

# ATLANTIC WALL

## An operational study

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It began with Cornelius Ryan and his famous book "The Longest Day" and has continued through many books, studies and films up to this latest of the offshoots of the D-Day landings and the subsequent Battle for Normandy — S.P.I.'s Atlantic Wall.

This game has the appearance of a monster and indeed the full Campaign Game is, but due to the types of battle fought the game can be split up into six one map games, all with enormous interest. One can also extend these by joining up two adjacent maps for example or playing on past the time limit for the scenario to see what develops during this crucial battle.

Solitaire play is very enjoyable and is easily catered for with the small scenarios; one can treat this game more as a kit to study the campaign than look on it as just another monster game to put on the shelf. Truly a game for study and enjoyment it is not without error and confusion on certain issues — no doubt these will soon be corrected with the now familiar Errata Sheet. Do not let this put you off though, common sense will see you through most situations not too clear in the rules and there is so much to enjoy that one soon forgets the errors.

The historical situation is known to everyone and does not need repeating, so let us study what we get for our money, what happens in the game,

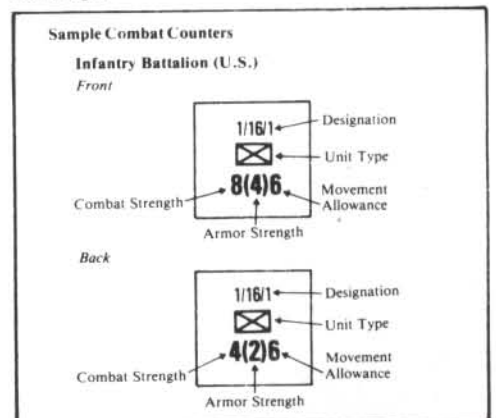
using an actual game as a guide, and then look at some tactical problems for each side with emphasis on the Invasion Stage. This will be covered in detail in the game description, which picks on the assaults on Sword, Juno and Gold beach areas.

### Comments and Presentation.

The game is well presented in a sturdy box with a picture of one of the large coastal guns on the front. It is a vast improvement over previous efforts and inside the game components fit neatly into place.

There are five attractive maps, three covering each of the main landing areas, one to pick up the Cherbourg area and one which covers the west side of the Contentin peninsula. The maps are well coloured, rather better than of late, with bocage shown in a hex by small lines splitting up the terrain to make it look like fields with hedgerows surrounding them. There is a good overall general impression on the maps with the Invasion Waves chart neatly set out opposite each landing area where waves of units waiting to come ashore are set up. My only criticism is the numerous charts shown on the maps. This is O.K. if one is playing the full game but as many people will play one map scenarios it is annoying to have to keep looking up tables on maps that are not in use. A little thought here with a separate chart sheet would have been nice, particularly as this is not a cheap game and one would have thought such a chart possible within budget limits.

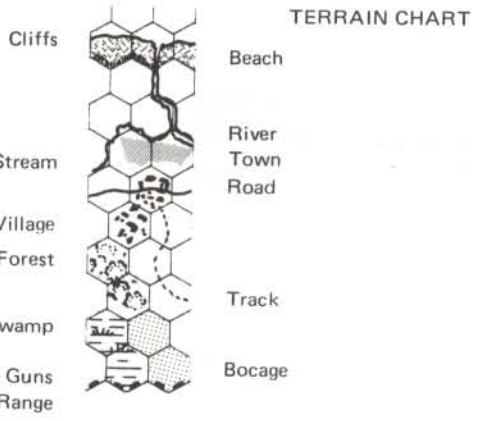
Each map is 22" x 34" in size with each hex representing 1 kilometre. All relevant terrain is covered though several important hills could have been shown as several important attacks struggled against some of these positions during the campaign.



The counters come in ten sheets, 400 per sheet, and have the usual S.P.I. appearance, very functional but not spectacular. Units are companies, parent battalions, Headquarters units and named leaders and represent the many types of units that fought in the campaign. Units are not dissimilar to the "Wacht am Rhine" ones from what I can see. Multi marker counters prevail as do individual ships down to destroyer level, rocket landing craft and air units in groups.

