

A Fast American Win in Luftwaffe

by Tom Hazlet

The game of LUFTWAFFE has been somewhat neglected in the pages of the GENERAL ever since its release three years ago. Many of the articles that have dealt with the game have concentrated on design and historical background. Those few articles which have discussed actual play of the game have dwelt mainly on the campaign versions, giving vague strategical suggestions. While the campaign versions are fine games, worthy of the attention they have received, it is unfortunate that they have overshadowed the basic game, which is a fine exercise in its own right, and one which places emphasis on the tactical consideration often neglected in the longer versions.

It is likely that many people who hear only about the campaign versions do not have the time to play them and thus never attempt the game at all. If you are one of these people, I suggest you dust off your game and try the basic version a few times. It is one of the few wargames available that can be played in an hour or less, enabling a series to be played in an afternoon. The tension level runs high, as the outcome of the game often depends on survival of one bomber factor on the last attack. It is a rare game that is decided by more than one or two cities. The game also has much of that quality which has been responsible for the survival of MIDWAY, the need to figure out your opponent's intentions and then to outmaneuver him in order to win.

I would guess that there are two basic objections in the minds of many people to playing the basic game. The first is the myth of German invincibility. The second is the horrendous CRT 1 will mention play balance later, though I hope to show in this article that the Germans are far from invincible. The CRT definitely needs some attention. I do not presume to question the historical accuracy of the table, which Mr. Zocchi defended in a recent issue. I do contend, however, that it ruins the game. A basic game of LUFTWAFFE with the present CRT has roughly the same "feel" as far as luck is concerned as an AFRIKA KORPS game with a 1:1 attack on Tobruch in June, 1941. One roll of the die can overcome superior tactics. Nevertheless AFRIKA KORPS continues to be one of the more popular games. The difference in the two is, of course, that we don't have to make the 1:1 on Tobruch, but we are stuck with the luck factor in LUFTWAFFE unless we change the CRT to reduce the role of luck to a more acceptable level. I will suggest three different methods giving the percentage results produced by each. I suggest you pick whichever one suits you best.

Alternative 1: When rolling the die a 1=3 and a 6=4, yielding the following percentages.

Die=1	Die=2	Die=3	Die=4	Die=5	Die=6
0%	16%	33%	33%	16%	0%

For those who dislike eliminating the 1 and 6 columns entirely one (if the following Methods should be used.

Alternative 2: When a 1 or 6 is rolled, roll again. The results of the second throw count, whatever the result. The percentages for this method are:

Die=1	Die=2	Die=3	Die=4	Die=5	Die=6

5.5%	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	22.2%	5.5%
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Alternative 3: This method involves the use of two dice (or one die thrown twice):

First Die	Second Die	Result	Percentage
1, 2, 3	1	1	8.3%
1, 2, 3	2, 3	2	16.7%
1, 2, 3	4, 5, 6	3	25.0%
4, 5, 6	1, 2, 3	4	25.0%
4, 5, 6	4, 5	5	16.7%
4, 5, 6	6	6	8.3%

After adjusting the CRT we can now concentrate on exploding the myth of German invincibility. This reputation has derived from two sources; first it is a spillover from the campaign game, where they do have an edge. More importantly, it comes, as a result of opening up the game for the first time, trying to muscle bomber formations through the heart of the defense, and watching them get blown out of the sky. After a few such experiences the game is declared unbalanced, and either thrown in the back of the closet or revised, "bombers on fortified clouds suffer 1/2 casualties." It is true that planning an attack requires more skill than shooting down bombers; thus games between two beginners often result in a German victory. However, an American player who constructs an attack plan based on a careful analysis of the defense will find himself managing at least a draw nearly every time, with more than a few wills.

Before I go any farther I would like to make clear that the campaign versions are more challenging than the basic game for those who have the time. I am concentrating on the basic game both because I feel it deserves some attrition and because the non-varying order of battle makes analysis easier. The same type of analysis may be, and should be, conducted for any quarter of a campaign game. This article is meant to provide an illustration.

