

France

ULTRA

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FRANCE

Winter 1939 or Spring 1940?

by Ken Cruz and Bruce Harper

Editor's Note: One of the perennial questions in A WORLD AT WAR has been whether it is better for Germany to attack in the west in Winter 1939 or wait until Spring 1940. Here we present the pros and cons of the early attack.

Ken Cruz plays the role of the mad German dictator Adolf Hitler by advocating an immediate attack once Poland has collapsed. Ken doesn't just talk the talk, he walked the walk by executing just such an attack in the 2004 Boardgame Players Association convention, as have many players since, as we shall see.

Bruce Harper weighs in for the con, setting out the advantages he sees to waiting until Spring 1940. Ironically, Bruce played Japan as Ken's partner at the convention and for at least a few hours was a cheerleader for the Winter 1939 attack....

Nothing much has changed since this article was first published in the Fall 2005 issue of ULTRA. Both the early and historical attacks have supporters, and it is rare to find a player who switches between the two.

WINTER 1939

by Ken Cruz

The Opportunity

One alternative for Germany is to spend its Winter 1939 turn just building more forces in preparation to crush the Low Countries and France in 1940. This period of time was historically referred to as "The Phony War" and "Sitzkrieg". How boring – such sloth should not be rewarded! There is much the German player can do in Winter 1939 to improve his chances of winning the game. Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands are easy targets that provide many rewards if conquered sooner rather than later.



What you get

During the 1940 YSS Germany reaps the rewards of its early conquest of the Low Countries. Let's see what the Fatherland will gain:

- An extra 30 BRPs (10 BRPs for the Netherlands, 15 BRPs for Belgium and 5 BRP's for Luxembourg).
- One extra DP for control of the Low Countries and a second extra DP for starting the year with over 200 BRPs (150 BRPs for Germany's base, 20 BRPs for Poland, 10 BRPs for economic interest in Russia and 30 BRPs for the Low Countries).
- An extra RP for starting the year with over 200 BRPs.
- The front line is one hex closer to Paris.

The extra DPs have the potential to be cashed in later during 1940 with a possible hex control result in Spain, a more favorable French surrender level or intelligence project results; their usefulness is endless. The extra RP can always help somewhere as well and being a hex closer to Paris always makes the Allies nervous.



How to do it

The conquest of the Low Countries is a simple task to carry out. The key to success is high odds attacks that minimize potential losses.

Fall 1939 builds

An essential component in the Winter 1939 conquest of the Low Countries is a fully built Luftwaffe. Germany therefore should give priority in Fall 1939 to building their remaining 10 AAFs and any AAFs lost in Poland.

The Defenders

The Low Countries have rather modest forces.

The Netherlands are defended by only a single 2-3 infantry unit and one AAF, both of which must set up in The Hague.

Belgium is somewhat stronger, but has no hope of surviving. It has one 2-3 and three 1-3 infantry units. There are lots of ways to set up these forces, but the optimum Allied setup against a Winter 1939 attack is to place the 2-3 and one 1-3 infantry unit in Brussels, one 1-3 infantry unit in Antwerp and the remaining 1-3 infantry unit in N25. It doesn't really matter how the Belgians set up, as they can't defend against the German attack.

Poor Luxembourg has no forces so the Germans take it for free.

Keep in mind that France and Britain cannot provide any help to the Low Countries in the turn in which they are attacked, so the Germans don't have to worry about French or British AAF providing defensive air support.

The Attack

The conquest will consist of four high odds attacks, but first the Dutch and Belgian AAFs have to be counteraired by one German AAF each. This guarantees that they can't interfere with the German attacks, and leaves Germany with 28 AAF.

The German ground units then move into the positions set out below:



The Germans execute four attacks:

- **The Hague:** Two 3-3 infantry units and 10 AAFs (16:4 = 4:1).
- **Antwerp:** One 4-6 armor unit, one 3-3 infantry unit and one AAF (8:2 = 4:1).
- **Brussels:** One 4-6 armor unit, one 3-3 infantry unit and 17 AAF (24:6 = 4:1).
- **N35:** Four 3-3 infantry units (12:2 = 6:1).

All the attacks will be successful and German units will occupy all the attacked hexes. The 6:1 is an automatic victory; for the three 4:1 attacks the Germans lose one 3-3 infantry unit on a die roll of “1”. The expected losses for the entire operation are about 2.5 BRPs from the two counterair attacks plus 1.5 BRPs from the ground attacks, for a total of about four BRPs.

1940

The Allies should now be a bit nervous: German troops are on the French border ready to assault northern France and Paris. The Allies must defend stoutly in France or Paris might fall in Spring 1940. The Allies must also have to worry about those extra Axis DPs and where they are placed.



