

Game 1

European Axis:	Jason Moore
Japan:	Bruce Harper
Allies Europe:	Randy Scheers
Allies Pacific:	Don Stanley
European Result:	Axis surrender in Fall 1945 (Axis +1)
Pacific Result:	Japanese surrender in Spring 1945 (Allied +2)
Overall Result:	One Turn Allied win

The game arose out of Gathering Storm, with war breaking out at the end of Summer 1939 between the Western Allies and Germany (over Poland). The first turn of A World at War was Fall 1939. Italy was neutral but at war with Greece. Other differences from classic A World at War will be noted as they affect play.

Comments on play are in italics.

1939

Fall 1939 – Germany conquers Poland. Poland had an extra 2-3 and an extra 1-3 infantry unit as a result of *Gathering Storm* diplomacy, but Germany started the war with more armor and AAF built than in classic *A World at War*, so this balanced out. Germany's force pool was also larger by two AAF and four infantry factors, because it had incorporated Danzig and the Polish Corridor into Germany before the outbreak of war.

Italy attacks Greece and makes progress, but Greece doesn't fall. Russia attacks all of Rumania, which is on their side of the *Gathering Storm* Pact line, with the Finnish border hexes being on the German side.

Winter 1939 – The Axis try to activate the Balkans and are rebuffed.

Germany sits and builds. Italy attacks Greece again and eliminates all the Greek units, ending up outside of Athens. Russia conquers Rumania.

The Axis Balkan diplomatic effort was part of the overall European Axis plan, which was to invade Turkey as a springboard to a 1941 attack on Russia. The Russian attack on Rumania triggered favorable diplomatic modifiers for Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, both of which were essential to the Axis plan. The diplomatic die rolls were bad, however, and the Axis ultimately had to conquer both countries.

1940

Spring 1940 – The Axis again try to activate the Balkans and are again rebuffed.

Germany declares war on the Low Countries and conquers Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway. This standard attack was somewhat harder for Belgium, which had an extra 2-3 and an extra 1-3 infantry unit as a result of *Gathering*

Storm diplomacy, and was easier for Norway, which had no units at all because of *Gathering Storm* diplomacy. France was perhaps tougher than normal because in *Gathering Storm* the Allies had mobilized four, rather than three, French armor units, and had increased their level to four factors each. The extra French 4-5 armor unit cost France two AAF, but the upgrade in quality did not affect the remainder of the French force pool.

Italy stays neutral and conquers Greece.

The Axis increase Italian shipbuilding.

The use of a research point to increase Italian, rather than German, shipbuilding in 1940 is almost unheard of. This was a direct result of the unsuccessful diplomatic die rolls for Yugoslavia in 1939 and 1940. The Axis idea was to build Italian destroyers in order to ferry troops from Italy to Albania, in order to attack Turkey. It is always hard to know if such measures are a sign a creative genius or an indication that a plan is contrived and going beyond the boundaries of the possible. There is no doubt that in this game the Axis were close to the edge for almost the entire game.

Summer 1940 – Italy declares war on the Western Allies. Germany intentionally doesn't take Paris but destroys the French defense. The Axis attack Bulgaria. Britain pushes into eastern Libya.

The Axis logic here was that to keep Russo-German tensions below 40 for a Summer 1941 attack on Russia (keeping surprise), the Axis had to delay the first Russian mobilization until Fall 1940. Interestingly, in implementing an Axis peace plan, Jon Hogen did the same thing in a classic A World at War game played at the same time as this game. The delayed Russian mobilization is meant to be compensation for a German failure to take Paris "on schedule", but it's not surprising that players try to turn the design intent upside down by purposefully delaying the conquest of France in order to slow down Russia's mobilizations.

Fall 1940 – Germany takes Paris and declares war on Turkey. Germany and Italy push pass the Straights and march toward Ankara. The attack on Turkey is facilitated by the Russian decision to use its *Gathering Storm* diplomatic success in Turkey to weaken the Turkish armor by one 2-3 infantry unit.

Britain captures Tobruk and starts sending units north toward eastern Turkey. The French surrender level is -1. Vichy is formed and all the French colonies join Vichy.

The Axis considered the Russian decision on the Turkish force pool to be a mistake, but this is really only so if you know the Axis plan at the start of the game.

Winter 1940 – Germany takes Ankara and pushes east in Turkey. In an astounding move which greatly impressed the European Axis player, the British fortify Kars in eastern Turkey and garrison it with a 4-5 armor unit and a 3-4 infantry unit. While this used a fair amount of the British army, it also created a speed bump which significantly impeded the German build up along the Turkish-Russian border.

In the West, the Germans raid with a BB4 and a BC3, and they are both annihilated when the Western Allies find a die that has “6” on every side. Raiding has its risks.