Examining the German units, we see that our opponent has three main forces as his defense, 5 Fw190s, 6 Me110s, and 8 Me109s. The three forces will undoubtedly be assigned to separate areas. The key to victory, obviously, is outmaneuvering the defense. Rather than dividing into three groups and trying to push through the defenders, an attack should divide into several small groups and attempt to slip past the defense. Hopefully the Germans will become confused, try to stop everybody and end up not applying sufficient force anywhere. At worst, a well timed series of attacks prevents each German force from eliminating more than one attack group. Say, for example, we launch a five pronged attack. Three prongs are destroyed, the two weakest ones are untouched. They each bomb three cities, adding Amsterdam this gives a total of 7. Obviously, in order to achieve a victory, some bombers must be able to survive a German attack. In order to determine the best chance for doing this we must first look at the specific defense.

A typical setup might have the Me110s opposite Italy because of their longer flight times, the Me109s guarding the approaches from England, the Me410s and Ju88 watching for a sneak, and the Fw190s playing "middle linebacker" in southern Germany. This type of defense seems to be standard for most German players. Like any defense, it has a weakness.

As we pointed out earlier, one of the 3 defensive groups must be overcome to get a win. In this defense the Me110s, semi isolated on the Italian front, are the weak link. We use an attack like the following: (diagram #1).

- ❖ **Group 1:** 5xB17 vs. Steyr, Vienna, WienerNeustadt, Gyor, Budapest; close escort: 3xP51
- ❖ **Group 2:** 3xB24 vs. Munich, Augsburg, Friedrichshaven; close escort: P51, P38
- ❖ **Group 3:** 3xB17v. Mannheim, Karlsruhe, Offenburg; close escort: P51, P38
- ❖ **Group 4:** 4x B24 v. Munster, Kassel, Bremen (2) (or Hannover) close escort: P51, P38
- ❖ **Group 5:** 5xB24 v. Rostock Anklarn, Oranienburg, Berlin, Sorau Hunter group; 3xP47 on Italian front
- ❖ The 9th B 17 hits Amsterdam.

The Italian front is the key. Group 1 must fight through the Me110s to get at least three out of five targets in order to achieve a win. We will discuss specific tactics in this section shortly.

The Fw190s are caught in a squeeze. They should destroy either group 2 or group 3 with no trouble, but the other group will get through to destroy three cities. Before group 4 falls under the guns of the Me109s it should reach Munster, at least. The sneak raid should yield at least three cities. This gives a total of eleven cities; the twelfth city is likely to come from either the Italian front or the sneak raid. A draw is virtually assured, assuming average luck.

Saying what will happen without explaining how is not very helpful, so we will look at each front individually.

All aircraft on the Italian front are placed "in flight" behind the R line during initial placement. As diagram #1 shows, the main portion of group 1 spends 4 turns in the air before reaching targets, the same amount of airtime the Me110s have without tanks. The close escort of 6 P51 factors should take three turns to wipe out in the following manner (we are using average rolls for purposes of illustration): turn 1; The Me110s roll a 4, which is adjusted to a 2 because of the E ratings, killing 3 P51s. A P47 attack kills 2 Me110s with a roll of 3. Turn 2: The 10 Me110s kill two more P51s with another 4. The P47s roll 3 again, wiping out 2 more Me110s. Turn 3: The 8 Me110s continue with another 4, killing the last P51 and a bomber. Return fire from the bombers kills a single Me110. The P47s are forced to go home. Turn 4: A final 4 kills three more bombers, which saves only 1 of the 3 cities in the center, barring AA fire. The Me110s are forced to land next turn, thus the counter bombing Budapest is unmolested, while Steyr also fell without opposition. If the Germans go after either of the flank bombers they guarantee the success of the central column, and make it likely that the other flank attack gets through as well. It is to make it difficult to kill both flank units that the Budapest unit splits off so early. If the Germans, refuse to attack first turn, so as to have enough fuel to hit the Budapest bomber on turn 5, then a P51 can split off to Steyr, giving that bomber a 2/3 chance of getting through. No matter how the Me110s defend this area the Americans will get at least 3, and probably 4 cities.

