

Highway to the Reich

A REVIEW OF SPI'S MARKET-GARDEN SIMULATION
BY TONY DINSDALE

Operation Market-Garden was certainly one of, if not the, most daring large scale undertakings during wartime. The details can be found in S&T 61, though the concept was quite simple; to take and hold fourteen bridges and a long section of roadway. This would outflank the West-Wall and at the same time gain a crossing over the formidable rivers which blocked the Allied advance toward the fatherland. The Market part was the paratroops to capture the objectives, whilst the Garden part was the push by the British 30th Corps to consolidate the position. Unfortunately, one reason for the disaster, was that it was too simple. The drop-zones and geography of the area showed only too well to the Germans in which direction the enemy was coming. SPI's simulation is a just tribute to the magnificent struggle that spanned half the Netherlands.

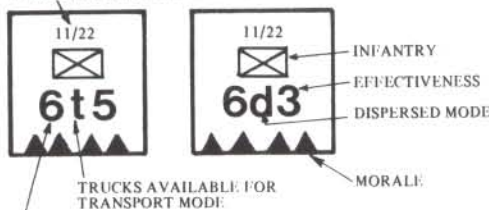
One thing that would not have occurred to Montgomery, was that the plan is also tailor-made to fit the "monster game" series, an increasing number of which are being published nowadays. The scale of 600 metres per hex gives a good tactical feel to the game, though with a map eight feet long there is still reasonable scope for strategy too. A total of well over 1,000 counters allows for the units to be given in terms of companies, tank and anti-tank units usually represent four vehicles, guns or whatever. The counters are quite adequate and packed with information, though it is the map which takes the prize for artistic merit. Rivers look the part for once, frequently being over 2 cms. in width.

The twenty-four terrain types give an accurate picture of the battlefields and differentiate between woods/forest and town/city. The only problem here is that the green (coloured) American paratroops tend to be too well-camouflaged and tend to disappear in the woods! The red British 1st looks good though, as does the inevitable black for the SS.

There are two copies of the charts and tables, which greatly aids play. There are also two unit manifests on which all the units in the game can be arranged at the start of the game, plus an "off-map movement display" for the Germans. The rule booklet is twenty pages long and the components require two game boxes.

Though the equipment is impressive and just about justifies the cost, the real appeal of the game to me is the actual system. The counters, one of which is shown below are a wealth of information, so much so, in fact, that this has led to problems with production and the die-cutting is not always as it should be.

11 BATTALION/22nd REGIMENT



STRENGTH

FRONT

BACK

Typical unit: German SS



To take the numbers in turn then. The strength factor is simply what it appears to be, a qualitative assessment, including the unit's defensive and offensive capabilities. For example, a thousand men armed with pea-shooters would have a strength of 40 but an effectiveness of 0. A single Tiger tank would have a strength of 1 but would still retain an effectiveness of 9. The morale rating speaks for itself and adjusts with casualties. The range is given in terms of hexes, most units being able to fire only into adjacent hexes. Artillery may be capable of firing nine hexes. There is a tremendous diversity of unit types, armoured car recce, tank destroyers and anti-tank guns to name but a few. Subordination does in fact affect play to quite a large extent and is handled very well.

A whole command structure exists, going through corps supply, to corps H.Q., to regimental/brigade level, then battalion level which may consist of several companies. Not only is a player concerned with this line of command/supply, he also has to make sure that his forward observers are of the same subordination to and in communications with the H.Q. controlling direct fire. All this causes the commander (the feel is very realistic), to have his units fight together *as* units. The good thing about this system is that the act is purely voluntary, making it more profitable to do this. Some games like Third Reich cheat by saying that one must do certain things, which is bad. Here, it is possible to split units up at any level when circumstances dictate.

There are two basic forms of combat and, whilst lobbing missiles at one another is a good way to pick off a few enemy troops, a determined attacker will use close action as the most efficient form of gaining ground and flattening the enemy. In the combat rules however, certain deficiencies do become apparent. The game system is not too simple to begin with and SPI argue that in order to keep down complexity, they have limited the rules regarding the effectiveness of units against varying opposition. As the rules stand, it is impossible to close action artillery with infantry and there are no benefits for stacking tanks with infantry, which is a bit poor. Fortunately all these points in the effectiveness ratings can be sorted out with a few simple rules such as "tanks halved in effectiveness when alone and attacked by infantry", which seems reasonable. Just a pity that it was allowed to happen.

