

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

OPERATION GRENADE

Pulling the Pin on the Germans

by Lee Enderlin

The Victory in the West system, of which *Grenade* is a part, was the result of one of those creative impulses for a unified approach to an interesting theater of World War Two. It is a demanding challenge to subsequent designers since although they are spared the problem of framing the basic structure of the game, they are by the same token denied the flexibility of making design decisions that drive the game in the direction they wish. Even though value assignments and exclusive rules allow some freedom, doing a system-game is a lot like writing a book with someone else's characters. Tough stuff. — Redmond

Late winter, 1945, was a particularly rough time for the German armed forces. Units were surrendering en masse in the West, Allied airpower was overbearing, and there was little fight (and often fewer soldiers) left in the units that remained on the field. When a game designer attempts to simulate this era, he does so at great risk. Rolling up a large pile of dead cardboard Nazis usually makes for a very dull game.

There are, however, a few situations that can be successfully treated on the game map and *Operation Grenade* (OG hereafter) is one of them.

The Game System

OG is part of the Victory in the West system. The distinguishing feature of this system is its unique hidden value rules. The players never know the exact combat value of a regiment size unit until it engages in combat for the first time. Smaller units, including cadres, have a fixed value, usually one.

It works this way: Each unit has two values printed on the front. One is a letter grade indicating morale: A, B, or C, with A the best. The second is a number indicating the manpower of the unit: 1, 2, or 3. The larger the number, the greater the manpower. The optimum, then, is A-3, the worst C-1.

A large number of chits are provided in the counterbox to show the current combat value. These chits are separated according to the large number printed on them. This number corresponds to the manpower number on the combat unit. Each chit also has three values printed on it to correspond with the morale letter. When a unit with a value of A-2 engages in combat for the first time, for instance, the owning player draws a chit from the container holding all the "2" chits, then cross-references the "A" to obtain a combat value between 4 and 14.

The chart accompanying this article shows what values can be expected in OG. The letter, of course, is the morale value. The

numbers in the left hand column are the manpower values. The numbers across the top are the combat values. The numbers where a row and column intersect indicate how many chits have their combat strength printed on them. "Total" is the number of chits in that row, and "Average" is self-explanatory. Our A-2 unit has 2 chances in 39 of having a strength of 4; 5 in 39 of being worth 9, etc. These charts are only for the initial, full-strength combat value. The chits are backprinted, so step reduction is built in.

As the game progresses, more and more units will be assigned a combat strength and owning players will be able to eliminate the inherent "luck of the draw" of the first few Game-Turns. However, unless a player has a photographic memory, he'll never be able to remember exactly what his opponent has, so the system is still important later on.

There are only two minor rules problems with the game and both are of the "clarification" rather than the "correction" variety. Players with any knowledge of World War II history should easily be able to interpret what the designer intended.

The first rule is 9.4, Divisional Integrity. The wording is slightly ambiguous about receiving this bonus on defense. You need to be adjacent to only one other regiment of the same division to qualify. This means that a division can lose one of its regiments in combat and still provide divisional integrity on defense, but no longer on offense. Units that are being attacked can disregard the diagram showing the requirements for divisional integrity in the standard rules. This is for attacking units only.

The second ambiguity is rule 25.0, Air Points. The German player gets only a total of two for the entire game. While this seems obvious to anyone with more than a passing knowledge of the history of the Luftwaffe, a glib, "rules lawyer" type of player could make a case for the German to receive two points every turn because of the wording of the rule. Sorry, Herr Goering.

There is only one mistake in the rules, but it doesn't affect the play of the game. The standard rules state that there are 200 counters in OG, but there are actually 250. Designer Joe Balkoski got permission to use a 255 countersheet (5 are blanks in OG) because it didn't increase the size of the sheet itself. The slip is unimportant, but if any of you noticed the discrepancy, at least now you know why it's there.