SPRING 1940

by Bruce Harper

At one point in the development of A WORLD AT WAR the Axis Winter 1939 attack was not simply a viable option, but was arguably the best strategy for the Axis. In my view, the cumulative effect of various rule changes has been to change the Winter 1939 attack into a dubious gambit, justified only in certain circumstances.

The German Superiority

The main reason I prefer to wait until Spring 1940 to attack in the west is that I see Germany's top priority as building its forces.

Historically the Germans had a big advantage over the Western Allies in 1940 in terms of doctrine, the

employment of their armor and air and the professionalism and competence of their leadership (Hitler's meddling notwithstanding). The Germans had a better plan and they executed it brilliantly. What the Germans did *not* have, Allied propaganda notwithstanding, was a quantitative or even a qualitative advantage over the Western Allies. The French and British had more tanks and planes and many of them were better than their German counterparts. They were just used poorly.

In A WORLD AT WAR, the German superiority is represented partly by the German CTL and Air Nationality DRM advantage over the French, but mainly by the higher combat and movement factor of the German 4-6 armor units and the German numerical advantage in armor and air factors.

The Germans may have as many as 40 armor factors, as against the nine French armor factors and the four British armor factors, two of which are often in Egypt. In the air, the Germans may have 30 AAF vs. France's five AAF and Britain's 15 AAF.

I emphasize the words “may have”...

Building Germany's Force Pool

Some numbers are in order.

Germany begins the game with 110 BRPs, and gains five BRPs in Winter 1939 from the conquest of Poland. Germany therefore has 115 BRPs to spend in 1939.

Since the free eastern front offensive in Fall 1939 is long gone (the starting German BRP level was increased to reflect this change), 15 BRPs of Germany's 115 BRPs are spoken for. This leaves Germany with exactly 100 BRPs.

Germany's unit construction limit is 50 BRPs per turn, which means that if Germany does nothing else in 1939 other than attack Poland, it can spend the remainder of its starting BRPs to build units. In practice, Germany may spend two or three BRPs in Fall 1939 to raid, so the actual number is slightly less, even if Germany defers its attack in the west until Spring 1940.

On the other side of the ledger, what does Germany have to build? Ignoring for the moment losses from the Polish campaign (which are usually around 8-10 BRPs of units), Germany's At Start allowable builds and its Winter 1939 force pool additions are: 10 AAF (30 BRPs); two 2-6 armor units (8 BRPs); eight 4-6 armor units (64 BRPs); one 1-3 infantry unit (one BRP); 16 3-3 infantry units (48

BRPs); two 1-3 airborne units (six BRPs); for a total of 157 BRPs. In addition, Germany will almost always want to spend six BRPs each turn on shipbuilding, for another 12 BRPs.

This adds up to 169 BRPs, plus another 8-10 BRPs for units lost in Poland, for a grand total of nearly 180 BRPs of builds.

Something has to give. Clearly Germany cannot build all its forces in 1939, as even with no shipbuilding and no losses in Poland, Germany will be almost 60 BRPs short of the amount needed to build all its forces. Fortunately for Germany's dreams of conquest, it doesn't need to build all these units. The attack in the west can be conducted without building any additional 3-3 infantry units, and can be carried out with fewer than 12 4-6 armor units.

Essential Builds

Starting the analysis from another viewpoint, what German builds are essential? I would never forego German shipbuilding, so there's 12 BRPs. Germany *has* to build both 1-3 airborne units (6 BRPs) and would certainly like to build its 10 AAF (30 BRPs), plus its expected one AAF lost in Poland (three BRPs), for a total of $12 + 6 + 30 + 3 = 51$ BRPs. Assuming raiding with two pocket battleships in Fall 1939, that leaves $100 - 2 - 51 = 47$ BRPs to build armor units. The two 2-6 armor units are the most cost effective (8 BRPs), which means Germany can build another four 4-6 armor units (32 BRPs), plus a few infantry units with the remaining 7 BRPs, or fudge its air builds a little bit and build one more 4-6 armor unit, for a total of five 4-6 armor units.

If Germany's four starting 4-6 armor units survive the attack on Poland, this will give Germany two 2-6 armor units and nine 4-6 armor units, plus almost all its AAF, for its Spring 1940 attack on France. Since Germany can't lose more than one 4-6 armor unit in Poland, it will have a minimum of eight 4-6 armor units for its attack on France in Spring 1940. If desired, and if Spring 1940 combat losses allow, Germany can have all its air and armor built for the Summer 1940 turn.