1941

Spring 1941 – Germany declares war on the United States! They do this to also declare war on Vichy France. Instead of moving into Damascus, the Axis attack the Vichy French unit in Damascus and exploit east to Baghdad, isolating the British expeditionary force in eastern Turkey and northern Iraq. As a result, the British position in the Middle East is pretty much destroyed. French North Africa goes Free French, so the United States starts dropping mechanized infantry into Tunisia. Suez is fortified and Britain sets up defensive positions on the *western* side of the Suez Canal.

Germany also attacks and conquers Yugoslavia, finally establishing a land route to the Balkans and Turkey. Italy transfers destroyers and some capital ships into the Black Sea, and German two-factor and its one three-factor armor unit set up in ports to invade southern Russia.

Russia sets up an interesting defense – strong in Poland, and no defense at all in the Caucasus! This surprised the Axis, but, as we shall see, it actually was quite a feasible defensive concept.

Was the Syria move brilliant or cheesy? The Allies didn't realize it was possible, whereas the European Axis player had actually executed this maneuver in a previous game (!) It was a double edged sword, of course, because the U.S. came into the war even earlier than it would have otherwise (Fall 1941, or perhaps Summer 1941).

Since the Syria gambit was one of the things the Axis were playing for, the move stood and the game went on. At most, it gave the Axis a chance to carrying out their overall plan. The European Axis, that it – or, even more accurately, Germany. Italy's position in North Africa was bad and could only get worse, while Japan suddenly confronted the reality that the German plan had brought on war with the U.S. in Europe several turns earlier than anticipated, forcing Japan to accelerate its own attack by at least a turn, if not more.

Summer 1941 – Germany declares war on Russia, captures Maikop, and gets to within one hex of Grozny. The attack in Poland gets Germany some ground but isn't overwhelming because of the diversion of armor to southern Russia and the strength of the Russia defenses in western Russia.

In the Mediterranean, the Western Allies get closer to Tripoli and start attacking Ethiopia. This exposes one of the obvious drawbacks to the Axis plan – Italy is hung out to dry.

Fall 1941 – Germany takes Grozny, Baku, and Dnepropetrovsk. Russia mobilizes an IC as an oil plant and sets up a line for winter. While the Russian oil situation is potentially dire, the Russian defense relies on mobilizing oil plants, at the expense of the BRPs, unit construction and resistance increases associated with ICs.

The Western Allies ring Tripoli and nearly complete their conquest of North Africa west of the Suez canal.

Japan attacks the Western Allies, its hand forced by Germany's hyper-aggressiveness. Japan sinks a U.S. carrier in Pearl Harbor, stays for a second strike, then also loses a carrier as the U.S. rolls a series of sixes. Japan takes its normal conquests.

One problem facing Japan is that it did not prepare for an early attack. It researched radar, following up with air and naval nationality DRM research. While Japan achieved its research goals, there were other projects that would have been more useful in the war Japan ended up fighting.

Winter 1941 – The Russian winter roll is a “6”, for an effective winter level of 9, because the Axis have two winter preparation levels. This still stops all attacks, so not much happens in Russia. This is a good thing, because Russia took the army oil effect in Fall 1941, leaving its armor units without ZoCs. Russia mobilizes a second oil plant.

Tripoli and Ethiopia fall, but Italy is still in North Africa east of the Suez canal so the Western Allies invade Palestine to isolate Port Said.

Japan finishes the conquest of the Dutch East Indies, and take both Lae and Rabaul.

Did the extreme Russian winter roll save Russia? That's hard to say without an exact analysis of the position. There weren't any exposed Russian ICs, although Germany might have been able to firestorm a Russian city. The harsh winter certainly took the pressure off Russia, and prevented Germany from improving its position – that alone might have been decisive.

1942

Spring 1942 – Nothing much happens in the Russian mud. Russia sets up its defense for summer, withdrawing in the north to trade space for time.

Italy is kicked out of Egypt and starts to reconsider this war. The Western Allies invade Sicily.

In the Pacific, Japan is strangely quiet...

Summer 1942 – Germany's summer offensive takes Kharkov, closes in on Moscow and Stalingrad, and isolates Leningrad and Rostov.

The Western Allies capture all of Sicily and take one hex in the boot of Italy. The U.S. airdrops on Livorno and reinforces it with a British armor unit.

The Western Allies attempt to send a Murmansk convoy with 10 BRPs and an oil counter. The convoy is opposed by a German 25-factor task force, five AAF, four NAS and three German submarines (the German surplus built up in anticipation of a shipbuilding crunch in 1943 and 1944). Everyone scrambles for the rules, and we are all

pleasantly surprised to see just easy a Murmansk battle turns out to be. The Germans roll like Norse Gods and in the first round they hammer the Western Allied cargo TF to such an extent that the only light ships left are the four transports carrying the BRPs and oil, so the Allies abort the convoy.

