

How not to fight against ROMMEL

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Having removed the British forces defending El Aghelia with the 5th Light on March 24th, Rommel prepared for a limited offensive at the beginning of April, setting the scene for supreme control of the desert.

April 1941.

The 20th Aus. Brig (1807) joined the 2SG Brig. 50 miles S.W. of Agedabia (0803) in an attempt to halt the expected German thrust; the 3rd Ind. Motorised Brigade took up a position at Mechili, while the Australian Brig at Tobruk was reinforced by the 18th Aus. from Alexandria. Elements of the 7th Armoured Div, being refitted, appeared at the British base.

Rommel attacked as expected. Both British units at 0803 were overrun by the 5th light & 104th inf. Reg; these German units then went on to overrun the 31MB at Mechili, and finish up with its supply unit 20 miles east of the town. Five Italian inf. Batt. with 'Ariete' and the 8th Bersaglieri Batt. advanced rapidly up the coast capturing two British supply dumps to the south (0406) and east (2111) of Benghazi, finishing up just outside the

Tobruk perimeter, where they waited for German units to arrive with Rommel. A third Italian force - 3 infantry Batt - advanced inland to Mechili, capturing a supply dump (1511) intact en route. Overall a very satisfactory beginning for Rommel, in that he had cleared Cyrenaica of British forces, and reached Tobruk, where the garrison had dug in; reinforcements in the shape of 3rd Arm'd and 7th light Div. arrived at El Aghelia.

May 1941.

The British counter offensive got under way with 7 inf. and an armoured Brigade moving up from Alexandria to assist the Tobruk garrison: 3 Italian batt. (1823) were overrun by 2 inf. and an arm'd unit, and the 8th Bers. was routed in a melee with British forces (3 inf at 1924, 2 inf and armed at 1823) west of Tobruk. The Italian (1923) counterattack was ineffective.

Rommel, perturbed at the seriousness of the British threat, brought all his reserves into play to counter it. The 3rd Arm., with 7th Light and 2nd Light, overran the British units in 1724 (2 Inf Brig), and encircled the other British forces outside Tobruk. In the ensuing battle, 2 British brigades were eliminated (1924) by Italian/German arm'd units (1923): the total British presence in 1823 was either eliminated or captured by Axis units attacking with Maximum supply. Aside from a lone brigade outside the fort, all that remained of British forces in Cyrenaica - in fact in Africa - was the Tobruk garrison. This Rommel now proposed to eliminate. The arrival of fresh arm'd units at El Aghelia seemed to make this event a more likely possibility than at first it appeared.

June 1941

After the reckless moves of the previous 2 months, British forces spent their time re-organising in preparation for the German attack. Tobruk was strengthened to 3 infantry brigades; an arm'd brigade joined the supply unit at Bardia, while another arrived at Alexandria. All in all the British position was precarious.

Rommel began by sending 5 Italian Batt. down to Sidi Barrani to counter any British threat: 1st and 2nd Light, with the 104th, captured Bardia with the supply dump intact, eliminating the British brigade, while Tobruk was isolated from east (1923), south (1724) and west (1826) in preparation for an attack early in July. Armoured and infantry detachments disembarked at El Aghelia to assist.

July 1941

This was a period of inactivity for the British forces, in that they had nothing to move with. Rommel attacked and took Tobruk easily using 5 arm'd and 3 inf. brigades in Maximum supply; his units at El Aghelia swept on to Mutruh, taking the Italian units at Sidi Barrani and the supply unit at Bardia with them; they deployed to halt the British counter which was expected soon. German arm'd and Italian units arrived at Base to support any threat in August.

August 1941

In a last attempt to halt the German drive on Alexandria, British arm'd units occupied positions at El Alamein (1247 & 1047), while training the numerous inf. brigades that had arrived at Alex. Rommel, not waiting around, attacked almost at once. Even without Maximum Attack supply, sheer weight of German numbers overcame the position at Alamein with ease, leaving Alexandria at Rommel's mercy. 3 arm'd and 2 inf. brigades were lost in the struggle to hold the position, counterattacks proving unsuccessful. German reinforcements reached Tobruk in preparation for the final offensive.