Historical Background

It is necessary to briefly touch on the history of the battle in order to understand the

"why and wherefore" of the first decisions the players will have to make.

OG was originally intended to cover the flank of the First Canadian and Second British Armies to the north (Operation Veritable). In game terms, this is the area in the vicinity of Geldern.

South of Grenade was Operation Lumberjack and this was the US First and Third Armies converging on Coblenz. Still further south, the US Seventh Army was to attack toward Frankfurt in Operation Undertone. The latter two are not at all represented in the game.

It was also hoped that, the good Lord willing, a bridge over the Rhine would be captured intact, but that seemed to be a lot to ask.

Grenade, then, played a pivotal central role in Eisenhower's broad front strategy. It protected the flanks of two other major military operations, but Veritable was specifically planned to be in conjunction with Grenade.

The British jumped off on schedule on February 8th (an Englishman would rather die than be late), and Grenade was set to go the next day. However, the Germans blew up two important dams (off the game's south map-edge), flooding the Maas River and forcing an immediate postponement. At this point, the game begins.

The Allied Player

The Allied player will usually have the second decision of the game, that is, when to attack. The German player will have already decided in which manner he wants to flood the riversides and the American must then plan accordingly. The German will probably use a gradual flood (for reasons we'll discuss later). If he does use a flash flood, the Americans have to attack right away on Game-Turn One (February 17th), so there is no decision to make in this case. A gradual flood, though, does cause problems.

The Germans greatest ally is time and the Americans don't have much of it. With a gradual flood situation, the American player will lose from one to seven turns waiting for the water to recede. He must decide when to launch his attack. The sooner he goes, the tougher the German defense will be, but the more time he will have to reach his objectives. Attack too late and he loses his surprise advantage as well as precious turns.

A reasonable compromise is to attack on February 23rd. This is the last day the Allies will have their surprise bonus (a one column shift in their favor) and the Germans will be almost at their weakest. The race for the objectives will be close, probably lasting

right until the last turn or two. If the American player is feeling lucky, he might try going on February 22nd. His losses will be greater, but if he manages to breach the river line somewhere, he has saved a turn. He can afford the losses, but if he doesn't crack the defense, he has wasted a good opportunity. Attacking between February 17th and 21st is suicide at worst and sorely tempting fate at best.

The effect of the river on German defenses is not a sure thing and dependent on a die roll. Modifications are made in the American's favor the longer he waits.

He can assure himself of at least one break in the opposing line if he waits until the 23rd. That is at the extreme southern end at hex 0110, which is unsupported for divisional integrity. Unfortunately, the great majority of objective cities are in the extreme northern end. He couldn't get further away if he tried, but he has to start somewhere.

He should bring one regiment of the 8th Division from hex 0108 to 0209, while moving the other two units into 0109. Since the town of Dueren in hex 0210 is undefended, he can gang up on 0110 without worrying about a forced attack into that hex. The 104th Division can move up from 0308 to attack 0310 and satisfy the required attack into that hex.

He should use every nasty trick he can on 0110 unless the German draws an extremely weak chit. He can get up to six column shifts against the poor sucker (surprise, air support, two for divisional integrity, and two artillery barrages). If the unit is weak, he can afford the luxury of using only as much force as necessary; if it is strong, the German fox-holes had better be good, especially if there is a lot of Allied airpower available. One thing the Allied player does not want to waste is this virtual freebie to an unlucky die roll.

Once across the river, the attacking is a little easier because the defenders are outflanked somewhat. This is important because the Germans will still have defense bonuses through February 24th if attacked solely across river hexsides. Naturally, the American player wants to minimize this advantage.

Game-Turn Two, regardless of when the attack is originally launched, will be the toughest. There is no longer a surprise bonus to help, and, as stated, the opponent will still have favorable defense bonuses. Some players I've seen hold back on this turn and attack only where necessary or where the flank has been turned. Given the game mechanics of *OG*, these are usually the same thing. I disagree with that on two counts.

