

Putting together *A World at War* (and *Gathering Storm*)

by Bruce Harper

Buying *A World at War* (and now *Gathering Storm*) is a significant investment of money, and learning how to play the game(s) is a significant investment of time and effort. Let's assume it's worth it, and now it's time for the payoff – you get to play.

Most *A World at War* players don't mind spending some additional BRPs to make a nice board and set of units, because they know that the time and effort spent learning the game is nothing compared to the time and effort they will be spending playing it. If you're going to waste time, you may as well do it first class.

Magnets - The Key to Success

Making a nice board and set means going magnetic. There are a lot of units and nothing is worse than having a wayward die roll or a cat wipe out half the Russian army. Even a less dramatic jostling of the board can displace units. With magnetized units, they stay where they belong until they are intentionally moved. The result is a much safer, and neater, game.

There are many different ways to magnetize the units, which are .5" square (some *Gathering Storm* counters are larger, but you won't be magnetizing the *Gathering Storm* activity counters, which are two-sided). Some players simply attach the unpunched units to a large, adhesive magnetic sheet, then cut them out (I don't like this); some players photocopy the unit images and attach them to magnetic sheets (even worse); and others attach the magnets directly to each counter (my preferred approach).

The result is that you are using the counters that came with the game, but each counter has a magnet attached to it. Ideally the magnet shouldn't cover the entire back of the counter, because then you are able to pick up the unit more easily by reaching under the "lip" of the counter.

For my current set, I bought two 100 foot rolls of .060x.500x100ft HE 1.4mgo with OD adhesive from Adams Magnetic Products (my contact was Skylar Trengove | Account Manager | 800.222.6686 | Direct 630.359.9430 | Fax 630.359.9529 | One Whatney | Irvine, CA 92618. The cost was \$1.47 per foot. Delivery was pretty fast.

I think there is a discount for bulk orders, so you might want to talk to your friends...

The tape roll (partly used) looks like this (see Figure 1):



Figure 1
A roll of magnetic tape

As noted above, the tape is .5" wide, which is exactly the width (and height) of an *A World at War* counter. This is shown more clearly in Figure 2.

When you cut the tape, using scissors or a paper cutter, you aim for a roughly .375" width (the other dimension will already be .5"). This measurement doesn't have to be exact, for two reasons. First, the magnetic tape is on the side of the counter that isn't visible, except for air and naval units when they are inverted. Second, high energy magnetic tape is very powerful, and this means that even a .25" by .5" strip is strong enough to do the job.

Still, you want to try to have all the magnetic strips about the same width (and therefore strength, if you can).



Figure 2
Magnetic tape and the Italian navy

Attaching the magnetic tape to the counters is time-consuming and shouldn't be attempted in a single session. It's always relaxing (at least compared to designing the game...). It's easier to magnetize the counters before they are punched out, but this isn't essential. You may also want to "magnetize as you go" – don't worry about units like the Vlasovs and Wangs until they actually come into play.

The main advantage to magnetizing the counters before they are punched out is that it makes it easier to ensure that the polarity of the magnetic tape is the same for each counter. The .5" dimension should be from the top to the bottom of every unit, with the lesser dimension running from side to side. This ensures that the counters won't repel one another when stacked (unless you turn them sideways – or they turn themselves sideways – which can be irritating).

Storing the counters

One frequently asked question on the Yahoo list is how to best store the *A World at War* (and *Gathering Storm*) counters. Magnetizing makes this much easier. You don't need little plastic bags or counter trays – use either cookie trays (bonus – you can make cookies) or lightweight magnetic white boards.

