

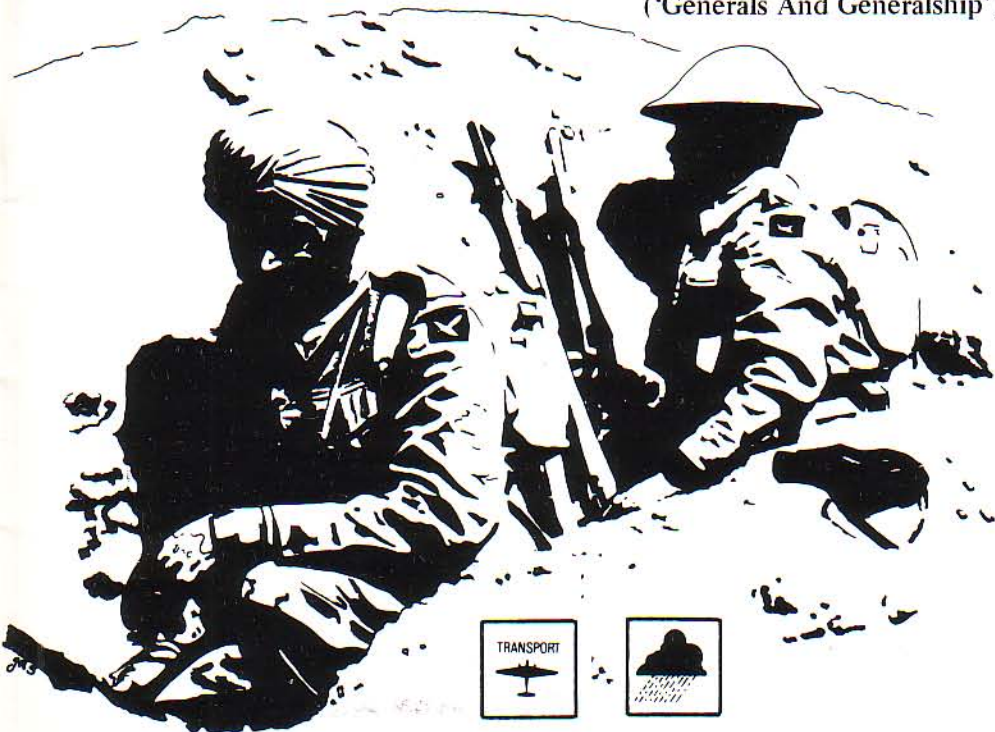
The Campaign for North Africa

BY BOB CAMPBELL



"The real foundations of military knowledge are topography movement and supply not strategy and tactics"

FIELD MARSHAL LORD WAVELL
(*'Generals And Generalship'*)



A casual browse through the components of **Campaign For North Africa** is almost certain to mislead. The first thing to strike you is the sheer amount of paper you get for your money. Even discarding the Historical Notes (a course of action which I strongly recommend, but more of that later) there is a solid day's reading for you in the rules before you even begin to divert yourself with the intricacies of the charts and tables. Without that reading, a superficial glance through the components will merely show you that there is an awful lot of detail, and an awful lot of rules.

Depending on your degree of cynicism, you will either decide that all this paper must contain the ultimate truth about North Africa, or that this must be just another SPI mega-buck mega-game where an awful lot of output hides a lot of awful design. Either way, you would be wrong. Both views could, at a pinch, be defended, but both greatly undervalue the game design (the second because the design of **CNA** is always well executed, even where I think it misguided; the first because it assumes an inevitability to the design dictated by its close correspondence to how it actually was). Underlying all the trivia of research (of which much has been made in the various Designers' Notes and design progress reports in **S&T** and **Moves**, there is a strong design framework. But the existence of this framework, vital though it is, means that **CNA** is in the end a set of consistent rules rather than 'the ultimate in simulational realism'.

That quote from the SPI advert for the game is certainly an overstated claim (although **CNA** is certainly the best simulation of the desert war yet) but it reflects what has always been the main object of the **CNA** project. **CNA** has never been intended to be a playable game. All through its long design life it has been touted as unplayable but highly informative; what SPI chose to call a Heuristic Intensive Manual Simulation (Heuristic, as every schoolboy knows, means 'enabling one to find out things for oneself'. Intensive Manual means, as the rules point out on a large number of occasions, [and rather too gleefully for my liking] hours of endless work for all the players). SPI apparently believe that this will provide you with 'the most consuming and fulfilling gaming experience of your life'. Strangely enough, I find this a much more credible claim although not one that I personally would endorse.

Back in the distant past, SPI produced a game called **USN** which covered the first two years of World War Two in the Pacific. It seemed at the time to many gamers to be what **CNA** is now claiming to be. It is hard now to see what the fuss was about, but back then it convinced by the sheer scale of the undertaking. Because it was so big and attempted so much yet seemed to hang together (albeit rather loosely in places) gamers became devoted to it. It gave the feeling that trapped somewhere within it was a real insight into the Pacific war struggling to get out. In a different way **CNA** has much the same feel to it.

The difference (and to my mind a vital difference) lies in the scale of the undertaking. **USN** had a healthy regard for logistical problems (although quite a few gamers seem to have developed house rules that quietly sabotaged this aspect of the game, something that happens all too frequently to those rare designs that dare to suggest that there is rather more to waging war than just good old-fashioned killing). It used 600 counters or so on a 23" by 34" mapsheet supplemented by a few odd logsheets and charts. In those days this made it a monster game. What really made it though was the purely hypothetical possibility of playing one of the campaign games; these were felt to be unplayable, owing to their inordinate length. Before starting one, you were solemnly warned that it was enormously time-consuming and would last at least 80 hours.

CNA is on a somewhat larger scale. It needs (for all scenarios) five 23" by 34" mapsheets; some 1800 counters are provided (but if you want to form Italian battlegroups you'll have to make your own counters) with three storage trays to sort them into (as far as I can see if you want to store counters in a logical fashion four trays is an absolute minimum). As remarked above, an awesome stack of rules and charts is provided, whilst to keep track of what you're doing, you are given masters of no less

than 12 different types of log sheet and permission to photocopy them. (Here you will hit another niggling problem; some of these masters are 17" by 11" and just will not fit the average photocopier)

Besides the sheer physical sprawl of the game, there is the solid graft involved in just pushing the game along. Playing time for one game turn (corresponding to one week in the campaign) is estimated by SPI at eight to ten hours once players get the hang of things (always an ominous phrase); maybe it takes a while to acquire, for my estimate would be decidedly slower. The Campaign Game runs for 111 weeks, so SPI quote playing times for this of 1000+ hours (on the box) or 'at least 1200 hours' (in the rules). (Is this an attempt to mislead the casual buyer, or is it just that the finicky types who actually read the rules are reckoned to be slower players?)