Japan declares war on Russia and takes Vladivostok.

As is so often the case, 1942 is the critical year of the game and this was one of the critical turns of the year. Russia had to give way somewhere, with two synthetic oil plants and the Allied grant routes being cut one by one. In these circumstances, Japan decided to sacrifice itself by attacking Russia, in order to try to push it into a permanent surrender.

A Japanese attack on Russia might be said to fall into the “don’t try this at home” category of A World at War strategies. It is superficially attractive, as in 1942 Japan has a large superiority in Siberia, its navy can defend against the U.S. outside of Western Allied land-based air, and if Russia is under pressure from Germany the last thing Russia wants is a second front in Siberia. But A World at War paints on a large canvass...

Make no mistake – a Japanese attack on Russia dooms Japan to defeat in the Pacific in early 1945, or possibly earlier, depending on how many risks the Western Allies are willing to take. The Japanese player was well aware of this, having done exactly the same thing in the 2013 convention.

The problem Japan faces is that it doesn’t fight its main enemy – the U.S. – in 1942 when it can. It isn’t so much that the U.S. advances faster than normal, although that’s relevant (Japan peaks at fewer island groups and the U.S. gets to eight island groups more quickly). The real problem for Japan is that it doesn’t inflict many casualties on the U.S. in air combat in 1942, so it doesn’t build up the resistance reserve it needs to stave off the Allies in 1945.

There are two related ways Japan can escape this doom. One is for the Axis to force a permanent Russian surrender, so that Japan can withdraw all its units from Siberia and Germany can survive until late 1945 or longer, offsetting a likely loss in the Pacific. The other is for Japan to take Irkutsk, either directly or by surrounding it before Russia surrenders, so that Japan gets a +1 resistance modifier each turn. By 1944-45, this would be roughly an additional +10 resistance modifiers, which completely changes the situation (the Allies would have to either invade Japan or use atomic bombs on it).

Both these possibilities require steel nerves for the Axis – Germany has to press its attack on Russia into 1943, as a Russian surrender that lasts only until 1944 guarantees a Japanese loss and makes a German victory problematic.

Fall 1942 – Germany pushes against the Russian defenses but doesn’t take anything critical. Germany abandons most of Italy. The Western Allies capture everything in Italy from Livorno south, and Italy falls with a -2 surrender level.

Japan pushes Russia back in Siberia, but doesn’t yet reach Irkutsk.

Winter 1942 – The Russian winter roll is a “3”, for an effective winter level of 4 for the Axis and 2 for Russia. The turning point of the war has been reached.

At this point, Germany had two main options. One was to take Moscow and force a Russian surrender. This almost guaranteed a narrow Axis loss, because Russia would reenter the war in 1944. The second was to take Gorki and continue fighting.

In considering the Russian resistance modifiers, the important point is not whether Russia would surrender (this was almost guaranteed unless Russia burnt its BRP base to rebuild units), but rather how long it would stay out of the war after surrendering.

In taking this long-term view, the following assumptions can be made:

- Russia has all its units built and has no oil effects.
- Germany controls the ICs in Moscow, Leningrad, Gorki, Rostov, Kharkov and Dnepropetrovsk.
- The Western Allies have invaded France.
- Japan does not control Irkutsk.

Russian DPs:

- +3 Basic allotment
- +1 Supplementary allotment (100+ BRPs)
- 2 Axis control of Moscow
- 1 Axis control of Leningrad
- 1 Axis control of Grozny
- 1 Japanese control of Vladivostok or Irkutsk (one for each)

Other modifiers:

- 3 For each IC controlled by Russia below 7.
- +2 For each Western Allied major power at war with Germany.
- +1 If the Western Allies control at least two hexes in European France.

The Russian resistance level is -1.

However, in 1943, Russia can produce an IC, bringing its resistance level to 0. In 1944, Russia produces another IC, and declares war in Summer 1944.

To illustrate just how difficult a game *A World at War* can be, the +1 for Russian BRPs isn't a given – it might be possible for Russia to grow to 200 BRPs in the 1944 YSS, depending on exactly how many unbuilt units it has when it surrenders and the state of the Persian grant route. In addition, the +1 modifier for the Western Allies controlling two hexes in France is not a given – although prolonging the war in Russia would likely allow a Spring 1943 invasion of France.

Finally, these calculations show how crucial Irkutsk is to the Russian surrender. If Japan took Irkutsk, Russia would have 10 BRPs less, which makes getting to 200 BRPs that much more difficult, and it would also have to contend with an additional -1 modifier. This might have kept Russia out of the war until 1945.

