

# OIL WAR

## Approach with Precision

by Richard F. DeBaun

*Mr. DeBaun has herewith provided us all with an incisive and rigorous appreciation of the operational problems and alternatives presented in the playing of Oil War. He and his group of UCLA playtesters have (as will become apparent) done their homework. Oil War being one of the more tactically "fragile" games, it would behoove all of us to study his advice well and thereby avoid the egg on the face that plops down out of ones careless initial moves.* —RAS

The following notes are some of the strategic options and tactical techniques available to the Arab and American Players in Scenarios One and Two of *Oil War*. They are intended to supplement the Players' Notes section of the game rules and assume that the reader is already acquainted with the general principles of military strategy and tactics (e.g., adjusting ends to means, flexibility, alternative objectives, etc.).

### U.S. STRATEGY

The most important strategic decision the U.S. Player must make is his choice of initial invasion site. The criteria for selecting the initial invasion site are:

- 1) Does the landing site contain sufficient air bases for rapid reinforcement in subsequent turns? The U.S. Player must be able to seize no less than two air bases on the First Game-Turn.
- 2) Does the landing site allow the U.S. forces to be safe from effective counterattack in the First Game-Turn? The forces landing the First Turn must not only be able to seize air bases, but *hold* them so the reinforcements can be brought into play.
- 3) Does the landing site provide reasonably easy access to target oil and port facilities?

The map may be conveniently divided into five geographical areas for consideration as invasion sites. They are: Iran, Iraq-Kuwait, Saudi Arabia on the Persian Gulf (including Bahrain), southern Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Although the relative merit of any given area as an invasion site depends in large part upon the abilities of the Arab Player and the initial deployment of his forces, each region has advantages and disadvantages peculiar unto itself.

The U.S. Player who chooses Iran for his initial invasion is throwing his weakest forces into the midst of the enemy's strongest. Half of the country (the half that contains most of the oil facilities) is beyond the range of A6 and A7 air support from the Gulf of Oman. The biggest problem is rear-area security for the U.S. ground units. Since Arab reinforcements may be brought onto

the map "anywhere within their Home Country free of Enemy Zones of Control" (Case 9.12), the U.S. ground forces will never be safe from encirclement and annihilation as long as the Arab Player has uncommitted Iranian Army reinforcements available. It can ruin your whole day to have an Iranian mechanized brigade suddenly appear behind your lines and help munch an Israeli brigade with a +4 encirclement. Iran has little to offer the U.S. in terms of victory conditions. If, by some miracle, his forces did survive and go on to take every oil facility in Iran, the U.S. Player would still only achieve a Marginal Victory, because the country has just one port. Even if he is able to seize additional ports in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia, the transportation line connecting them to the Iranian oil fields is extremely vulnerable to counterattack, especially by Iraqi reinforcements.

The single attractive feature of the Iraq-Kuwait area is its abundance of open air bases. If the U.S. Player chooses to invade here, he is often able to bring into play as many as six of his air landing brigades on the First Game-Turn. On the negative side, the area is beyond the A6/A7 Range Line and surrounded by Arab Armies. The U.S. spearhead is subject to immediate counter-attack by strong Iraqi and Iranian forces. By Turn Two, the U.S. forces will still be under attack by additional units from Saudi Arabia. In the face of this strong opposition, it is nearly impossible for the U.S. to hold any of the air bases captured in the initial assault and doubtful that any of the invading units will survive beyond Turn Three. If the U.S. forces *do* survive (either through Arab inaction or Divine Intervention), their problems have just begun. The entire Iraq-Kuwait area, including northern Saudi Arabia, contains only fourteen oil facilities. In order to achieve even a Marginal Victory, the U.S. must send units north into Iran or south to Ra's Tanura. This will involve fighting on two fronts, without adequate air support, and with the deadly complication of Iraqi reinforcements appearing behind U.S. lines. Campaigns in Kuwait are reminiscent of Custer's escapades on the Little Bighorn—beleaguered U.S. forces slowly, slowly twisting in the wind.