Please note that there is now an errata for ATLANTIC WALL issued in October 1978. This has been published in Moves 42. Editor.





### ATLANTIC WALL MAP SECTION D

SWORD BEACH  
LANDING DISPLAY

Queen Green   Queen White   Queen Red

ALL FUTURE  
LANDING PHASES

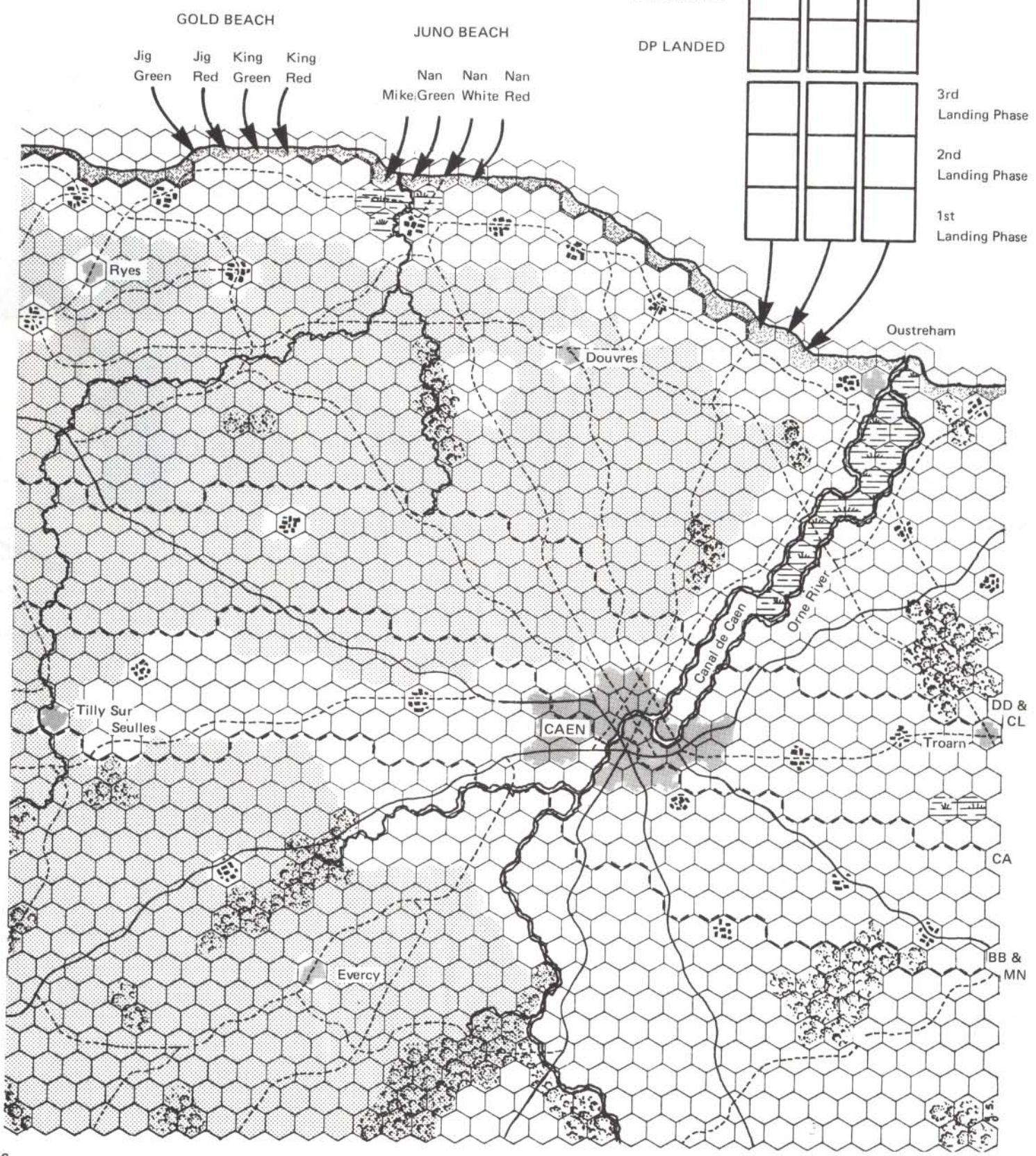
GAPS BLOWN

DP LANDED


3rd  
Landing Phase

2nd  
Landing Phase

1st  
Landing Phase





The rules book is some 36 pages long, complex due to the two main phases in the game — Invasion and Post Invasion rules making up the bulk of the book but with special rules adding their own individual sections. A fair number of errors or omissions do not help play and as so often in the past a few more weeks in this area would have saved the inevitable long errata sheet. Having said that, **Atlantic Wall** is a game with many new features so obviously some error or lack of clarity in the rules is to be expected but many aspects, small in themselves, could have been corrected prior to final printing.

The only other minor gripe is the number of trays included in the box. The three included are nowhere near enough as it is, I could have done with three more. As the box is of a different size to the older plastic trays one will have to cut up counter trays to fit.



### Sample Game.

We will now look at the Invasion Stages of a game played depicting the British landings at Sword, Gold and Juno beaches. I have chosen this area as with paratroops involved one gets most of the various forces that took part in the landings in action on the first day.

Each day is 4 turns long — it is a.m., June 6th 1944, 02.00 hours. High over the heads of the 716th Infantry Division in its various strongpoints and resistance nests aircraft of Transport Command bring in Paratroops and gliders of the 6th. Airborne Division. These units are going to try to cut the road routes north and south of Caen in the hope of slowing down German forces who will try to attack the Invasion Forces. Several sticks will try to hold the roads over the Orne River and Canal to stop German forces attacking from the east as well.

