

The BORODINO game system is one of the finest SPI has developed. Happily, it has not been debased by being adapted for the North Africa Quadrigame. In fact, one of the flaws of the original system — the exchange combat results — has been eliminated and quite a number of interesting innovations have been added.

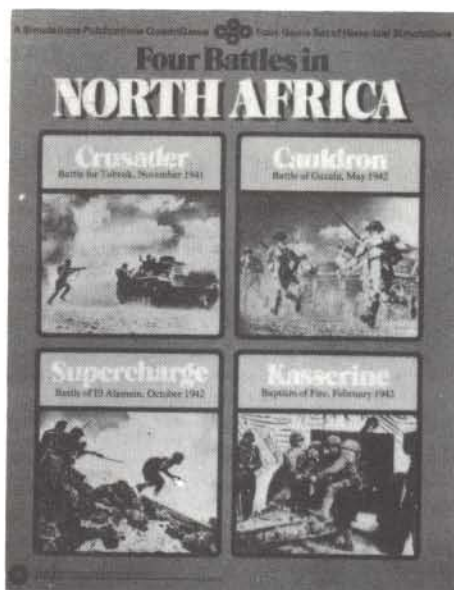
The quadrigame is four games in one — four attractive half-sized maps and four sets of units dealing with various battles of the WW11 North African Campaign. There is a basic set of rules for all the games, then special and/or optional rules for the separate games and their scenarios. Play level is battalion-brigade, hexes are scaled at two to three miles and game turns represent one day. There are never more than a hundred units in play, games tend to be reasonably short, so they're good games for two players on a wet afternoon.

Most of the scenarios stick fairly closely to the basic rules. No difficulty in shifting from one game to another. The exception is Kasserine which has special weather and withdrawal rules and a rather complicated victory point scoring system and reinforcements schedule.

Kasserine deals with the German attempt to knock out the newly-arrived Americans and Cauldron is the battle of Gazala. Both have only one scenario. Supercharge (the battle of El Alamein) and Crusader (the struggle for Tobruk) both have three scenarios.

For the price it's a rich feast — far more material than one reviewer can cope with within reasonable time and space limitations, but the crux of the matter is the game system. It is still a basically simple system — no stacking, rigid Zones of Control (ZOCs) mandating combat and a play sequence of movement, then combat. There are interesting embellishments on this theme — the advance after combat rules, for instance (up to four hexes) gives the game great fluidity. After a combat phase the front line rarely looks even remotely like it was. There are usually a few deep armoured thrusts into somebody's back yard cutting off units and/or obliging one side to hastily mount a counter offensive that wasn't anticipated. It is a very realistic rule simulating the cut, thrust and parry of open desert warfare.

The Integrated Combat Results Table is a good example of how far wargame design has progressed in the few years since the advent of BORODINO. Instead of the simplistic "defender doubled for rough terrain" combat results are fine-tuned to six different situations: an attack into rough terrain; broken terrain, ridges, stream or town; bridge, grove or ditch; mixed terrain; and an attack by armour against a position supported by an anti-tank unit. It's a bloodless CRT — there are only three results of Attacker Eliminated and none of Defender Eliminated — so the same BORODINO strategy of outflanking to cut retreats is preserved. I hope to see more of these Integrated CRTs in future games.



# NORTH AFRICA QUADS



SPI's QUADRIGAME REVIEWED  
BY RALPH VICKERS

But that's not all. Another fine rule enables a defender, after the phasing player has launched a specific attack, to bolster his defences with protective fire from his artillery and/or ground support strength (air and off-board long-range artillery). This is a far more legitimate technique of introducing uncertainty and surprise into combat results than a die roll. (I hope that SPI will continue to develop this idea to the point that one day they can try a game with no die rolls at all).

On-board artillery and ground support strength can also be used to reinforce attacks, so it isn't a one-sided rule. In fact, without impairing the "fairness" of the games it adds to the drama by enabling both players to escalate their attacks when a vital position is at stake.

Regrettably, however, this review cannot be wholly on a paen of praise. While SPI (and the other game producers as well) has made breathtaking advances in the sophistication of game mechanics, they still persist in their ancient ways of rule writing and playtesting. To err, forget and goof is human, so we can all forgive SPI for omitting a dozen units from one of the Initial Deployment Schedules and a rule here and there (all confessed in the errata) but as usual there are other sins that are harder to pardon:

(1) When is a unit's status for attack determined? At the beginning of a player's turn, or at the instant of combat? On this point the rules are mute. Yet it is a vital point and it is hard to understand how the playtesters overlooked it. I opted for the latter alternative, which seems to be the norm in SPI games today.

(2) Does the list of omitted units for initial deployment in the Crusader errata apply to *all* scenarios?

(3) Just like they did in PanzerArmee Africa the art department all over the map drew trails and roads running parallel but not touching through the same hexes. Again the rules are mute on how much, if anything, it costs to switch from one to the other. (I'm certain this is a detail that will fox many players, particularly the uninitiated.) Well, in PAA the errata ruled that if you moved into such a double-trail hex paying normal terrain costs you could claim to be on whatever trail or road suited you. But if you move into a hex along a trail or road and want to switch over to a parallel line, then you have to pay normal terrain costs. A lot of dirt that could have been avoided by running parallel roads through separate hex rows, surely?

