

Game Report from Table 8 / Euro-WiFCon 2004

Players and Power dispositions:

Rüdiger R. -> Countries formally known as Commonwealth
Friedrich Hiller -> US of A, France and sometimes China
Gunnar Shei -> USSR and sometimes China
Henrik Jacobsen -> Japan and Italy
Holger Schulz -> Germany

Options were a rather common deluxe combination using almost all of the chrome, including the 2d10-landcombat-table. Exceptions worth mentioning are: Not using CVP, i.e. having classic carriers instead, no ASW-units, no CL and no HQ support.

After a pretty standard collection of Poland and Denmark in Sep/Oct/39 Germany traded quite a number of stratbomb hits with France during the first winter.

Italy entered war during the first turn against France only and hit the too big French convoy-line in the Med with ten sinkings then and later altogether. Furthermore the French TRS got damaged. In the surprise impulse also Algeria was invaded with the MTN-DIV near Oran. The beachhead was then extended and pushed westwards. Balbo and a small armygroup including Libyans followed overland from Tripoli via Tunis to later take out decently defended Algiers in the summer of 40. Finally they formed up a line in the Atlas mountains south of Tangier facing British peacekeepers in a stalemate there for the next three years to come.

A German INF-DIV walking from Austria was able to board an Italian cruiser as early as only little later still in the course of the first turn. It went to a still empty and then out of supply Malta. Quite nice Axis opening so far.

Belgium was attacked in rain in Mar/Apr/40 employing the then brand new German PARA. The Belgians set up their two best corps in Antwerp. Only one got successfully groundstruck and playing without HQ-support then really hurt the German opportunities. But with heavy air and artillery support a maximized +10 assault came forward nonetheless, yielding a bloody 2/2 result. Thus the German PARA and the 9 factor INF died in the process. HQ von Bock was the lone survivor to occupy Antwerp, so the Allies contemplated an albeit still weak counterattack. They, saving stress on both sides, decided against trying it.

May/June/40 saw a very unlikely row of abysmal weather. Allies had the initiative and ended the turn on the first fine weather and on first opportunity to do so after just five impulses (rolling 3 crucial 1's in a row). Both former impulse pairs had seen rain in relevant northern temperate zone. So the Germans had not a single fine weather impulse in this whole summer turn! Guess who was really cursing now.

Of course with this start to the supposed to be blitzkrieg Paris did not come into reach in Jul/Aug/40. France even felt strong enough to train a new pilot in J/A after having given all its production since M/A to a Britain which didn't like this new-found French confidence. There were the first small signs of later growing "Allied Player fiction" to be observed. Then S/O finally brought Germany three impulses of fine weather and the French lines were broken. Georges had to evade from the fray by boarding the repaired French TRS just in front of the

massed German armour that hadn't bothered to kill a victim deemed incapable of escaping. Even Paris was attacked in Sep/Oct/40 with decent odds. So was the French pilot built in vain? No, the city repulsed the attackers and did so again in N/D/40, twice with a net result of 19 on the assault table. Ouch, said the men in fieldgrey! The French pilot indeed finally manned a 3 factor fighter and – in the first and only success of the French in air-to-air-combat – shot down a Stuka with its pilot before himself being trampled over when Germany finally took Paris in M/J 41.

But the Axis anyway had made up a different priority than taking Paris. They achieved a breakthrough between Rouen and Paris, crossed the Seine and pushed toward the Bretagne to open up an anti-CW base as early as possible. Soon it swarmed with German and Italian FTRs, NAVs, SUBs and surface fleet including the CV Graf Zeppelin finished for Nov/Dec/1940.

Even the Italian surface fleet set sail. Almost all BB and CA went to the Cape St. Vincent and even took a TRS along with them sailing through Gibraltar, which was possible for them still being neutral to the CW. The second TRS stayed in the Western Med but planned to return to base to Brest at the end of the turn as well. A CW, who had just taken out Portugal in the meantime, understandably felt very strongly provoked by these Italian moves and saw himself forced to now pre-emptively declare war on Italy. The Royal Navy caught both TRS with surprise. Both were “only” damaged, which made Rüdiger mutter about having failed to achieve outright sinkings.