Following the landing procedure many units are scattered due to Pathfinders failing to light flares which would help avoid such scatter — a table is used to check for lighting of flares followed by a further roll on a scatter table. Losses (in steps) are taken as several units land in towns, swamp and on

German units. Overall the drop becomes well spread out and must form up quickly to stop the Germans.

Three assault waves make up the initial a.m. attacks, each wave using a similar game procedure — the Allied player trying to land unpinned units so that assaults against German static units can be made. These first few turns are very tense!

First air and naval guns go in to try to 'take out' the strong coastal batteries which can cause disaster to the assault waves; only 7 are put out of action, a moderate response as two of the strong Le Havre units are still in good shape to attack. The coastal batteries duly open up on the first of the assault waves and destroy three tank units and hit one battleship, HMS Warspite. Following this the naval units which have not already fired, and Rocket Landing Craft, attack the strong points and resistance nests of the 716th. Division, pinning several units and destroying two.

Now the first assault wave comes in, several DD tank units try to swim ashore but one sinks and two drift to other landing beaches. The infantry follow though several are lost on the way in, including Brigadier Smith as his craft overturns in the choppy sea. Commandos pile ashore on undefended areas to climb the cliffs where they hope to cause damage to some of the German static units.

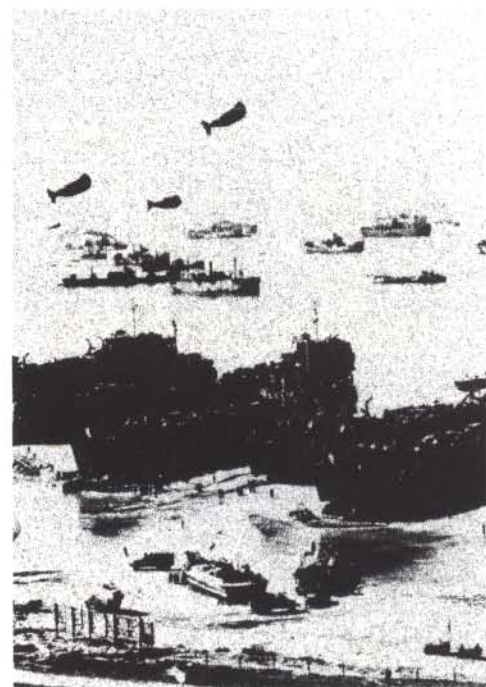
In the first wave German small arms fire attacks cut down a few units, including one of the precious Demolition Engineer Factors who are used to try to clear the beach area for future movement of forces inland. Until each beach is "clear" movement inland to any distance is almost impossible.