So far, so good; you just happen to own a ballroom and you know a friend with a lot of time on his hands. Unfortunately, you'll need to know a few more. Ideally, each division on the map should have its own commander, but the rules strenuously recommend, based on playtesting experience, that each side should at the very least be handled by a team of five players. So, if you want to work through the entire campaign for North Africa from the brief incursion into Egypt by the Italians to Rommel's final retreat off the board after El Alamein and Operation TORCH (and it is on this basis that the game has always been justified), you will really need to drum up another nine like-minded enthusiasts (to be polite) eager to devote 1500-2000 hours of their life to attaining enlightenment by playing (if that is really the word) CNA. Even if you confine yourself to something a bit smaller in scale, you aren't going to be able to whittle down the manning levels all that far. You will however stand a better chance of getting to play the game and put the design through its paces.

For I suspect that congregations of ten wargamers, let alone ten wargamers all prepared to play CNA, are so uncommon and infrequent that the full campaign game of CNA is doomed to remain unplayed (at least in the UK). I would love to be proved wrong on this, but it does enable me to ignore the Campaign Game with an easy conscience. If you do play the Campaign Game, SPI would love your comments on playbalance after you've played the game a few times — say Spring 1982. They must however have some ideas on the subject already, because the Axis are unable to invade Malta, and Commonwealth forces may not advance beyond Marble Arch, both summary prohibitions being justified on grounds of playbalance (a point that the anonymous copywriter might have considered before being so bold as to dub CNA 'the ultimate in simulational realism').

LOGISTICS. Supplies, Supplies!

As a game, therefore, CNA consists of a number of short scenarios where actual combat will loom rather larger, and sustained logistical effort seem less important than in the long campaign. This is a pity, for it weakens one of the fundamental points of the CNA system; the primary importance of logistics.

For, despite all the detail worked into the combat system (which has the net effect of most combat systems devised by Richard Berg; it produces a firm conviction that combat is both complicated and unpredictable) and despite the possibility of greatly simplifying the logistics rules to enable players misguided enough to concentrate on the complex land and air rules, the heart of the system is logistics. This is necessary if CNA is to do what it sets out to do (reflect the underlying realities of war in the North African desert), but, judging from the skeletal state of logistics in the average board wargame and the complaints of "over-complexity" made against those games that flesh out this side slightly, CNA, with its heavy stress on the mechanics of actually keeping a modern army in the field, is taking a highly unpopular approach to a popular subject.

The main thing to remember when viewing the war in the desert as a problem in logistics is that doing anything will cost you something and doing nothing doesn't come cheap either. Units have to be kept supplied with four basic commodities; fuel, ammunition, water, and stores (best thought of as food, but defined as everything that isn't any of

the other three). Apart from water, which is found at oases and towns in small quantities, everything has to be brought in from outside the desert. The Commonwealth is assumed to have unlimited supplies of all these items in the Nile Delta (the glories of the Middle East Base Area thus don't enter into CNA at all) whilst the Axis has to ship in everything from Italy (or Greece once that has fallen). This involves planning convoys in advance, taking losses to air attacks on the way (submarine and surface naval attacks are left out of the game [one hopes their effects are not] — in general, the naval side is greatly abstracted, compared to the detail piled on on land and in the air) and finding on arrival that the situation is transformed and that a differently composed convoy would have been more welcome. For the Axis, there is the additional problem of ferrying over replacements, which must be booked onto convoys before convoy size is even known.

Since supplies are thus freely available, there remains only the minor problem of getting them where they are needed. Players must set up a distribution system; a chain or net of supply dumps continually being depleted and replenished by the endless movement of hordes of motor transport carrying supplies. This is not as simple as it sounds (in CNA, nothing is ever as simple as it sounds, even when it sounds quite complex).

To start from the other end, combat units can only take with them enough fuel for one move, and enough ammunition to fire everything off once. This means that if you plan to do anything with these units apart from letting them sit out the war on top of a supply dump, then they are going to need trucks with them loaded up with spare supplies. Since troops have to be supplied regardless of their combat effectiveness, and supply is a real problem, small bodies of troops with a high combat effectiveness are of great value. The Italians face the selfsame problem the French faced in Portugal against Wellington; any army big enough to beat the British is so big it will starve.

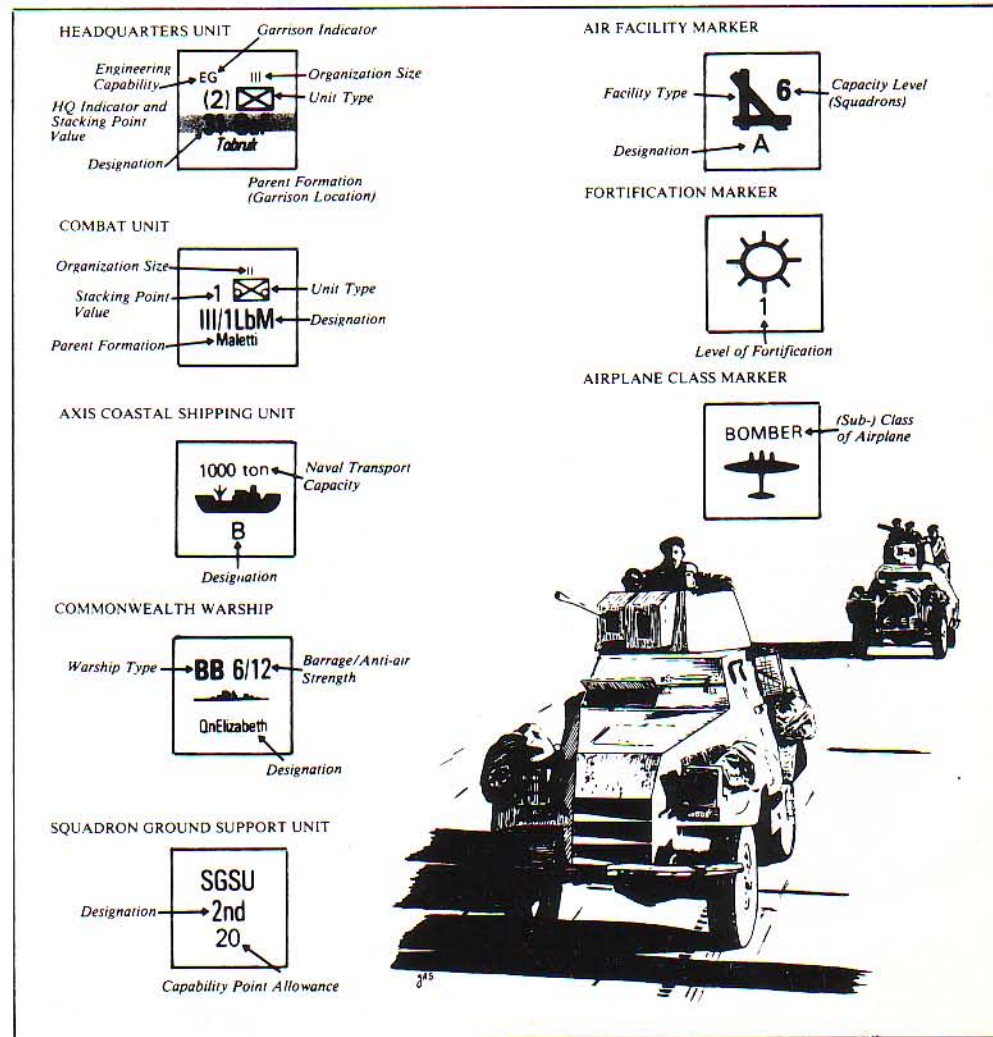
Trucks can also be allocated to combat units in order to convert foot-sloggers into motorised

