital. These attacks require, respectively, a 3-3 infantry, 4-6 armor and 5 air factors, plus 3 armor units and 12 air factors. Average losses here are:

$$\text{Expected losses} = 0.1875 (12,3) + 0.03125 (26) + 0.96875 [0.1714 (16) + 0.1143 (8)] = 7.17 \text{ BRP's}$$

As Beyma notes in closing, BRP losses are not the only consideration in picking a Polish defense. After all, the difference between 7.59 and 6.67 BRP's is not likely to decide the game. The defense which requires the greatest commitment of German units, particularly air and armor, to Poland provides the best insurance against a first-turn attack elsewhere. The following table shows this comparison.

Combat Factors

	Inf.	Armor	Air*	Total
AH defense	6	0	20	26
Beyma's comparison	3	16	15	34
Standard defense	3	16	19	38

*Includes 2 factors to counterair Polish air.

As this table shows, AH's defense finishes dead last in diverting forces from other areas. Note especially that it requires no armor, while the other defenses demand all 4 armored units. And the standard defense uses only 1 air factor fewer. The AH defense thus exacts a high price from the Allied player in return for an average gain of 0.42 BRP's.

German Options

Even without all of that armor freed by the AH defense, Germany in Fall 1939 has enough units to go looking elsewhere for combat. Basically, the German player has four options.

- 1) Do nothing. Not very appealing to an aggressive (or wise) German.
- 2) Attack Russia. I do not advise it. Russia starts with 68 combat factors and 90 BRP's, for a total strength of 158 combat factors (assuming the BRP's are used exclusively to build infantry). Given a sloppy Russian deployment, Germany may be able to take Leningrad in Fall 1939, costing Russia 15 BRP's and her fleet, if docked there, because it will have no other port as a refuge. This leaves the equivalent of 116 combat factors for Russia. Another

42 must be destroyed before Spring 1940 to bring Russia below 75 and force surrender. Given Germany's weak initial forces, most of which will be attacking Poland on the first turn, and France and Britain pounding on the western border, destruction of 42 factors in two turns is most unlikely. Once 1940 begins, Russia gets 75 more BRP's (60 if Moscow has fallen), and German success becomes even more remote.

3) Invade the Low Countries and/or Denmark, This is the course I suppose many players adopt. It has the advantage of posing an early threat to France. It also has its disadvantages.

Against almost any Polish defense, the uncommitted German forces may be able to conquer Luxembourg and Belgium, Netherlands or Denmark, but no more. Thus for the price of an offensive option and two declarations of war, Germany gains up to 20 BRP's and threatens France from 3 more hexes. Worth it? Hardly.

To digress a bit, the importance of the yearly cycle in 3R can scarcely be overstated. The fate of nations, especially France and Russia, often hinges on surviving until the year-start sequence and receiving a fresh BRP allotment. For this reason, Germany benefits little from attacking France in 1939. Absent idiotic play, France cannot be felled in two turns. And knowing that 85 BRP's are due in the spring, the French player can counterattack with abandon. So Germany should attack in Spring 1940, forcing France to stretch her BRP's over 4 turns instead of 2.

Since the French campaign will not begin until 1940, those 3 Belgian hexes provide little advantage in Fall 1939. Incidentally, if Germany moves into unoccupied Luxembourg in Fall 1939, units there could be attritioned out immediately, since Luxembourg has no capital. But if Germany waits until France occupies Luxembourg, units there can be attacked across the river, thus allowing Germany to place a bridgehead marker in Luxembourg. The bridgehead prevents the Allies from taking Luxembourg by attrition and permits German units to overstack in preparation for the drive on Paris.

The better course, therefore, is to wait until Winter 1939, then take Belgium, Netherlands, Luxembourg and, if desired, Denmark, in one offensive option. The 15 BRP's saved can buy 5 air factors, a sizeable dividend. And by 1940, Germany will be in position to invade France.

4) Declare war on Yugoslavia. I favor this course.

Most German players will prefer to get Italy into the war as soon as possible, particularly now that the rules prohibit German units in neutral Italy. But if Italy declares war in Fall 1939 for 35 BRP's, she can spend only 2 more that turn, not enough for an offensive option against France or British troops in North Africa.