After the first wave has gone in 'Juno' is in good shape but both 'Gold' and 'Sword' areas are held just along the shore line.

The second wave now starts to come in; this time the naval guns take out most of the batteries and casualties are light. The Allied engineers start to clear the gaps which will leave the beach free for future movement. Heavy fighting all along the line manages to secure each beach area though only 2 hexes inland at the furthest point.

During the third wave assault the monitor 'Roberts' is sunk and several infantry and tank units destroyed at sea with others drifting along the coast causing many problems for the Allies. Heavy German fire from several strong points cause most of the Allied units to be pinned so that they can't get in a good final a.m. assault. 'Sword' and 'Juno' have cleared half their obstacles and 'Gold' slightly less due to poor engineer work and only a 2 kilometre penetration of the coast has been made. The overall situation is very balanced so far and very interesting.

The German Player, in his a.m. turn, starts to try and clear away some of the parachute companies which will hinder his Panzer units from getting into position to hit the Landing Forces once a beach is cleared. German units are only allowed to fire with units adjacent to beach forces until the beach is cleared after which all normal game rules apply for those units that come on at that beach area.



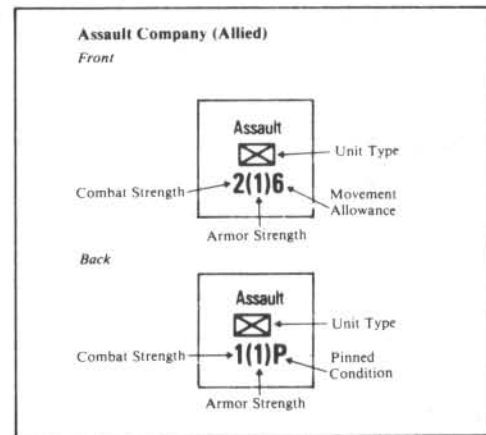
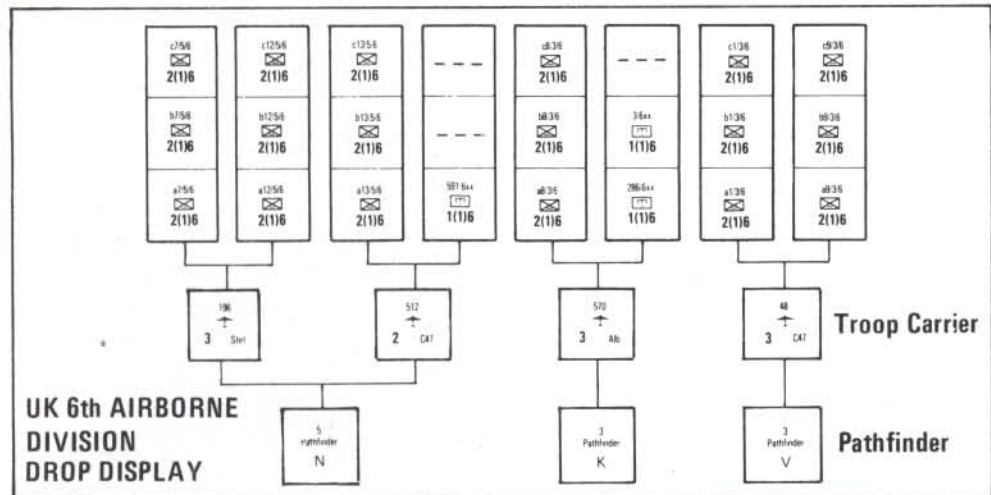
### INVASION PHASE

It is now worth studying the rules so far as the Invasion is, of course, the key to the game and it presents a set of rules unusual to me; we will return to the game later.