U.S. landings in the three southern areas have the advantage of being under the protective umbrella of the total U.S. air strength. Eastern Saudi Arabia is within easy striking distance of both the main Saudi oil facilities and the two ports to the north. The Arab forces in the immediate area are not great and the Iraqi and Iranian Armies can't reach you until Game-Turn Two. Despite the

relatively weak units the Arab has available for a First-Turn counterattack, it is difficult for the U.S. spearhead to survive a landing in this region. Units which seize the air bases at Ra's Tanura and Az Zahran are easily destroyed, since they are pinned against the Persian Gulf and have no avenue of retreat. If the U.S. Player lands an unsupported unit at the air base in hex 1324, it can usually be encircled by the Saudis on the First Game-Turn and eliminated with a +4 differential. The Arab Player can also prevent the U.S. from bringing reinforcements in through Az Zahran until Game-Turn Three merely by placing one of his Saudi units "At Start" in hex 1420 (e.g., it takes one Turn for the U.S. to eliminate the unit, one Turn to move into Az Zahran, then a third Turn when reinforcements are allowed to arrive).

U.S. units which land in Bahrain are safe from counterattack, but are trapped there for the remainder of the game, since they are unable to leave the island. The Bahrain air base is therefore useless as a place of entry for U.S. ground reinforcements.

An initial invasion in southern Saudi Arabia holds a slightly better chance of survival for the U.S. forces. This area is beyond the range of the Iraqi Air Force and three to four Game-Turns away from the Iraqi and Iranian Armies. Enemy attacks will be coming from one direction only, and the U.S. forces can sweep north without fear of Arab reinforcements suddenly appearing behind their lines. However, if the Arab Player immediately responds to the initial landing with vigorous air and ground attacks, it can be difficult for the U.S. forces to establish an adequate defensive perimeter. This is especially true if they fail to inflict losses on Saudi ground troops in Turn One. (Surviving Saudis are almost certain to encircle and destroy any U.S. unit in the air base on hex 1128). Even worse is an Arab success in eliminating U.S. air cover over the captured air bases and thereby delaying the U.S. build-up long enough for the Iraqi and Iranian Armies to arrive on the scene. Things are not quite as grim for the U.S. Player in this sector if the Arab Player has failed to garrison Riyadh (and it can therefore be given immediate air cover once a U.S. ground unit occupies it). If Riyadh is occupied by a Saudi ground unit, the U.S. won't be able to bring reinforcements through the air base until Turn Three, at best (e.g., on the First Turn, the U.S. forces enter Riyadh during advance after combat and the Arab Player responds by placing a cheap air unit over the hex; in Turn Two, the U.S. forces must destroy the Arab air unit and protect the hex with air units of their own; Turn Three, the U.S. Player can bring

on reinforcements through the air base). I am not suggesting that the U.S. should *never* land in southern Saudi Arabia if Riyadh is garrisoned, but that the U.S. Player should know what he is letting himself in for.

Qatar is often the safest place for the U.S. forces to land. Like southern Saudi Arabia, it is beyond the range of Iraqi air units and free from interference by Iraqi and Iranian ground forces until Turn Three or Four. It is also the easiest sector to defend. The entrance to the Qatar Peninsula can be held by a single U.S. unit, and once the Qatar infantry brigade is eliminated, the U.S. forces are secure from encirclement. If he can get away with it, the U.S. Player might try to take the air base in hex 1728 in conjunction with the initial air landings in Qatar. This depends entirely upon the Arab's "At Start" deployment and should not be attempted if he will be able to encircle the air base in a First-Turn counterattack. The usual Arab reaction to an invasion of Qatar is to plug the Peninsula with expendable units in an effort to delay the U.S. advance for as long as possible. The effectiveness of this tactic is relative to the ability of the U.S. to gain air superiority. The Arab units sent to contain the U.S. build-up in Qatar will be blown away as soon as the full force of U.S. air power can be set loose on them. If the Arab Player sends the stronger Iranian and Iraqi forces south to assist the blockade, they are vulnerable to being cut-off from their sources of supply by a landing on the coast road by the Marines or U.S. air landing reserve. Against a resourceful Arab opponent, the U.S. Player can have trouble breaking through the blockade, but no matter what the Arab Player does, the U.S. can rarely be prevented from achieving at least a Marginal Victory as he fights his way north. And, as the Prophet said, a marginal victory is better than no victory at all...

