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THE FRENCH CONFECTION

How to Make An Airy Pastry of a Defense Last For at Least Two Turns And What You Must Do When the Croissant Crumbles

by Dave Hanson and Bruce Harper

Introduction

Every *A WORLD AT WAR* player has at some point experienced the frustration of trying to defend France against Axis invasion. The Allied player generally feels better if he tells himself that he's actually just defending Britain, in France. Emotional excuses become useful in the game as in history because, well, France's fate is to FALL. We show in this article how France can last *just long enough* to preserve Allied hopes.



The French Military

A WORLD AT WAR reflects in the French force pool the deep divisions in and weaknesses of the French nation in 1939 and 1940. The French Army as it existed in those years equaled the expanding German Army numerically and in quality of equipment, but in no other significant ways. Most critically, the Germans possessed significant advantages in quality of training

and morale. A famous Frenchman named Napoleon Bonaparte once put the ratio this way: "Morale is to all other factors on the battlefield as three is to one." Our game reflects the mismatch.

Germany starts Fall 1939 with 14 infantry corps and generally will build none; France starts with ten infantry corps and four allowable builds in 1939. The basic French infantry unit has a 2-3 rating against the German 3-3. French armored units (one at start, two that may be built), are rated 3-5. These face the German 4-6 Panzers, and suffer shortfalls in combat strength, movement ability and in sheer numbers: Germany begins with four 4-6 armor units and in 1939 will often build another four or five, plus one or two 2-6 armor units. German armor will outweigh the French armor by some 40 factors to nine.

The French combat training level (CTL) starts at a basic level of one (no particular handicap in the first turns of the war), but the Germans have a CTL of two. The French Air Force likewise falls short of Luftwaffe power, both in numbers of factors and the French Air Nationality DRM of one against Germany's Air Nationality DRM of two. France does possess a useful and balanced Navy, with a Naval Nationality DRM of one, but Axis players will avoid wasting their naval strength against French fleets. The Axis prefer to engage the French Navy with their air power, if at all, depleting the French fleet and thereby gaining pro-Axis French Surrender Level (FSL) modifiers.

When *GATHERING STORM* is played, some German armor units may have a combat strength or three, rather than four, factors, and Germany may build and deploy fewer infantry units than in classic *A WORLD AT WAR*, but rarely more.

France's force pool may also vary, with France starting with more different levels of infantry, armor and air units. GATHERING STORM research may increase the combat strength of French armor units from three to four factors, and the Maginot Line may be extended towards the French coast (at the expense of some French infantry units).

Most of all, the war may start at any time, so the first turn of A WORLD AT WAR may well be before or after Fall 1939. When playing GATHERING STORM, the Allied player must always keep this in mind, to ensure that France isn't caught unprepared, with too many unbuilt units and armor units that arrive in the French force pool too late.

The following analysis assumes a classic A WORLD AT WAR starting turn of Fall 1939, but when GATHERING STORM is played, the time line will often be different. While many of the same considerations will apply, one of the best things about the prewar games is that they confront players with novel challenges, and France is no different. The Western Allied player must be careful not to take classic A WORLD AT WAR assumptions for granted.

1939

So far as early survival goes France finds its best defense not from its army but from the A WORLD AT WAR rules. In Fall 1939 a German attack is illegal and in Winter 1939 it is subject to severe restrictions.

Fall 1939

The rules prohibit German attacks anywhere but Poland in Fall 1939:

9.91 INITIAL AXIS OFFENSIVE OPERATIONS: In the first turn of *A World at War*, an Axis major power that undertook aggression against a minor country in the final turn of *Gathering Storm* may not carry out any offensive actions or attritions on fronts other than the one containing that minor country. (EXCEPTION: Raiders - 21.5331).

Classic A World at War

In classic *A World at War*, the first turn is Fall 1939 and Germany may only conduct offensive operations against Poland, and may not carry out any offensive actions or attritions on the western or Mediterranean fronts (EXCEPTION: Raiders - 21.5331).

This restriction reflects the German focus on the historical campaign against Poland in September 1939 and allows the French to bring their army up to full strength before Germany can organize an attack in the west.

Winter 1939

In Winter 1939 German progress on the western front is severely limited by the weather. Here are the relevant portions of the Winter Table:

Winter Table - 34.41	
0	No effect.
1	Movement of armor units during exploitation reduced by 1.
2	Movement of armor units during exploitation reduced by 2.
3	Movement of armor units during exploitation reduced by 3; overruns and airdrops are prohibited.
4	Movement of armor units during exploitation is reduced by 4.
5	Movement of armor units during exploitation is reduced by 5. Fortifications and railheads may not be constructed.
6	Exploitation is prohibited.
Automatic winter levels:	
6	Western front

While the Axis may attack France in Winter 1939, they may not conduct overruns, airdrops or exploitation. To defend, all the French must do is place ground units in each hex of its frontiers with Germany, Belgium and Italy. The only French hexes which the Germans might take in Winter 1939 are Maginot hexes and Sedan; Italy might grab V20. If these hexes are defended by double stacks of 2-3 infantry units, France will suffer nothing from any German attack save possibly a lost DP if the Germans retain control of two hexes in France. To achieve even this small result, Germany must incur all the drawbacks of a Winter 1939 attack in the west, especially the diversion of 15 BRPs to a western front offensive and 20 BRPs for declaring war on the Low Countries. The 1940 Wehrmacht will be smaller by several 4-6 armor units and perhaps some AAF. For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see the article on when Germany should attack France.

