

NORMANDY REVISITED

by Steve List

The original Test Series Game *Normandy* was, like many of its fellow TSGs, a rush job. It has been considerably improved in the second edition; yet it still suffers from a certain number of moderately minor defects. Before discussing the tactics and basic strategies available to the players, I would like to use this article to go over some of the elements of the game.

The unit counters are very pretty, but they are basically the original set given a face-lift by the use of better graphics. As a result, some units needed for this edition have been left out, while some unnecessary ones have been retained. The two Allied 16-10 units (Combat Commands A & B, U.S. 2nd Armored Division) are never used, while a 6-10 tank battalion is missing. The Allied 22-10 and 20-10 units cannot break down simply because the smaller units needed were not provided. Also, the Allied 12-10 units should be marked as brigades, instead of battalions.

The rules suffer from some inadequacies, primarily incompleteness in regard to certain situations. The following rule corrections and additions were worked out with Bill Sullivan and Jim Dunnigan, and can be regarded as conclusive.

Combat: Due to an oversight, the usual clause which prohibits a player from retreating enemy units into elimination when alternate routes are available was left out; it should be regarded as being in force. Units with a Movement Allowance of one *may* retreat two hexes, and units may retreat across river or flooded hexsides if there is a bridge present across that side and no other rule forbids retreat.

Terrain: Units may entrench on any type of terrain except fortifications. The fort hexes of QQ 29 and RR 31 are also to be treated as bocage, i.e., armor cannot attack them, and bocage movement rates apply.

Miscellaneous: If, due to scattering, Allied parachute units exceed stacking limits, invert the excess units. As soon as the stack is in supply, the excess units must move; if they can't move, they are eliminated. After moving off, they are turned upright and can function normally. (The non-inverted units may move off the stack instead; this is equivalent to moving the inverted ones.) Inverted units are not counted in the Defense Strength of a stack, and are eliminated if the stack is eliminated, retreated, or involved in an exchange. In the case of an exchange, the inverted counters are not counted as part of the total.

Allied units may not use road movement rates on the first turn. They may, however, use bridges to the extent of crossing bridged river or flooded hexsides at the movement cost defined by the terrain in the hex being entered.

The items above pertain to actual mistakes or omissions in the game. There are, however, some aspects of the game which I disagree with. The comments and recommendations below are strictly my own. The readers may adopt, ignore, or modify them as they see fit.

VICTORY CONDITIONS: If the German uses Order of Battle E or F, he can get, by the rules, no better than a marginal victory, no matter how well he does. To counter this, use the relative casualties to determine a weighting factor and use it to modify the total of Allied Victory Points. Count the losses for each side in terms of the strength points of the component battalions (e.g., a 7-6 regiment counts only 6 points) with German tank and recon units counted double. If Allied casualties are the greater, subtract one Victory Point for every five casualty points in excess of the German total. If the German casualties are greater, add to the Allied point total in the same way.

THE ARMOR RULE: *Combat Case J* states that armor units must be stacked with a non-armor unit in order to attack or to use its full strength in defense. This is somewhat unrealistic, especially since the companion non-armor unit isn't required to take part in the attack. I would suggest that armor units on clear hexes can defend at full strength, no matter what they are stacked with, and can, while unstacked, attack a clear hex at full strength (exception — half strength if the defenders include a Flak or anti-tank unit). Whether players use this rule or not, I feel that Flak or anti-tank units stacked with armor should have no effect on the armor's ability to attack.

At any rate, the large Allied armor units should be exempt from any form of the armor rule, (except attacking into bocage hexes), as they were not pure tank units. A British armored division contained two brigades, one of which contained three battalion sized tank "regiments" and a motorized infantry battalion. This is similar to the independent armored brigades also used by British and Commonwealth forces. Thus, the 22-10 and 20-10 units could break down into three 6-10 tank units and a 2-10 infantry battalion. The other brigade of the division contained three motorized infantry battalions. The British 12-10 unit should be replaced by an 8-10 unit which is marked as armored infantry and breaks down into three 2-10s. The US 12-10 unit represents Combat Command Reserve of the 2nd Armored Division, and as such had no set Table of Organization. Assuming that it is correctly sized, it should break down into a 6-10 tank battalion and a 3-10 armored infantry battalion.

