

A World at War

2006 World Boardgaming Championship

Edited by Mike Crowe, Gamemaster

Summary

This year 22 people attended the A World at War tournament, which featured five full campaign games. For the first time in recent memory, one game actually finished in both theaters, while one game finished in Europe, with a few turns to go in the Pacific. The final outcome was pretty clear in each of the five. Many people stopped by to discuss the games, and several participated in a demo of the Coral Sea scenario, which introduces players to the naval combat system.

The tournament provided a good forum for playing with the new rules for Russia (Russian surprise, Russian winter), as well as rules to reduce excessive Axis casualties prior to the fall of France, research changes to reduce frustration over low rolls on crucial long-term projects, and a variety of Pacific and sub warfare changes designed to make the Pacific more interesting to play. The general consensus was that the changes worked well. Russia gets hammered in 1941, but can usually survive 1942 as she did historically. The research changes were invoked only occasionally. Pacific naval combat was more interesting and more frequent. In the game that finished, the result was a tie in Europe, and a tie or a one turn Axis victory in the Pacific. That's about as balanced a result as one could expect.

Brief Event Description

Game 1, between Eric Thobaben and Steve Voros as Allies, and Ken Cruz and Bruce Harper as Axis, was a draw in the European Theater, and evaluated as a tie or a one point Axis victory in the Pacific. Ken drove far into Russia, but Eric managed to come back, activating Turkey in the process and creating a major distraction in Rumania. Bruce achieved a naval DRM for Japan, a feat many thought impossible, and fought a massive naval battle with Steve involving six task forces on both sides. Steve pulled out a win by invading China and bombing Japan into submission from the mainland. For his efforts, Eric was awarded the plaque.

Game 2, between Rob Carl and Joe Brophy as Axis, and Vic Hogan, Markus Kassoboehrer and Ed Schoenfeld as Allies, resulted in a two point Allied victory in Europe. Rob Carl's invasion of Russia was stopped cold by a series of Russian 1-2 attacks that eliminated eight armored units, and a simultaneous invasion of France. Germany finally succumbed to an atomic bomb on Berchtesgaden.

Game 3, between Tor Abrahamsen and Jason Moore as Axis, and Randy Scheer and Tim Schroeder as Allies, resulted in an Axis victory on both boards. Tor, making his first appearance after years of playing with Bruce Harper in Vancouver, did well in Russia, and gave the Allies a late war surprise by adding 9 U-boats in 1944 and re-starting the Battle of the Atlantic. Jason captured Port Moresby by invading Australia and denying the airbases in northern Australia to the Allies.

Game 4 was between Jim Sparks and Chris Goldfarb as Axis, versus Markus Kassbohrer and Brian Conway as Allies. A description of this game are not available.

Game 5, between Trevor Mathis and Jeff Mathis as Axis, and Mike Crowe, Paul Milne and Jerry Smolens as Allies, was adjudicated as an Allied victory. Trevor and Jeff employed a British first strategy that emphasized raiding in both the Atlantic and Indian oceans, as well as a Britain-only DoW in the Pacific. This strategy gave Mike a lot to do as the Western Allies. Fortunately for Mike, he rolled like a bandit for most of the raider combat in both the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean, and the strategy fizzled. Meanwhile, the US sat out the war in the Pacific until 1942, and the Russians were waiting until summer 1943 to declare war with overwhelming force. The Russians defended somewhat carelessly along the Russian border, hoping to tempt Trevor into an Axis DoW, which they thought would definitely hasten the Axis end. Trevor took the bait, but would have surrounded most of the Russian army had both of his 1-1 attacks succeeded! Fortunately for the Allies, the second one failed. At this point the game was called as an inevitable Allied victory.

Rules Changes

Bruce Harper, the game designer, suggested only minor changes. The changes motivated by the end game in Europe were as follows: (1) Prohibit the stockpiling of submarines or transports. In one game, nine German u-boats made their first appearance in 1944. Now they must appear on the force card each year. (2) Remove Russo-Allied cooperation restrictions if the Allies control Berlin, so that the Berchtesgaden redoubt can be reduced without resort to nuclear weapons!

In the Pacific, the most interesting proposal was to make the limitation for building ASW, destroyers and transports apply to ALL major powers, and to remove submarines from this category. Thus Japan, Germany and Italy are now also subject to spending no more than half (rounded up) of their shipbuilding in this way. Japan is the most affected by this. The objective was to remove some of the scripting from Japanese pre-war shipbuilding (since everyone always built destroyers with any spare SBPs), and motivate the Japanese to build more capital ships, as they did historically. In compensation, the Japanese start with more transports now (20, rather than 18), and don't have to send destroyers with the Pearl Harbor strike force. In addition, the Japanese are given one extra RP per year for intelligence-only projects, as many players neglected these, and investing in some of these projects increases game variability and makes Japan more interesting. As a counter-balance, the Indian and Chinese national army force pools have been capped well below the number of counters provided. Other adjustments included preventing the proliferation of airbases in New Guinea, and letting the Thai units enter enemy territory, but not attack enemy forces (i.e., they can walk into an undefended Rangoon).

On a final note, satisfied with the stability and balance of the game, Bruce is planning to start work on the prelude to A World at War, titled Gathering Storm. This will be a short game lasting around two hours, which will allow players to explore alternate diplomatic, research, shipbuilding and mobilization strategies in the years leading up to the war. This will let players begin with varying starting situations.

Detailed Description

[Editor's Note: The only detailed game description provided for this year was the match that resulted in the first place plaque.]