France begins the game with 40 BRPs and must build two 3-5 armor units (12 BRPs) and four 2-3 infantry units (eight BRPs). In addition, France must spend six BRPs on naval builds in Fall 1939 and at least three BRPs on naval builds in Winter 1939, as France may not defer naval construction during the Phony War:

27.7272C. DEFERRING CONSTRUCTION: Construction or repair of a naval unit may be deferred, at no shipbuilding or BRP cost, by moving the ship counter along the same row one column to the right. Naval units in the "Winter" column are moved to the "Spring" column. Completion of construction or repairs is thereby delayed one turn. The voluntary deferring of naval construction is subject to the following restrictions:

- ...

- France may not defer naval construction until the Allied player turn following any one of:
 - An Italian declaration of war against Britain or France;
 - The first Axis full offensive on the western front; or
 - The first German declaration of war against a minor country on the western front.

In a GATHERING STORM game, France's starting BRP base may be less than 60 BRPs, if it hasn't fully mobilized (this will be rare), and its starting BRP total will vary, based on when war broke out, the relative German and French support levels, how many tile points France had at the of GATHERING STORM, and the number of French trade pacts in minor countries when war broke out.

In classic A WORLD AT WAR, France will therefore have $40 - 12 - 8 - 9 = 11$ BRPs left over in 1939 to mount some sort of limited offensive. The most helpful attack might be to send some French AAF to counterair any stray German AAF, in hopes of eliminating one or even two German AAF. The French can rebuild their air losses and be at full strength for 1940. The French must be sure that the total of BRPs spent on this offensive operation (which they can control) and rebuilding the losses (which they can't fully control, although attacking a stack of 10 or 15 German AAF will ensure higher losses) doesn't exceed the available French BRPs. Deficit spending is illegal in 1939 (39.22C) and France can't deficit spend anyway (39.22B). The French may use the extra BRPs to double-accelerate the *Jean Bart* in Fall 1939 or lay down a destroyer in Winter 1939. It is desirable for the French to avoid BRP growth in the 1940 YSS, since any such growth would add to the value of France as a conquest for Germany (58.71).

1940

Given the limitations on and costs of German actions in 1939, the Germans will usually spend their time and BRPs building up the Wehrmacht for 1940. This also means that Germany benefits from the protection of rule 15.54 into Summer 1940:

15.54 EARLY GERMAN OVERRUNS AND EXPLOITATION ATTACKS: "Ex" results from German overruns and exploitation attacks are treated as "Ex-1" results:

...

B. On the western front during the first two Axis player turns in which the Axis conduct any western front offensive ground or air operations, but no later than Summer 1940. Normally this will be Spring 1940 and Summer 1940.

So France will likely face the first blast of Axis force in Spring 1940. France must survive long enough to delay German ground operations against Britain or Russia until 1941. How long is enough?

The One Turn French Collapse

Let's start our answer by saying that one turn is *not* enough. Allied players cannot allow a German conquest of France in Spring 1940. If Germany conquers France in Spring 1940, then Germany has time and BRPs to operate against Britain during all three remaining turns of 1940 and into 1941. Britain cannot survive the kind of pounding that Germany will dish out over a year. And even if Germany doesn't go after Britain directly, the Axis can collapse the Middle East and still mount a full-fledged invasion of Russia in Summer 1941.

British forces are not necessary to prevent a French Spring 1940 collapse, although they certainly make it much easier to construct a viable French defense. The success of the Western Allied campaign in France will then be measured by the level of German and British casualties, the French surrender level and the position on the board at the start of the Fall 1940 game turn. It is important to realize, however, that even if the British commit forces to the defense of France, Germany can still conquer France in Spring 1940 if the Allies help them by making serious mistakes.

An extreme example demonstrates this sort of Allied "help" for the Axis. At a 2004 convention game, Germany conquered France in Spring 1940 with absolutely *no* Axis casualties. A defective Allied defense assured the result. France and Britain defended northern France strongly, with double-stacked infantry and all their armor units; but left only replacements along the Franco-Italian border, backed up by 2-3 infantry units.

Seeing this deployment, Italy declared war on the Western Allies in Spring 1940, and several German 4-6 armor units and supporting AAF moved into Italy. A German 4-6 armor unit and Italian infantry attacked a French replacement in hex T21, southeast of Lyon, creating a breakthrough at 3:1 odds. Then two German 4-6 armor units, supported by 16 Axis AAF, overran the French 2-3 infantry unit defending Lyon. Five French AAF based in Q21 between Lyon and Paris could have helped the defense, although the Germans would have intercepted them.

The Allied player decided to hold back the French air to defend against exploitation attacks, but exploiting German armor units, unhindered by Allied ZoCs, tore across France and occupied the undefended French airbase, displacing the French air force and inverting it. Four of the German 4-6 armor units attacked the two French 2-3 infantry units garrisoning Paris from the west. Supported by the remaining German AAF flying from western Germany they captured Paris at 3:1 odds. Meanwhile other German forces took Brussels, eliminating the last land supply source for all defenders of northern France.