But he should have been content and grateful in fact! Perhaps he didn't realize it at that time, but the Axis were up for a joint Sea Lion. At least this was their original plan. The German MAR stood ready, the PARA was rebuilt as soon as possible. But with both the Italian TRS forced back to the closed Med after their repair this plan was forgone. An originally contemplated complimentary attack on Spain and overland push toward Gibraltar was out of question with the late unfinished job in France as well.

The Axis had to adept and try to do the best flexible response. They employed an - admitted somewhat “gamey” - strategy that nonetheless did the balance rather well in keeping this game edged: The remaining French cities were attacked and cleared of defenders but not entered by Axis troops. Thus Lille, Lyon, Vichy, Toulouse were left under local French administration to save stress from US public opinion. Formally France was conquered as late as May/Jun/1942 around the time of the thereby postponed US-war-entry.

In the meantime the CW was hit all out economically. All torture instruments stood ready: Condor, Zeppelin, Froggers, 4 German and 6 Italian surface raiders and tons of SUBs. The best performing “lucky time” was the beginning of 1942, that saw 15 Allied convoys sunken each turn! This was on top of the former losses. We stopped counting at a score of 70 sunken Allied convoys in early 1943. Together with the later attrition in the Pacific the Allied convoy losses over the whole game might amount to as much as 100. Also some strat-hits on the UK were scored with a high water mark of 3 a turn.

The British rightfully replaced CP by building them heavily in due time. Rüdiger was up to repair every BB and CA he could with first priority. His zero-box-escorts were quite impressive, but there were different views in the Allied camp whether this method should go to the cost of high box hunter-killer-parties. I guess the Axis also had Rüdiger pushed psychologically into a very defensive mood. Anyway, there was not much CW production left after ship-replacements for offensive stuff for a long time. In consequence the stratbombing

campaign against Germany came to a complete end. Furthermore there was no big invasion capability ready for 1943 and it was even lacking air superiority for the sea box (the Allied dispute whether missing LL or wrong priorities are to blame for the fact that the CW-FTR-pool was still full – not with shot-down fighters, but with fighters never built - at the beginning of Sep/Oct/43 remains unresolved).

The Allies desperately tried nonetheless, even bringing in some 12-range US-fighters thus conceding air superiority in the pacific, not regaining it until the end of the game, although they probably would have had it back in Sep/Oct/44. With no US-Offensive chits ready they had to put to sea one impulse in advance during the intended landings in May/Jun/43. This gave away their destinations in the Bay of Biscay and gave the opportunity to the Germans to rush the anyway strong Atlantic wall even more so to that place. In the end all three daring invasions (+3, +4 and +3 assault respectively) onto the strip between Bordeaux and Bayonne failed miserably without even killing a single German unit. They were jumping onto corps as there were no free spots left.

To do anything still in the summer of 1943 the Allies then shifted their attention to something more in the league of their equipment handy at this moment: Denmark. There they got ashore and could even expand and reinforce with loads of armoured units built for France in a double move. But they paid a very high price. Their fleet in the North Sea was found by the huge Axis Naval Air wing. Eight NAVs found with FTR-superiority. Two US-AMPHs were properly sunken, being numbers 3 and 4 after one previously in the Atlantic and one in the Pacific.

The strong force ashore in Denmark posed a threat nonetheless. Elite German units were sent to seal them off from the way to Copenhagen, an impressive German 11-ARM, 11-ARM, 4red-ATG stack is to be remembered here, him bearing the pressure at the decisive defensive corner (hex 0640).

Of course these units would also have been of good use on the Eastern Front. What had happened there up to this time?

There was no 1941-Barbarossa and as it then turned out not even a real 1942 one. Only operation “Barbara” was launched (Our fun description name; short for the tiny girlish ‘rossa seen here). The Russian bear was really well fed. The Lend Lease to USSR option was played on the very first turn of the game! Yes, at the beginning US-Entry level started out amazingly high, but later fell back in a similarly astonishing way. CW, US and France all made their full contributions all time to Stalin. The Soviets had never claimed Finland, but demanded and got Bessarabia. In consequence they built for a straight 16 BP a turn through all of 1940 and 1941.

Perhaps it is suggestive, that the USSR was even strong enough to conquer Persia, Iraq and then greedily even Saudi-Arabia in parallel to their defence in Europe during late 1942. There in the Near East some entertainment was up: The Persian CAV heroically and unexpectedly stopped the Communist attack in the hex northwest of Teheran for some time so that the Persian MIL could form up in the capital. Thus two attacks had to be made by the Red Army which even suffered some losses in the progress. Well, it was only the CAV-DIV to be traded. Obviously someone knew the phrase “beating a dead horse” down there. More importantly in the meantime some oil trains made the trip to Germany which also had built all their SYNTH already; so had Italy.