Bomber group 2 also starts out on turn 1. It could reach Munich a turn earlier if it started out from a different hex, but the extreme southern Course is kept in order to prevent the

Fw190s from attacking both groups 1 and 2. The Success of this attack depends on whether the Fw190s defend against them or move west to pick off group 3. In any case the Fw190s should not be able to hit group 2 until after the second move. This makes it too late for them to assist the Me110s. The only way they can attack after I move is if their initial placement is near Augsburg. An initial placement this close to Italy leaves the British front unsupported and we should consider an adjustment to make a stronger drive in this area, which we will mention later.

Before leaving this front, it is necessary to mention fighters in general and the P47s in particular. In their first few games American players generally use all their fighters as "hunters" but they soon discover the value of close-escort and use all their fighters this way. Nevertheless "hunters" do have their value even in the basic game. The Italian front in this sample attack is a perfect example. If the P47s were close-escort, the Germans could ignore the stack they were with and they would be wasted. As it is in this example they can protect both groups 1 and 2. If the Me110s attack group 1, the P47s should Counterattack. In the two turns before they have to break off combat they should destroy 4-6 factors, enough to ensure the Success of the bombers. If the Me110 should off from attacking and move to threaten group 2, the P47s can provide adequate protection by maneuvering between the two and making it difficult for the Germans to close without suffering a first strike.

The other areas are not so complicated. Bomber group 3 is designed to cooperate with group 2 to squeeze the Fw190s, who can easily eliminate one group but don't have enough firepower to attempt to destroy both. Group 3 should leave one turn later to ensure proper timing, as group 3 is one turn closer to its targets.

Group 4 is meant primarily to tie down the Me109s. After the escort is eliminated the bombers should scatter as much as they can in an attempt to occupy the Me109s as long as possible. Thus the pattern shown on the map may vary considerably, depending on German reaction and luck. This group should leave at the same time as group 3 to prevent the Me109s from attacking both groups.

Group 5, the sneak raiders, enter on turn 3. It should be noted that the fifth bomber unit is not really expected to reach Sorau, and could be reassigned to Berlin if you prefer. It is there primarily to provide added firepower and absorb losses. The balance in this area is extremely sensitive, but this extra unit should tip the scales in the Americans' favor. The Germans should destroy 3 bomber factors in the first attack, while return fire kills 3 Germans. The 3 remaining Me410s are insufficient, barring very good luck, to keep the sneak raiders from getting 3 or 4 cities.

Obviously the above plan of attack is only valid against the German defense Outlined above. I would like to stress that this defense is the one favored by many German players and is probably the strongest one overall. Any attempt to correct the weakness on the Italian front will leave another weakness elsewhere. For example, suppose the Me410s are shifted to Italy. This leaves a sneak raid wide open. The Me109s cannot cover two areas. If they try to, a properly timed attack from England will force them to land as the sneak raiders appear.