For this debacle to occur, which for many players would justify replaying the turn, the Allies had to make some very serious mistakes, the main one being failing to recognize the threat of a southern attack. If German armor can reach the Franco-Italian border, the Western Allies have to block the threat. As is often the case in *A WORLD AT WAR*, this is fairly easy to do once the player realizes the threat exists.

When *GATHERING STORM* is played, number of Italian civilian factories still to be mobilized will determine when Italy can declare war on the Western Allies, and therefore how soon this threat materializes.

The British Commitment

It is difficult to find a better use for British units in 1939 and early 1940 than employment in France. British failure to help France is a near-mortal Allied sin, as Britain truly defends itself by defending France. Britain starts the war with two 2-5 armor units, two 3-4 infantry units, six replacements and a few Commonwealth units. By the end of 1939 Britain will have up to thirteen AAF, and may have up to two more 3-4 infantry units if Canada and South Africa deploy their starting infantry corps to Europe.

In a *GATHERING STORM* game, the strength of the available British forces can vary considerably. Britain might therefore be able to put more forces in France than in a classic *A WORLD AT WAR* game, or sometimes less. This is an important consideration to keep in mind in *GATHERING STORM* as Britain considers whether or not to mobilize its civilian factories.

Usually Britain will deploy its ground units in second-line hexes in France where the Germans must attack them with expensive 4-6 armor units and AAF. Britain also must carefully base the Royal Air Force out of German counterair range, but within four hexes of

its expeditionary forces, so as to provide defensive air support if desired.

What to send? How many British ground units should be employed to assist in the defense of France? The basic rule of thumb is that the minimum useful British deployment is two 3-4 infantry units or one 3-4 infantry unit and one 2-5 armor unit. A second 2-5 armor unit is certainly useful, as the British armor units provide extra ZoCs to hinder German movement and don't suffer a -1 DM against exploitation attacks as do infantry. The British must be careful to stack any 2-5 armor units 3-4 infantry units if there is a possibility of a useful overrun by German 4-6 armor units. Generally speaking, one or two 3-4 infantry units and a corresponding number of 2-5 armor units guarantee French survival until at least Summer 1940 and a reasonable chance at a pro-Allied French surrender level.

The British should keep their units concentrated, keeping open lines of communication back to the French ports. While the British normally make a serious commitment to France, they shouldn't send everything. The British should defend each of their beaches with at least a replacement, and have to be prepared to deal with a sneaky German airdrop into southern England prior to the French surrender.

Assuming France doesn't fall in Spring 1940, does a Summer 1940 Axis conquest of France amount to "just long enough" for the Allies? Maybe, maybe not. You won't know until later! Game design intends a Summer 1940 conquest as the natural and usual result, favoring neither side and having a neutral effect on the game in the long term.

A Fall 1940 conquest usually tips the game in favor of the Allies. Germany may deliberately delay taking Paris in order to take something else in the interim. An undefended London or an opportunistic declaration of war on Spain are possible distractions which might be well worth Germany's time. These Axis alternatives lie beyond the scope of this article.

When *GATHERING STORM* is played, the time line will often be different, but it is still generally true that if Germany takes more than two turns to conquer France, this is sign that something might have gone wrong. There have certainly been games where Germany has bogged down in France, usually because the Allies have an economic advantage and Germany finds itself running short of BRPs in the year in which it is trying to conquer France. In extreme cases, France may survive, but more commonly this results in a pro-

Allied French surrender level and a strong Britain, which can be nearly as bad for the Axis.

Anglo-French Cooperation Restrictions

The Anglo-French cooperation restrictions are a key aspect of the French campaign and the players must be familiar with these rules (53.2). The most common and important features of these restrictions are worth discussing.

The Anglo-French cooperation restrictions are normally lifted at the start of the second Allied player turn following the German attack in the west (usually the Allied Summer 1940 player turn):

53.21 COOPERATION RESTRICTIONS TEMPORARY: Friction between Britain and France early in the war limits cooperation between the two powers as set out below. Some or all of the Anglo-French cooperation restrictions can be lifted by a successful Anglo-French cooperation research result. Regardless of the current Anglo-French cooperation level from research, all Anglo-French cooperation restrictions are lifted at the earliest of the following three times:

- A. The start of the second Allied player turn following any one of:
- An Italian declaration of war against Britain or France;
 - The first Axis full offensive on the western front; or
 - The first German declaration of war against a minor country on the western front.
 - A German declaration of war on Russia.
- B. The start of the Allied Spring 1941 player turn.
- C. The start of the Allied player turn after France surrenders.

Classic A WORLD AT WAR assumes a “par” (4-step) result for GATHERING STORM Anglo-French Cooperation research. The triggering events are also slightly different, to take into account the possibility of different wars.

The lifting of some of the restrictions may be accelerated by achieving an Anglo-French cooperation research result (53.22), but let’s ignore that possibility.

One important restriction prohibits British units from defending certain French hexes:

53.23 PROHIBITED HEXES: British units may not occupy:

- A. Paris;
- B. Marseilles or Lyon;
- C. The city of Vichy;
- D. Any Maginot hex. Once a Maginot Line hex has been occupied by Axis forces, British forces may enter it, even if France has not fallen and Anglo-French cooperation restrictions are still in effect.