(4) The basic rules say ground support points and reinforcements are listed on the Turn Record Tracks; they are not. (Suggestion: to keep score on ground support points expended, use a pile of discarded units on the track like chips).

(5) The Dash to the Wire scenario of Crusader begins in mid-turn. The British player is assumed to have completed his phase. A natural question left unanswered is whether the British player expended any of his ground support points or not. This should have been mentioned, even if the British player is assumed not to have expended any. Just because the rules say nothing it doesn't assure me that for play balance a "no expenditure" answer is fair.

(6) Rule 7.97 has a diagram demonstrating the mechanics of advance after combat. I think that the majority of players will assume that this diagram depicts a segment of the battleline. Let's assume that it does. The diagram depicts units A, B and C advancing along an enemy's Path of Retreat — all advancing illegally and no doubt causing endless confusion and arguments among players not wise in the ways of interpreting wargame rules. A, B and C have all advanced out of supply (even a friendly occupied hex does not negate an enemy ZOC in respect to supply) and Rule 12.24 states: "No unit may move into an unsupplied position during an advance after combat..." Do they really mean this or not? My guess is it's the diagram that is wrong, not Rule 12.24.

Of course, it can be argued that this diagram isn't part of a continuous line, that in this case the supply path of the advancing units comes around the bottom or top of the diagram etc. etc. Okay, but my point is that the confusion wrought here is unnecessary — the diagram could easily have been changed one way or another. Remember, a diagram has more impact than a thousand words.

The truth is that this is the sort of error — let's call a spade a spade — that will continue to creep into rules so long as the game publishers continue to playtest in their old ways. It is no good having "Friday night

playtesting sessions" by players who are already familiar with the game. And worse, with the anxious designer hovering over their shoulders "explaining" everything.

Games have to be finished, then playtested by bright, independent people who have never seen the game. And the game designer should be locked up in another room. All those willing to pay a few pence more to cover these costs, please write to your favourite game publisher.

Here I must confess that when I faced this multi-game I had to decide on one of two review strategies — either skim through all the games, or concentrate on one. Right or wrong, I elected to concentrate on one. I picked at random Crusader: Dash to the Wire. It was the game I *didn't* want to study because it looked to me like a static siege of Tobruk. I am elated to report that the designers were much more crafty than I expected. If all the games and scenarios are typical of this one, then all are first rate.

There is a siege of Tobruk, but the Axis don't win a single victory point even if they overrun the fortress. The main battle takes place in the open desert where allied relief columns are attempting to push through. The Axis win points for destroying and/or cutting supply to allied units. The allies also receive points for destroying the enemy but their big payoff is for reaching Tobruk.

Tobruk is in the upper left hand corner of the map, surrounded by Italians who must keep the feisty Tobruk garrison penned up. To be sure they do, the Axis player must assign the Italians a backbone of German units that he can ill spare. The main concentration of German power is massed in the desert about forty miles southeast of Tobruk. The allies are confronting this strong force with a line stretching in a semi-circle from the south to the seacoast in the north. On the far right is another pocket of Germans defending Bardia. This is a weak but constant threat to the British "corridor" running to the coast. Everybody is almost surrounded by everybody else. A fascinating game situation.

For the allies the best approach to Tobruk is along the coast. But how much strength can they afford to commit there and still contain the panzers in the south?

On the other hand, should the Axis try to push their panzers along the south, joining with Bardia and cutting supply to the allies in the north, or should they switch their strength to the north to meet the allied advance head on? They certainly cannot afford to have their northern front sandwiched between the allied relief column and the Tobruk defenders. Yet they have got to guard their southerly supply lines against a swift allied strike. It is a delicate situation for both sides and meanwhile those Italians around Tobruk keep tangling with the garrison and screaming for reinforcements. On the other hand, Tobruk cannot hold out indefinitely. Really intriguing!

If the other games and scenarios are half as good, then North Africa Quadrigame is going to be popular for a long time.

# British Subscribers to S&T

BY BRAD HESSEL SPI

The following comparison between SPI's British and American customers is based exclusively on the Feedback results for S&T 59, for which the SPUK results have just recently been processed.