September 1941

A strike against the German positions at Alamein was ordered, and 5 inf. and an arm'd brigade attacked Alamein (1247) and 1047) in an attempt to breach the defenses. But only 2 German arm'd units were lost, and in a fierce German counterattack all the British force was eliminated. Alexandria was at Rommel's mercy.

With a swiftness that so shook American observers that it reaffirmed their intention of staying out of the war, Rommel mopped up the remaining British units in Alexandria, capturing their supply dumps intact, and cabled the news to Hitler. Together with the successes of Barbarossa to date, it was a decisive blow.

Analysis of the campaign

Six months to take Alexandria; six months to remove a British presence in North Africa that had been there for so long; six months to defeat a force initially stronger than his own and eventually to outnumber them at the finish. How? Basically the answer is that the British commander was very poor. At the outset it is clear that nothing can stop



Rommel from capturing Cyrenaica, so the sacrifice of units at Agedabia and Mechilli was pointless. They would have been better employed moving back to Bardia in preparation for building up a strike force while Rommel battered away at Tobruk. Then when he was sufficiently weak, strike hard and fast. To strike in May was a waste of time; the British forces were too weak. Another point where the British player fell down was in the attacks themselves. Twice — at Tobruk in May and El Alamein in September — British forces attacked and failed to eliminate their German opposition totally. The power of the German counter is such that the British player *must* eliminate *all* Axis units in any hex, so that they counterattack at zero and not 4/2 times their printed strength. At Alamein the result was driven home when all the British forces were lost by the counter from the remaining Axis units. The other drawback is that it gives Rommel two chances to eliminate British units — in the counter attack and in his own move. Thus the British commander should have played a waiting game, allowing Rommel to exhaust himself until he could go no further. The other reason for such a short German campaign was in the good tactical play of the German commander

He rightly left the capture of supply dumps and other minor roles to the weaker Italian units, and used the German and Italian arm'd forces to overrun allied units and/or eliminate them in actual combat later in the move. He never wasted any opportunity, always eliminating any force he attacked so that it could only counter at zero, and he only used the minimum force to achieve this. He also did not hurry himself; the rapid advance was due to his exploitation of the British errors. All in all, the campaign is a fine example of how not to fight Panzer Arme Afrika on the one hand, and how to do so on the other.

Main objectives for each side

British:

Play it cautious until 1942, building up your strength. Allow Rommel to attack you, never *attack* him unless you can be sure of eliminating *all* German units in the hex that you are attacking. From early 1942, begin limited offensives designed to keep Rommel's strength down to allied level, and about September begin all out offensive. This is the only way to win against a good German player.

German:

Your main object is the taking of Cyrenaica by May, Tobruk by June and Bardia by July. You should then consolidate your position close to Sidi Barrani, before moving on Alexandria. Do not spread German units too thinly amongst the Italian forces; just enough to keep the latter from being overrun too easily. Should Tobruk not fall by June/July, you have a fight on your hands. Use the Italian units to ward off any British relief party, and concentrate on the fort until it does fall. Then proceed as before.

Overall, with two good players, the game should end up a draw, though the odds slightly favour Rommel.

SPUK service was rated at 6.7 during June-July 1977. This is a minor drop on the previous two months, with 32% saying the service was improving and 60% saying it was static. In this issue we asked what time lag there was between your order being posted to us and your receipt of said order. In theory it should take 7 days for you to get the goods — two days for your order to get to us, two days for us to clear the order (assuming goods are in stock), two days for the goods to get back to you, plus a day thrown in for good measure. The results were as follows:- 17% got the goods within 1 week, 45% within 2 weeks and 29% within 3 weeks. Since "within two weeks" could be anything from 8 days to 14 days, the information is not quite as helpful as I would first have hoped. This question has been reworded in this issue's feedback.

Customer service was rated at 6.56, virtually identical to the previous two month period, with 23% saying this service had improved and 71% saying it had stabilised. Again we asked how long it took for Customer Service to answer your queries/complaints. 33% got a reply within 1 week, 36% within 2 weeks and 21% within 3 weeks. Again I will rephrase this question in the next feedback before drawing any conclusions.