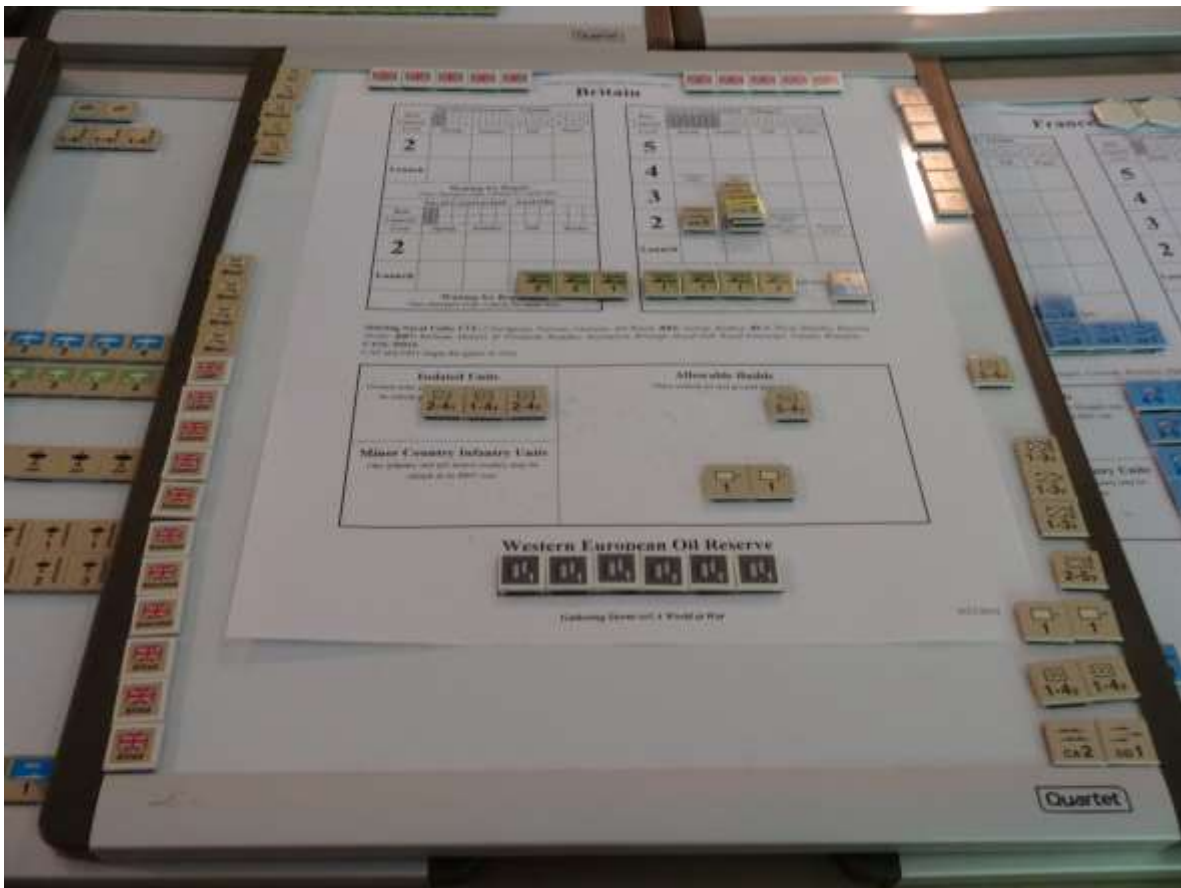


Figure 3
British scenario card

Because the counters don't move around, these white boards are ideal. Around 15 take care of all the *A World at War* units (including the four Naval Status Charts). Figure 3 shows the British scenario card, with the magnetized units firmly attached. The white boards holding the other British units and the French are visible underneath. Figure 4 shows the white boards for all the Western Allies, all on a single card table. The counters on the French white board (bottom right) include the new fortification counters from *Gathering Storm*.



Figure 4
The Western Allies

It should be stressed that these white boards are very light – most of the weight would be from the counters themselves (more precisely, from the magnets on the counters). Their light weight makes the white boards easy to use during play. Provided you can find the right white board, it is easy to hold it or put it on the mapboard while build units or doing something else that requires the scenario cards or other sources of units.

Needless to say, it's best to have a large playing area (especially for a Global War game), but it is easy to stack the white boards that hold the units, whether during or in between games, so they make very efficient use of whatever space is available.

Figure 5 shows the Axis, Russian and miscellaneous white boards. The Japanese white boards are not shown. The larger codebreaking cards available on the A World at War website (laminated) can also be seen.



Figure 5
The others

Mapboards

There isn't much point to magnetizing the units unless the mapboards are placed on something to which magnets adhere.

There are two basic options:

Big magnetic white boards:

These are used at the World Boardgame Players convention. They are just bigger versions of the white boards discussed above for the counters.

They are light weight, very portable (you can move an ongoing game easily and safely) and don't require any assembly. They are readily available at places like Staples and WalMart.

<http://www.walmart.com/c/kp/whiteboards>

This is a very good, perhaps preferred, option.

One piece of advice – don't get a white board with a tray for chalk or markers at the "bottom". It just gets in the way.

Plywood and furnace sheet metal:

If you are more skilled in the workshop (or know someone who is), you can do it this way. This is what I have (I knew someone).

1. To start, buy a piece of plywood of the right size (4 feet by 3 feet or a little smaller) for each of the two mapboards (or three pieces of plywood if *Gathering Storm* is involved, but you can just place the *Gathering Storm* mapboard on top of the *A World at War* mapboard).
2. Go to a furnace place and get thin ferrous sheet metal. Have them cut it to a size a little smaller than the plywood.
3. Glue the sheet metal onto the plywood using permanent cement (so do it right).
4. Laminate the *A World at War* mapboards or get thin plastic sheeting and put in on top of the boards (this is what I did).
5. Put a wooden frame (molding) around the mapboards, both to hold everything in place and for aesthetic purposes.

The result, depending in on the skill and care involved, looks very nice and lasts forever. The one drawback is that the mapboards are heavier than in the white board approach, so the game is less portable.

Figure 6 shows the European mapboard. The plastic sheet covering the mapboard has slightly wrinkled over time, but this isn't noticeable during play. The important point is that the combined thickness of the plastic sheet and the paper mapboard itself doesn't impair the functioning of the magnetics. The counters adhere to the mapboard very well.

In addition, the unit can be taken apart and part of it replaced if needed (for example, if the plastic sheet gets cut or torn and is impeding play; or if the molding gets dented or stained). But in reality this rarely happens.

Figure 6 also shows some other things: a *Gathering Storm* box on the center left; a motivational poster on the upper left, beside the cabinet used to store the game; and a glimpse of the Axis white boards on the right.

The models of the Tiger and T-34 tanks on the upper left and upper right corners of the board require no explanation.



Figure 6
Europe

The mounted mapboard of course is only part of the playing area required for the game. Several large tables are needed to hold the white board with the counters, as well as the player aids and record sheets.

How to redesign your home so that it more “*A World at War* friendly” – and how to convince others that such a redesign it worth it – lies outside the scope of this modest article.

The molding used to frame the mapboards can be clearly seen in Figures 7 and 8.



Figure 7
Bottom left corner



Figure 8
Bottom right corner

The underside of the bottom right corner is shown in Figure 98. The molding is attached with countersunk screws from underneath, so they aren't visible to the players.



Figure 9
Bottom right corner (underside)

Conclusion

The important thing to remember about preparing your *A World at War* and *Gathering Storm* games for play is that once it's done, it's done. The components last a very long time and the magnets even longer.

Again, my rationale for investing this additional time and effort into the physical game layout is that I spend a fair amount of time playing. When I play I want to be able to concentrate on important things, like where the German airborne units are, without worrying about whether the German airborne unit has fallen on the floor. I want to try to figure out how to defend against the Russian armor, rather than trying to remember where they were before someone accidentally bumped the table.