First, the Allied player cannot afford the time, and second, he can afford the losses. In fact, he is going to have a hard time finding something for many of his units to do as the game progresses, so to hell with it. Take your lumps. It's only paper blood.

Game-Turns Three or Four will see the southern end of the German line vanish, leaving open the road to Koeln. It is the only objective city in the southern half of the map. Since the 7th Corps cannot advance north of the 09xx hexrow (see what I mean about having troops with nothing to do?), the capture of Koeln is also the 7th Corps' only objective. But the American player shouldn't get too greedy; this is the one instance when he has plenty of time. The Ger-

man forces will be weak around there if they exist at all. There are far more important places to defend.

Optimum use of the 7th Corps is its role in clearing the southern river defense line and the area around Forst Hambach. Then it can be sent where it is needed most, depending on the circumstances. If the river line is not yet clear, it should be sent to attack the units still there from the rear. If the river line is under American control, the corps can be sent eastward to Koeln. It shouldn't be allowed to tangle up with and slow down the lead elements of the 19th Corps, but it should be used to attack any lingering German units. The American player should remember that once the Germans move north, there won't be much use for the 7th Corps, so it should get as much action as it can early.

In one game I played, the American player sent the corps to Koeln too early and simply had to retrace his steps later when the German infiltrated three strong units back into the river line. The resulting delay cost the American the game because these units tied up a larger number of 19th Corps troops who were needed far to the northeast.

The reason for staying away from the 19th Corps' line of advance during these critical Game-Turns is that this corps has the task of making the most important attacks in the game and these should be started as soon as possible. This corps' first objective after crossing the river is to drive immediately toward the line of improved positions from hex 1113 to hex 1415. This is the weakest point of the German defenses, and once cleared the road to vast riches of victory points is wide open. The corps should be sent there quickly and not allowed to get tied up in attacking units simply because "They're there." This may end up costing a turn or two in reorganizing the front. The follow-up units of the 7th and 13th Corps should take care of these Germans if possible.

I always send the 739th mine clearing tank battalion to this sector. While other parts of the map have more improved positions for this unit to neutralize, it is this same weakness that makes it important to use the battalion here. Once through the main line of defense positions, this unit can be sent to clear the ring around Krefeld.

It is imperative that the American player understand that this is the main attack. All other attacks are simply secondary to tie down enemy units that could be used in this sector. Victory or defeat will rely on how this

Seventh Army's GI's crossing the Rhine near Worms.



attack is handled. It will take time and the fighting will not end after an Allied breakthrough at the defense lines, but if the American player can bring the 19th Corps up quickly enough and handles the attack properly, wasting a minimum of time, the German player will be incapable of reacting.

Once the defense line is cleared, the battle becomes more open as the Germans will be forced back into pockets of resistance rather than contiguous lines. At this point, the speed of the American mechanized units becomes important. They should dash for every unoccupied objective city, surround the pockets of German units, and attack as many occupied cities that they have a mathematical chance of capturing. This is quite a lot to ask from so few (and sometimes relatively weak) units, but the Germans won't be in very good shape, to say the least.

These tasks will have to be carried out with whatever is available because time will be running short by this point in the game. The American player will have to take a few chances, especially if his attacks along the defense line were slow in reaching fruition. As weak and few as these units may seem, they are sufficient to accomplish most of their jobs.

The 13th Corps has the tough job of fighting its way through all the defense positions that the 19th Corps wants to avoid. It's going to take time and casualties, but the enemy troops have to be attacked to support the eastern flank. Once the area between Empter Wald and Duellen is taken, this corps can turn west and help capture Roermond, continue north toward Venlo, or east to Viersan and eventually Geldern, depending on which area, if any, needs help. In all likelihood, some units of the corps can be effectively sent in all three directions.