infantry (a much more useful item) but really supply should have higher priority. The supply trucks attached to combat units ('first-line trucks') serve as a sort of camel's hump for them, but with the additional complication that they themselves will be burning up fuel every time they move; they may be part of the solution to the supply problem, but they are also part of the problem.

Furthermore, the first-line trucks are going to need refilling because their associated combat units can only live off their hump for just so long. This replenishment must be carried out from supply dumps and by 'second-line trucks' which ferry supplies from the dumps to the first-line trucks which will actually take the supplies into battle. Unless you are fighting on the doorstep of your base area, there is a further need for transport to cart supplies from their point of entry (landing port or base) to the supply dumps serving the front line. This is carried out mostly by 'third-line trucks'. (Although the difference between third-line and second-line trucks is only one of nomenclature, first-line trucks differ from both at many points in the rules.)

Merely maintaining an army where it stands thus involves a lot of effort. Matters are made worse by wastage of supplies (besides the actual consumption of fuel and water, stocks go down because of evaporation) but the real problems begin when the army moves, and especially when it moves forward. An offensive requires almost by definition the provision and consumption of large quantities of fuel and ammunition which must be stockpiled well forward beforehand. (Since the location of supply dumps is revealed on the map, stockpiling in front of your forward positions, as O'Connor did before his offensive, is a bit too risky in the game). Besides the problem of accumulating supplies for the offensive, you must also find the trucks and supplies to build a supply system to enable you to maintain yourself on the ground taken by the offensive. There is a chance of taking enemy supply dumps to ease your difficulties, but this cannot be relied upon, although it is nice if it happens.

That in a nutshell is the entire supply problem and



procedure. It is much easier to describe than the byzantine combat procedure, yet poses much more fundamental and more difficult problems which should not be underestimated because they can be set with a remarkably short and simple set of rules. It is fairly easy to see what you should be doing to stand the best chance of winning a combat; but organisation of supplies is nothing like as self-evident. How should trucks be allocated between second and third-line duties, and between first-line duties and use to motorise infantry? Or again, how should supplies of the various types be rationed to each other for a particular type of operation?

Besides supply and combat, there are a whole range of rules covering various bits of 'housekeeping'. For example, all the time your supply trucks are scurrying around in all directions they are wearing themselves out and are liable to break down. This can in fact happen to any moving vehicle (except for some reason the intrinsic motor transport of artillery units) and is governed by distance moved and the type of terrain covered (each type has, as well as a movement point cost, a breakdown point value). As with many of the CNA procedures, an exact exposition and explanation would be tedious; the system seems based on reasonable premises and involves much paperwork and time.

Of course, faced with trucks breaking down on you, you don't just write them off and leave them lying by the side of the road. Instead, you have a vehicle repair system (or to be more accurate you set one up), with Major Repair Facilities (Alexandria, Cairo and suchlike) and Temporary Repair Facilities, which you can construct in the field. You can either tow your broken-down trucks to the facilities and repair them there (towing is curiously abstracted, as no vehicle is allocated to towing, and no fuel is expended; instead the broken-down vehicle tows itself for free) or else try field repairs. If these were as cost-effective as facility repairs (in terms of supplies, which are consumed for this as for just about every activity) then nobody would bother setting up facilities. They aren't, so the more realistic course has to be followed. A similar system, but differing in most details, operates for other vehicles (tanks, armoured cars, etc.) that break down. In addition, tanks destroyed in combat can be repaired (but only at facilities or by a few mobile ARV counters).

To construct the required Temporary Repair Facilities in the field you will need engineers (although some divisional headquarters can perform this and other selected engineering functions). Engineers have a wide range of uses; although very few are exclusive to them, they perform them better. They may construct roads, but then so can ordinary infantry; the trick is that infantry stacked with engineers treble their road construction rate. They alone can repair damaged sections of railway (only two New Zealand units can extend the railway; in fact can do nothing else). In both road and rail construction, construction is limited to work that was actually historically carried out. No such restriction applies to airfields (which only engineers can build) or landing strips (the ground elements of an air squadron, known as SGSUs (Squadron Ground Support Units) can also build these, but generally have other and better uses).

Engineers are also useful in areas more closely related to combat. They can both lay and remove minefields, as well as reducing movement costs through them for other friendly units. When stacked with infantry, they can construct fortifications (nervous Commonwealth players can make an early start on the El Alamein line). It is said that when attached to units close assaulting a fortified hex they partially neutralise the effect of fortification, but this seems only of use if the unit is so small (battalion size or less) that it has no ZOC, for engineers are not permitted to enter enemy ZOCs. (I wonder if the intention is that they may enter when stacked with combat units, but for the moment best stick to the rule as printed). The designer (Richard Berg), who seems at times to be reviewing his own game in the rule books, points out that engineering is somewhat abstracted, as the emphasis of the game design lies elsewhere.

ORDER OF BATTLE: Three of Our Units Are Missing....

On now to the actual combat units. CNA is claimed to have the first commercially available

Order of Battle covering all belligerents at battalion level for the entire African campaign. This claim is made, not by the same hyperbole-saturated anonymous optimist who wrote the advert for the game, but actually by the otherwise modest Richard Berg. There is a trivial point to be made (CNA does not cover the entire African campaign) and a much more serious one.

Undoubtedly a lot of research has gone into assembling the Order of Battle. The effort was extensive enough to permit the passing comment on the hapless LUPI DI TOSCANA division 'probably the worst Italian regular division'; a comment which is almost certainly true, but implies a fair amount of research into the fiasco of the Italian campaign in Albania (where the 'Wolves of Tuscany' were rechristened 'Hares' (Lepri) after showing a disconcerting tendency to run when faced with an enemy). I think we can assume that the original research was detailed and accurate. Unfortunately, as has happened before (Trieste in Yugoslavia [Revolt in the East] is an obvious example) research of whatever quality has been let down by mistakes at later stages. In some cases the same unit is given contradictory arrival dates in different charts whilst, unless I have overlooked something (word-, chart-, and table-blindness are related hazards with big games like CNA), there is a major omission in one Scenario.