With some minor adjustments in Italy, some cities should still fall there. For example, group 1 is reduced to 4 bombers, going after Steyr, Vienna, and Wiener-Neustadt, with a close escort of 2 P51 and 3 P47. Group 2 has a c. e. of 2 P51 and 1 P38. A bomber is added to group 4. This adjustment should yield at least 8 cities, 5 in the sneak, 3 in the center, Steyr, Munster, and an alternative that should be considered if the Me410s reinforce Italy, and one that should definitely be used if even stronger forces are sent there, is to attempt to overwhelm the defense opposite England. (See diagram 2) Italy is ignored entirely. All 12 B24s are placed in flight behind the R line with a c. e. of 1 P51 and 3 P38s. Also on the first turn, 3 B17s with a P51 move toward Mannheim, Karlsruhe, and Offenburg. The remaining 4 P51s and the 3 P47s are reformed into hunter groups. The c. e. of the B24s is designed merely to soften the first attack of the Germans. We want the bombers to be able to fire defensively before any of the formation has to split away. One turn of defensive fire, coupled with attacks from American fighters, should kill 11 German factors. After the second turn of battle the Me109s and Fw190s should be reduced to a total of 8 factors or less with a loss of 10 bomber factors. One more attack will eliminate the Germans as an effective fighting force. The sneak raiders meet with little opposition while the Karlsruhe force has not been touched. The B24s should get anywhere from 4 to 8 cities themselves. The only hope the Germans have is the quick arrival of the Italy defense force, an unlikely possibility.

An alternative to guard against this is to reduce the main force to 11 bombers and use the 12th to hit Amsterdam, freeing a B17. Three B17s go on the Karlsruhe raid, the sneak raid is reduced to 3 bombers, picking off Gydna, Marienburg, and Warsaw, and the final three B17s hug the Southern edge of the board in an attempt to hold the Italian defense. If ignored, they hit Vienna, Gyor, and Wiener-Neustadt.

If less than the Me190s and Fw109s guard England, and this can happen after the Germans have been burned a few times on the Italian front, then the B24s should Push through easily, with no attempt at finesse necessary.

I want to reemphasize what has been the point of this entire article: any defense can be beaten if you stop, add up the probable losses per turn, figure out the best routes of attack, and coordinate those attacks properly. The above attack plans work well against the defenses presented, but as individual defenses vary the attacks must adjust to take advantage of the inevitable weaknesses. Think!

Most of the principles illustrated above apply to the campaign versions as well as the basic game. Just a word on the campaign version is necessary, however. "The American player must consider that early bombing of the cities in the Vienna area has the effect of reducing greatly the area the German has to defend, and makes the defense in the center much tougher.

In closing, I'd like to mention a few ideas that may not be obvious from the above.

1. Amsterdam is a free city. Don't forget to send one counter to destroy it.
2. Fighters are generally used best as close escort.
3. The P38s should always be used as close escort because of their ineffectiveness in combat.

4. Because of their high E rating P51s are very good for close escort. One should generally be placed on the top of each bomber stack. A special effort should be made to use P51s as close escort in areas defended only by Me410s and Me110s because of the great difference in E ratings.
5. P47s are the best hunter group.
6. Close escorts should always drop tanks; they won't be around long enough to worry about fuel. When P51s drop, they force the Germans to do likewise, which really hurts the 109s and, to some extent, the 190s.
7. Unescorted bombers, when in a stack of less than 10 factors, are usually better off separating. It requires more German factors to ensure killing them all in several small attacks. Many times the Germans can't cover them all.
8. Bombers can generally fight off about 1/2 their number of fighters over a series of turns.
9. Hunter groups can be effective in reducing the Germans in an area where the hunters are not greatly outnumbered, particularly because the Germans can rarely afford to take time to attack the fighters.
10. If Me109s or Fw190s try to defend two areas, or defend in an area with few bases, proper timing should put them on the ground at the crucial moment.

I would also like to repeat that luck plays a significant role in LUFTWAFFE because of the small number of rolls, but the same holds true for many popular games.

For those of you who still find LUFTWAFFE unbalanced, I would like to remind you that it is the easiest of all games to balance. Merely adjust the number of cities required for a win. Another method is to play two games, switching sides. The winner is the person who destroyed the greater number of cities with the American side. The short playing time of LUFTWAFFE permits it.

For those people who become tired of the same situation, but don't have time for the campaign versions, there is the Operation Custer variant. Additionally, "Luftwaffe Situation 13" in the March 1973 General provides an interesting means of choosing alternate line-ups although the victory conditions mentioned there are rather lopsided.