The second important restriction is that British and French units may not stack together:

53.25 STACKING: British and French units may not stack together under any circumstances.

The third restriction prohibits a wide range of joint activities, most of which flow from the prohibition against joint stacking. To save space, only the headings have been including in the following extract from the rules, except for the most important restriction: 53.251D:

53.251 PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES: The restriction in 53.25 prohibits the following:

- A. **EXPLOITATION:** ...
- B. **OVERRUNS:** ...
- C. **AIR BASING:** ...
- D. **DEFENSIVE AIR SUPPORT:** British air units may not provide defensive air support for French units.
- E. **GROUND SUPPORT AND AIR INTERCEPTION:** ...
- F. **AIR COVER AND AIR ATTACKS ON NAVAL UNITS:** ...
- G. **CARRYING TROOPS:** ...
- H. **NAVAL INTERCEPTIONS:** ...
- I. **NAVAL COUNTER-INTERCEPTIONS:** ...
- J. **INTERCEPTION OF AIRDROPS AND AIR TRANSPORT:** ...
- K. **INTERCEPTION OF DEFENSIVE AIR SUPPORT:** ...

Rule 53.252 allows a variety of activities, several of which relate to attacks from different hexes. Finally, rule 53.27 makes the restrictions apply symmetrically to Britain and France.

The most significant effect of the Anglo-French cooperation restrictions is that the French and British defend on their own until the restrictions are lifted. This means that if the Germans are attacking only French ground units, they can ignore the British air unless they want to conduct an airdrop which can be intercepted by British AAF. This applies mainly in Spring 1940, and to a certain extent in Summer 1940.

From the Allied point of view, covering one or two key hexes with British ground units strengthens the Western Allied defense not simply by freeing French ground units for other duties, but also by allowing the British AAF to participate in the battle.

The Germans therefore will try to “work around” any British ground units by instead attacking French ground units. Ideally, the Germans will be able to isolate the British units without allowing the RAF to take part in the battle. The Allies, for their part, will try to position the British ground units in key hexes, so that German avoidance of them hamstring the Axis attack.

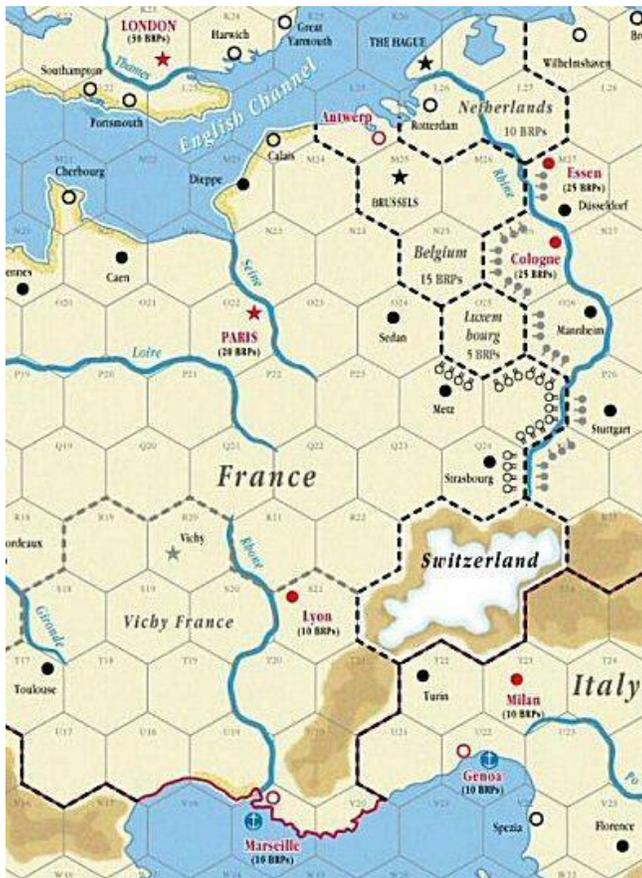
The German Attack

The Axis capture of Paris means the conquest of France.

58.11 WHEN FRANCE SURRENDERS: France surrenders at the end of the Allied player turn if:

- A. Paris is controlled by the Axis; or
- B. France voluntarily surrenders when it would not otherwise do so. France may not voluntarily surrender until Fall 1940 or later.

The Axis have four possible approaches to Paris. We shall consider each of these attack routes in turn, in ascending order of preference.



The Air Line

The first Axis alternative, a German airdrop on Paris, can be dismissed as ineffective unless executed in conjunction with some other attack. Sometimes a canny and daring Allied player will leave Paris unoccupied, or held by a single-factor replacement, preferring to deploy the stronger Western Allied ground units forward to clutter the land approaches to Paris. This may tempt the German player to use an airborne unit and risk German AAF to airdrop into Paris.

As Germany starts 1940 with only one air transport unit, only one German 1-3 airborne unit may be used for such an airdrop. The German capture of Paris by

airdrop immediately costs France 20 BRPs for loss of a key economic area, plus more BRPs on an offensive operation to recapture Paris. The limitations on French units while Paris is occupied will also be triggered. But there is no doubt that the Allies *will* retake Paris. They will have more than enough ground units adjacent to Paris to succeed. A German 1-3 airborne unit will defend with a DM of two, with only three factors of defensive air support, for a total defense of five.

