

German Raider Strategies By Elihu Feustel

One approach is to use a minimal raider program in conjunction with submarine warfare to kill as many transports as possible. Whether your goal is the economic starvation of England, or just the delay of deployment of US forces, this approach has a very finite lifespan. To understand why, look at the off-board raider interception tables.

The British player rolls 1 die when intercepting raiders, and there is an automatic modifier of -3. The net result determines how many ships intercept the raider group on the way to the Atlantic. In most cases, if even a single CA2 tracks the group, the transports are spared. At the beginning of the game, a raiding force will directly attack transports 50% of the time unless there are other modifiers, such as a 3 ship group (+1), or a strategic Ultra card(+1/-1). If a 4 was rolled and modified to "1", a single CA2 intercepts, while a "6" would result in a CA2 plus up to two other ships, with a chance for reinforcements on the return leg.

Before the US becomes involved, the British can get one more +1 modifier for interception by getting an air range research result. This research serves the dual purpose of defending against raiders AND submarine warfare. Since the WAs start with a "+3" effect for range, they can frequently get this by Summer 1940. If 1 RP is used in 1939 and 1940, and an air general research breakthrough is achieved in 1940, the WAs will get their increase air range if the sum of two research attempts is at least a "6" (i.e. they roll a "3" in 1939, and a "3" in 1940).

Once the US enters the war, Britain gains an additional +1 interception modifier and another +1 modifier for every 6 CVEs in the Atlantic (which also aid against submarine warfare). Because of these modifiers, the raider threat to Britain's transports pretty much folds in 1942.

The bare-bones raiding program

In most games, the Germans raid in
Fall 1939 with 2-3 BC2s
Fall 40 – Winter 40: 2 BB3s
Spring 41-Winter 41: BB4, BB3

The cost for a "fairly historical" raider program is 2 BRPs per turn (offensive operations for 2 ships, assuming no general offensive on the Western Front), plus 6 BRPs and 2 ship building points to build the Bismarck. While the raiders should never have trouble getting off-board (either leaving from Murmansk, or from Western France), the worsening modifiers for interception make it impractical to target raiders in 1942 and beyond.

This analysis assumes that even a single CA2 intercepting will stop the raiding force. When a raiding force faces a solo CA2, it has two choices: attack with both ships (2 BB3s with a +1 NDRM will kill it on a "7" or better, while damaging it on a "3" or better), or

attack with just one BB3 (killing on an 8 and holding on BB3 out of combat to attack transports). If Britain is in economic trouble, it might make sense to hold one BB3 out; otherwise killing a CA2 is preferable.

One tactical concern: if your raiding group is intercepted by several ships, your objective is to survive the raiding mission, including the second round of interceptions. For this reason, it is often best to target CA2s or other small ships, so they don't contribute to "piling on" in the second round.

How much damage would this minimal raiding program do if they were not intercepted? Remember that Germany has a +1 DRM in combat against British ships. To figure out expected casualties of raiders that are not intercepted, look at the average damage inflicted for all 36 possible rolls on 2 dice. With that methodology, you would expect these losses:

Fall 39 (PB2 x 2): 1.1 (40/36)

Fall 40-Winter 40 (BC3 x 2): 1.72 (62/36)

Spring 41-Winter 41(BC4 + BC3): 2.33 (84/36)

However, the first raider group will be intercepted half the time with 2 ships (and more with 3). The raiders after the fall of France (assuming Britain researches air range successfully) will be intercepted 66 2/3% of the time. This lowers the expected transport losses to:

Fall 39: $1.1 * 0.5 = 0.55$

Fall 40-Winter 40: $1.72/\text{turn} * 2 \text{ turns} / 3 = 1.15$

Spring 41 – Winter 41: $2.33 / \text{turn} * 4 \text{ turns} / 3 = 3.11$

Total: 4.75 transports

This ignores the loss of ships to both sides. In most games, the German fleet is a non-factor after the US enters the war, and Britain has plenty of surface ships unless she makes mistakes in the Mediterranean.

The "quick and dirty" cost to Germany is 2 SBP + 6 BRPs in construction (to finish the Bismarck) plus 14 BRPs in offensive costs. Paying 20 BRPs to sink 4.5 transports is a reasonable tradeoff in the early game, especially when Britain already has shipping problems.

Normal "Full-raider" Strategy

Germany has a few additional options to increase the potency of its raiders. One option is to construct the Graf Zeppelin and produce 2 NAS. Looking at the Naval Attack Table, 2 NAS pack quite a punch – as much as 6 naval factors (but without a naval DRM if it attacks separately).

CVLs offer one big advantage over other capital ships: their combat can be resolved before fleet combat. This allows German CVLs to "soften up" intercepting forces before

fleet combat. Consider this hypothetical: The British roll a “6” on the outgoing leg, and intercept with 2xCA2, BC3 and BB4. If the raiding force were 2xBB4, the British player would “pile on” on a German BB4 with 11 factors. With the -1 net naval DRM, this force would damage a German BB4 with a roll of “8” or better, and sink it with an “11” or better.