The rules recommend a casual set-up of the Graziani's Offensive scenario to all those who wish to knock the pieces around for a bit and see how the system works. Two of the Italian divisions involved in the initial set-up are present on the countersheets, but have (as far as I can see) dropped out completely from the Organisation At Arrival Chart (the written record of the vaunted complete Order Of Battle). There is thus no information at all on their composition (other than that implied by the counters) or on their strength. For my own purposes, I made the 'quick fix' assumption that these two divisions (the Cirene [63rd] and Marmaricia [62nd]) were identical to the Catanzaro [64th] whose strengths are given. The one real uncertainty lies in the artillery where there is no reason to assume uniformity of equipment. One can hardly claim that glitches like this totally destroy the value of all the research, but they certainly do nothing to enhance it. If you wanted to be cruel, you could gibe that the order of battle is only complete in parts.

Since the object of a review is to draw attention to the merits (or otherwise) of a game and not to seize upon some minor fault, work it up out of all proportion, and use it to damn the game utterly, too much should not be made of this lapse. A search for other missing divisions revealed only one other absentee; the Italian 61st (Sirte) division which turns up as a reinforcement early on in the same scenario. The search took me 15 minutes; it is unfortunate that after spending 2 years playtesting CNA nobody at SPI carried out that particular 15-minute test. With the 'quick fix' given above even the mutilated scenario can be attempted; the lapse seems unfortunate, rather than symptomatic.



UNITS AND FORMATIONS: The Roll your Own Army

On the whole, then, the CNA order of battle seems to have been compiled with loving care. The justification for this effort lies not in itself, but in the use to which it is put. Two commonplaces of game design (the step-reduction of unit strength and the build-up and breakdown of divisions from and into smaller units [in this case battalion size]) are combined to provide an extremely flexible but bureaucratic means of forming and representing large formations with great precision.

It is nothing new to find the use of a single divisional counter to represent the individual units of that division (generally more conveniently stacked together on an off-map array). The composition and capabilities of these smaller units are, however, usually fixed. In CNA, whilst every formation is only an administrative handle to facilitate

control of the constituent units, every unit is in its turn only an administrative device for storing strength points and capabilities. Since the properties of a division are those of its constituent units, and the strength points in which the battalions and companies are quantified correspond to about 100 men, 5 to 8 armoured fighting vehicles or 4 to 8 guns, the degree of precision in divisional strength is remarkably high.

Furthermore, the tanks and guns with which units are equipped are of definite types with differing properties. Combined with the differing effectiveness of various infantry units, this makes it possible to show on an operational level the difference between large poor-quality units and small elite units of the same cumulative combat strength.

Brigades are formed from the correct historical groupings of battalions but the Commonwealth is able to chop and change brigade compositions as in real life. Divisions are formed by combining brigaded troops and divisional assets. In addition to these basic 'assigned' units, units may be 'attached' to formations. Assignment corresponds broadly to 'owning' the unit and attachment to having the use of it. Units can therefore only be assigned to one formation at a time, nor may they be attached to more than one, but the two formations do not have to be one and the same. A unit may be attached to one formation at the same time that it is assigned to another.

There are limits to the number of units that may be assigned to a formation, and also on the number that may be attached. These are set to reproduce historical formation types, but allow players some latitude. Formations may be slimmed down or beefed-up by detaching or attaching units, whilst units themselves need not be at full strength, nor will the strength of outwardly identical units be the same. Because all that actually appears on the map to be inspected by the opposition is the formation counter, much of this remains pure guesswork until it actually comes to combat.

Combat losses are taken as reductions in units' strength points and have to be made up by the allocation of replacement points. Apart from the need for a short training period and the need to march replacements once trained to a specific unit to which they have been allocated this is a simple enough procedure for infantry. For tanks and guns the situation is complicated by the regular model changes; particularly for tanks and anti-tank guns replacements are often of a different type to those already in use. Although mixing seems at first sight a bad thing (administratively far from tidy), it seems to be favoured by the combat system and the way combat losses are taken. Strangely enough, there seems to be no benefit to be gained by standardisation) obviously equipping an armoured unit with a mixture of Matildas and Stuarts severely limits its uses, but there are no administrative or logistic penalties to be faced). In fact, it isn't all that strange if you consider that there is no attempt to differentiate between ammunition types; perfect interchangeability of spares is easier to swallow than perfect interchangeability of ammunition and to insist on the falsity of these assumptions would further complicate the book-keeping.

There are other points at which 'the ultimate in simulational realism' is decidedly penultimate. Reinforcements, for example, arrive the turn they are due come hell or high water. In particular, no matter what trouble Axis supply convoys may be having, Axis reinforcements arrive dry-shod on the quay at Tripoli at no shipping cost. If you look at the Commonwealth reinforcement procedure, though, you promptly find that the level of realism is much higher. Many Commonwealth reinforcements arrive in Egypt still needing licking into shape. This is reflected in a poor morale rating (yes, we have morale) adversely affecting their chances in battle. Not to worry, though; stack them with a trained unit in Cairo, let them stew long enough and you get fully-trained fighting men. This is recommended, but not obligatory; if you fancy sending out raw recruits fresh off the troopship to stop Rommel's battle-hardened veterans in their tracks you can try it (and the best of British luck).

MOVEMENT: The Art Of Not Going Too Far

You now have reinforcements suitable for the front. Feed them, water them, fuel and arm them, load their lorries with supplies and you can send them there. The movement system is not over simplistic. Instead of a fixed movement point allowance, units have a Capacity Point Allowance (CPA) which can be spent on many different activities (movement, construction, combat &c.). When carrying out most activities, units can exceed their CP but suffer for this by losing cohesion (the cohesion rating drops one for every CP expended over the CPA). Successful combat or complete rest are the only ways of regaining cohesion. As cohesion drops the likelihood of having poor morale in combat increases. With a cohesion level of -17 units must surrender when close assaulted, while at -26 they give up the ghost, can't move, attack or defend and consequently surrender to any enemy unit prepared to take an interest in them.

Within these limits, units may move and have combat repeatedly, as long as they are prepared to pay for it. This is termed 'continual movement' (the difference between continuous and continual is a nice one; has the writer gone for continual because movement is in fact interrupted, or because it seems to go on for ever?). All units may move, then combats are resolved, then all units within 2 hexes of the enemy or freshly released from reserve may move again (units released from reserve pay a CP penalty representing the waiting time before they were released) and so on until the phasing player has had enough or has run out of CPAs or of units eligible to move. Things are further complicated by the ability of the non-phasing player to retreat his units before, during or after combat, but the point to note is the possibility of concentrated attack. A key hex may undergo repeated attacks in one Operations Stage (the subdivision of a Game Turn containing one Movement and Combat Phase, henceforth OpStage). There are three pairs of OpStages in each Game-Turn and the player with the initiative nominates which player is to go first in each pair. This gives him the powerful advantage of being able to pick his moment and then pounce, taking two of his OpStages consecutively (back-to-back) with a very good chance of developing a successful offensive.