Worse, a good Allied player will recapture Paris by attacking across the Seine and Loire. A successful cross-river attack allows the Western Allies to place a bridgehead counter in Paris, which allows the Western Allies to stack up to five ground units in Paris to defend against a German attack in Summer 1940. A German airdrop into Paris will thus often result in an improvement of the Allied position, and is therefore counter-productive for the Axis unless made in conjunction with ground attacks.

The Alsace Gate

Of the various ground approaches to Paris, the central route leads directly from Germany into France. One benefit of this “1870” route through Alsace/Lorraine is that Germany need not declare war on the Low Countries, which costs Germany BRPs (although these are recouped from the value of the conquered minor countries) and increases USAT. Another benefit arises when the French surrender is resolved: with the border hexes in German hands there is no fortified sanctuary for French units to survive and shift the French surrender level in favor of the Allies.

From the German point of view, the Alsace route suffers from three major drawbacks. The first is that Paris is five hexes from the German border. This distance ensures that the conquest of France via the Alsace route will require at least two turns absent a glaring blunder by the Allies. Secondly, the way is so narrow that Germany’s armor units will have little maneuvering room as they pass through Alsace; Germany can only blast forward by brute strength, eliminating French units instead of isolating them. Finally, in the 1930s the French fortified this route. The Maginot Line adds a +2 DM to the defending French units. To overcome the high DM of the Maginot garrison and get at least 2:1 odds on its attacks, Germany must use large amounts of AAF for ground support, usually at odds of less than 3:1. That said, if France fails to double stack the Maginot Line, Germany certainly should consider attacking Maginot hexes,

especially the P25 salient. Otherwise-unemployed German infantry serve this purpose well, if the Germans are willing to accept casualties from the mandatory exchanges resulting from attacks on fortress hexes in supply.

The Alpine Trail

Both sides always have to pay attention to the possibility of an Axis attack through Italy and across the Alps in southeastern France.

An Axis invasion of France by this route stretches the French defenses and leads directly to Marseilles and Lyon. Capture of these key economic areas costs the French BRPs, reduces the French construction limit and shifts the French surrender level in favor of the Axis. However, the route suffers shortcomings similar to the Axis invasion route through Alsace, in that the terrain is difficult and the German armor units won't have room to maneuver.

A good German player will always leave some 4-6 armor units within movement range of the French Alps, but the number of German armor units which can exploit from an Alpine breakthrough is limited by the number of hexes available in Italy for the armor prior to the breakthrough. Creating the breakthrough itself may not be an easy task, as the mountains along the Franco-Italian border and the Rhone provide defending French units with a favorable +1 DM. If the French adequately defend the south, significant amounts of Axis AAF will be needed for ground support if the Axis are to mount a serious attack. Exploiting armor also have their exploitation movement capability reduced by one if their breakthrough hex is in rough terrain (16.31D).

An Alpine attack requires an Italian declaration of war on the Allies, which may not be part of the overall Axis plan in Africa or for USAT. And of course the Alps are far from Paris, which means that a southern attack will still take at least two turns to conquer France, barring Allied help (as described earlier in this article). If the Axis rely solely upon the Alpine Route then they will not be able to isolate and cut off large segments of the French Army, as Britain can provide sea supply to the Allied armies in the north. This type of attack will likely result in a pro-Allied French surrender level.

The Alpine Trail is a good route into France in conjunction with another attack, but usually isn't sufficient on its own. Because of the limited capacity for exploitation, the southern route is an ideal

secondary attack. The Germans should always threaten to attack south of Switzerland, and when they do, the Western Allies must always commit some units to defend against that attack.

The Belgian Highway

Historically Germany took this northeastern route into France. Blasting through Belgium gives the German armor some maneuvering room to both attack and to isolate Allied units. An advance through Belgium outflanks the Maginot Line, unless it has been extended by GATHERING STORM research, and all Low Country hexes are clear terrain, with no rivers to block the German advance or increase the DM for the defending Allied units. The German-Belgian border is also only four hexes from Paris, giving aggressive German armor the opportunity to get adjacent to Paris on exploitation attacks. Lines of approach get no better than this.

A one-turn offensive will usually conquer Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, yielding Germany 30 BRPs and a DP for the next YSS. Exploiting German armor may well take the Channel ports, giving Germany airbases close to southern England, which should keep the British honest by forcing them to keep some units in Britain to defend against airdrops or seaborne invasion in Summer 1940. Finally, the northeastern attack may be carried out without Italian participation.

The only drawbacks to this route are that Germany must make declarations of war against Belgium-Luxembourg and the Netherlands, which increases USAT, and bringing the Belgian army into the war creates a few small speed bumps for the Axis in Spring 1940. Most of all, the Allies should be ready for this attack, so the Germans will be forced to engage the bulk of the Anglo-French forces once they enter France.

When Belgium has received Allied or Axis diplomatic attention in GATHERING STORM, and one side or the other ends with three flags in Belgium, the Belgian Army may be reduced or increased by one 1-3 (greater variation was possible when GATHERING STORM was first published, but this has been moderated). The addition or removal of a single Belgium 1-3 infantry unit is more significant than most players think, because it affects the number of German factors that can attack Western Allied units in France, which in turn can expand or limit French and British defensive options.