The 16th Corps and the one division of the 12th Corps should work together. By the time the supply restrictions are lifted from the 12th Corps on Game-Turn Six, the American player should be ready to attack Roermond with at least two divisions, one from each corps. Even though they are out of supply early, their movement allowances are unaffected, so this time can be utilized to move the units to their start lines in anticipation of their involvement in Grenade. Once Roermond falls, these units should head for Venlo while the weaker units of the corps remain behind to clear the river line, if necessary, with the 13th Corps.

This is a general overview of the Allied strategy. Now, here are some tactical hints on how to accomplish this.

First of all, back in Koeln, the 7th Corps will be anxiously staring at the Rhine bridge there. If the German player has left a regular combat unit behind to increase his odds of blowing the bridge, the American player should not attempt to force the situation before the last couple of turns. That unit could surely be used elsewhere and the 7th Corps isn't going anywhere, so let the German outfit languish. In fact, anywhere the American player has an overabundance of troops and the German player is tied down on the eastern end of the bridges, the American should wait before attempting the coup.

However, if the fighting is not going in the American's favor, he may have to gamble

I feel it is best to use the feeble German airpower on the first or second turn. This is the best defense situation he will have because of the flooding and meager artillery support will also be available. Most of the units will also get the divisional integrity bonus, too. Later, the artillery will have been overrun and often, the units will be too intermingled, spread out, or simply destroyed to qualify for integrity. By that point, it doesn't help much to reduce an 11-1 to a 10-1. Use those airpoints early, when they will do the most good.

Exactly where to use air and artillery will depend on what kind of chits you draw. Use them for your strongest units because your weaker ones will probably be pushed back anyway. If there is any hope at all, give the unit in hex 0110 all the support you can.

Don't retreat a single hex more than necessary except to keep a line intact. Every assault the American has to make will slow him down for a turn. In the open terrain south of Grevenbroich, use the hilltops for your advantage in light of the lack of improved positions. Usually, slow moving units will be trapped in this area and these can be utilized as a rear guard by moving them as close to the American lines as possible instead of trying to save them. Slowing the Allied onslaught is your prime concern, not the preservation of your army. Sounds incredibly cruel, doesn't it?

The biggest German headache is maintaining a reserve to prevent breakouts. Initially, this will be easy, especially if he is lucky enough to roll an early strategic withdrawal. In any event, he has to move as many units as feasible from the 12th Corps to the weak sector around Grevenbroich. An early American breakthrough here will mean an early shower.

The hilltop in hex 0912 is a key piece of terrain. It can provide offensive bonuses to three attacks on improved position hexes, one of which is hex 1113, on the extreme western end of the German sector. Try to hold onto this hilltop as long as you can to help your defense gain the needed time to move into place.

Later in the game, after the inevitable breakthrough takes place, drop into small pockets of resistance. A long line will no

longer be feasible, but these isolated pockets can still hold things back. Save some units for gallant stands around Geldern and Rheinberg, if possible. Assuming all the bridges are blown, the enemy will have to take two of the three cities worth three victory points each to win the game. This is excluding Koeln which shouldn't be defended beyond Game-Turn Three or Four except with throwaway Volkssturm units.

The third of these northern cities is Moers and is virtually indefensible. It has no fortifications and is approachable from all six adjacent hexes. It is also the nearest of the three to the Allied advance. Geldern itself is an entrenchment and approachable only from four sides while Rheinberg has no defenses, but can be attacked from only three sides. Also, these two are on the very last hexrow of the map. The game is won in the battles for these two cities.

The German player should rarely abandon a prepared defense line voluntarily, even if the units are in danger of being cut off. First of all, this forces the American player to attack one or two more hexes south of the goal. Second, it forces him to split up his units a little. Since Allied zones of control do not extend into these hexes, he must physically occupy them until the German player can no longer threaten to sneak back into a hex the Americans have already taken.

The German player will have to sacrifice a fair amount of units in those defense lines, but he will be gaining the greater advantage of time.

