

The Oil Offensive; A Luftwaffe Variant by Jerry Wallace

Luftwaffe is unquestionably the finest air battle game to come along, and it certainly is my favorite. After its initial popularity, however, I began having trouble talking my face-to-face opponents into playing the Advanced Game. With the limited time most of us have for our hobby, we quickly discovered that we could play 5 or 6 PANZERBLITZ situations in the time required for one full LUFTWAFFE Advanced Game. And, too, my wife had a few choice words to say when I would come home at 4:00 a.m. after a nine-hour session of LUFTWAFFE. Brevity is not only the soul of wit, but also a positive virtue in a war game.

What we all wanted was a LUFTWAFFE version that could be played in 3 to 5 hours and which nonetheless preserved the essential excitement and realism of the Advanced Game. The Basic Game and Operation Custer variants, although short enough, were not quite what we wanted. For one thing, there were too many drawn games; for another, the one-quarter games are inherently somewhat unrealistic because the American has little incentive to protect his bombers after they have destroyed their targets and strategy, therefore, is not generally of a very high order. The shorter games are basically tests of tactical rather than strategic skill.

The following Advanced Game variant was developed to meet these problems and is, in addition, quite within the realm of historical possibility. Fortunately, one of the greatest virtues of LUFTWAFFE is its flexibility: like PANZERBLITZ, it admits of an infinite number of variants. This one is a three quarter game running from July 1944 through January 1945. Except as amended below, use all the Advanced Game rules.

FORCES:

Both players start with all forces that would be available for the July 1944 quarter, including the German's school units but excluding railroad units and, of course, units previously withdrawn. As in the Advanced Game, the German may, in January, April, and July 1944, substitute one Me262 unit for one other front-line combat unit due in the same quarter. Reinforcements, replacements, and withdrawals are all handled as in the Advanced Game. No RAF raids are allowed, unless you want to include them as an element of play balance.

REPLACEMENTS:

The American gets 30 fighter and 50 bomber factors, usable in the same way as in the Advanced Game; losses must be replaced as long as the factors hold out. The German gets 4 replacement factors per quarter, and these may not be accumulated.

VICTORY CONDITIONS AND BOMBER MISSION REQUIREMENTS:

The Americans win by totally destroying all 17 oil targets by the end of the January '45 quarter. Each oil target must be bombed by at least 3 factors of bombers in order to be destroyed.

Hence, targets can be partially destroyed and may take more than one raid to reduce: an oil city bombed by only two factors would still be producing at 1/3 of its capacity. The Germans win by saving all or any part of one Oil City. In addition, the

American must note on his target sheet not only which target each of his bomb groups is heading for, but also the exact turn on which each group will appear on the Start Line or numbered Baltic Sea-Russia squares.

These rules require a new Target Sheet. Here is mine:

TARGET

CITY	Hit 1	Hit 2	Hit 3
Gelsenkirchen			
Dulmen			
Mannheim			
Hamburg			
Hannover			
Braunschweig			
Meresburg			
Bohlen			
Leipzig			
Brux			
Berlin			
Ruhland			
Pardubice			
Vienna			
Mislebach			
Bratislava			
Budapest			
Airbase			

UNIT	TURN OF APPEARANCE
B17s	
34	
91	
95	
97	
99	
305	
351	
381	
457	
B24	
93	
389	
445	
449	
451	
453	
459	
461	
465	
467	
489	
B26	
17	
323	
387	
391	

397	
A20	
410	
B25	
47	
A26	
386**	

Replacements:

30 Fighters

50 Bombers

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This Target Sheet is actually a bit easier to use than the one AH provides. The target cities are listed in geographical order from NW to SE, which makes it easier to keep track of raids, since bombers of the same type will most often bomb targets relatively close to one another. For each factor that survives to bomb a city, check off one of the boxes; three strikes and he's out. Besides drawing a line between the unit and its target, you must also indicate the turn of appearance on the Start Line. By using a different color of pencil or ink for each quarter, you can keep a full record of the entire game on a single target sheet. Besides saving target sheets, these records are valuable for your post-mortem analysis.