In Europe there was not much attrition to be experienced by the Soviets. Both sides handled each other with caution and with great respect. For good reason! Both were strong, so really toppling the other by premature attacks seemed not likely, if possible at all. Instead the counterattack potential on both sides was very strong. Germany still had both its initial O-Chits handy, having had no possibility to spend one earlier in the short summer turns of 1940.

Germany's "Barbara" in the summer of 1942 therefore only cleared up a few left behind Soviet speed bumps. Minsk and Odessa were the only two Russian cities ever attacked and taken. But there was no use in even approaching the entrenched line along the Dnepr which was even reinforced with several FORTs.

Germany was rather happy about the Soviet disposition. A border set-up would probably have allowed the Soviets to break the pact in January 1942 and spoil the Balkan alignments. But with things actually as they were the Germans could patiently wait for the US-entry before doing their business. Greece had carefully been taken in the otherwise lull period of 1941. This was not too easy still, with only one transport capacity available in form of one built AMPH, since the damaged Italian TRS still had to be repaired from their Gibraltar adventure. But with heavy bomber and PARA support all went well in Greece for the Axis. Rumania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia could thus be peacefully aligned in 1942.

This opened up the route to another "farsighted" Russian actions though. The double-11-ranged Yer-2-Bomber from its base on the Krim-peninsula flew the longest stratbomb flight ever seen in a search for an unprotected Axis factory and really found one. It turned out to be the really surprised Italian city of Tarent! And it was in fact hit once.

The Soviets dared their first real attacks in the winter of 1942/43. They concentrated on driving an edge into the German front in the Pripjets, even daringly driving tanks into the occasionally frozen middle. This sector was not too well closed by German defenders yet, but with some countermeasures and manoeuvring it still held tight at the end of the winter.

Summer 1943 saw the Wehrmacht-front voluntarily taken back a little to the line Chisinau-Minsk-Riga, the Russians now following closely. This was brought to an amusing halt though for almost a full turn by a very successful German Air Action which turned big parts of the Soviet line face down and consumed most of their reorganization capacity.

But then the Soviets started to throw offensive chits. We played out six Soviet Chits in the time between Jul/Aug/1943 to Jul/Aug/1944! The first one produced two not too good attacks. Even with the chit-doublings coming from Zhukov they resulted in a +4 assault and another blitz in roughly the same league only, due to heavy German air support. But with high rolls these attacks were still achieving their purpose. Holger could live with the successful Russian blitz east of Lvov, but with Gunnar rolling a 18 the +4 assault brought the Russians into Chisinau and across the Dniester! That badly impaired Holgers morale. To make things worse, bad weather followed suit to spoil the possibility for a counterattack. But after one impulse pair more to go the longed for opportunity finally came. Germany spent an offensive chit as well and retook Chisinau, and thereby reclaimed its fighting spirit! So to sum up after all we were back to basically the same lines and had just traded 1:1 chits.

Winter 1943/44 saw the Russians growing even stronger. With more O-Chits they got across the Dniestr and pushed into the direction of Bucharest. But the German line stabilized ever and ever, with much stain to the German player still. In another - albeit lucky - counterattack

the Red Army's pet 12 factor GBA ARM could be killed after it had moved in a two-unit-stack in front of big German guns.

Farther north, the Wehrmacht yielded ground every time it was expected to have snow, leaving only single speed bumps at the corners of the front to minimize own losses. Finally in early 1944 the Minsk-Riga-line had to be taken back behind the Memel.

As we stopped playing, the USSR build and spent two offensive chits every turn. This would have had a further effect in the one more year left to be played. But the German defence line was still strong and intact, although no longer as impressive as it had been in 43 when there was nearly a complete second line behind the first whereas now there were still some reserves but no longer in abundance. And Ploesti was still unbothered pumping for the Axis war effort.

Meanwhile the western Allies found cooperating rather difficult, players showing a live interpretation of "combat friction". Best they could do and did do was to outright split theatres. The US handled the Denmark campaign and the France invasion 44 which was to come again. And Rüdiger-Winston went to play in the Mediterranean.