Combat: As the rules now stand, large units cannot break down during the Combat Phase; an attacker could lose a whole regiment in an exchange with a battalion. I suggest allowing breakdown during the Combat Phase for the sole purpose of extracting exchange casualties. In such a case, enough battalions must be removed to make good the losses.

SCATTERING RULE: It seems to me that if a parachute regiment is scattered in a drop, its component battalions would be unlikely to land close enough together to be in the same

hex. Even if they did, the cohesiveness of the regiment would be destroyed. To reflect this, whenever a regiment is scattered, the die should be rolled separately for each surviving battalion. If three battalions should end up in the same hex, they cannot combine to form a regiment until the Movement Phase after they are first in supply. Glider units can also be subject to the scattering rule, with the exception that they can lose no more than one battalion.

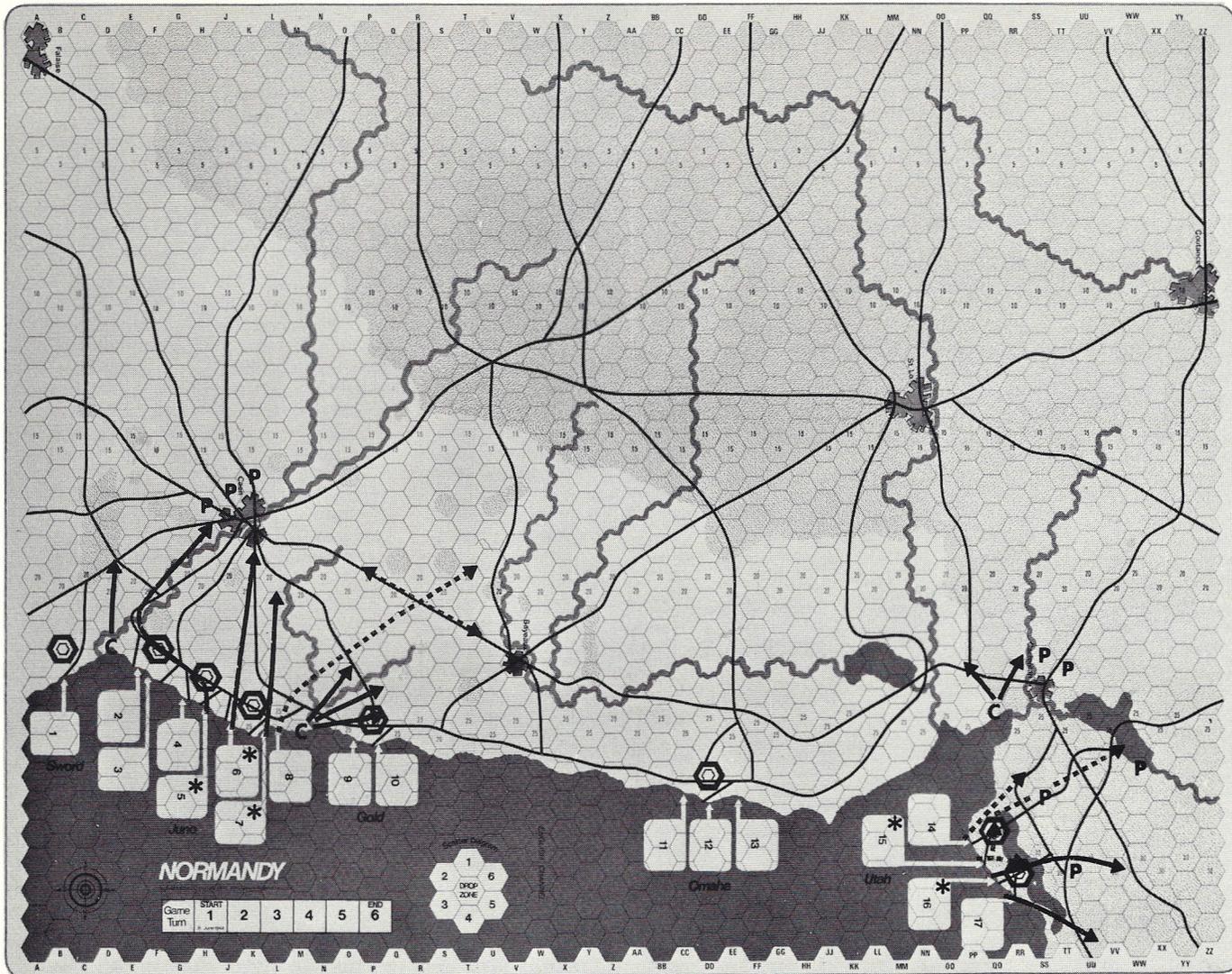
Normandy as a game has drawbacks which are not correctable by massaging the rules. As it says in the Designer's Notes, "you will quickly see the importance of the first move... the plans of both sides can often decide the game... what was committed before the game began could easily decide the game." This, unfortunately, is all too true. It has the effect of dividing the game into a "pre-game" and a "game proper" segment, with the added possibility that the decisive segment is the pre-game one. A player who finds himself in a hole as the first turn progresses has only five turns left to recover what may well be an already irretrievable situation. This detracts from the importance of the game itself and can surely destroy a player's enjoyment of the remainder. Why not go all the way and just have the players make and compare plans; then we could dispense with all that tedious unit moving and die rolling.