As for the terrain over which all this movement and combat is taking place, suddenly there's a whole lot more of it. The rules note (Berg as reviewer again) "For those gamers used to *Panzer-armee Afrika* or *Afrika Korps*, the game-map of CNA will come as something of a shock and a revelation: there is terrain in all those empty spaces". Indeed yes, this game is the first covering North Africa to include terrain clearly shown in a £30 world atlas. Is this really a matter for congratulation or should we perhaps ask how so many independent game designs all came to omit the same bits of North African terrain? To be fair, the present game takes place over accurate terrain with a historical communications net with players free to repeat the historical improvements made during the war.

COMBAT : War Without Haste

And so to combat. I am in two minds about the system used. It seems over-elaborate; after the fashion of *Vera Cruz* and *The Crusades* there seems to be a triple encipherment of the factors being fed into combat before any result emerges. This has the great virtue of taking gamers a lot nearer the uncertainty with which combat is entered in the real world than the 'put a unit either side, send the 1-5 round the back, soak off the Young Guard with the artillery, and that is 3-1 surrounded so he must be dead' approach possible (and necessary) with some simpler combat systems. Berg combat systems often seem to revel in being uncrackable and highly unpredictable, offering 'a wide variety of results' to use the very words with which he described the CNA Assault CRT. Once the level of logistic and organisational detail had been settled, and it became obvious that CNA was in truth going to be vast and virtually unplayable, there can have been very little incentive to cut back on detail and complexity in the combat system. As in the Air Game, the rules give me the strong impression of an over-egged pudding. To let you see what I mean, this is the combat procedure. To be strictly ac-

curate, what follows is only the edited highlights, as some side-alleys remain unexplored, but this in essence is what you do.

First, you move units adjacent to the hex you wish to attack. You may attack units not exerting ZOCs over these adjacent units, and must attack stacks which do (anything more than a solitary battalion, broadly speaking). You can 'hold off' with artillery in order to satisfy this requirement (apart from some additional requirements on how much artillery needs to be committed, hold off seems to be our ancient friend soak-off).

At this stage (still during movement) the non-phasing player is given a chance to chicken out or in the terminology of CNA 'react' by moving away (provided he can spare the CPs to pay for this). He must sit tight if he is non-motorised, if he'd have to enter an enemy ZOC to get away, if he was already in an enemy ZOC before additional units moved adjacent, or if the unit moving adjacent has a sufficiently greater CPA and intends to close assault. Note, however, that you can't force a whole division to stand and fight by moving a couple of armoured cars next to it to hold it until your infantry moves up as well — you will need at least a brigade.

Since we are detailing the combat sequence, we had best assume that the defender stays put. Other units will then move until all movement and reaction is finished. For each combat, the players note whether their artillery is deployed Forward (where it will be more effective, because it is able to combine strength with other Forward artillery when Barraging, and then to fire again in the Close Assault or Anti-tank segments) or Back (where it can only Barrage, and may not combine strength, but on the other hand the guns will take no losses in combat unless the position is overrun [a term which in CNA applies to overwhelming attacks in the combat segment, rather than the overwhelming attacks carried out during movement normally implied by the term]). The other player is not informed of the decisions made.

The fighting can now start. The artillery leads off by barraging. Players specify the hexes from which they are barraging and are told in return and in the most general terms what there is for them to fire at in adjacent hexes (say 'Hex A; one tank battalion, three infantry battalions and an artillery battery'). They then pick what seems a likely target ('Hex B, infantry battalion number two') and let rip. (By the way, if you want to save ammunition, you needn't fire off at full strength. This applies for all succeeding stages of combat as well. Remember, if you find yourself without ammunition, you can only do one of two things; cheat or surrender). If you happen to know that a particular unit is in a hex and you bear it a grudge you can single it out by name. The rules don't say what happens if you're wrong and it isn't there (I'm sorry, the City of London Yeomanry are not at home. May I have Master Bunn the Baker's Son? ?) and by now you will have noticed that a certain amount of trust and honesty are needed for the smooth running of the game.

Barrage results in pinning units (which then lose all further interest in the proceedings), inflicting casualties as well as pinning or in nothing. There are, effectively, separate CRTs for infantry, armour and artillery targets, with an additional one for trucks (which may not be specified as a target, but any barrage against a hex gets a free roll against any trucks present). As with most tables in CNA, 36 die roll results are possible, two clearly distinguishable dice being used.

All barrages are resolved before any combat proceeds further. The non-phasing player (now with a somewhat clearer picture of what may be brewing [for one thing he now knows the number (but not combat strength) of units stuffed into the formations adjacent to his barraging artillery (which is a fundamental problem with the system; what is this reconnaissance by artillery supposed to be simulating, and can it be justified?)]) has another chance to think discretion the better part of valour. This is no longer 'Reaction' but instead 'Retreat before Assault' and can take place simultaneously all along the line. All, some or none of the non-phasing units may be moved — units adjacent to enemy units can be moved as far as the non-phasing player wants to go and can pay CPs for, whilst those not under attack can be moved to a more limited extent. There are two

main restrictions; units cannot retreat into enemy ZOCs and Pinned units can't move. It follows from the continual movement rules that it is quite possible to carry out a Retreat before Assault which stops an offensive dead in its tracks, only reserves being left able to move. To prevent this the phasing player has to surround or pin by barrage the enemy front line; let us assume he has done so and forced the defender to fight.

Combats are now resolved hex by hex. Players secretly allocate their forces to Anti-Armour or Close Assault (or withhold them if worried about ammunition). Anti-Armour combat comes before Close Assault, and concerns itself with knocking out the other side's tanks. Strength points allocated to Anti-Armour (not necessarily units — some strength points of a unit may be allocated to Anti-Armour, some to Close Assault, and some withheld; units are not indivisible, although strength points are) blaze away at the enemy armour. You now get more information on enemy forces at this stage; the types of tanks involved (but not their numbers) and if any other armour types (recce, self-propelled guns, or infantry half-tracks) are present, but not their actual hexes. If you had no barrage, or have forgotten what you found out from it, you may find yourself firing Anti-Armour at a hex devoid of suitable targets. In this case, you can reallocate the wasted points to Close Assault (halving their effectiveness so you'll know better next time). Since it is Close Assault that determines who ends up holding the hex, why fire Anti-Armour at all?