The differences in his orders of battle in the two Scenarios greatly affect the U.S. Player's strategic capabilities. In Scenario One, he has a definite advantage over the Arabs. The seven air landing brigades give the U.S. Player enough units to launch a strong initial invasion and still maintain a formidable mobile reserve. The threat of these uncommitted air landing units can make the Arab Player fatally cautious in his response to the U.S. invasion. And the F-4's and F-111's in Israel are an immense help in achieving the rapid air superiority needed to accomplish a Decisive Victory. Despite this strength, the U.S. Player can be beaten in Scenario One (and badly, if he lands in either Iran or Kuwait), but the Arab Player will be hard-pressed to stop an invasion in the south. The U.S. situation is considerably more difficult in Scenario Two. He lacks adequate air support for his initial invasion and won't get it for quite a few Game-Turns. Since he has two less air landing brigades, he is denied the operational flexibility enjoyed in Scenario One. And he has three less ground units, which compounds the effects of his losses and doesn't leave him with much of a second chance if his first landing fails.

### ARAB STRATEGY

There are two basic strategies available to the Arab Player. He can either throw everything he has at the initial U.S. landing in the hope of crushing it in the first two or three Turns, or he can play for time and make the U.S. fight for every inch of ground. Which of the two to use is determined by the U.S. Player's choice of landing areas and the size of the Arab forces available for an immediate counterattack in that area. If the U.S. lands in Iran, Iraq-Kuwait or the area around Az Zahran, those forces are easily overwhelmed in the first two or three Game-Turns. Because of the distance from Iran and the availability of U.S. air support, a landing at Qatar or southern Saudi Arabia is more difficult for the Arab Player to stop, but it *can* be done. To succeed in the south, the Arab Player must maintain constant pressure on the U.S. forces. Until Iranian ground forces join the battle, the main source of this pressure will be Arab air power.

The Arab Player should realize that the complete destruction of his air force is virtually inevitable. It is only a matter of time before the U.S. Player amasses enough strength to do the job. Until that time, the Arab Player must use what air strength he has to its maximum effect. As long as he has the strength to do so, he should attack the U.S. air cover over captured air bases in an attempt to prevent reinforcements from landing. The Arab Player must take risks, but the early odds are in his favor. In Scenario One, the U.S. Player has 37 air combat points available on the First Game-Turn, with a maximum air defense in one hex of 12. In Scenario Two, he has only 13 air strength points, with a maximum defense in a single hex of 10. The First-Turn air strength for the Arab Player, not including SAM sites, is 38 in both Scenarios. Of these, 36 can strike as far south as Az Zahran, 31 as far as Dukhan-Riyadh-1128, and 28 as far as Doha-1728. This means the Arab Player has a good chance of eliminating any stack of air units the U.S. Player can put together in the First Turn. An aggressive air war by the Arab Player in the first few Turns can cripple the U.S. build-up and keep U.S. forces on the map at a strength level vulnerable to Arab ground attack.

If the Arab forces fail to stop the U.S. build-up in the south, the Arab Player will be forced into a strategy of containment, trading brigades for hexes. Reinforcements shuttled south for this purpose must be protected by the Iraqi throw-away Su-7's, then hidden in the SAM sanctuaries at Riyadh or Az Zahran until needed. Use the minimum screening force necessary for the job. Economy of force should be the guiding principle in establishing the defensive blockade. A single Kuwait infantry brigade is as effective a roadblock as a stack of two Iranian mechanized brigades.

### U.S. TACTICS

Because his ground units are so strong, The U.S. Player relies less on maneuver and

finesse in combat than does the Arab Player. The U.S. forces can usually blow away any Arab unit in their path, whereas the Arab Player, with his qualitatively inferior ground forces, must nearly always rely on encirclement of Enemy units to assure their destruction.