A German declaration of war on Yugoslavia permits Italian units to take an attrition option there as

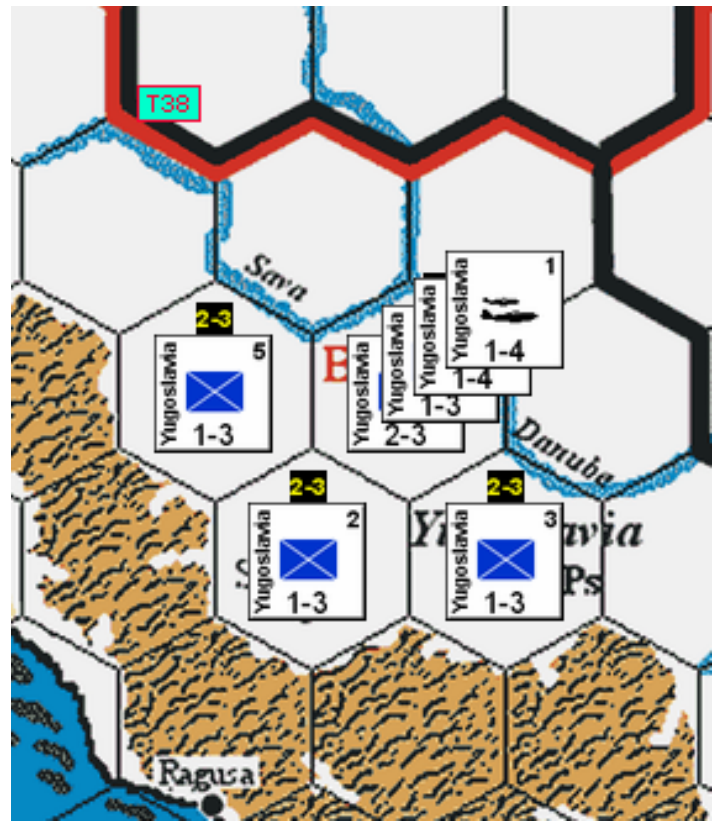


Figure 4: Yugoslavian Defense

(Note: I can only assume the Yugoslavian Force Pool differs between 1st edition and 4th edition; I all 1-3s here are 2-3s in the original article – WGA)

well as in North Africa. Unfortunately for the Axis, Italian initial ground strength totals only 14 factors. Even if all 14 participated in the attrition option against Yugoslavia, a 1/6 chance that no Yugoslavs would be eliminated remains. And a fullstrength Yugoslav army can prevent a 2:1 attack on Belgrade by the deployment shown in figure 4. Because of stacking limits, Italy can cram only 14 ground factors into the hexes across the river from Belgrade. Counterair of Yugoslavia's 2 air factors leaves 8 Italian air factors as ground support, for an optimum attack of 22:12 or 1: 1. Roll a 5 and Italy is in trouble.

Remove any one Yugoslavian unit in Fall 1939, though, and the defense breaks down, allowing a 2:1 against Belgrade in Winter 1939. To guarantee that the attrition option in Fall 1939 bags at least 1 unit, the German player should send enough units there, probably excess infantry, to reach the 21-30 column on the attrition resolution table. This move virtually assures the fall of Yugoslavia in Winter 1939, makes for a happy Italian ally and gives Germany 10 BRP's for a cooperative conquest. Not bad for an investment of 10 BRP's and a few infantry units.

Incidentally, since Italy has only 2 BRP's to spend on unit construction in Fall 1939, Germany is well advised to build a few replacement units for strategic redeployment to Italy. An Allied amphibious assault or attack across the Alps and exploitation to Rome in Fall 1939 bodes ill for the Axis.

The rest of the German builds should emphasize the weapons of offense; air, armor and airborne. As the German player, I always build the

airborne unit in Fall 1939 and base it at Bremen, where it can reach London and Paris. This forces both the British and French to garrison their capitals. From here the para unit can also be dropped on Copenhagen to aid infantry attacking across the crossing arrow. From Copenhagen, the para unit can either be strategically redeployed back to Bremen or, in conjunction with an air unit, assault Oslo. More on Norway later.

A Two-Front War

For the real craps shooter, or simply to liven up the game, the German player may consider a simultaneous attack on Poland and France in Fall 1939. This option promises either a stunning Axis success or an early end to the war. Most of all, it requires good to excellent German die rolls. To illustrate this strategy, I will use the standard Polish defense (figure 3) and the French set-up suggested by A H in its contest solution in Vol. 12, No. 1 of the GENERAL (figure 5).