One's preconception of the British wargamer may reasonably include pipe and middle-age paunch. This, however, is not a very accurate profile of the British S&T feedback respondents. 53% of the Britons who sent in FB cards were 21 or younger (33% under 18) as compared to 41% of the American audience (24% under 18). Generally, the Briton had less education (55% with no college compared to 43% American), had subscribed for a shorter time span (45% were in their first year compared to 31% for the Americans) and had been in the hobby for a much shorter period (3.89 years to 5.60 years on the average). They owned a lot fewer games (65% of the Britons had fewer than 31 games, 47% of them fewer than 21 games, compared to 45% and 28% on this side of the Atlantic; 13% of our boys have over eighty games while only 4% of the Britons are so inclined). And, 4-day week or not, they played their fewer games somewhat less than the Americans played their games (1-9 hours — 31% of the Britons, 27% of the Americans; 10-20 hours — 40% of the Britons, 37% of the Americans; 20+ — 29% of the Britons, 36% of the Americans). The Britons like slightly more complex games on balance (6.24 average for Britain, 6.15 for America), though the tendency to bunch towards the middle that is evident in America (only 8% total answer "1", "2", "3" or "4" and only 5% answer "9") is even more pronounced in Britain (only 3% answered "1", "2", "3" or "4" and only 2% answered "9"). That may be a function of the smaller sample, however. As to preferred periods for game subjects, the British were generally more enthusiastic about older periods. When asked to name their favourites, 12% picked Ancient (7% American), 10% picked Middle Ages (5% American), 6% picked pre-Napoleonic (5% American) and 8% Napoleonic (7% American). Americans favoured the somewhat chauvinistic "Civil War" 8% to 5% over the Britons, but both samples were equally enthusiastic over World War 1 (8%).

World War II (19% British/22% American), Post-WW II (11% British/13% American) and Future (21% British/ 25% American) were less popular in Britain than America, although they were still elected by 51% of the British audience overall (as compared with 60% of the Americans).

Finally, one preconception was buttressed, as more of the Britons wanted letters in S&T (55% yes; 29% maybe; 17% no) than Americans, (49% yes, 32% maybe, 20% no).

In rating things, the British generally liked games better and were more critical of writing. For example, the issue game (Plot) was rated 6.45 by the British and 6.02 by the Americans, while the Britons gave lower ratings to the two main articles (6.34 for Plot and 6.35 for the Russo-Japanese War compared to 6.42 and 6.74 respectively) than the Americans. Similarly, OGM (6.41 British/6.71 American), Briefings (6.26/6.40) and FYEO (6.77/ 7.01) did worse in the British eyes than Americans. They also gave a lower opinion of the format (question 26) — 6.32 compared to the American rating of 6.61. Nevertheless, the British rating for issue overall was just about the same as the American. I guess they lower their standards for Americans writing English. (The figures were 6.59 for the British and 6.51 for the Americans).

Games, on the other hand, as I mentioned above, were received more generously by the Britons. 46 games were rated in issue 59 (not counting Plot). Of these, 15 received fewer than ten votes from the British sample and were thrown out. Of the remaining 31 games, 21 were rated between .15 and 1.0+ higher than the American sample had rated them, 3 were about the same and the Britons panned (relatively) 7 games. However, many of the British results were based on scanty results and it is quite likely that the pattern which we have noticed in analysing FB data here (namely, that game ratings tend to go down the larger the sample) is in operation. Of the 5 games rated by more than 30% of the total British sample, 2 were higher, 2 were lower and 1 was a standoff.

## FEEDBACK RESULTS PHOENIX 7

During the period April/May 1977, SPUK service was rated at 6.88. This is higher than the previous two month period with 27.06% saying that we are improving and 65.02% saying we are steady. Customer service got a rating of 6.56, again an improvement on the previous two months. 22.81% felt this service was improving whilst 74.56% felt it was steady.

No non-SPI games were feedbacked in this issue, indeed such questions have met with so negative a response to date that I am discontinuing them with immediate effect.

Starsoldier got an overall rating of 7.24 for physical quality. The following table gives details of your reaction to the game.

	Map	Frontsheet	Rules book
Worse than SPI	6.06%	18.18%	6.06%
Level with SPI	75.76%	75.76%	87.88%
Better than SPI	18.18%	6.06%	6.06%

96.88% said that the physical quality would encourage them to buy UK produced games again. It is interesting and not too surprising to note that the Rules Book and Frontsheet, both of which were taken from our Wigan printer and given to the Stockport printer who already produces the Maps, got the least positive reception. I do not think that the figures above are anything to be ashamed of, however we will continue to strive for improvement.

48.91% of those who returned the Phoenix 7 Feedback also sent in that from Phoenix 6.

81.07% said they would subscribe to Phoenix, 24.62% purely on merit and 67.48% on both merit and desire to support a UK magazine.

Issue 7 was rated 6.28 overall, 66.34% said was better than the previous issue (which was rated 6.5) and 74.59% said they wanted more articles on boardgaming basics.

There is a continual calling for such articles but no one ever seems to come forward with the right kind of material. How about it you veteran gamers? Send us articles that can help beginners get into the hobby.

Finally, 86.92% of you said that, given the number of SPI games on the market, Phoenix is not SPI orientated.

S&T 61 Feedback Results	
Rate October War (Simulation)(1-9)	7.04
Rate October War (Article) (1-9)	6.99
Rate Arnheim (Article)(1-9)	6.31
Rate Outgoing Mail (1-9)	6.45
Rate Briefings (1-9)	6.08
Rate 'For Your Eyes Only (1-9)	6.45
Rate This issue overall (1-9)	6.95
Was this issue better than the last?	
No opinion	6.01%
Yes	74.05%
No	19.94%