Well first, some equipment (for example anti-tank guns) is going to do more damage to the enemy when used against armour. Second, the rules for taking losses differ between Anti-Armour and Close Assault. Only in Anti-Armour can one be certain that losses inflicted are suffered by highly effective units (armour). Anti-Armour results are Damage Points inflicted on the enemy. Enough AFVs must be destroyed to absorb these damage points (tanks have differing DP values, from the Mk VI Light at 1 point to, no, not the Matilda (6) but the Churchill Mk II (7)). Losses are taken immediately from units allocated either to Close Assault, or to Anti-Armour. Close Assault has yet to be resolved, and Anti-Armour is resolved as though both sides fire simultaneously, so the obvious course is to take losses from the Anti-Armour tanks. Tank losses materialise as destroyed tank markers with which you can do various fun things after the battle.

All that remains now is the Close Assault. Under certain conditions this may turn out to be a Probe, which costs less CPs to start and to finish. In some ways, this serves the purpose of the traditional overrun by cutting the CP cost of crushing small delaying forces. Otherwise, it is virtually indistinguishable from a Close Assault (the defender need not know the difference until after combat resolution).

The players now reveal the unit types involved in the Close Assault and the grand total of combat strength committed (but not how the total is made up). The Assault Differential is calculated and subjected to column shifts according to a wide range of possible modifiers; fortification (partly offset by engineers), terrain, relative unit size and morale. Morale has to be determined first (basic morale modified by cohesion after paying for combat and by die roll); the relative unit size modifier is also worth thinking about.

Why should large units fight better than small units with the same combat strength? — this is not the only effect of the modifier, but it is the one that puzzles me. Where large units are up against a large number of small units the rules explanation of the modification (better organisation) seems reasonable, but the case of a small highly effective unit is not to be explained thus. Units with the same combat strength should inflict the same absolute casualties, but the CNA CRT gives percentage losses and that is the real answer: the CRT design necessitates the modification (percentage loss CRTs are tricky things). To resolve the close assault, both players throw two dice, which tell them their own percentage losses and, when (for once) added together, if any losses are captured and if the combat has become an engagement (and therefore costs more to break off) or has forced the defender to retreat. Retreats can only happen

on the defender's dice-roll and engagement on the attacker's.

Retreat means just what it says; you retreat 1, 2 or 3 hexes according to the result against you. You can't retreat into enemy ZOCs, naturally, but only lose an additional 10% combat strength for every hex you should retreat but can't, instead of the more usual total elimination.

Capture is not so simple; having got a 'capture' result, there is an additional die-roll to find the percentage of losses which are captured by the enemy. First, losses will need to be worked out, an intricate procedure of which one point seems of major importance; where units from more than one hex took part in the combat losses must be shared proportionally between the hexes but there is no such requirement to share between different units in the same hex. Both players having taken their losses, a die is rolled to find the percentage of his losses captured from the player with the 'capture' result against him. From the unequally distributed losses, the captures are selected, again without any requirement for even distribution among the losses. There are two possible types of captures; prisoners, who you can't use, but must feed, water and generally look after (there are some rather jolly POW rules that have a vague whiff of self-indulgence to them), or equipment, which you can use. All things being equal, therefore, tanks will never get captured but infantry always will!

Nonetheless, the Profile book on Commonwealth Armoured formations quoted as a design reference includes a half-page photo of captured Italian M 13/40s being used by the 6th Australian Division's divisional cavalry. This poses not one, but two

problems. First and more trivial, under CNA rules, there is no way this unit can operate tanks; it must stick to its original Bren carriers. Presumably a very definite design decision was taken on this; it would be a strange lapse if the game went directly against a quoted reference supported by photographic evidence purely by accident. Secondly, how did the Aussies get those tanks?

Not just because the Italians hadn't read the rules, but rather because they surrendered. Surrender can occur voluntarily at any time except halfway through combat (the opponent must accept the surrender, provided he can expend the Capability Points he needs to do so) or become compulsory by lack of ammunition, by loss of cohesion, or by a poor die roll when checking morale prior to close assault. In most games there is no incentive to surrender, and the Churchillian dictum 'You can always take one with you' is ruthlessly applied. In CNA, however, the great attraction of voluntary surrender when in difficulties is not the avoidance of senseless bloodshed, but the chance the surrenderer gets to destroy up to half his equipment, which might well otherwise be captured.

That just about wraps up the combat procedure. As I said before going through it in detail, I am in two minds about it. Its complexity seems a bit of a mismatch with the simple but laborious logistics system, so in theory I don't like it. In practice, however, the sundry complexities of the combat system seem easy enough to master (or at least to learn) and once this is done you cannot really accuse them of destroying the flow of the game. Although I don't like the design mismatch I think I see, I really cannot point to anywhere it does any harm. The feel is wrong, but the result seems right.



THE AIR GAME : Monty's Flying Circus?

If I suspect a design mismatch with the combat system, then I am certain of it with the Air Game. I think it over-complex, and am not the only one to do so. The Designers' Notes made the same complaint, Richard Berg adding that the Air Game was only retained because the playtesters enjoyed it so much. As a side-show, it does have its attractions, but it is only a side-show and can be omitted with only minimal alterations to the rest of the rules. I can see little to be said for its retention; it seems an uneasy companion to the rest of CNA and there must be easier ways of having fun. Here, as in a number of places, I feel the game could have been tightened up by ignoring the playtesters' longing for a bit of entertainment.

The actual design seems an uneven mixture of detail and abstraction. The basic unit is the individual plane (giving the feeling of great realism) but the sorties flown are greatly reduced in number (avoiding most of the problems associated with genuine accuracy). The level of detail of the plane roster enables (for example) the Commonwealth player to start the campaign with 1 Sea Gladiator (with other types beside) at Malta. You suddenly realise that this is the one survivor of the famous trio with which Malta started the war, and cannot help but be impressed. On the other hand, problems do appear. Playfair tells us that to give maximum battlefield cover to Operation COMPASS, the air defence of Alexandria was reduced to two Sea Gladiators borrowed from the Fleet Air Arm.

This cannot be reproduced in CNA for two reasons. First, there is only one Sea Gladiator in the entire game ('Charity' at Malta). Secondly, there is no Fleet Air Arm at all (not even one restricted to carrier operations since the RN carriers do not appear in the Mediterranean Fleet).

There is more to the Air Game than listing planes. Each plane type has its own characteristics listed to govern its availability for and performance on various types of mission. These boil down to various kinds of bombing, defensive and offensive fighter flying, plus strafing and more peaceful activities like transport, transfer, and reconnaissance. Keeping the planes flying takes a fair old amount of logistic and administrative effort, but as with the land game, there is sugar on the pill in the shape of a complex but fun combat system.

The combat system really cannot be said to set out to simulate anything in particular. It is a fun system loosely representing plane-to-plane combat with the combat strengths of the planes being modified by tactical manoeuvrability, skill rating of the pilot and anything else that seems worth fitting in. This is the sort of thing that people who like this sort of thing appreciate.