The remaining German forces, which consist of a few 4-6 armor units and about half of the German 3-3 infantry units, can be built in 1940 or even 1941. If Germany attacks Russia in Summer 1941, it needs all its air and armor units, as well as its airborne units, but it can do without some of its infantry, which can be built in Summer 1941.

The Cost of the Winter Attack

If Germany attacks in the west in Winter 1939, it will spend 20 BRPs on declarations of war (only one declaration of war is required for Belgium and Luxembourg) and 15 BRPs on a western front offensive. This reduces the German 1939 builds by 35 BRPs. The BRP value of the German losses in Winter 1939 will be small.

It's up to the German player to decide what units to leave unbuilt, but it's helpful to think in terms of specific units. If Germany attacks in Winter 1939, it will go into 1940 with up to five fewer 4-6 armor units (it will have something like four 4-6 armor units rather than nine 4-6 armor units). Or it might have 12 fewer AAF, or some combination of the two.

Comparing Forces

It can be a fatal mistake for the Germans to assume they will have a decisive advantage in France and that France will automatically fall. This is certainly true *if* the Germans have transformed their potential advantage into something concrete by building their air and armor units, but until they are built the additional units don't do anything. This is one reason why Germany collapses near the end of the game (it doesn't have all its units on the board) and the same logic applies at the beginning of the game. Unbuilt units do absolutely nothing until they are built (for Britain, Russia and Japan, whose resistance levels are reduced by unbuilt units, they do less than nothing).

The use of 1939 BRPs to declare war on the Low Countries and attack, rather than build units, will mean that Germany has only rough parity with the Western Allies in armor and air strength going into 1940. The Western Allies will probably have an infantry superiority, and certainly will if one takes into account the inherent superiority of defense and the defensive modifiers for the Maginot line.

If a Winter 1939 attack reduces the number of German armor, the scope of German breakthroughs in Spring 1940 will be significantly reduced. If the Germans have less air, they may not be able to attack at all in Spring 1940.

It goes without saying that the idea of the Winter 1939 attack isn't to conquer France in Spring 1940, so let's have a look at how the French campaign is likely to unfold, as compared to the simple and almost foolproof Spring-Summer 1940 conquest associated with the Spring 1940 attack.

The French Campaign

To me a Winter 1939 attack implies a Spring 1940 German attrition in the west, deferring a western front offensive until Summer 1940, when the Germans have built another 44 BRPs of armor and air units. I realize that in our convention game Ken's Germans attacked in Spring 1940, although I'm not quite sure how or why, nor can I see how the Germans would be able to sustain this level of fighting, since attacking implies losses. In any case, it's clear that even if Germany conducts an offensive in Spring 1940, they can't take Paris in that turn, because German exploitation on the western front is prohibited in Winter 1939. Both an attrition and a modest offensive (constrained by the "missing" German armor or air units), may put the Germans in position to take Paris in Summer 1940.

If the Germans attrition in France in Spring 1940, the Western Allies have a decision to make. One option is to take replacements as losses and give ground to the Germans, then attrition and hope to regain the lost hexes or force the Germans to take front-line units as losses. The second option is to take front-line French 2-3 infantry units as losses themselves and hold their ground, in order to try to hold Paris until Fall 1940. Both options can be combined with counterair attacks to reduce the German air superiority for Summer 1940, since French and British air losses can be rebuilt, while German air losses won't be available for a German attack in Summer 1940.

If the Germans attack in Spring 1940, how big an attack will it be? If the two sides are roughly equal in air, the Germans won't be capable of too much, although they may get within reach of Paris. If the Germans have built air units in Winter 1939 so they have an air superiority, they will only have five or six armor available for exploitation (and maybe less, depending on what happens in Norway). In any event, if the Germans conduct an offensive, the Western Allies fight, including by making counterair attacks in Spring 1940 if the opportunity presents itself.

Anglo-French Cooperation

Anglo-French cooperation restrictions will be lifted at the start of the Western Allied Spring 1940 player turn, which means that British units may defend Paris and British and French air units may cooperate in attack and on defense in Summer 1940.

The essential Allied strategy is to trade French

BRPs for German BRPs, since the French BRPs will be lost once France surrenders. The longer and more intense the fighting in France, the happier the Allies should be. Britain should be willing to sacrifice BRPs and run risks in order to stem the German tide and delay the fall of France until Fall 1940, because the chances of a German invasion of Britain will be low and the first German "Happy Time" in the Atlantic will be delayed by a turn. This is why Anglo-French counterair attacks in Spring 1940 come into consideration or, if the German air withdraws, even a joint ground offensive.