Finally, there is the question of how to handle the bridges. Keeping combat troops in the eastern terminal hexes enhances the odds of blowing them up, but not much. I don't like to waste the combat units, especially in Koeln where a smart Allied player will tie it down for the whole game.

The best shot the American player will have is 19%, regardless of the presence of German units (the "ruse" rule). He gets that just once. He has an 11% chance without any units or with Volkssturm units and a 6% chance with a regular combat unit. I prefer to let my units fight (and mostly die) and trust the die rolls to General Luck.

German losses will be horrendous and there is nothing he can do about it, so he may

as well make the most of it and laugh in his opponent's face to show his contempt.

In Summary

The biggest complaint I have about *OG* is the restriction of the American mechanized forces in the beginning of the game. These units cannot move for the first three turns. I cannot understand the reason. There are restrictions on a number of other outfits, both German and Allied, but they all make historical sense. The 9th and 11th Panzer Divisions had no gas, so they would have spent time waiting for supplies before entering the game (one and two turns, respectively). Hitler was loathe to give up any territory, let alone German, so the strategic withdrawal rule for the 2nd Corps makes sense too. The Allied 12th and 16th Corps were in relatively secondary areas, so they were out of supply because units in the primary areas had priority.

The mechanized rule appears to be an artificial add-on for the sake of play balance. It affects the game in two ways. First, the American player has to be very careful in his initial set-up for his self-propelled artillery units. Judicious placement will insure maximum use during the three turns of their immobility.

Second, the American infantry will be strung out in attacking the Maas River line, resulting in the loss of divisional integrity in some cases. This is inevitable if he wants to make as many attacks as possible in Game-Turn One, which he should.

In general, however, *OG* works because the victory point objectives are difficult for the American to reach. One army is very strong and always on the offense, while the other is weak and can only make a rare, local counterattack to alleviate the boredom of constant defense. Yet, the weak army has an excellent chance of winning.

There is one aspect that some would say hurts the game, although it is historically quite accurate. That is the business about the bridges.

Yes, they were extremely important, and yes, capturing one intact was mostly a matter of luck. If the Allied player gets one in *OG*, he will probably win. If he's lucky enough to capture two, pick it up and start all over. He can't lose. This is an excellent example of how circumstances over which the opposing generals have no control can influence a battle. Two bridges over the Rhine should be a major Allied victory.

Admittedly, playing a tenacious, resourceful defense only to have luck take away a hard-earned victory is difficult to swallow. This doesn't happen often in *OG*, but it is a fact of war. "Game-gamers" hate it; "historian-gamers" accept it. Nobody really likes it. I find it to be a very satisfying touch.

Let's face it, despite the bloodthirsty competitiveness of some gamers (and we all know at least one like that), this is, after all, only a game and the German player can still get some satisfaction from good play if Fate decides against him. An astute American player will recognize this.

Of course, the two of you have one great advantage over history. You can always set 'em up and...

Play it again, Sam. ■■

COMBAT STRENGTH AND MORALE RATING BREAKDOWN CHART

MORALE/ STRENGTH	COMBAT VALUES																AVE	TOTAL
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16		
A 1*	1	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	2	2	2	2	-	-	-	-	6.64	25
B 1	3	2	4	2	6	2	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4.52	25
C 1	5	4	2	6	2	4	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.64	25
A 2	-	-	-	2	3	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	3	2	-	-	9.00	39
B 2	-	-	5	4	8	5	8	4	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6.00	39
C 2	-	5	4	8	5	8	4	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.00	39
A 3	-	-	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	11.00	23
B 3	-	-	-	2	4	2	5	2	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	7.10	23
C 3*	-	-	2	4	2	5	2	4	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.60	23

Note: An asterisk (*) indicates that this unit is provided for reference only; there are no A-1 or C-3 units in *Operation Grenade*. Also, there is only one B-1 unit provided in the game.