To quote the designer again, "it does recreate... the original situation... That, of course, is what the game is supposed to do." No. That is what a "simulation" is supposed to do. A game should be a playable and enjoyable experience for all participants. This one can all too readily become a hell of a drag or a crashing bore, depending on how much you outguessed or were outguessed by your opponent.

Another defect of the game has no single cause, but arises from the combination of its short duration, restrictions on movement, and the Combat Results Table. The CRT has thrown out Avalon Hill's hallowed "three-for-one-for-certain-victory" rule of thumb. Here, a 3-1 is a 50-50 proposition unless the defender is cut off from retreat, while the higher odds are amply endowed with the (usually disproportionately costly) exchanges. The best recourse in situations which discriminate against head-on attacks is to maneuver. But the terrain and Zone of Control penalties hamper local movement, while a reasonable competent opponent will not present much of a weak point against which maneuver can be directed. Long term maneuver is impractical in a game only six turns long. The isolated units on the board at the start of the game are quickly wiped out or removed from danger. As the German reinforcements arrive, the situation becomes one of two mongrels circling, each growing defiance and too scared to start anything.

Despite all this bad-mouthing of the game, I think it is far from a total loss. Aside from quarrelling with some of the mechanics, I think it is quite playable. My biggest beef is against the space-time scope and the design approach; the game as it stands is somewhat poorly conceived.

After all the above, I'll presume to make some recommendations on playing. These do not take into account any of the rule variants I suggested above, that is, these pertain to the "straight" game. The use of the rule variants



ALLIED LANDING AND BUILD-UP

Paratroops and Commandos are placed in indicated hexes. Infantry are placed in indicated beach boxes. Follow-up forces are landed at each Supply Beach on Game-Turn shown. This particular build-up is designed to get armor on shore as quickly as possible at optimum efficiency.

* = Supply Beach

— = General route of march

----- = Alternate routes of march depending on German dispositions

ALLIED ORDER OF BATTLE/NORMANDY INVASION FORCE:

on map
P = Paratroop

one each on SS 23, SS 28, TT 23, TT30, VV 26, H 17, J 17, K 16.

on map
C = Commando

two on QQ 25, three each on D 22, M 25

one each on beaches 14, 15, 16, 17, 5, 6, 7, 8

two each on beaches 5, 6, 7, 8

SECOND WAVE: use as required by developing situation.

x8	x2	x2	x2	x1
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x1	x1
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FOLLOW-UP FORCES:

Game-Turn 2:
 one each on beaches 15, 16

Game-Turn 3:

one each on beaches 5, 7	two each on beach 16, one on beach 6
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two on beach 5	one on beach 6
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one on beach 7 (this unit may be landed later and/or at another beach)

Game-Turn 4:

two each on beaches 5, 6, 7, 16, one on beach 15	one on beach 15
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Game-Turn 5:

two each on beaches 15, 16

should not markedly affect the validity of the comments below.

Allied: The most obvious problem in determining the invasion plan is uncertainty as to the opposition. This requires the Allied Player either to be conservative in his goals, or to be bold and hope that he faces a weak German. The latter course can lead to disaster as well as to magnificent victories. I'll play it safe and outline a strategy that should gross the Allied Player a minimum of 28 Victory Points, which will leave him with 23 to 48 Victory Points (depending on the German OB) and at least a marginal victory.