Possibly the most important feature of the system though is the ability of units to assume a variety of modes – travel, dispersed, concentrated and disrupted. The latter is only assumed as a result of a close action. Dispersed mode is what concentrated units do when they come under fire. The men run for cover and so the effectiveness is reduced, see diagram. The strength of course does not alter, except for the Netherlands SS units which miraculously are halved when dispersed. I think that is something of a misprint though. All units have a movement allowance of four but the mode affects movement costs dramatically, so that travel mode on roads can move you 64 hexes onwards in one game-turn. Modes

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do not affect stacking restrictions which depend on terrain.

Every game system has its foundations in its sequence of play though and this is certainly a good example of that. Through a highly commendable effort to establish some form of semi-simultaneous play, without having to write down orders all the time, the only serious fault (perhaps just in my view) has occurred. A fifteen phase turn sequence takes a very long time to plough through, especially when up to seven factors have to be taken into account for a single close action attack. Besides making postal play impossible, experienced players will find that each turn takes an hour at the very least. One must therefore allow five hours bare minimum for a turn in the campaign game. With 104 turns, at five hours each.....Mmmmmm.

The scenarios seem a less daunting prospect and one could always link two or more together if something large was required but not quite that long. The opportunities for multi-player games are excellent and with six scenarios there is plenty of scope. One could easily set up typical battles as the units are quite versatile.

All in all, Highway to the Reich appears to have been rushed in some respects. The high standards of care and attention provided by SPI have been allowed to relax in places. The scenarios are horribly biased though they generally produce the correct results — it just means that instead of calling what actually happened, a draw, they say that the player who achieves this wins. And it is so realistic (accurate) that he does. Minor points regarding historical timetables are also slightly invalid. There are numerous small mistakes in the charts which also need rectifying.

Even in view of these facts, I consider HWTR to be an excellent simulation, especially for the more experienced wargamer. No collection is fully complete without it since it is something of a break-

through in World War 11 wargaming. Much can be learned from playing the game and indeed, one could write a whole book about the systems and the tactics available. The player who likes to plan his moves with meticulous care and fool the enemy in many tactical simulations should really be at home with this. Montgomery said that in years to come it would be a great thing for a man to say "I fought at Arnhem". In time to come, it will be a great thing for a man to say "I played through a campaign game of Highway to the Reich". I doubt whether I shall be remembered for the quotation however.

HIGHWAY TO THE REICH GAME SCALE

Each hexagon on the mapsheets represents an approximate distance of 600 metres from side to side. The hexes are used to differentiate specific types of terrain: clear, mixed, broken, rough, woods, forest, city or town. In addition various other features are represented on the mapsheet: primary roads, secondary roads, trails, railways, bridges, hill-tops, streams, rivers, lakes dikes, ferries.

Each infantry unit represents a company with each strength point indicating 25 men. Armoured units represent platoons, troops or zugs with each strength point indicating individual vehicles. Each artillery unit represents a battery with the strength points indicating each gun.

All units have a movement factor of four. The units mode and the type of terrain it is moving into affects the expenditure of points or fractions of points.

Each Game-turn indicates the passing of two hours of real time.

HIGHWAY TO THE REICH GAME TURN PLAYING SEQUENCE

1. **Allied Command Phase:** when the Allied player assesses the supply status of his headquarters units and attempts to restore disrupted units.
2. **German Organisational Phase:** the German player may reorganise the mode of any of his units — such activity may trigger allied opportunity fire.
3. **Allied Conditional Fire Phase:** Allied player executes Fire Attacks, direct and indirect, with any eligible units. Units firing in this phase may not then move in the following phase.
4. **Allied Conditional Movement Phase:** the Allied player may move any unit, within the limits of the rules, that did not participate in Fire Attacks in the previous phase. Reinforcements arrive. Moving units may Close-Assault according to the rules. German units may have the chance to Opportunity Fire upon moving Allied units.
5. **German Conditional Fire Phase:** as phase 3.
6. **German Conditional Movement Phase:** as phase 4.
7. **Allied Free Fire Phase:** all eligible Allied units may fire.
8. **German Command Phase:** as phase 1.
9. **Allied Organisational Phase:** as phase 2.
10. **German Conditional Fire Phase:** as phase 3.
11. **German Conditional Movement Phase:** as phase 4.
12. **Allied Conditional Fire Phase:** as phase 3.
13. **Allied Conditional Movement Phase:** as phase 4.
14. **German Free Fire Phase:** as phase 7.
15. **Game-turn Record Phase:** the marker should be moved one space on the time track indicating the passing of two-hours of real time.