Figure 5 French Defense

Germany begins the war with 9 infantry units, 4 armored units, 20 air points and 2 fleets. One infantry unit must be placed in Finland to prevent a Russian attack. The other 7 start in East Prussia or

eastern Germany, poised to attack Poland. Deploy the 4 armored units in western Germany in position to attack through Luxembourg. As for the air force, one unit must start in the east to counterair the Polish air force and provide ground support for one infantry attack. Place an airbase counter on the hex east of Strassbourg with an air unit there to counterair the French air unit at Lyons. The other 2 air units base in western Germany, in range of the hex east of Paris. Dock the fleet in Kiev or further west to threaten interception of British transport missions to France.

Italy deploys strongly in North Africa in an attempt to divert British reinforcements from France. Place two 1-3's on the French border, two 1-3's on Rome and one in Albania. One air unit should be based where it can reach the units guarding the French border, Rome and both northern beach hexes. The fleet starts at Taranto, and everything else goes to North Africa.

At the start of Fall 1939, Germany declares war on Luxembourg and takes offensive options in the east (free) and west, at a total cost of 25 BRP's. Italy declares war on the Allies for 35 BRP's.

In Poland, the infantry and 3 air factors make 3:1 attacks on the four 1-3's north and west of Warsaw, while the other two air factors counterair the Polish air force, neither side taking losses. At least 1 infantry unit must advance into the hex vacated by each eliminated Polish unit. All 4 hexes will be needed next turn for a 2:1 on Warsaw.

In the west, the air unit on Lyons is counteraired (no losses), while another German air unit stands ready to intercept the other French air unit. Two armored units move into Luxembourg and, with 4 factors of ground support, attack the French infantry unit on Sedan at 3:1. Exchange losses must, unfortunately, be taken from the air factors. One armored unit advances into Sedan. The remaining 2 armor units exploit to Sedan and attack the infantry unit east of Paris at 2:1 (figure 6). Meanwhile, the Italians take an attrition option in the Mediterranean and make threatening gestures toward Suez.

Germany uses the 50 BRP's left for builds as follows: in the east, up to 3 infantry units, making total forces there 8 infantry; in the west, 1 air unit, the airborne unit, 2 armored units and whatever infantry is left over from the east; 1 replacement unit must also be built and SR'd to Rumania.

Italy's builds are limited to two BRP's. Use them to build replacement units on the unguarded beach hexes.

If Axis luck has been good, France will be in difficult straits. Because of the German armor adjacent to Paris, no French units may be built on or SR'd to Paris. The only unit which can reach Paris will be the French armor. Note that the infantry northwest of Sedan is out of supply and cannot move. As a result, the hex northeast of Paris will remain vacant.

In general, French units will move north, toward Paris. Replacement units can be built on the