The Wehrmacht

What Axis forces might we expect to see ready for Spring 1940? A well-prepared German will have a fully-built Luftwaffe of 30 AAF. One of Germany's greatest advantages over the Western Allies is its air superiority, and Germany should maximize that edge. To the air punch Germany will have added both of its 1-3 airborne units, allowing it to threaten airdrops in both France and Norway. Ground forces will vary somewhat, depending upon German casualties in Poland and 1939 spending priorities.

As noted earlier, when GATHERING STORM is played, the exact German forces will vary, depending on a number of factors, including when war breaks out.

Assuming no German armor losses in Poland and no battleship accelerations or extra combat spending in 1939, the average German Fall and Winter 1939 builds will look like this (the Germans will have slightly less than 100 BRPs to spend on construction in 1939):

- **Naval:** 12 BRPs.
- **Air:** 30-36 BRPs (depending on losses in Poland).
- **Airborne:** 6 BRPs.
- **Armor:** 40-48 BRPs (two 2-6 armor units, four or five 4-6 armor units).
- **Infantry:** Few if any BRPs.

For the Spring 1940 attack in the west, Germany will deploy 30 AAF, two airborne units, ten or eleven armor units, and infantry. Because of the narrow frontage, the Germans don't need all that many infantry, and shouldn't be concerned that they have unbuilt infantry units at the start of the campaign.

Italy might be able to contribute another five AAF, a 2-5 armor unit and some infantry



The Battle for France

All these generalities are helpful, as it is important for A WORLD AT WAR players to understand why the battle for France tends to unfold as it does. But the real test for both players is in the execution of the German attack.

Overruns

German strength allows that deadly concentration of force known as the overrun:

13.52 MECHANICS: Overruns are conducted by moving no more than two units (EXCEPTION: Specialized units may overstack for overruns) through the same hexside into a hex containing enemy unit(s) at odds of 6:1 or greater. At least one of the overrunning units must be an armor unit with a functional mechanized component. Each overrunning unit must expend one additional movement point to occupy the overrun hex. If the overrunning units do not have sufficient movement points, the overrun is prohibited.

The Germans can easily overrun Belgian 1-3 infantry units with twelve factors. The most southern Belgian hex (N25) is a common site for an overrun, when it is defended by a single Belgium 1-3 infantry unit – it can be overrun by two German 4-6 armor units supported by four AAF. The same analysis applies to a 1-3 in Antwerp, or (less commonly) in M26. Germany may overrun two Belgian ground factors almost anywhere in Belgium, including Brussels – but this would divert many more German air factors and reduces the power of any attack into France.

Once Germany takes N25, it can attack Sedan from two hexes (N25 and Luxembourg, which has no defending forces), creating a key breakthrough. Alternatively, German units in N25 may attack Brussels. If the Allies deploy the Belgian 2-3 infantry unit in N25 to prevent this overrun, the Germans have the option of overrunning a Belgian 1-3 infantry unit in Brussels.

Germany won't be able to do many overruns, because it drains the German AAF, but the Allies always have to take this tactic into account. The Allies must decide where to leave the holes, as they can't cover every hex.

The French Defense

From the Western Allied point of view, a fundamental consideration is to make their front line "overrun-proof" so that German forces cannot penetrate to the second line of defense and create breakthroughs. Once the front line is strong enough to

stop overruns, the defender can then concentrate on minimizing the destructive effect of exploitation.

A secondary consideration, however, is that in some sectors the Allies may wish to defend with more than the bare minimum necessary to prevent overruns in order to hold certain areas and create more favorable French surrender conditions.

A typical classic A WORLD AT WAR French defense, applying these principles, is depicted below:



An overrun-proof line along the French border is backed up by two French armor units and, directly in between Sedan and Paris, a British 2-5 armor unit and 3-4 infantry unit.

The logic of this defense can be seen by analyzing each possible German attack, beginning in the north.

- German armor overrunning the Belgian 1-3 infantry unit in Antwerp runs into the French 2-3 infantry unit and replacement in Calais, which have a defensive value of six and can't be overrun. If the Germans instead exploit off the Belgian 1-3 infantry unit and overrun the French infantry adjacent to the breakthrough hex, they then would have to attack the French 3-5 armor unit northeast of Paris.
- A drive through southern Belgium and Luxembourg can create breakthroughs in the French border hexes, but then the exploiting German armor runs into the Western Allied armor, which can't be overrun.
- A breakthrough in the most eastern Maginot hex could be followed by exploitation overruns of the other Maginot hexes, but this advance peters out and cannot reach Paris.
- In the south, no overruns are possible and any exploitation attacks out of the French Alps are blocked by the French 3-5 armor unit backing up the line and the French 2-3 infantry unit in Lyon, which defends at full value against exploitation attacks.

There are many possible variations to this defense. The Western Allies may prefer to leave weaker frontier forces in some areas in order to more strongly defend Lyon and Marseilles. The precise size and location of the British forces may vary as well.

The position of the Western Allied air forces is important. The most logical spot for the French air is the hex southwest of Paris, because defensive air support may be flown to every key hex. Similarly, the British air should be based in a hex which cannot be counterair, but from which it can fly defensive air support over the British ground units in France.

