

BULGE

A Statistical Report of Game Characteristics

by Claude Bloodgood

Mr. Bloodgood has a professional background in statistics and accounting and has created for us a reporting format and validation system unique in all of wargaming. He and his fellow members of the prison population at the Virginia State Penitentiary devote a good deal of their recreation time to wargaming — and have brought to their gaming sessions a careful structure of records keeping and thoughtful criticism.

Statistics for this review were compiled at the Virginia State Penitentiary, which has a good core of experienced players and a steady flow of newcomers to gaming. This cross-section of players provides an excellent base from which meaningful statistics can be accumulated under controlled playing conditions with arbiters. It provides an interesting test for each game available. Rules disputes between experienced players will focus attention on hazy rules very rapidly, and problems that are not resolved easily will result in the "problem" game seeing little action. The levels of complexity are quickly established, frequently differing with published or advertised levels. Average playing times are calculated based on actual play, with these times used for scheduling purposes: in a penitentiary, these times must be accurate in order to obtain approval for adequate playing time and space from prison officials.

Statistical Analysis

Participating Players: 41

52.5% of active players selected the game from an inventory of more than 70 available titles during the six months ending 6/22/80.

Repeat Players: 36

87.8% of the 41 participants played the game again after completing one set (each player playing each side once). This is a key test of a game's real interest level; 50% is average.

Total Games Played: 138

The German Airdrop rule was utilized in 82 games with very little difference in results.

Average Playing Time: 2.93 hours

Total playing time was 404.5 hours for 138 games. Players new to *Bulge* should expect their first game to take about 4–6 hours, unless they are thoroughly familiar with the rules.

Shortest Recorded Game: 0.20 hours

Played between two experience players and conceded at the beginning of the third German player-turn.

Shortest Complete Game: 1.66 hours

Played between two experienced players repeating on *Bulge*.

Longest Recorded Game: 9.25 hours

Played between two players new to *Bulge* and fairly new to wargaming in general.

Best Side Results: Germans 76-62

Between fairly equal opponents this edge would be greater, as game-set results compiled include some unequal pairings.

Game Imbalance: 10.1%

Formula is wins minus losses, divided by the number of games played. *Bulge* exhibits better than average play balance.

Game Balance Analysis

The game imbalance statistic provided does not weigh the relative player skills; thus, a closer look is needed. Approximately 40 of the 138 games played were between seriously mismatched players, and the better player won both sides of the sets easily. When these results are eliminated from the statistics, the game imbalance level increases to 14.2%. This means that the German side should win 57.1% of the games when opponents are roughly equal. Playing the Allied side is a real challenge.

Subjective Analysis by Players

Player Balance: 6.78

Average of 41 responses; 9 is perfectly balanced, 1 is totally unbalanced.

Playability: 7.93

Average of 41 responses; 9 is supremely playable, 1 is unplayable.

Length of Game: 7.52

Average of 40 responses; 9 is exactly the right length, 1 is much to short or long.

Game Challenge: 6.95

Average of 41 responses; 9 is extremely challenging, 1 is no challenge.

Rules Disputes: 8.02

Average of 41 responses; 9 is none of consequence, 1 is constant disputes.

Comments on the Game System

Bulge utilizes a game system that includes many of the best features of other games blended into one smooth system. The mechanics are easily learned, but reading the rules is essential. Accelerated mechanized movement is a key factor, and the counterbalancing rule for Allied bridge interdiction is also important to understand; the German tactics are built around mobility and the Allied position is dependent on blocking that mobility. Pre-movement and post-movement combat also provide for a fast-paced game.

The use of two Combat Results Tables (Primary and Secondary) is a major improvement over earlier combat systems, with secondary diversions now possible without obtaining impossible odds for all attacks — a good addition to the game.

Supply rules are remarkably clean. Weather and Air Power rules are simple and effective. The primary complaint is with the Victory Conditions, which favor the German player. Even this complaint is not too serious, for many games are more imbalanced than this one. This is an excellent game-system that does not distract player attention away from playing the game. ■■

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