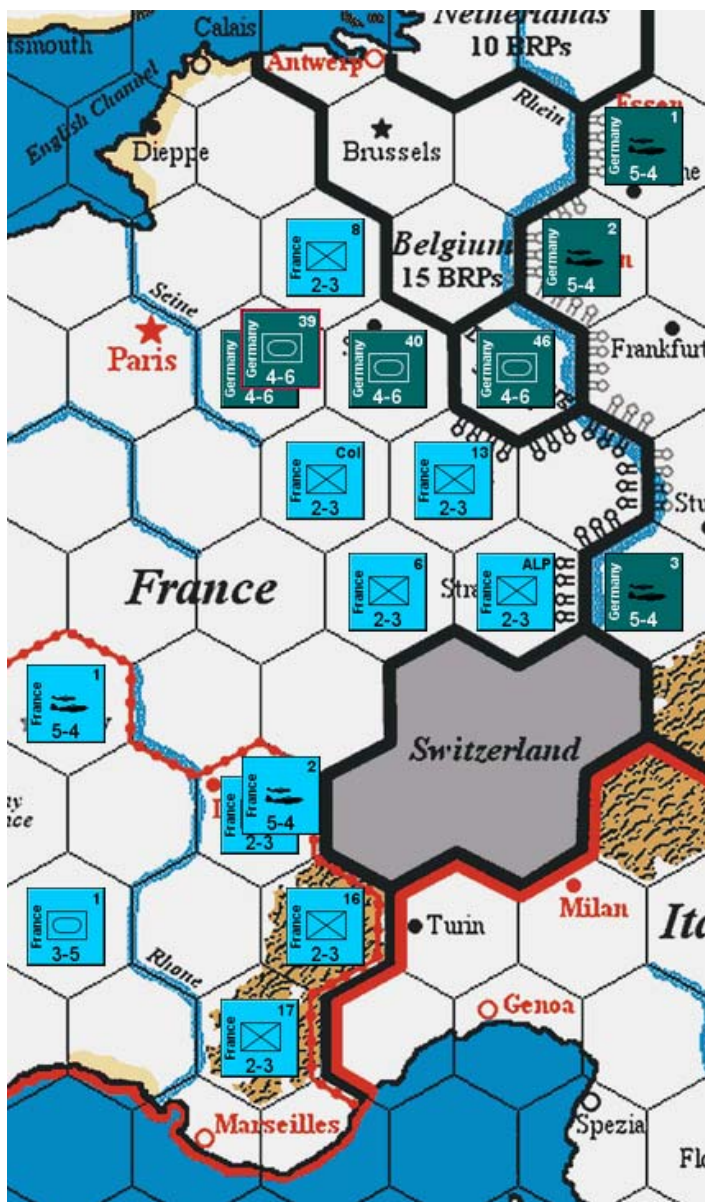


Figure 6: Note that infantry northwest of Sedan may not trace supply from Dieppe to hex southwest of Dieppe, and so cannot move.

Italian border, freeing the infantry there. Any surviving air factors stage to bases out of range of German counterair, such as Lorient and La Rochelle.

Rather than waste BRP's on a low-odds, risky counterattack, France should take an attrition option, hoping to regain the hex next to Paris. Germany, on the other hand, must keep that hex free of French units. If necessary, the German armor there should be removed as attrition losses to prevent a French advance. This will, however, permit SR to and builds on Paris and the hex northeast of Paris.

With a full 42 BRP's to spend, France can build its entire force pool. As mentioned above, 3 replacement units should be placed on the Italian border. The fourth appears in the vacant Maginot Line hex. One armored unit probably should backstop the Italian front defense to prevent breakthrough there. The other armor and all infantry appear around Paris, in anticipation of the coming attacks.

Germany again takes offensive options in the east and west in Winter 1939. In Poland, the 8 infantry units attack Warsaw across the river at 2:1 (Polish air force counteraired again). In France, two armored units occupy each of the following hexes: hex east of Paris, Sedan and Luxembourg. With 10

air factors ready to intercept the French air force, the armor on Sedan and 4 ground support factors attack the adjacent infantry at 3:1. The other 4 armored units exploit, two reoccupying the hex east of Paris and 2 taking the hex northeast of Paris. With the para unit, they attack Paris at 3:1, two victorious armored units advancing. (figure 7).