Ratings on U.K.-printed SPI games were as follows:-

	Better than SPI	Level than SPI	Worse than SPI	
Mech War				
Frontsheet	17%	75%	8%	
Map	11%	61%	28%	
Rules	7%	67%	26%	
Overall Rating				6.89
Dreadnought				
Frontsheet	13%	81%	5%	
Map	18%	74%	8%	
Rules	26%	56%	18%	
Overall Rating				6.42
Sniper				
Frontsheet	9%	80%	11%	
Map	3%	80%	17%	
Rules	17%	69%	14%	
Overall Rating				7.06
Sorcerer				
Frontsheet	12%	70%	18%	
Map	21%	49%	30%	
Rules	14%	67%	19%	
Overall Rating				6.21

To the question, would the quality attained thus far encourage you to purchase further U.K. prints, 92% of you said Yes, which is a very encouraging answer indeed. A number of feedback cards carried specific comments on various game components. These have been noted for future reference.

On now to questions on the Phoenix. 84% of you said you would subscribe to Phoenix, 27% on merit and 47% on merit plus support of a U.K. magazine. 45% of you felt that Issue 8 was an improvement on Issue 7, while 35% said it was on a par.

We have been asking for ratings on articles in Phoenix but have not published these as most of the articles appearing are sent in by volunteers. To the question — Do you want to see the results of these ratings?, 63% said Yes and 27% said No. Since the 27% may well be contributors or would be contributors who might be discouraged from sending articles should we publish the feedback results, we will hold off doing so at present.

The ratings I can give you without fear of recrimination are as follows:

News from SPUK	6.26
Feedback Results	5.49
Overall Presentation	6.55
S&T Feedback Results	
Rate S. Africa (Simulation)	5.97
Rate S. Africa (Article)	6.31
Rate Fulda Gap	6.69
Rate Outgoing Mail	6.46
Rate Briefings	6.07
Rate F.Y.E.O.	6.58
Rate Issue Overall	6.50
Was this issue better than the last?	
Yes	37%
No	52%
Would this motivate you to subscribe?	
Yes	73%
No	23%



NEWS FROM S.P.U.K.

No sooner do we overcome one problem than another steps right up and hits us where it really hurts. This time it is a dock strike in the States. As of October 1st, all container traffic from the U.S. ground to a halt, and at the time of writing (1st November) this situation has not altered. I understand that the only seafreight coming out at present must use non-containerised ships and space on these is at a premium. I spoke to SPI yesterday and was advised that they hoped to get our S&T 64 shipment to us by the end of November, possibly through Canada. However, they do not yet have firm information and we at SPUK must just sit back and hope for the best.

Normally, I would not attempt to write this column under these conditions since dates and circumstances are highly speculative. At this time of the year, however, Ray Bowden has a particularly heavy workload and it would be grossly unfair of me to add to his problems by sending him extra late copy. So I must soldier on and give you what little information I have.

SPI have now obtained permission to go ahead with the production of their Lord of the Rings game. Regetably, their agreement with the copyright holders enables them to market the game only within the U.S. and Canada. We are unable to obtain supplies for distribution within the U.K. at present. SPI can accommodate direct sales to any mail order customer since, strictly speaking, an order received at their office is a sale concluded in New York. Should you wish to obtain a copy please write direct to the following address:-
Sales Department
Simulations Publications Inc.
44 East 23rd Street
New York, U.S.A.

The games are available as follows:-
Middle Earth \$20.00 + \$2.00 p&p (approx. £14.00 inc. Bank Fees)
War of the Ring \$15.00 + \$2.00 p&p (approx. £11.25 inc. Bank Fees)
Gondor, the Siege of Minas Tirith \$5.00 + \$1.00 p&p (approx. £5.00 inc. Bank Fees)
Sauron, The End of the Second Age \$5.00 + \$1.00 p&p (approx. £5.00 inc. Bank Fees)
All four titles are scheduled for shipping November 15th 1977.

The estimated Bank Fees included are £1.50 in each of the above quotes. To send payment by international money order will cost you £3.00 per transaction, twice the estimated Bank Fees.

As mentioned in 'Hotline', SPI have discontinued the supply of spare parts to us because of the considerable work and wastage involved. This in effect means that we also must discontinue our spares service forthwith on all imported games. We will continue to operate a spares service for all U.K.-printed games.