The northwest corner of the map is the key. By seizing Carentan, the Allied Player can cut it off from the south and east, which are the sources of almost all the German reinforcements. The town is worth 2 points; a division off the north edge (towards Cherbourg) by the end of turn 3 is 12 points; another division off to the west (to cut off the peninsula) is worth 6; and penetration to hex ZZ 24 to cover the second division going west adds 2 points for penetrating 8 hexes inland (only 2 points, because there is a second beachhead). Total so far is 22 points. To reach 28, we "merely" take Caen.

It would appear somewhat foolish to have such widely separated beachheads, but this has the virtue of going right to the sources of the points. The German must contain both landings because a breakout from either would get too many points for the Allies. Caen is a jump-off point for the east edge (8 points), possibly for Falaise and the south edge (6 points, plus 5 for penetration). Forces from the Utah area could take Coutance, St. Lo, the south edge, or even drive through to link the two beaches by road, which would double the points awarded for penetration.

The specifics are as follows. Supply beaches are marked by an asterisk (*):

UTAH Beach

Paratroops: one each on SS 23, SS 28, TT 23, TT 30, VV 26

Commandos: two on QQ 25

First Wave: one 7-4 each on beaches 14, 15*, 16*, 17

JUNO Beach

Paratroops: one each on H 17, J 17, K 16

Commandos: three each on D 22, M 25

First Wave: one 7-4 and two 6-10 each on beaches 5*, 6*, 7*, 8

Notwithstanding that Juno has been allotted 3 supply beaches, all the first wave armor and a good share of the infantry, the main effort in the first 2-3 moves must be at Utah. It is vital to get a division off at UU 23 by the end of the third turn and to protect its supply line. Juno cannot be neglected, though. The major German counterattacks will come here: count on plenty of bloodshed. If you manage Utah well, Juno can get full attention after turn 3. Be careful of an attrition battle. If the German has a strong OB, he could win it. Don't be afraid to risk casualties, but be sure you cause enough in return and don't over-estimate the losses you can afford. Confine the armor to the clear terrain in the east. Only recon units should go ashore (if necessary) at Utah unless you plan to drive to the east to link up the beaches.

German: There is no question but that the Hun has a tough row to hoe in this game. The Allied player can easily seize the points he needs before much in the way of German reinforcements can get to the scene. It is then up to the German to take those points away. If he has OB E or F, he'll just about have to drive the enemy into the sea to get even a marginal win, and if he has one of the weak OBs he'll have to hustle to stay alive.

Incidentally, I believe the best overall German OB is A. It is numerically the second strongest (412 motorized and 100 infantry strength points) and its use deprives the Allies of 5

Victory Points. Its chief drawback is that most of the reinforcements arrive late in the game. OB E is nearly as strong (368 motorized, 143 infantry) and gets the bulk of its forces on early, but it has more infantry and awards 15 points to the enemy.

Rather than try to tailor a German strategy for each of the OBs, I'll lay on you some general principles. The first is to be opportunistic. You'll have to scratch for advantages anywhere you can get them, so a preconceived and rigid plan could be a hindrance.

Generally, you must contain and, if possible, isolate each separate landing. If the enemy does go for Carentan and the northwest corner as I have suggested, he has already gained a huge bloc of points which he can easily defend. Unless you feel lucky or fey, don't attempt to throw him out of there. Use as small a force as you can to contain him and concentrate on flattening the other beachheads. (Of course, there will be times when you have to counterattack in that area to win; lotsa luck.) Your best units are the large SS tank regiments, and they won't do you any good in the bocage or split into battalions.

Placement of initial units is a tricky problem. The temptation is to place them in fortresses on the grounds that they'll die anyway, and even at 10-1 there's a 50% chance of an exchange. But the same advantages can be had by entrenching further inland. This allows you to cover roads, block off the beaches, take advantage of terrain, and get out of range of those pesky destroyers (light naval fire missions). If you get three hexes from the beach, the Allies can't attack you on the first turn, except by moving tank battalions onto any paratroops who happen to be adjacent to your forces.

No matter what your skill, however, it is basically your opponent's luck and competence which will determine whether you'll win or lose.