If the raiding force were BB4 + CVL2, Germany’s conservative tactic is to target light ships with air strikes. 2 NAS will almost always damage or kill a CA2. In the ensuing naval combat, Britain then engages with only 9 factors. She requires a “10” to damage a BB4, and critical hit to sink a BB4. This “first-strike” potential against light ships will greatly enhance the survival of the screening ships.

The problem with CVLs is that they are fragile. If the screening ship is damaged on the outgoing leg, a German CVL is doomed to death on the return leg (the British player will target it directly, as the entire raider force is screened). The other liability is to British CVLs. If the raiders are intercepted by a single CVL, expect the British player to not hold back for CAP – he will gladly exchange CVLs to limit the raider threat. If after CAP and air defense only one squadron attacks a German CVL, the net attack modifier for the NAS is -1 (The German NDRM is one better than Britain’s ADRM; the German CVL modifier offsets the British NAS modifier). With a net attack modifier of -1, a single NAS will damage your CVL with a “7” or better. 2 NAS will damage it with a “5” or better, and sink it with a “9” or better.

If the Graf Zeppelin is launched in Summer of 1940, it has 6 “raiding” turns before the entry of the US. If it is damaged even once, it loses half of its useful raiding life. While one intercepting British CVL poses a serious threat to it, two almost guarantee its destruction.

How likely is the British to engage with a CVL? Each ship beyond the original CA2 can be selected as a CVL with a roll of “5” or “6”. Assuming Britain was diligent in getting its air range breakthrough, each interception roll will be at “-2”, and the raider will face 2 rolls (outgoing and returning) each turn.

The possible intercepting forces are are:

Interception roll	Forces	Chance of no carrier
6	CA + 3 ships	0.30
5	CA + 2 ships	0.44
4	CA + 1 ship	0.67
3	CA	1.0
2	None	1.0
1	None	1.0

For each interception roll, the raiding force has a 27% chance of encountering at least on CVL, or a 47% chance per turn.). Note that if Britain fails to get an air range result, German raiders have it much easier: Britain’s chance of engaging with a CVL drop to

15% per interception roll (or go up to up to 40% if the allies play an unopposed strategic Ultra card.)

If each encounter with a British CVL has about a 58% chance (1 NAS rolling 7 or better) of killing or damaging the Gref Zeppelin, the Gref has a normal “raiding life expectancy” of 3.7 turns before US entry into the war.

A German CVL could also be destroyed if its screening ship is killed in the first engagement. If a player is going to build the Gref Zeppelin and produce NAS, it makes sense to rush-build the Bismarck (both ships launch in Summer of 1940). This greatly minimizes the change of having the Gref killed – The Bismarck must be hit by 3 points of damage (instead of 2 for a BB3) on the outgoing leg to leave the Gref vulnerable.

The full-raider strategy requires:

Rush-building the Bismarck and completing it in Summer '40: 12 BRPs, 2 SBPs
Completing the Gref Zeppelin in Summer '40: 3 BRPs, 1 SBP
2 NAS: 2 BRPs + replacements, and production
Offensive operations: 14 BRPs (the same as earlier)
Total: 31 BRPs, 3 SBPs

An unopposed BB3 or BB4 (with its +1 DRM) has an expectation of killing 1.4 (51/36) transports. With the new naval rules, 2 NAS can attack as 6 fleet factors, when firing with another German ship. Consequently, BB4 + CVL raiding force not intercepted will attack on the “10-12” chart at +1, and will kill about 2.86 transports.

How much damage will this strategy cause?

Fall 1939 with 2 PB2s: 0.55 Transports

Fall 40 – Summer 41: BB4, CVL: $(103/36)/3 = 0.95$ transports/turn

Fall 41-Winter 41: BB4, BB3: $(84/36)/3 = 0.77$ transports/turn

Total: 5.9 transports.

This only destroys about 1.15 transports more than a normal raiding strategy. For the extra 11 BRPs (and production of 2 NAS), this is not cost effective unless part of a coordinated Mediterranean effort to strain the British navy.

One assumption is that German raiders become irrelevant once the US enters the war. Due to the “rules of engagement”, raider combats often cater to Germany’s strength – its naval DRM, and avoids the Western Allies strength – their superior numbers. Is there a way for Germany to continue pressuring the Western Allies, even after the US entry into the war?

Total surface raider strategy

Germany can continue raiding after the US enters the war, but it becomes much more difficult. The WA will have better modifiers for interception (+1 for US at war, +1 for

every 6 CVEs, and likely +2 for each air range results in 1942). With the addition of the U.S. fleet, there will be a better selection of ships resulting in fewer “dead” numbers (e.g. rolling a “4” and having no BB4s or BB5s).