Bewildered by these impossible calculations, the Axis take Moscow, which was probably just a mistake. As it happens, the Germans roll a “1”, then an “Ex”, suffering massive losses, but that isn't the real problem. By committing all their forces to attacking a strongly-defended Moscow, the Germans use all their reserves and make a fatigue-related blunder which, to a certain extent, was a natural product of the German over-extension.

The Axis leave the defenses to the encircled Russian IC in Rostov too weak, and the Russians counterattack to link up to Rostov. This reduces the Russian resistance level further, but because Germany doesn't have a land supply line to the Caucasus, it doesn't have the option of rejecting the Russian surrender and fighting on. This ensures Russian re-entry into the war in Summer 1944, with the Russian position being that much better because it retains Rostov.

While there was much research and fighting to come, the Axis gamble in Russia failed and the only question was whether the Axis could hang on for a tie or narrow loss. Germany had to take Gorki, maintain the encirclement of Moscow and Rostov, and fight on, even though this meant allowing the Western Allies to make further progress. Japan might have been able to take Irkutsk and fight into 1945, while Germany could have completely ignored Russia had the Russian surrender stuck until 1945.

1943

Spring 1943 – Germany abandons Russia since it won't be able to get back into the war this year and defends against the Western Allies, rebuilding some of the losses from the battle of Moscow. Germany also starts a minor push back into the Middle East, which had been mostly liberated over the last year. The Western Allies cannot make any progress against Germany.

The Pacific hardly bears mentioning. Over the next two years, the U.S. gradually advances under its land-based air, while its carrier forces reach critical mass sooner than usual, because of the early U.S. entry into the war, especially in Europe. There is one carrier battle at Guam in Spring 1944, but otherwise little naval interaction and no chance for the Japanese to stop the American advance to the China coast in mid-1944.

Summer 1943 – For the most part, the lines are static. The Western Allies manage to push Germany back into southern Russia, and there is some movement in Albania and Greece, but nothing significant happens.

Fall 1943 – The Western Allies manage to get to the Po river in northern Italy and cross the straights in Turkey.

Winter 1943 – The Western Allies capture Genoa and Sofia as both sides send more units into the Balkans.

1944

Spring 1944 – Germany begins to contract, so the Western Allies invade a lightly defending Normandy in France as well as invading southern France and taking Marseilles and Lyon.

Summer 1944 – Germany counter-attacks in northern Italy and takes back the recent Western Allied gains. Russia re-enters the war against both Germany and Japan. The Western Allies link up their fronts in southern and northern France.

Fall 1944 – Bucharest and Ploesti fall, as does Paris.

Winter 1944 – Russia gets to the front in Poland and does some light-weight attacks. Belgrade falls. The Western Allies push forward in France but do not make it to the West Wall.

With 25 AAF based in China, the U.S. navy patrols off Japan and the Japanese navy intercepts. A combination of carrier air strikes and kamikazes eliminates enough American naval factors to give Japan another few resistance points, allowing it to last one more turn.

1945

Spring 1945 – Germany “turtles” and the Western Allies and Russia advance two hexes to the West Wall and Warsaw.

Japan surrenders.

Summer 1945 – Germany continues to turtle. The Allies continue to advance, but without air cover over Berlin they can’t conquer Germany.

Fall 1945 – The Allies counterair the German air, and then drop an atomic bomb on Berlin.

Germany surrenders.

Final Comments

The game was tense right from the start, with Germany attempting a very difficult plan and getting little help from the dice in doing so. The Balkan diplomatic failures and heavy combat losses in France come to mind. But in *A World at War* you can rarely complain about luck, and the Axis knew they had a very small margin of safety.

Had it not been for the tactical exploitation of Syria, the Axis position would have been worse, although the Black Sea invasions shouldn’t be underestimated. However, to

execute this maneuver, Germany had to bring the U.S. into the war in Spring 1941, and this provided the Allies with ample compensation for the collapse of the Middle East.

The first turning point may have been in Winter 1941, when the Russian winter was a “6”. The second turning point was definitely a year later, in Winter 1942, when the Axis were faced with an impossibly difficult decision – take a Russian surrender and hope to hang on, or gamble by taking Gorki, toughing out the Spring 1942 mud turn, and attacking one more time in Russia in Summer 1942, in order to try to force a more lasting surrender.

Ultimately the game ended in a one turn Allied victory, which was a fair result for an exceptionally hard-fought, complicated game that confronted the players with new and difficult challenges, quite apart from the variation stemming from *Gathering Storm*.

As an aside, this game again confirms the optimistic view that *Gathering Storm* generated games of *A World at War* are almost always viable and are often more interesting and enjoyable than classic *A World at War* games.