HISTORICAL NOTES: A Rave From The Grave

Whilst the Air Game strikes me as irrelevant but harmless fun, the same cannot be said for the Historical Notes which are part of the CNA package. The first section is a straight reissue of some ten-year-old S&T articles by Al Nofi. These articles were not well received at the time and to reissue them without revision seems an extraordinary decision.

The trouble is that Mr Nofi has very definite views and is not afraid to express them. He has no regard for the British Army. This is certainly a tenable (if unpopular in Britain) view and it is not to this that I object. The trouble is that he is so keen to state his case that at times he seems to have equal regard for the truth. Rather than accept the British casualty figures for Operation COMPASS (Wavell's Offensive) which reflect unfavourably upon his

SEQUENCES OF PLAY FOR THE CNA LAND GAME AND THE LOGISTICS GAME

LAND GAME SEQUENCE OF PLAY

I. Initiative Determination Stage

II. Naval Convoy Stage

- A. Naval Convoy Schedule Phase
- B. Tactical Shipping Phase

III. First Operations Stage

- A. Initiative Declaration Phase
- B. Weather Determination Phase
- C. Organisation Phase
 - 1) Reorganisation Segment
 - 2) Construction Segment
 - a) Construction Completion Step
 - b) Construct. Initiation/Continuation Step
 - 3) Training Segment
 - a) Training Completion Step
 - b) Training Commence/Continue Step

D. Naval Convoy Arrival Phase

E. Commonwealth Fleet Phase

- 1) Fleet Assignment Segment
- 2) Fleet Repair Segment

F. Reserve Designation Phase

G. Movement and Combat Phase

- 1) Movement Segment
- 2) Breakdown Determination Segment
- 3) Combat Segment
 - a) Position Determination Step
 - b) Barrage Step
 - c) Retreat Before Assault Step
 - d) Force Assignment Step
 - e) Anti-Armour Step
 - f) Close Assault Step
- 4) Reserve Release Segment

H. Truck Convoy Movement Phase

J. Commonwealth Rail Movement Phase

K. Repair Phase

- 1) Towing Segment
- 2) Maintenance Segment

L. Patrol Phase

At this point the opposing player undertakes Phases F through L.

IV. Second Operations Stage

Repeat all facets of First Ops Stage

V. Third Operations Stage

Repeat all facets of First Ops Stage

VI. End of Game-Turn

You have now completed one full game turn, a full week of the real campaign.

LOGISTICS GAME SEQUENCE OF PLAY

I. Initiative Determination Phase

II. Strategic Air Planning Stage

- A. Designation Phase
- B. Axis Malta Avail. Determination Phase
- C. Strategic Mission Assignment Phase
- D. Malta Raid Phase

III. Naval Convoy Stage

- A. Naval Convoy Schedule Phase
- B. Convoy Resolution Phase

- 1) Convoy Reconnaissance Segment
- 2) Convoy Lane Assignment Segment
- 3) Convoy Bombing Segment

IV. Stores Expenditure Stage

V. First Operations Stage

- A. Initiative Declaration Phase
- B. Weather Determination Phase
- C. Organisation Phase
 - 1) Water Distribution Segment
 - 2) Reorganisation Segment
 - 3) Attrition Segment
 - 4) Construction Segment
 - a) Construction Completion Step
 - b) Construct. Initiation/Continue Step
 - 5) Training Segment
 - a) Training Completion Step
 - b) Training Initiation/Continue Step
 - 6) Supply Distribution Segment
 - 7) Tactical Shipping Segment

D. Naval Convoy Arrival Phase

- E. Commonwealth Fleet Phase
 - 1) Fleet Assignments Segment
 - 2) Fleet Repair Segment

F. Land Support Air Phase

- 1) Mission Assignment Segment
- 2) Mission Deployment Segment
- 3) Air-to-air Combat Resolution Segment
- 4) Flak Resolution Segment
- 5) Mission Completion Segment
- 6) Return to Base Segment
- 7) Tactical Maintenance Segment

G. Reserve Designation Phase

H. Movement and Combat Phase

- 1) Movement Segment
- 2) Breakdown Determination Segment
- 3) Combat Segment
 - a) Position Determination Step
 - b) Barrage Step
 - c) Retreat Before Assault Step
 - d) Force Assignment Step
 - e) Anti-Armour Step
 - f) Close Assault Step
- 4) Reserve Release Segment

J. Truck Convoy Movement Phase

K. Commonwealth Movement Phase

L. Repair Phase

- 1) Towing Segment
- 2) Maintenance Segment

M. Patrol Phase

VI. Second Operations Stage

VII. Third Operations Stage

VIII. Strategic Air Recovery Stage

- A. Return to Base
- B. Aircraft Maintenance Phase

IX. End of Game-Turn

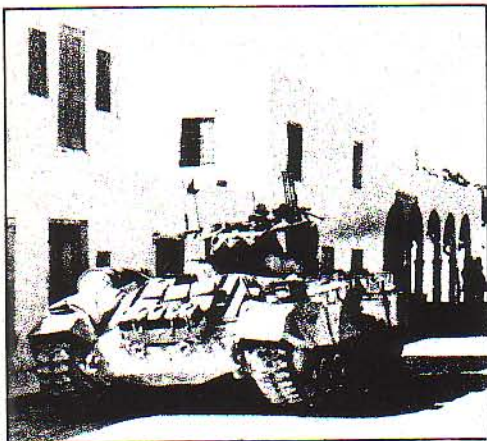
favourite (Italian) army, he would rather suggest that they be ignored because it is well known that British military historians are incapable of telling the truth.

What we have is yet another conspiracy theory. These make for good thrillers but poor history. In this case, the villains of the piece are the types who kept command in the British army to themselves; Anglican scions (not members, but real genuine scions) of noble or landed houses who had served in the Guards or a fashionable cavalry regiment (a picture of Churchill rather than his generals; in view of Churchill's delight in the new it is interesting that Mr Nofi assures us that these types were honest, brave and intelligent, but uninnovative). I found it most disappointing that Mr Nofi never got round to claiming the existence of a Protocol of the Elders of Eton; it would have added the finishing touch.

Two other characteristics vitiate the section produced by Mr Nofi. First a looseness of language. He talks approvingly of the Nazis 'democratising' the German Army. The Nazis held neither with the rule of the people by with and for the people nor with the proposition that all citizens should be treated equally (of course, just as his Agincourt article showed he hadn't heard of Crecy, it is just possible that Mr Nofi hasn't heard of Jews). As a second example of this black humour, we are told that the Dominions differed from Britain because in them (they are listed by name including South Africa) one man was thought as good as another.

Second, there is an almost scary lack of logic. The sea war section tells us that Italian convoys were small and contained equal numbers of merchantmen and escorts. Against these were inflicted 15% losses split in 4:1 ratio between merchantmen and escorts. The conclusion drawn from this (for which a suitable sociological explanation is given) is that the British concentrated on the escorts. Further, after listing all the factors which made the Mediterranean totally different from the Battle of the Atlantic, the conclusion drawn nonetheless is that the triumph of the Allies in the Battle of the Atlantic shows that the Italians should have conducted their convoys as though the Mediterranean were identical to the Atlantic.