Game 1

European Axis:	Ken Cruz
Japan:	Bruce Harper
Western Allies:	Europe: Eric Thobaben
Western Allies:	Pacific: Steve Voros

Game narrative provided by Eric Thobaben.

Introduction. There's nothing like a good fight. And that's exactly what happened in the game between Ken Cruz/Bruce Harper (Axis) and Eric Thobaben/Steve Voros (Allies) at the 2006 Boardgame Players Association convention in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Japan (Bruce Harper) deliberately restrained itself in the interests of trying to build a solid and resilient position, intending to last into 1946. The Germans (Ken Cruz) were by no means as modest. Germany's plan was to conquer Russia, period. To this end, Ken produced two 5-6 heavy armor units for a Summer 1941 Barbarossa, as well as two winter preparation results in time for Winter 1941. Longer-range plans included jets, radar, flak and interceptors to ward off Allied bombing.

For the Western Allies, the assumption was that Ken would adopt the standard Los Angeles plan of emphasizing submarine warfare, therefore the Western Allies planned to counter in kind. (This assumption proved correct.) The Western Allies also emphasized military research and produced three air transports and three airborne by 1943 to allow for more flexible tactics to penetrate the Axis defenses. Russia did what it always does: produce gobs of air and ground forces. The original Russian plan was to produce several early shock tactics results in an attempt to break the German line earlier than normal. But few plans survive contact with the enemy. While the first shock tactics result came in 1940, subsequent results had to be deferred until 1944 and 1945 because of the strength and success of the Axis Barbarossa campaign.

1939-40. Most of the early war unfolded as expected, with two exceptions: the Western Allies achieved their first air range result in Fall 1939 (with a research die roll of "6"), which freed up naval resources and allowed the British to eventually launch two massive five-factor battleships later in the game; and the Western Allies made a heavy diplomatic commitment to France in 1940. This, coupled with Ken's careful conduct of Axis offensive operations, meant the U.S. did not enter the war in Europe until Summer 1942, but in compensation the French Surrender Level favored the Allies, in part because Germany did not establish Vichy France. The British therefore obtained the maximum amount of Free French forces and all the French colonies went Free French. Things looked good for the Allies in 1940.

1941. Then 1941 arrived, and with it came the ferocious German attack into Russia, using a near-record 18 Axis armor units, including the two German 5-6 heavy armor units. A mild Russian winter and two winter preparation results allowed the Germans to capture Rostov and exploit and place a bridgehead over the Don in Winter 1941.

1942. This bridgehead stretched the Russian line just thin enough that the Axis forces continued to push deeply into Russia in 1942, first up past Leningrad and Moscow in Summer, then south around Maikop in Fall. Had the Germans made Turkey a diplomatic priority, Russia would have surrendered in Winter 1942. But they didn't, and the Russians were fortunate on their diplomatic die roll for Turkey and were able to bring the Turks into the war as a Russian minor ally. To make matters worse, the Americans were able to do the same with Spain in late 1942 as well, on another fortuitous diplomatic die roll. So, just as in the real war, the German tactical brilliance in Russia was offset by

the Reich's diplomacy.

Meanwhile, in the Pacific, the initial Japanese attack unfolded as it normally does, but with smaller advances into the south Pacific. In addition, the Japanese pushed into China and tried to take advantage of what appeared to be lapses in the Chinese defenses.

1943. In 1943 the Russians, taking advantage of their Turkish minor ally, tried an interesting gambit and redeployed a number of units through Istanbul in an attempt to crack the Axis defenses near Ploesti. Had this succeeded, the Russians would have been spared the long march across the steppes. The Russians captured Sofia, but blew out on a 2:1 attack into a mountain hex in central Bulgaria in Summer 1943. This proved to be an expensive (mostly air and armor losses) endeavor, and the Russians were forced to rebuild these units and use them in Russia to get to Berlin the slow way. In Spain, due to high Western Allied combat losses and a small army, the Western Allies were unable to do much more than push into southwestern France in 1943.

Several naval battles favored Japan, as the gods of war smiled on the Japanese at the crucial moments, and this allowed Japan to maintain carrier superiority and its defensive perimeter through 1943. Humorously, the Japanese researched an increase in naval nationality which spared the five-factor *Yamato*, by a single modifier, from being damaged by 22 Western Allied fleet factors in fleet combat.

1944. In Europe the Reich began to collapse, as it normally does, with Germany eventually withdrawing to Germany proper by the end of 1944. A massive and successful German counterattack against the Russians in Winter 1944 was a highlight.

The Japanese transports were well defended by several research results and the Japanese position remained intact into 1944. The Americans were eventually able to defeat the Imperial Japanese Navy at Guam. The U.S. then pushed everywhere it could in an attempt to make up for lost time. The Japanese fell back to what they pretended was a new defensive perimeter.

1945. A successful Russian attack on Berlin in Summer 1945 that employed seven 3-3 infantry using five shock tactics results, was successful (the pile of Red infantry set a record, and was only supposed to soften up Berlin for a separate exploitation attack!). It was a close call, and the Western Allies had to drop an atomic bomb on Berchtesgaden in order to defeat Germany in Summer 1945 and score a tie in Europe.

In the Pacific, Japan held out valiantly, but was unable to keep the Western Allies out of China. An invasion of Foochow allowed the Americans to base air units within range of Okinawa for an invasion in Summer 1945. A timely Western Allied "6" for uranium separation research in Fall 1945 provided two atomic bombs for use against Japan that turn. Both sides concluded that a Fall 1945 Japanese surrender was possible, and a Winter 1945 Japanese surrender was certain, so the game was called a tie or a slight Axis victory. All the players had a great time.