The US actually got ashore in May/June/44 not only at the historical time but also at the historical space, i.e. in the Normandy. Friedrich had bad luck in doing so again, because the approaching PARAs were turned back in the air removing the most important of four planned attacks. Thus not cutting supply to the defenders two of the other attacks dropped from somewhere around +15 and automatic to somewhere around +8 which then again failed completely. So the 4 hex invasion only succeeded in taking one hex with a +10 Blitz attack using the US-Marine ARM-Division and still lost one MOT-corps there as well. The Germans had only Graziani as a full valued ARM in the close vicinity of the successfully invaded hex and without the choice for a blitz-attack on it decided to not yet counterattack. The American beachhead in the Normandy was thus able to expand to a second hex in May/June/44 and to bring a lot of armoured units. This was possible without removing any from Denmark; the troops for successful invasions weren't lacking, but the successful invasions themselves were.

An attempt in the first impulse of J/A to expand to a third hex with a +9 Blitz brought a 1/1 only and failed. As this was the last impulse we played the US was spared further testing of its luck in France. With only one Axis HQ-A, one ARM and one MECH and loads of crappy infantry opposing an all armoured Allied force with vast reinforcements in England even this tiny beachhead stood a solid chance of expanding further and eventually to reach Paris. Some more German MECHs from the last reinforcement wave were already approaching though. But for the turns to come the Russian front may have demanded the majority of further reinforcements.

The glorious German defence in Denmark cited above had been weakened by replacing the 11-factor-ARM, who got an appointment in France, with an infantry and would probably have succumbed soon to a nearly all-armoured attack from three sides with a lot of shore-bombardment. The way to Copenhagen would then still have been packed with German troops but their uncertain supply status would maybe have made it easier to clear that path and to open another front in the Baltic sea, coming late like everything in the West but nevertheless. And maybe even the defence of Kiel could have been tested.

The British finally broke through the Morocco three-year-old Atlas line commanded by Balbo in 1943. Then the Tommies went - as they themselves boosted - to conquer three capitals!

These were the powerseats of Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli. Summer of 1944 saw the British invade Sardinia. They were in fact ashore, but there were still four Axis land units on this island holding the most important hexes. With the only scarce nearby own airfields being those in Tunisia the Italian Coast was still too hot to enter for the Allies with the huge Axis air superiority lurking there.

One year in advance of the official game end, when we stopped playing, the British MAR-DIV also took up position in the Aegean islands to perhaps open up another front at the coast of Greece, occupied by some Yugoslavs and Bulgarians.

But what had happened in the hitherto not at all reported Pacific theatre? Things started out slowly there. Japan opened its offensive against China with a lousy roll reaching exactly the feared 14. And its rolls against China weren't meant to improve much during the whole game. Japan thus had to be content with taking Si-An late at some time in 41 in the fourth good attempt to take that city and then hold on to a defensive line never giving a single hex back to the extremely healthy Chinese which justly failed in three –admittedly weaker, but not totally bad – counterattacks on Si-An. Inopportune turn ends and bad weather was a also major contributor to Japanese failure in China in the first place. Fortunately the Allies overlooked the Chinese for a major part of the game because of their split responsibility. A more aggressive approach combined with US pressure in 42/43 could have brought Japan to its heels there.

After the Russians had been persuaded by the initially extremely good US-entry to abandon their plan to attack Persia right after their initial claim of Bessarabia they started to show up at the Manchurian border in rapidly increasing numbers. That looked really impressive! But a combination of a strong Japanese defence and US-entry considerations averted the outbreak of hostilities.

Only when the Russians had mostly left towards the European theatre did Japan declare war and take Blag, Vladivostok and a Russian resource and isolated two more. Just two Japanese attacks were made in the Russo/Japanese war, both against lone units, resulting in a 14 and a 19, making Henrik relieve that the war ended there. Hostilities were quickly concluded with an enforced peace and nothing happened at that border for the rest of the game, except Japanese retreating in 44 in preparation for a probable 45 Russian attack they could not defend against at the front.