In short, the historical notes cannot be recommended. There are plenty of books on the North African campaign and almost all of them are preferable to these notes. Don't buy the game for the notes, and if you want to brush up on history to get more out of the game try your local library.



SUMMING UP

Of course, nobody in their right mind would buy a board wargame for the sake of the historical notes. People buy them for the game either as a game, or as a simulation. The designer makes it perfectly clear that he doesn't see *CNA* working as a game; people are only going to get something out of it if it is the simulation they want, and then only if they can take the 'total immersion' needed to get the project moving. He's spent 3 years on the game and I haven't, so it would be foolhardy to contradict him. But does *CNA* work as a simulation, and is it a must to buy?

Good questions, which I could answer right now. If I did though, I'd miss the chance to air a few other thoughts I have on the game. It isn't merely self-indulgence to duck the final verdict for the moment

the verdict must first be justified. To reach the verdict a few other questions must be answered first.

Starting at the lowest level, is the game coherent? It seems to be; the worst error outstanding is the omission of those three Italian divisions. Secondly, are the facts factual? In the logistics section it is hard to tell. Alternative sources of information are sparse, and the level of detail of logistics is sufficiently low for much faulty work to pass undetected. On combat units, which can be more readily checked, the design team are sufficiently sure of themselves to complain of inaccuracy in the British official history (Playfair). There are, however, occasions on which *CNA* can be shown to be in error. Nonetheless, these occasions are so rare and so minor that, with a touch more charity than that allowed to Playfair, they can be overlooked. From the nature of the occasions, it would seem that facts have been overruled to avoid an untidy design (which is excusable) rather than being ignored because they were not known (which is not).

Third, does the design offend against common-sense, or (rather more to the point) historical evidence? Not in any fundamental way, although there are one or two points where an eyebrow might be raised. Most of them can probably be defended as necessary simplifications, but the use of artillery in a reconnaissance role seems the most dubious and least justifiable offence.

Fourth, how well do the various areas of design fit together and with the overall design? This is where I start to have my doubts. *CNA* is a bit of a camel; it looks as though it was designed by a committee. The rules fall into three main chunks, each with their own level of detail; combat, logistics and air. In addition, there are a number of other 'serious' rules which seem to fit with logistics (these mostly govern various housekeeping activities) and a few 'fun' rules which don't really fit in at all. Although Richard Berg notes that the design thrust of the game is concentrated on logistics, this is truer of the effort needed in play rather than the actual design, where logistics seem to have at the most achieved an uneasy equality with combat.

Fifth, is the design thrust of the game in the right place? Almost every aspect of the game has changed from the original proposal (made as the SPI revival got under way with *Panzergruppe Guderian*). HIMS were to 'treat battles and operations in great detail and with the highest possible accuracy'. They would have 2 or more mounted maps, 800 or more counters, a 32-page booklet (plus charts) and 16-page (or longer) HIMS Program which presents the historical battle in simulation terms, on a one for one basis with historical commentary' (no, I don't know what that means either, and I'm not sure they did). The specific proposal for 'The War In North Africa' promised to cover all the elements usually left out, such as 'air and naval forces, extensive treatment of logistics, information gathering behind enemy lines; plus many other aspects of the campaign. Regiment/brigade level with weekly turns'.

It is not yet a crime to change one's mind, and the amount of change is if anything a good sign, showing the design to be better thought-out than the proposal. One thing which has been retained is the emphasis on supply.

Now there are two views on supply

- "The real foundations of military knowledge are topography, movement and supply, not strategy and tactics"
- "A lot of people complain about logistics and supply and I say 'Look do you want a supply game? I'll give you a supply game' I can count biscuits with the best of them"

The latter (voiced there by Jim Dunnigan) is the more usual view in wargaming. Supply and logistics are regarded as irrelevancies that bog down the action instead of the central problem that they have been in most campaigns. Most gamers want to play with tanks, not trucks, and this creates a market pressure against 'complicated' supply systems. Researching supply is a good deal harder than researching minor details about front line units and it requires the expenditure of time and

money on aspects of the game than can actually be shown to detract from the game's popularity. Therefore, only problems with playbalance or the designer's own regard for historical truth as he sees it will lead to anything more than the most rudimentary supply system appearing in the game (Furthermore, it sometimes seems to me, if it does it will be speedily circumvented or 'corrected' by many of those playing the game)

CNA, however, has opted for a more realistic insistence on the importance of supply. This greatly strengthens its claim to give a real insight into the campaign. Playfair by no means ignores logistics (and is in fact better on the subject than the war history of the RAOC which tends to lose itself in trivia like the fireproofing of packing cases (so that the front-line troops couldn't use them for firewood)), but never really explains the fundamental considerations. Rereading Playfair after familiarising yourself with the logistics system of *CNA* will give a much greater insight than merely relying on either one alone. It is in logistics alone that this holds true; for all its detail, *CNA*, like Playfair, does not excel in describing combat. So much of the virtue of *CNA* lies in its enthusiasm (an enthusiasm I share) for the importance of supply.

On the other hand, it is the administrative load of logistics that necessitates the assembly of large teams to play the game and thus makes the game effectively unplayable for most gamers. Is this then a telling argument against *CNA*? I don't think so; *CNA* gives you a strongly designed framework with which to explore events, rather than a game. Even the various scenarios seem more a way of setting up different phases of the campaign for exploration than playable games. The complaint I would make is that, by managing to play the game, the designers have thought the game playable but dull and have therefore compromised its authenticity by bolting on various fun rules to amuse the play-testers.

For *CNA* does on the whole, despite various little niggles, have a feel of authenticity. Of course, authenticity can only really be appreciated if you are actually in a position to recognise the unauthentic; for that reason, the more background reading you do, the more you'll probably get out of this aspect of *CNA*. For myself, *CNA* almost completely justified itself the moment the 7th Medium Artillery Regiment opened up on the Italians as they moved forward along the coast; I checked on its equipment for combat computation, found '60-pdr guns' and immediately recalled the photograph in Playfair volume 1 '60-pounder guns in action below the escarpment'.

So, does *CNA* work as a simulation? This is still a tricky question. Except under unusual circumstances, I do not think it does, yet it certainly works, if not as a simulation. It is heuristic, it does lead to discovery and understanding. It does so almost entirely in its logistic and housekeeping rules; its other sections strike me as mostly entertainment and overall *CNA* is a rather unhappy mixture. But the bits that achieve something do so so well, and in an area that others do not attempt, that the whole seems to me justified; a success if only a partial success. It does not contain the ultimate truth about North Africa, but there's enough there to be getting on with.