JETS AND SCHOOL UNITS:

In October 1944 and January 1945, the German must trade school units for his jets (except for JG7 in Jan. 1945; he gets that regardless). One full-strength school may be swapped for one jet unit; if there are no full-strength school units surviving, the German may swap 3 partially destroyed ones for 1 jet unit. Killed school units may be taken as replacements, but a school unit must have been on the board for a full quarter before it can be swapped for jets. For example, the school unit NJG 102, which arrives in October, 1944, could not be swapped for a jet unit until January 1945 (ditto for replacements). School units must be placed on the board; they may not be held off the board to prevent losses.

LUFTWAFFE FUEL REQUIREMENTS:

The German may fly only as many factors as he can fuel. Each intact oil city produces enough fuel for 3 Luftwaffe factors; if one allied factor bombs the city, its oil production drops to 2, etc. Hence, the number of unchecked boxes on the Target Sheet at the beginning of a quarter indicates how many German factors may fly in that quarter. For example, in the first quarter of the game - July 1944 - the German can fly 51 factors, or 25 full-strength units. (He has no one-factor units, so the odd factor is simply extra; full-strength units cannot be split, so, in this case, the whole unit is grounded.) The German has a total of 33 full-strength units, but 8 of them are school units. So, in July 1944 he can fly all of his front-line combat units, but if he wishes to fly some of his school units, an equal number of combat units must remain OD the ground. Units grounded for lack of fuel remain grounded for the entire quarter, even if losses bring the number of factors in the air below the number authorized. Nor can some units be landed in order to allow grounded units to fly that quarter. Only the first 50 factors to

take off in July 1944 can fly during that quarter. Units grounded for lack of fuel must be placed on the board.

HISTORICAL JUSTIFICATION:

There is perhaps even more historical basis for this variant than for the original version. In the Advanced Game, German fighter production inevitably declines steadily from 1943 to 1945 while their petroleum crisis is accounted for in the "oil variant" optional rule. This will affect play in only one out of three or one out of five games you play, depending upon how you adopt this option. In point of fact, the production of fighter aircraft was not the Luftwaffe's main problem. German fighter plane production reached its all-time high in 1944, over 25,000 aircraft; even in the chaotic months of early 1945, when the roof was literally caving in on them, German aircraft plants turned out nearly 5000 fighters. The Luftwaffe's biggest problems were (1) petroleum, and (2) pilot training. By making oil targets and school units vital elements in the game, this variant attempts to replicate the actual strategic situation of the summer of 1944.

NOTES ON STRATEGY:

This game is better balanced, I think, than the Advanced Game, and so both players must be somewhat more canny in their strategic planning. Unless the German is hopelessly incompetent, a first-quarter mass assault upon the heartland cities is suicidal, but the best way to reduce Luftwaffe strength is to cut his oil supply. Thus, an indirect approach is required; economy of force is necessary for success. Of all the oil cities, only Dulmen and Gelsenkirchen are real sitting ducks. The A20's can reach Mannheim in two turns, but, unless the German's attention is diverted elsewhere, they will require a sizable escort. Hamburg is the only city that is really vulnerable to sneak raids, and even it can be saved if the German wants to badly enough. The Vienna-Budapest targets are tough to defend because of a lack of bases, but American losses are likely to be high there, too. American strategy will, of course, depend upon the German set-up, but one sound principle is to overload the defense by simultaneous attacks from Britain, Italy, and the Baltic. The German will be hard pressed to defend all these areas at once, and he must carefully choose which attacks to intercept. The American will often get a chance to strafe German jets or school units while the Luftwaffe is occupied with the separate raids. The German objective is to save as much of his oil production as he can while inflicting high losses on the USAAF. He need not worry too much about his own aircraft losses (he will most probably have more planes than he can fuel at any given time), but he must protect certain types; Me410's, for example, should not attack alone, if possible.

PLAY BALANCE:

This variant is quite well balanced as it is, but if you find one side or the other winning too often, the simplest method of balancing is to adjust the number of American fighter replacement factors to 20 or 40 depending on who needs the help. Personally, I think this variant would be excellent for tournament purposes. Give it a try. I'm sure you'll like it.