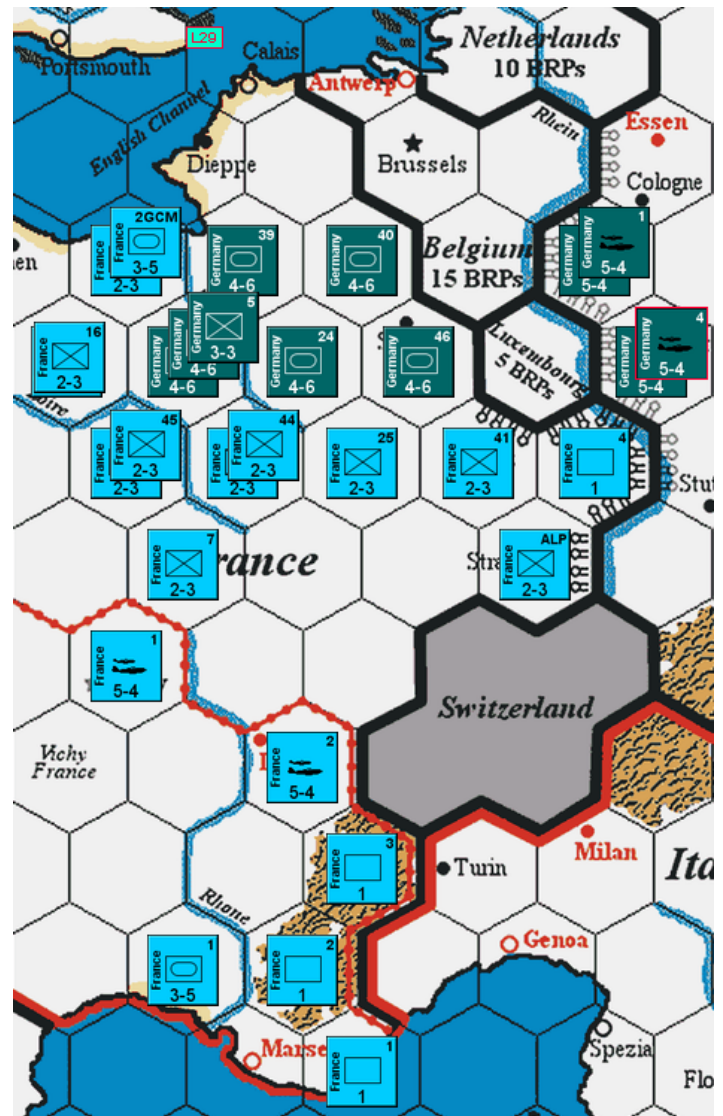


Figure 7: Position after German Winter 1939 combat phase. France can get only 17 ground factors adjacent to Paris for counterattack.

After combat, Germany builds her air force to full strength and spends the rest of her BRP's on a few armored units, more infantry and/or replacement units to help defend Italy. The fleet is SR'd east while the victorious infantry in Poland is SR'd west.

If all has gone well for Germany, France can attack Paris from only 4 hexes at 18:22 = 1:2, with little chance of success. Before trying this strategy, remember that I have assumed near-perfect die rolls for Germany and no British forces in France. The two German fleets cannot stop all transport of British units to France and cannot prevent SR of British units at all. In addition, the British air units do not need naval help to intervene in France. The Italian deployment in North Africa should divert some British units but perhaps not enough to guarantee success in France.

If you, as the German player, want a quick game of 3R or if you see a faulty French deployment,

consider this strategy. But be prepared to take your lumps.

The Allies in 1939

As the foregoing suggests, Allied strategy in 1939 and for as long as the Axis stays on the offensive depends on Axis strategy. This is especially true of France, whose goal is nothing more than survival. France must deploy carefully, build her entire force pool in Fall 1939, and wait for the inevitable. Unless Italy deploys miserably on the border, France should be content to stay on the defensive. The AH French set-up (Figure 5) seems best, although I would like a unit on Marseilles. That port provides the only link between France and her colonies.

Britain, however, is another matter. The British need have little fear of a "Sealion" in 3R. Germany starts the war with only 2 fleets and will usually build air and ground units rather than expensive fleets. The main threat to British survival is an air assault on London, but this threat may be defused by keeping 7 ground factors on London. Given the restrictions on ground support imposed by 3R's second edition rules, Germany can muster only 12 factors against the British capital (para plus 9 air factors). Seven factors on London, doubled on defense, assure that Germany can do no better than 1:2 odds.

Relatively secure on their island, the British can consider sending troops overseas. Depending on Italian and German commitment to North Africa, much of Britain's armed forces may be required there. Whatever can be spared should, in my view, be sent to France. Allied Victory demands that Germany not conquer Russia. And as long as France stays alive, Russia cannot receive the full Axis attention. So far from being altruistic, a British presence in France works to the benefit of Britain and the Allies generally.

How should British troops in France be used? The rules dictate that British units cannot occupy Paris or Maginot Line hexes. Beyond these restrictions, the British can deploy on the front lines for defense or lay back as an offensive reserve.

If Britain decides to use its French contingent defensively, the units should be placed in the expected path of the German advance on Paris. Likely hexes are directly east and southeast of Paris. The former represents the most direct route from Luxembourg; the latter, the only approach which avoids river defense lines.

The Anglo-French cooperation rule makes the placement of British units especially critical. That rule prohibits stacking of British and French units. AH has ruled that "stacking" includes British air units flying defensive air support for French ground units and vice-versa, because DAS requires that the air units be placed on top of the defenders. As a result, if British ground units are deployed away from the German advance, then British air units will be unable to fly DAS at all.