Where might the British units be placed to meet the Spring onslaught? The Allied player will want to keep them concentrated in positions from which they can bug out to the Channel or Biscay ports when France begins to collapse. The British usually will want to stay out of reach of German infantry in order to avoid being subject to regular ground attacks, which usually means taking up a position in the Allied second or third lines. Given these criteria, British units often will be posted in one or more of the following locations in Spring 1940:

- Two 3x4 infantry units blocking the approaches to Paris from the east or southeast.
- A 2-5 armor unit somewhere south or southeast of Paris, probably in P22 or P23.
- A 2-5 armor unit southwest of Lyon, behind the French Alps, to provide a ZoC to hinder Axis exploitation from the south.

These British units may stick around in France for the Summer 1940 turn, but need not do so. Their main purpose is to make it easier to avoid a mistake leading to a dangerous Spring 1940 collapse, and to limit the German advances in Spring 1940 so that the French surrender level is reasonable.

In Summer 1940, with even more Axis armor flooding into France, the British will be able to do little to prevent the debacle. There is a direct relationship between the number of ground and air units the British are willing to risk and the number of French ground units which survive the Summer 1940 turn to modify the French surrender level. But if the British have too many ground units committed to France with few or no defending units in Britain, Germany may well forego taking Paris in Summer 1940 and instead try to get a foothold in an inadequately defended Britain, intending to follow up with an all-out attack on Britain once France is conquered. Similarly, if the French collapse sees too many British ground units lost to isolation, Britain may be faced with the unpleasant choice of warping its air and naval builds to rebuild ground units at double the normal cost or risking a Fall 1940 Sea Lion. Balancing the risks and benefits of committing British ground and air units to the defense of France was a difficult task for Churchill and is no less difficult in A WORLD AT WAR.



German Tactics

Germany will enter France using one of two exploitation techniques: either on a broad front or in long “fingers” of exploitation.

The broad front usually appears following exploitation attacks out of breakthroughs in Belgium. Exploiting German armor units attack and eliminate the Allied units (usually double-stacked French 2-3 infantry units) occupying the Franco-Belgian border hexes (hex row 24). While the German armor will have only penetrated one hex into France, it will all be supplied and Germany is well positioned to attack a hex adjacent to Paris in Summer 1940. A potential flaw in this approach is that the Western Allies sometimes get a high attrition roll and recapture one or two hexes in row 24.

Exploiting “fingers” involve separate breakthroughs and exploitation attacks which try to split the defending Western Allied units into isolated pockets which are unable to defend coherently. Not surprisingly, this technique is much more effective on the broad Russian steppes than in the more confined spaces of northeastern France. It is difficult to execute such attacks unless the Western Allies fail to defend key hexes adequately.

If the defenders are encircled and unable to free themselves, they will die out of supply during the Allied Spring 1940 player turn and the cost of rebuilding them may well be prohibitive. However, if the isolated units can be supplied, then the exploiting armor units themselves may be cut off, which will prevent them from exploiting during the Axis Summer 1940 player turn. This may not matter if there are enough other German armor units in full supply.

The Russians and especially the Germans are often able to pinch off such exploitation attacks by attritioning them. Alternatively, a defender who has sufficient strength can simply attack the exploiting armor, which by definition is unaccompanied by supporting infantry (see the Summer 2005 issue of ULTRA for a successful example of this type of counterattack). Neither defensive technique works well in France, because the Western Allies are too weak to take more than one or two hexes by attrition, and because the German air superiority rules out effective offensive ground operations. The main danger for the Germans is that they will have too narrow a front near Paris to exploit with enough armor units to take the French capital in Summer 1940.

Western Allied Counterattacks

We have all at some point experienced the anguish caused by a series of “1” and “2” ground combat results. These die rolls portend piles of dead units from “Ex” and “a” (or, Heaven forbid, “A”) results. What courses of action are available to the Western Allies if Germany suffers this experience in Poland, the Low Countries and northern France?

France doesn't have much of a BRP margin for playing around, given its low construction limit. But French BRPs are much more “disposable” than British BRPs, because France rarely collapses because it runs out of BRPs. If the Western Allies can “trade” French BRPs for German BRPs, they should almost always do so. So what kinds of attack are feasible for the Western Allies, and especially the French, in Spring 1940?

First, the Western Allies should look for small stacks of German AAF. A lazy Axis player might leave one or two AAF outside the “big stack” airbases in Frankfurt and the Ruhr. German AAF which counterairred from a front line base could not TR back to other stacks for protection; or it may be the German player preferred to uninvert AAF which counterairred rather than TR it to a safer hex. If the French counterair a single German AAF with two French AAF, the most likely result is that each side will lose one AAF. France can afford the trade if it can rebuild the lost AAF and have the AAF uninverted for the Summer 1940 turn, while Germany will bleed a bit more and have fewer AAF during its Summer 1940 player turn.

Secondly, the Allies should check to see if any exploiting Axis armor units are in hexes against which French ground units can get 1:1 odds. Attacks of this sort can be costly and may also fail, but the loss of even one or two Axis armor units can affect the French surrender level by reducing the Axis ability to eliminate French ground units. In addition, the Germans don't have unlimited BRPs in 1940 (although it often seems otherwise to the Allies), so every unit the Allies can eliminate affects the Axis war effort, if only by reducing their options.