If the initial invasion site is Qatar, and the Qatar brigade occupies Dukhan, he should be sure to attack it from hex 1822 or 1923. Otherwise, a retreat result allows the Qatar brigade to slip into hex 1822, from which it can move to assist Saudi forces in an encircling counterattack.

Take careful note how far the Arab Player moves his Kuwait or Iraqi air units. If moved their maximum range, they can sometimes be eliminated by simply covering their home air base with a U.S. air unit (e.g., if the Kuwait Lightning is used to cover Dukhan, the only air base to which it can be staged is at hex 0711).

I disagree with the suggestion in the Players' Notes that about the only offensive action that should be taken until Game-Turn Six is ground attacks made by F-111's. If flank security can be maintained, the U.S. Player must try to expand his enclave each Turn, eliminating the numerous, but weak Arab units that are thrown in his path whenever the opportunity arises. This constant erosion of Arab strength may force him to call upon the Iranian reinforcements to hold the line and thus deprive him of a strategic reserve in the north.

The Marine reinforcements can perform a variety of important tasks. They can boost a flagging advance or break a game wide open. Marine landings in Kuwait cut Arab supply lines and block the flow of reinforcements south. Capture of air bases there can speed the U.S. advance north by providing points through which ground reinforcements can be brought. If the Arab Player has taken heavy losses or committed his Iranian reinforcements too early in the game, a Marine landing near Bushire can often cause a dislocation of the Arab effort sufficient to give the U.S. Player a Decisive Victory.

Hold two air landing brigades in reserve until Game-Turn Seven or Eight, then use them to seize Basra and the air base in hex 0607. This will prevent any stockpiled Iraqi air reinforcements from being brought onto the map and possibly interdicting the oil facility supply line needed to fulfill the Victory Conditions. If the U.S. Player can deny the Arab Player the use of those two air bases on Turn Eight (and has conducted at least an average air superiority campaign), the only air units the Arab Player should have left to interdict U.S. supply lines will be the two Iranian air reinforcements—not enough to do the job.

Since the Victory Conditions state that supply lines "may not be traced through a hex occupied by an Enemy air unit" (Case 10.1), remember that SAM sites must be physically occupied to count as part of the

U.S. victory network. Thus, Bahrain is useless for fulfilling Victory Conditions unless Az Zahran is garrisoned by a U.S. unit.

On game-Turn Eight, each oil facility/port hex in the U.S. Victory Point network and the transportation lines connecting them should be covered with an air unit unless already occupied by a ground unit. This is to thwart last ditch attempts at air interdiction by the Arab Player. It's embarrassing to have victory snatched away just because you forgot to cover your transportation lines with the numerous air units you have at your disposal.

#### ARAB TACTICS

Avoid stacking ground units unless they are in a SAM hex or forced to stack in order to get a sure kill on a U.S. ground unit. It takes the U.S. Player only two air units to kill two brigades stacked together. He must use four air units to kill the same two brigades if they are on separate hexes. This prohibition against stacking applies to Arab air units as well. It takes the U.S. more forces to kill two air units when they are on separate hexes than when they are stacked in the same hex. The protection given at SAM sites is illusory once the U.S. Player gets a decent number of aircraft. When Arab air strength is no longer enough for effective offensive action, the Arab Player should disperse his air units to make them as hard to kill as possible.

If the U.S. forces land at Riyadh, the Arab Player should hold two of his ground units in Dukhan until Turn Eight, then send them out to contest the oil facilities around hex 1424 or cut the transportation line at hex 1421. If he lands at Qatar, two Arab units should be held at Riyadh until Game-Turn Eight, then used to contest the oil facilities at hex 1125 or 1227 or to cut the transportation line at hex 0521. In either case, the mere presence of these Arab units on the U.S. Player's flank may cause him to send forces against them which he could put to better use in the push north or in garrison duty.

At the start of the game, the Arab Player should deploy the Kuwait Army along the Saudi Arabian border for rapid deployment south. In the First Game-Turn, a brigade starting in hex 0813 or 0914 can relieve the stronger Saudi unit protecting Az Zahran at hex 1420.