British units may also be held in reserve for the eventual counterattack on Paris. British armor assumes particular importance here, as they allow 8 factors to be crammed into a single hex, rather than the French maximum of 6. Those 2 extra factors may spell the difference between a desperation 1:2 and a usually successful 1:1. Remember that British units cannot advance into Paris; make sure that at least one French infantry piece survives even a full exchange. This may force the Allies to take exchange losses in British units, but this may be the best course. With only French units left, next turn's attack to re-retake Paris will require only a French offensive option. And it saves the British player the trouble of staging his own Dunkirk withdrawal. To rescue British units from France in one turn will require an offensive option. The British fleets must change to a French port, transport the ground forces back home, and be SR'd home themselves. Better to be lost in combat and leave the French army intact for another turn.

Russia

In the early turns of a typical game, the Russian player must be ready for anything and do nothing. Russia should deploy with at least 3 possibilities in mind: (1) attack on an ungarrisoned Finland; (2) attack on an ungarrisoned Rumania; (3) early German declaration of war and invasion. The first requires strength in the north; the second, strength in the south; the third, strength in the center. Consequently, the Russian army finds itself spread along the border. But that is necessary anyway, to occupy all of the pact cities in one turn.

Clearly, a premature Barbarossa should be welcomed rather than feared. War in Russia while France remains in the game guarantees victory for all but the most inept Allies. But there is no point in making Germany's task any easier. The approaches to Leningrad and Moscow should be guarded well enough to prevent a one-turn conquest of these cities. And whenever the German airborne unit gets in range, a ground unit should be placed on Parno. Otherwise, the para unit can drop on Parno and open the port to German naval transport or SR. Even without the airborne unit, Parno and Talum, as the pact cities least accessible to Germany, should be well defended.

No discussion of Russian options in 3R would be complete without exploring the question of war with Turkey. In his comments to the 3R Series Replay in Vol. 11, No. 6 of the *GENERAL*, Don Greenwood hypothesizes a two-turn conquest of Turkey, costing 40 BRP's plus losses. Since Turkey is worth only 30 BRP's, Greenwood concludes that this strategy will result in a net loss of at least 10 BRP's by the time Barbarossa begins.

The flaw in Greenwood's analysis lies in valuing BRP's spent in 1939 and 1940 at face value, instead of their 1941 value. Since Barbarossa will occur mainly in 1941, every Russian decision should be evaluated on how it will affect Russia's readiness in 1941.

The following chart traces the usual course of Russian BRP spending and growth from Fall 1939 to Spring 1941. It assumes that German garrisons prevent attacks on Finland and Rumania and that Turkey is left alone. As the chart shows, by Spring 1941 Russia will have built her entire available force pool totalling 61 BRP's and will have available 149 BRP's, with a base of 124.

NO WAR WITH TURKEY

	1939	1940	1941
Old Base		90	90
Surplus x 0.3		+1	+34
New Base	90		124
Conquests		+25	+25
Year-start BRPs	90	116	149
Declarations of war	10		
Offensive options	15		
Builds	+61		
Total spent	86	0	
Surplus	4	116	

The chart below assumes that Russia declares war on Turkey in Winter 1939 and conducts an offensive option that turn. It allows for 2 more offensive options plus 10 BRP's of casualties before Turkey is subdued sometime in 1940. By Spring 1941, Russia has conquered Turkey, occupied the pact area and built to the limits of her force pool. Surprisingly, even after spending 65 BRP's battling Turkey, Russia starts 1941 with 161 BRP's, 12 more than would be available if Turkey were not attacked. The new base BRP figure is 106, 18 below the base achieved by not attacking Turkey.

WAR WITH TURKEY

	1939	1940	1941
Old Base		90	90
Surplus x 0.3		+0	+16
New Base	90	90	106
Conquests		+25	+55
Year-start BRPs	90	115	161
Declarations of war	20	0	
Offensive options	30'	30	
Builds	40	+31	
Total spent	90	61	
Surplus	0	54	

As this analysis illustrates, the 25 BRP's spent in 1939 and the 40 spent in 1940 are actually worth less to Russia in 1941 than the 30 gained by conquering Turkey. This is so because the 25 spent in 1939 are the equivalent of only 2 BRP's (25 x 0.3 x 0.3) in 1941, and the 40 spent in 1940 are equal to only 12 (40 x 0.3) 1941 BRP's, disregarding the base increase.