And were the Americans with their fantastic initial US-entry looming large by then? Not in the least. With most of 41 already over gear up hadn't happened. Drawing four zeros in a row against Japan in conjunction with the Axis depriving the US of entry wherever possible hadn't helped Friedrich. Neither had the fact that he first created all the tension needed save one and then picked the largest chit available to move into the tension pool thus depleting his scarce entry even further. So despite making gear up always the first priority of all American decisions regarding playing of options, e.g. no gift of destroyers despite British pleas, it came as late as Sep/Oct/41. War appropriation had to wait until May/Apr/42. The Americans then decided to declare war against Germany and Italy on a 50% chance in late May/Jun/42 and succeeded to their great relief. That finally ended the German behaviour of waiting to take any offensive action against the Russians.

At the same time in May/Jun/42 the CW declared war on Japan and thus enabled US-troops to sail port to port into an as yet empty Rabaul, without needing the still unplayed reinforce pacific-option in that constellation. Thus the Axis got punished a little for their cruel strategy

of depriving the US of entry. At the downside of events the British DOW cost the US the maximum amount of entry possible reducing its chance to DOW Japan to 0. Luckily the Japanese player didn't know that and declared war on the US in Jul/Aug/42, giving Friedrich another sigh of relief.

The Japanese then rapidly mopped up Singapore which despite the long time for preparation was only defended by a lone militia. Legaspi, defended by Mac Arthur whose scheduled reinforcements didn't arrive in time, and all of the Philippines were only cleansed out, after the US had taken Truk. The Japanese then put themselves into a defensive position and waited for the American to do his worst.

They didn't have to wait for long as the American had decided to sacrifice his planned for 5 early Stratbombers, the CP for LL and some Carriers to the poor state of his economy but tried to keep the ability to attack in the Pacific right from the start. The arrival of the first Hellcat in the Pacific was soon followed by the jump of the Americans to the Marshalls, first taking the undefended islands and then taking out the lightly defended Kwajalein and Eniwetok whose value to the Japanese had anyway been dramatically reduced due to the never contested presence of Americans in Rabaul.

The US then proceeded without delay to the Carolines, again starting with undefended islands and then moving a complete stack of marines next to Truk. It then launched an +8 assault attack on solidly defended Truk itself with two crappy GARR aided by the marines. Although it was meant to be only preparatory it succeeded with the American rolling exactly the needed 12. A late entering US thus came to Truk all the sooner. But as the US were now mainly building material for the European theatre and sent no plane with range below 12 and not even all with that range into the Pacific the balance of power in the Pacific slowly shifted back to the Axis. In a last display of strength the American fleet sailed into the Bismarck Sea because this allowed it to port strike two Japanese TRS, that were face down and therefore couldn't flee. The offered even carrier battle didn't materialize because the turn ended too soon for that but not too soon to see the demise of both TRS.

The US then made tentative attempts into the direction of the Bonins but without any major achievements. Their main objective at that point was only to keep the Japanese player in a defensive mood as Japanese air power increasingly made its presence felt. Finally Japanese defensiveness ended with a really Big Bang. Taking advantage of a major American blunder the Japanese attacked Truk in a Supercombined action and retook it with a +7 or +8 assault. When the American took a Supercombined in May/June/44 for his invasion of France he decided to use it in parallel for another attempt on Truk as well sailing his fleet into the Solomons. But the resulting attack was poor and only killed one of the 3 defending units. The Japanese player then rebased all his air power into the vicinity of Truk and then sailed and flew into the 1 box of the same sea zone thus demonstrating his by now impressive air superiority. Luckily for the American neither side found each other. A major reason for the Japanese comeback in the Pacific was that her production was intact for the duration of the whole game, although lower than normal in the first 3 years. Japan lost only 6 CP, due to its heavy convoy protection.

The American fleet was also forced to abandon Rabaul due to the threat of port strikes but with the return of something around 8 carriers from the European theatre and the arrival of a whole bunch of new LBA all due Sep/Oct/44 further gains of the Japanese were unlikely. A stalemate situation would probably have ensured in the Pacific for the remainder of the game with seasaw battles around the Marshalls. The battlezone would have been in north monsoon,

so only the next 3-4 turns would have seen major action. Probably the game would even have ended with another US-offensive in the pacific but time was ticking away fast there for the Allies. USSR would probably have concentrated on Europe, and Japan was in the process of boosting defences in Manchuria.

Nice situation to have a still open balanced game in summer of 1944. Most players at the table would have liked to play it out. End result at official finish would probably have been a draw or a slight Axis victory.