The single Qatar infantry brigade should be placed in hex 1922 "At Start." If the U.S. Player invades Qatar and doesn't destroy this brigade in Turn One, the Arab Player will be able to use it in concert with Saudi units in an encirclement. If the U.S. Player does attack the Qatar brigade, it means he has one less air landing unit available that Game-Turn for capturing an air base. And if the U.S. Player goes after the brigade with air units only, the best differential he can get is a +12, which still gives the Qatar brigade a one-third chance of survival. (NOTE: There is a typographical error in the "+12" column of the Combat Results Table. The result on line four should be "De," not "Dr.")

To minimize Arab losses when attacking U.S. air units, the following tactics should be used. Stack the two most valuable attacking units (e.g., the Iranian F-4's) in one of the adjacent hexes and place one other air unit (only) in each of the other five hexes which surround the target. When the attack is successful, the stacked aircraft are advanced into the target hex. They will be immune to effective counterattack, since there is only one empty hex from which they can be attacked. If the U.S. counterattacks any of the surrounding buffer units, he will be forced to stack in order to get a good differential.

Unless there is a chance to crush the U.S. initial invasion, Iranian "At Start" units are best used sitting on the SAM sites at Basra, Abadan and Ahvaz, waiting for the Marines. The Iraqis and excess Iranians should be sent south to help slow the U.S. advance. The existence of uncommitted Iranian and Iraqi ground reinforcements is usually enough to keep the intelligent U.S. Player from trying to pull anything cute in Iran or Iraq. For this reason, it is generally unwise to bring Iranian ground reinforcements on the map until the U.S. Player commits his reserve air landing units and his Marines. Remember that units not brought on the playing area can't be killed. Reinforcements brought into play prematurely are asking to be destroyed by the F-111's.

The Iranian and Iraqi air reinforcements are the Arab Player's ace-in-the-hole. It is possible to turn the game into a last minute Arab victory if the air reinforcements are withheld until Game-Turn Eight and then thrown *en masse* in a sort of Bedouin *Bondenplatte* against the transportation lines connecting the U.S.-occupied oil facilities. The U.S. Victory Condition supply path may not be traced through a hex occupied by an Enemy air unit.

In conclusion, it should be remembered that none of the above guidelines are absolute. As in any conflict, strategic and tactical considerations must be tempered by knowledge of one's opponent's skills and eccentricities. It is this personality factor which makes each game a unique challenge and prevents its deterioration into a pre-ordained set piece.

## Battle of Nations [continued from page 14]

and infantry stabilized the situation around sundown.

This third day's battle, while not as flowing or dramatic as that of the 16th, forced the French into a more desperate situation that made it imperative for the Grand Army to escape before it was crushed. For the Allies, the action on the 18th was not a total success by any means, but it did prevent Napoleon from retreating to safety.

### Game-Turns Eighteen through Twenty: October 19

During the night and early morning, Napoleon got most of his troops out of the east bank area, leaving only the VII, VIII and XI Corps as a rear guard. These three corps made up about 30,000 men, all of which were located on the edges of Leipzig. The key bridges across the Elster (between hexes 1318-1319) were garrisoned by two divisions of the Young Guard and mined for demolition once the rear guard was across.

It was not until ten o'clock that morning that the Allies began to make any serious attempt to stop the French, but by then just about all the Grand Army was safely over the Elster River. Suddenly, later in the morning (Game-Turn Twenty), a panicky Guard engineer set off the charges and blew up the bridges while troops were still crossing them. The rear guard, now stranded in Leipzig, became a confused mob trying to escape any way they could. Many tried to swim across the Elster, but were drowned, including Poniatowski. By the end of the day, what was left of the Grand Army was on its way to the Rhine and those units isolated in Leipzig surrendered. So, by the gradual attrition of the French, the Allies got their decisive victory and ended the 1813 campaign.

The four-day struggle cost the Allies almost 55,000 killed and wounded. They captured 300 French cannon. Napoleon lost well over 38,000 casualties and all three of the rear guard corps on the 19th. Six French generals were killed, twelve wounded, thirty-six became prisoners, including one King of Saxony. All of the French Empire east of the Rhine was lost as province after province defected to the Allies. After Leipzig, Napoleon was never to have the initiative again until his exile.

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