Remember too that the British add five AAF to their force pool in Spring 1940, so the combined Anglo-French air strength will be 25 AAF, or even more if the British produce AAF. Even with the help of the Italian air force, the Axis will have no more than about 35 AAF, so the Axis margin of air superiority for the key airdrop on Paris is not that great.

The bottom line in France is that a Winter 1939 attack may lead to a long, costly campaign where the British don't worry about shipbuilding and BRPs and instead roll up their sleeves and commit to wearing down the Germans in France. While the Germans will have a few more 1940 BRPs than normal (with a Spring 1940 attack they will receive the pro-rated BRPs for the Low Countries in Summer 1940) and won't have to attack the Low Countries, the German construction limit will be the same, and that's where the Germans may run into problems.

Even if the Germans win the battle for France, they are less likely to have the forces to do anything significant in the rest of 1940, and I think Fall 1940-Spring 1941 are the turns where the Axis win or lose the game.

The French Surrender Level

One hidden consequence of this type of fighting in France is that the French surrender level may favor the Allies. Because the forces are more evenly balanced, the Germans may not have the luxury of being able to capture Lyon or Marseilles. For the same reason, more French ground units are likely to survive the German conquest, which also shifts the French surrender level in favor in the Allies. Since the German strategy will be known to the Allied player by the time the 1940 YSS arrives, the Western Allies can either put DPs in France to try to get a large Free French force or can rely on these modifiers and use their DPs elsewhere,

as they see fit.

Ken's solution to this problem was not to establish Vichy France at all. That is a different topic, but for now I'll just say that at the convention the Japanese response to this development was to send a secret peace mission to the Chinese to see whether we couldn't all play WRASSLIN' instead...

Other Considerations

In addition to the military advantages of having control of the Low Countries as the jumping off point for the Spring 1940 attack on France, which I think are more than offset by the disadvantages discussed above, the Winter 1939 attack gives the Germans one additional RP and two additional DPs in the 1940 YSS. The RP can be useful, because it allows the Axis to put eight, rather than seven, RPs in a single category (probably naval research). The DPs can obviously come in handy in a variety of ways.

For the Allies, if Italy also declares war in Winter 1939 there is an early increase in USAT which may turn out to be a significant drawback to the early German attack. Assuming equal allocations of DPs and covert operations, USAT will be 8 in Winter 1939, so a die roll of "6" is needed to trigger an American mobilization and another Western Allied RP and DP. A Winter 1939 American mobilization is something of a disaster for the Axis, because the American BRP base will be 12 BRPs higher in 1940 as compared to the normal Spring 1940 American mobilization, 18 BRPs higher in 1941, 27 BRPs higher in 1941, 40 BRPs higher in 1942, and so on (due to the magic of compound interest).

Even without good luck in this area, the worldwide tension level will be 11, so the Western Allies will probably get an additional RP, as the U.S. gets one RP for every 10 tensions worldwide.

It is therefore not guaranteed that the Germans will get an RP and DP advantage relative to the Western Allies from the Winter 1939 attack. The Axis can prevent this by keeping Italy neutral until 1940.

From Italy's point of view, entering the war in Winter 1939 has its advantages and disadvantages, as is discussed elsewhere. Ethiopia and Libya will be more vulnerable than they are after France falls, in part because the Italian infantry will have its combat training level reduced because it will likely only be in limited supply, and will therefore incur a -1 DM (15.33C). The Italians will also forego slight BRP growth in the 1940 YSS, but in exchange the Italians will have all their BRPs available for 1940. They will probably need them, because the Italian AAF and 2-5 armor unit are likely to be pressed into service in France. If the Western Allies fight in France, as they probably should, combat between the British and Italians in 1940 may well occur near Paris or London, rather than in the desert near the Libya-Egypt border.

Conclusion

I consider the Winter 1939 attack to be terribly risky for the Axis, with little payoff. The Western Allies will know the German force levels going into the 1940 YSS, and can allocate their RPs and DPs accordingly. By attacking early, the Axis fail to make the most of two of their big advantages: the German air and armor superiority and the Axis flexibility in choosing its strategic goals after the fall of France.

Never Say Never

"Terribly risky" or not, our author found himself attacking the Low Countries in Winter 1939 at the 2010 Convention. Had he become older and wiser?

Older, perhaps, but no wiser. Still, no plan survives contact with the enemy. Fall 1939 brought several rude surprises. Most importantly, the British and French rolled for Anglo-French cooperation and got the maximum result. The Western Allies also mined Norwegian waters, which reduced the German construction limit. Faced with such provocations, the Germans shocked their adversaries by attacking in Winter 1939, even with some AAF unbuilt. After a bitter struggle, the Germans won a one-turn victory...