If the Western Allies spend less than 15 BRPs on offensive operations, they can still roll for a western front attrition and hope to take a hex and eliminate additional Axis units. This is especially true if the Western Allied offensive operations are restricted to counterair attacks, with their ground units attritioning. The obvious drawback, of course, is that if the British use BRPs to counterair, then rebuild the AAF they lose,

they could end up in a deep BRP hole, as they might be paying for the privilege of losing AAF.

If Germany doesn't take Paris in Summer 1940 then the foregoing advice also applies to the Allied Summer 1940 turn, although the British have to be careful not to get ground units caught in France in the event the Germans launch a surprise Fall 1940 invasion of Britain.

While it's commendable for the Western Allies to try to inflict German casualties, they should also try to minimize British losses and avoid having French units unbuilt or leaving key hexes vacant, as this will give the German 4-6 armor units more “running room”. But, as is often the case, playing for an advantage may mean running risks.

Tenacious Defense

Apart from counterattacks, what should the Western Allies do in response to the German attack into France in Spring 1940?

The Western Allied priority is to get the largest possible garrison into Paris. That means a minimum of two 3-factor ground units. Unless Anglo-French cooperation restrictions no longer apply, two 3-5 armor units should be in position to break contact with any exploiting German armor and move into Paris. If the British are permitted to move 3-4 infantry units into Paris, so much the better, as the British ground units may defend Paris while the French armor units clutter up the German lines of approach.

This is subject to some qualifications, however. In a GATHERING STORM game, France may have 4-5 armor units available for the defense of Paris, and Britain may have one or more specialized units, which may be able to stack in Paris if the Allies achieved a high level of GATHERING STORM Anglo-French cooperation research. Conversely, it may be more important to use the French armor units to prevent deep German exploitation, in order to preserve French units and achieve a more favorable French Surrender Level.

The second Western Allied priority is to prevent or deter a Fall 1940 German invasion of Britain, while at the same time gaining as favorable a French surrender level as possible. Since these two goals are often incompatible, the Summer 1940 Allied player turn can be challenging. Often the British will disengage their ground units and retreat the BEF to ports, then use Atlantic transports to sea escort them to Britain, Gibraltar or South Africa.

As for the French and whatever British units remain in France, what the Western Allies can do depends upon how far the German spearheads have reached. France must create new defensive lines, protected by rivers if possible. The west bank of the Seine needs defense by two 2-3 infantry units if possible. The hex southeast of Paris, L26, is also important. If German 4-6 armor units have broken into central France south of Paris, then France should rebuild 2-3 infantry units along the north bank of the Loire.



Salvaging something from the Debacle

It is important for the French to try to form a coherent defense for two reasons.

The first reason is that a challenging defense of France in Summer 1940 will force the Axis to use enough of their air that they can't use significant amounts of AAF against Britain, whether by counterairing the RAF, bombing Britain or actually invading. If the Germans can get a head start in Britain like this, their chances of executing a successful Sea Lion increase. Better that the French take the punishment, leaving Britain in better shape to weather the ensuing Axis storm.

The second reason is that the two most important French surrender level modifiers are the number of surviving French ground factors and control of Lyon and Marseilles. Both modifiers are directly influenced by the skill and audacity of the players, as well as by more mundane factors such as luck. So the Allied player who makes a quick Spring 1940 move and abandons France may find himself saddled with an unnecessarily adverse French surrender level, which at the very least will cost him Free French forces.

At the same time, the Western Allies will want to save as many British ground units as possible from the French collapse. Without these units Britain will be exposed to a Fall 1940 German invasion, and if they are

isolated Britain will have to spend double, one way or the other, to build them in time.

Conclusion

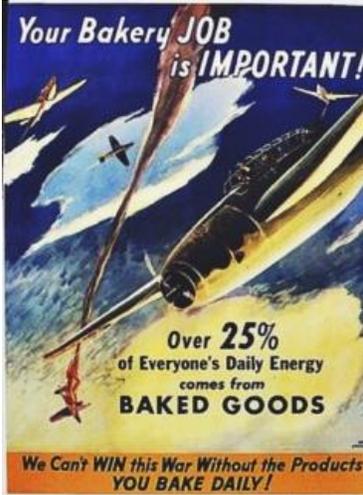
Further discussion of the struggle in 1940 leads into the question of Britain, which is the subject of other articles. The battles for France and Britain are intimately connected, and the transition from one to the other is probably one of the most subtle and difficult aspects of the game.

The French can't really offer sufficient resistance to the Germans on their own. They should survive until Summer 1940; but without British assistance the German casualties will be low, the French surrender level will favor the Germans and, worst of all, the Germans may be able to start their assault on Britain in Summer 1940, before finishing off the French.

But if the British commit too much ground and air to France, they may find themselves in a severe BRP crunch as a result. This may mean they are unable to defend themselves against a direct German invasion in Fall 1940. Heavy British air losses in France can also open the door to an inexpensive, prolonged and effective German bombing campaign. This gives the Germans the option of hammering Britain, then switching to the east with prospects for a successful attack on Russia in Summer 1941, or honoring the Pact with Russia and pounding Britain throughout 1941. Either scenario is dangerous for the Allies.

And of course all these possibilities expand when GATHERING STORM is played.

The bottom line in France is that spongy croissant pastries usually disappear quickly – but they last long enough to provide enjoyment and can also cause serious indigestion!



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