All this does not make invading Turkey a foolproof strategy. As seen in the analysis of Polish defenses, BRP's alone should not dictate decisions. If, for example, Germany defeats France rapidly,

Barbarossa may begin while Russia is entangled in Turkey. Furthermore, German conquest of Turkey as a preliminary to invading Russia both costs Russia an immediate 30 BRP's and opens up her southern front. At least, the Turkish conquest will require diversion of precious units southward to defend the conquered territory. In short, I tend to accept Greenwood's advice against attacking Turkey, but I do not accept his BRP calculations.

Ironically, a Turkish campaign in 1940, even if unsuccessful, may blunt a potentially devastating German tactic. More on the problem of the "unwanted initiative" later.

The foregoing comments on strategy in 1939 substantially cover strategy in 1940. This is as it should be decisions in 1939 must be made with an eye to the coming year and beyond. But 1940 also presents unique problems, a few of which are considered here.

Norway

If 3R is won or lost in Russia, then Russia may be won or lost in Norway. Germany needs Norway as a base for interdiction of Murmansk convoys, potentially Russia's lifeline. Conversely, the Allies need Norway to prevent interference with aid to Russia.

For Germany, Norway must be conquered in 1 turn or not at all. If Norway survives the initial attack, Britain may and should intervene with substantial ground and air forces, landing at Bergen. This, in turn, will force Germany to either send more strength to Norway or concede Britain 10 BRP's and unmolested convoys to Russia.

Germany can effect a one-turn conquest of Norway only through the air. As mentioned earlier, the German airborne unit may be dropped on Copenhagen, untripling the Danish defense. From there, Oslo lies in range of another drop. Preparatory to this assault, the German player should build an airbase in northern Denmark and stage an air unit there. Even if both Norwegian 1-3's occupy Oslo, the ensuing attack at 2:1 odds almost assures that Norway will fall. One German fleet SR'd to Bergen makes Norway invulnerable to Allied invasion. The Allies have no air bases within range of Bergen to reduce the fleet there below 9 factors, making amphibious assault possible.

Britain must take Norway in 1 turn for the same reason. German air units staged to Oslo or German ground forces landed southeast of Oslo can make things tough for the British. But Britain too has the capability to complete a one-turn conquest, by sea.

Britain requires both 4-5 armor units, the 2-5 armor and 36 naval factors to take Oslo. One 4-5 plus 6 naval factors (2 combat points) attack the 1-3 on the western beach at 2:1, losses extracted from the fleet. The other 4-5 and 2-5 exploit to Oslo, attacking the remaining 1-3 at 3:1. If both 1-3's garrison Oslo, the 2-5 occupies the beach (breakthrough) hex and both

4-5' s exploit and attack at 2:1. Either way, Oslo should fall.

For Germany and Britain, then, Norwegian strategy is to attack first and decisively.

North Africa

North Africa is the battleground of the tactician. Because of the relatively few units usually sent there, each small mistake is magnified and each large mistake is disastrous. The unnecessary loss of one unit, insignificant in Russia, can tip the balance of power in North Africa. Although strategy there varies greatly, depending on what units can be spared from other theaters, tactics remain constant enough to merit a few remarks.

As it did historically, supply plays a crucial role in North Africa. Egyptian and Libyan ports act as supply sources for Allied and Axis units, respectively. Conquered ports and beachhead markers may also function as supply sources, but this requires a nine-factor fleet per 9 units supplied. With naval strength at a premium in the Mediterranean, players are well advised to guard their Egyptian or Libyan ports well.

Supply considerations also increase the importance of two other game concepts; zones of control and controlled hexes. Units cannot trace supply through enemy ZOC, even if the hex is occupied by a friendly unit. Nor can supply be traced through enemy-controlled but unoccupied hexes (3.4). As a result, armored units, with their ZOC and high movement rate, assume added importance in North Africa.

As noted earlier, the African front often receives the left-over units of both sides. Similarly, players may be reluctant to spend many BRP's on offensive options there. Thus both sides increasingly resort to attrition combat.

Normal combat (i.e., the offensive option) demands that the strongest units defend the most important hexes. Attrition combat encourages deployment of weak units on critical hexes. The sequence of attrition combat creates this anomaly. When the attrition table requires both elimination of counters and enemy occupation of hexes, the counters are eliminated first. Not surprisingly, players prefer to eliminate weak, easily replaced units. But this leaves the important hexes, occupied by strong units, subject to enemy occupation. On the other hand, elimination of these strong units preserves the hexes but at a high price. The solution is to place weak units on critical hexes. Their elimination saves the big units *and* the now-vacant hexes.

