

# WESTWALL QUAD

A Review of SPI's Quadrigame by Jeff Parker

While the Allies raced across France in the summer of 1944 and on into Belgium, the Germans were dusting the cobwebs from the bunkers of their last prepared defensive line in the west. Begun earlier in the war, the Westwall became irrelevant with the total German dominance of Western Europe. It was never completed, its guns were stripped for the Atlantic Wall and not replaced. The earthworks thrown up at the last minute were manned by untrained and ill-equipped troops. As an obstacle it presented no problem to the Allies but for the Germans it served as a rallying point for the battle-hardened units retreating from France, and as an assembly point for fresh troops from the Fatherland. The German lines of communication had shortened while those of the Allies were stretched to the limit. As the Allies paused for breath the German sense of organisation and discipline reasserted itself to a degree not thought possible by the Allies. German losses between early June and early September 1944 were an estimated 700,000 men. The Allied commanders believed that one last push would end the war, although they could not agree on what form such a push should take. In a sense, of course, they were right but the fierce battles fought in front of and behind the Westwall cost more in lives and time than they ever anticipated.

SPI's Quadrigame, *Westwall*, draws on four battles to illustrate this period, from the first unsuccessful attempt to seize a bridgehead over the Rhine to the first unexpected crossing at Remagen. It has become customary to criticise the Quadrigame series for lack of detail and it is true that this feature is a minor irritant in those games dealing with periods of strict linear tactics. It becomes less important in the modern battle games where units are generally a well balanced mix of types and less vulnerable to attacks from flank and rear. It might be considered dubious whether a battalion of musketeers would attack a regiment of lancers, as is possible in all SPI's Napoleonic games, but a modern and properly equipped infantry battalion could at least dent a few tanks, as the Egyptians proved in 1973. The designers of the Quadrigame series have, however, placed themselves above such pedantic detail and perhaps we should do the same, judging the games on the overall impression they give of their subject.

Using the above criteria, the first of the Westwall battle simulations is superb. It represents the entire course of Operation Market-Garden, which was Montgomery's attempt to seize the Rhine bridge at Arnhem

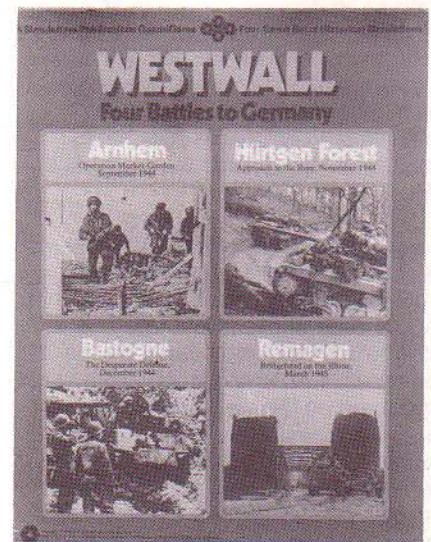
The game is fraught with the dangers and difficulties which beset the original operation. I found myself willing the little cardboard counters to cross the last few inches of road on the coloured map to the relief of the battered paratroopers in Arnhem, as if they could summon up some reserves of inspiration which my own efforts lacked. Alas, all was in vain. The game ended as it had started in an exact simulation of the real thing. A pitifully few troops were evacuated from Arnhem and both sides sat back to count the cost. I could only find one glaring error which did not seem justified from the point of view of game mechanics, and that was that the main road from Nijmegen to Arnhem was raised and flanked on both sides by soft ground impassable to armour. It was, in fact, an anti-tank gunners dream and one of the chief causes of the failure to reach Arnhem with armour in time. On the game map this feature is not shown, although, to be fair, during play testing no armour got through in that direction anyway! On the credit side the game features bridge demolition by the Germans, engineer-assisted river crossing, variable weather which can delay airborne landings and special rules governing combat in towns. All things considered, the Arnhem game is one of the best in the series.

The next game in the sequence is Hurtgen Forest. The Allies have already breached the Westwall and here the US 1st Army attempts to break through a motley assortment of German troops to reach the Roer valley. There are few references available on the battle but it was essentially an infantry fight. The terrain was appalling and ideal for defence, nullifying the American firepower superiority to such a degree that progress was made at a snail's pace. The Germans were at this time preparing for their Ardennes counter-offensive and were ready to give ground to buy time. Their only armoured units must be withdrawn early in the game but they do receive reinforcements throughout which can be fed in piecemeal wherever they are most needed. The German player must concentrate on maintaining a continuous line in advantageous terrain while the US player must look for, or create, weak spots to exploit. Given two competent players the game will faithfully recreate the creeping progress of the Americans, but it is rather like playing a game of chess with nothing but pawns.

Bastogne, the third of the Westwall games, differs, as the designers' notes say, from the many other games concerning the Battle of the Bulge by having a semi-tactical flavour.

It depicts the siege and relief of Bastogne which can be played as two separate scenarios or as a complete 'Campaign'. Bastogne was an important road communications centre in an area notorious for its closed-in countryside. It was one of the early objectives of the German Ardennes offensive but the Americans chose to tenaciously defend it and the result was a classic though brief siege with 18,000 Americans, mostly of the 101st Airborne Division, holding off everything the Germans could spare from their Westward drive. Patton's successful relief of the beleaguered Americans caused a change in role of the opposing armies with the Germans this time putting up a stubborn defence. The campaign scenario thus tests both players in their offensive/defensive skills, and the sense of urgency required to attain the objectives lends the game some of the excitement of the Arnhem scenario.

The capture of the rail bridge over the Rhine at Remagen is the subject of the final game of the set, and a poor subject it is. Historically, a force of three battalions of US troops discovered that the Remagen bridge was intact. The German major commanding the pitiful garrison failed to demolish it and was subsequently shot for his error. The point is that the German garrison was no match for three battalions of experienced US troops and to make a playable game of such an uneven contest requires a little distortion of history. The designers admit as much in their notes on the game and, with the necessary modifications, have succeeded in producing quite an interesting scenario. It is not however, the battle for the Remagen bridge. No more need be said.



Looking at the *Westwall* Quadrigame overall I can say that I am impressed by the way the games played, and this is high praise since I am not a devotee of the simpler type of game. The chosen subjects deal, at a tactical level, with incidents which were important in the broader campaign. I would like to have seen some brief notes putting all of the battles in perspective. It is a feature which is lacking from the entire Quadrigame series, but I have learned that SPI are a thorough organisation and no doubt the idea was considered and rejected on perfectly sound grounds.