If Germany is going to continue raiding after US entry into the war, the optimal raiding force is a BB5 + 2 CVLs. A BB5 is very difficult to damage with the raider engagement rules. Without improvements to either side, a German BB5 has a +2 NDRM over interceptors (German NDRM of 3 versus WA 2; +1 more for being a BB5).

On the Naval Attack Table, you’ll see it is no small task inflicting 4 hits with a -2 DRM. Consider this “bad case” interception in 1942: The allies roll a “6” on interception, and intercept with 6 ships: CA4; BB3; BB4x3. If German air strikes deal 3 damage to soft ships, WA only engage the German BB5 with 15 factors. On a “10” or greater, British can cripple the BB5. The BB5 properly shoots back at a fast BB3, usually crippling it. On the return trip, it may not get any better. Under the new raider rules, slow ships disengage. German NAS will soften up added cruisers. Do the Western Allies have enough fast BB4s and BB3s to pile on? Rarely.

This task force will almost never engage transports, but it will chew up a lot of CA2s and BB3s, with an occasional other ship if the WA only engage with 2-3 other ships (so the CVLs aren’t required for defensive cruiser sinking duty).

Here is a naval program that puts early raiding pressure on, launches a BB5, and puts on normal submarine pressure:

1939: Fall: scuttle a CA2, lay down a BB5, build 1 Sub
Winter: 2x accelerate Bismarck, advance Tirpitz

1940: Spring: get 1st Naval breakthrough, increase shipbuilding (to 3); produce 3 subs, 5 NAS
Build 3 Subs, 1 NAS (build 1 every turn)
Summer: Launch Graf Zeppelin and Bismarck; build 1 sub
Fall: Rush build BB5 x1, lay CVL, replace sub
Winter: Advance Tirpitz, lay CVL, replace sub

1941 Spring: increase shipbuilding (to 4); produce 3 subs and 2 NAS
Build 4 Subs
Summer: 2x accelerate BB5; replace subs; lay CVL
Fall: launch CVL; replace subs
Winter: advance Tirpitz; 2x accelerate BB5; replace subs

1942 Spring: increase shipbuilding (to 5); produce 3-4 subs
Build 4-5 subs
Summer: Launch BB5 (!), CVL; replace subs

The impact of this raiding program will deal about the same transport damage from 1939-1941 as the "Full-raider" strategy – about 5.9 transports. After the BB5 is launched, expect to kill about 6-7 factors per turn. Killing all these extra heavy factors won't usually justify the expense of this program. If the allies take moderate losses in the Mediterranean, however, these extra WA heavy-ship losses can delay D-Day or Italy's surrender date.

If you do well at killing allied heavy ships, you can start sending out a second group (BB4x2, BB3 or CVL). With even moderate losses to WA ships, they won't have sufficient ships to "pile on" both groups. If you reach this point, expect to have oil problems – you'll frequently need to uninvert more than 25 naval factors per turn while Italy is in the war.

If you want to try the total surface raider strategy, there are other strategic and research decisions you can coordinate with it.

Strategic:

Contest Malta – you want to draw Britain into a fight for supply. If you use the whole German air force, Britain won't play – instead, use about 5 AAF + 3 NAS. Look to trade Italian fleets for British as well.

Delay US Entry – don't attack Greece or Yugoslavia. Try to keep them out until Spring or Summer of 1942.

Bomb Britain in Fall, Winter 40 (and Spring 41 if you can afford it). This makes it harder for Britain to keep building its heavy ships.

Take Egypt – if you can raid in the Indian Ocean with German forces, the Western Allies do not have the forces necessary to oppose it.

Research:

Air defense – this will help your CVLs survive (in addition to saving you BRPs from bombing in the end game). Try to get your first in 1940 before the Gref raids.

Radar – will reduce BRP losses from the eventual allied bombing campaign, AND makes it much easier to get ADRM/NDRM breakthroughs. 1 is good, 2 is ideal

NDRM – subs fight better, and your BB5 becomes ridiculous to engage (or keeps parity with WA NDRM improvement). Aim for 1942 or 1943.

Harbor attacks – premium targets are ports with CVLs (for the initial one). Later, use a CVL for the harbor attack; look for CVLs or eliminating a ship-class (e.g. killing the last BB4)

If you are the allies, there are several things you can do to counter this strategy:

Research air defense – each breakthrough minimizes German CVLs

BB5 – start building this early! It fills the "5 slot" if you do not want to engage carriers.

Harbor attack – obvious.

CVL patrol – before you lose 2 CVLs to the Pacific, you can patrol with 10 NAS. Look for opportunities to hit key raiding ships that are not under air cover.

Norway – if you win Norway, Germany can't deploy to Murmansk. It becomes much more difficult for raiders to get to the Atlantic (impossible once German air goes east). Don't overextend trying to take/save Norway though, or you may get invaded early.