This tactic works well enough during enemy attrition options. But what if the enemy takes an offensive option instead? Much to his delight, the very hexes he wants are the most poorly defended. To protect these units and hexes during offensive combat, the defender needs superior air power. Without it, he must guess which option his opponent will select each turn and deploy accordingly.

One strategic question does recur in North Africa. After France falls, the die determines whether Lebanon-Syria and Algeria-Morocco-Tunisia become Vichy or Free French. Put simply, Britain cannot permit a Vichy Lebanon-Syria at the back door to the Suez Canal. Rather than depend on the die, Britain must plan ahead.

The turn before France's fall is anticipated, the British player should station one or two units at Lebanon's border. On the turn that Germany enters Paris, these British units move through Beirut to occupy the beach hex. Even if Lebanon-Syria turns Vichy, the British units there control the sole port, occupy the sole beach hex and are positioned to conquer the entire colony. Obviously, the presence of a French-turned-Vichy unit would complicate things. For that reason, the infantry unit starting in Lebanon-Syria must either return to mainland France or be eliminated in North African combat.

Russia

The notes on Russian strategy in 1939 also cover most of 1940. One additional problem, alluded to earlier, may arise in 1940, to the great displeasure of the Soviet player. This is the problem of the unwanted initiative.

The initiative rule, unique to 3R, provides that the alliance with the most BRP's at the start of a turn moves first that turn. This rule makes it possible for an alliance to move twice before the enemy can respond. For example, if Germany and Italy spend BRP's heavily in Fall 1939, Britain and France, by judicious spending, may gain the initiative in Winter 1939. An unsuspecting Italy may fall as a result of this double turn. Of course, the Axis will regain the initiative in Spring 1940, giving it a double turn during which France will likely fall. But what Allied team would not trade France for Italy in Spring 1940?

So viewed, the initiative rule presents extra strategic options. It can also place Russia in an unrealistic dilemma. Assume Russia declines to invade Turkey. Instead the Russian player occupies the pact area and builds his entire force pool in 1939. He starts 1940 with 116 BRP's and nowhere to spend them. As a result, he ends 1940 with the same 116 BRP's.

Germany, on the other hand, spends BRP's easily in 1940. Assume that France falls by Fall 1940, allowing Germany's full attention to turn east. Even with the 42 BRP's gained from the French victory, Germany can and probably will spend herself below Russia's 116 BRP level by Winter 1940, in preparation for the invasion of Russia.

Russia will therefore "gain" the initiative in Winter 1940. After Russia's turn, Germany launches Barbarossa. With a fresh infusion of BRP's in the 1941 Year-Start sequence, the Axis regains the initiative for Spring 1941. Germany moves again and attacks again, driving deep into Russia, possibly taking Leningrad and/or Moscow and surely placing much of the Russian army out of supply.

In my view, this tactic is both unrealistic and unfair. Perhaps AH intended this use of the initiative rule to reproduce the shock effect of the initial German attack. If so, it overdoes it. Surely the shock effect was not equivalent to giving Germany a three-month headstart, as 3R does. Even worse from the players' point of view, Russia can do almost nothing to defend herself. Almost nothing, because Russia could spend some BRP's in a Turkish invasion. But 3R surely perverts history if it forces Russia to attack Turkey in order to avoid giving Germany an unwarranted advantage.

Perhaps for this reason AH has advised that players may opt to ignore the initiative rule if they agree beforehand. Even this solution has its problems. It prevents the two-turn Allied conquest of Italy discussed earlier. It also locks the Axis into the initiative for the game's duration, an historically inaccurate situation. Better, in my opinion, to amend the initiative rule to permit Russia to waive the initiative until actively at war with Germany. Once Barbarossa begins, Russia will have ample opportunity to keep its BRP level below the Axis level,

CONCLUSION

As any 3R player knows, this article barely scratches the surface of the game's strategy and tactics. Unlike some of the AH "classics," 3R may never foster a "perfect plan." And if this means that 3R will be played and replayed, discussed and debated, then 3R will surely take its rightful place as one of the best wargames ever published, and easily the finest true strategic-level game developed pending release of *THE RISING SUN*, that is.

I would be remiss if I failed to acknowledge Ron Magazzu, whose fine PBM system (yes, we play 3R by mail) and skilled opposition have helped give me the experience and motivation to write this article.