### Parachute Drop Phase.

The game starts with the Allies bringing in their three Parachute Divisions, the two American ones on the Contentin peninsula and the British 6th. Airborne on the 'Caen' map.

It is dark when the units arrive and with a very neat system, though with a lot of dice rolling, one finds it anything but easy to get a close drop. Firstly the Pathfinder counter must land having rolled for scatter. It then tries to light its marker flares to enable the transport aircraft to drop the Parachutists on target. A nice touch this with each transport group having differing abilities to drop a good tight stick of troops so a non flare-lit drop can cause enormous scattering and losses. Paratroops can easily be scattered all over the map and I feel the rules pick up the hazards of the night drop well though there is a lot of luck on the die roll. With a very limited movement ability initially it is often hard to concentrate the Parachute units.



### Sea Landing Phase.

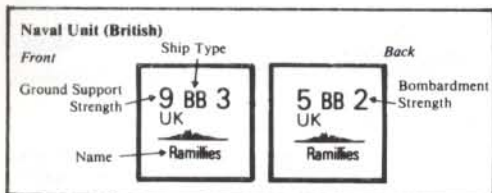
This is the heart of the initial game and has an intricate set of rules, again leaning heavily on the dice. It is the Allied aim to get ashore and clear the beaches as fast as possible with Demolition Engineers otherwise the three assault waves of the first turn, plus later reinforcements, will be pinned down and unable to do very much. Each beach has a 'Gap Number', this being the number of points the Engineers must achieve to allow landed units and new units coming in the chance to move inland.



Each beach area is well protected by a large number of resistance nests, strong points and batteries plus a large number of strong batteries off the board to the east. With lots of cliffs prohibiting movement, except for commandos and Ranger, it is no easy task to get strongly ashore.



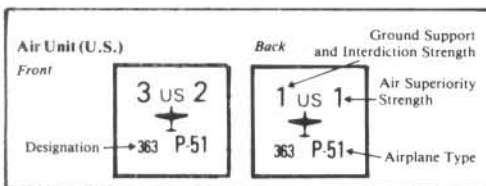
The Invasion Phases each follow a similar sequence which involves naval bombardment by individual ship counters, counter fire by any unpinned destroyed batteries against the ships or, more usually, on the forces waiting to land. Rocket landing craft can help with shore bombardment though they have no range shown on the counters — they are expended once they have fired. I feel that the RLCs should not fire more than 3 hexes inland as they had a short range and several batteries are well inland.



The individual companies of tanks, infantry and engineer demolition points then try to get ashore. They are subject to drifting, each beach having a drift factor. The DD tanks can attempt to swim ashore and if they land safely do not suffer a compulsory pinned result which all other tanks have once they land. Pinned prevents movement and reduces combat ability. If infantry units land without drifting they are also unpinned. It is important to get ashore unpinned as one wants to try to remove German forces still adjacent to the beach hexes. The Germans can attack Allied units that land adjacent to them in their small arms fire phase as long as they are not pinned — German units that are pinned cannot attack! Surviving Allied units now have an assault phase to try to scrape a few more feet of land for themselves.

The successfully landed Demolition Engineer points try to blow gaps in the beach defences using a special table. The number of gaps blown regulate the number of follow-up forces that can land on the following high tide, these occur on all even turns.

This sequence continues until each beach is cleared when the game moves on to the Post Invasion Phase where the 'normal rules' for the game apply. These rules only apply to units on cleared beaches, uncleared beaches continue the invasion sequence of phases until themselves cleared.



## POST INVASION STAGE

Once a landing beach has been cleared by reaching its Gap Number all units landed on that beach and any that land as reinforcements can operate normally with an unrestricted movement ability; pinned units may now operate normally as well. With the advent of the Post Invasion Stage the German player gains the ability to attack all units that have moved into this stage; in the Invasion Stage only parachute units and units adjacent in the Smallarms Fire Phase could be attacked by ground combat. Allied Air Support can now be given to cleared beaches and when all landing beaches on a given map have been cleared the naval units can use their ground support strength to support units in range anywhere on the map.

Having got one or more beaches into this stage the game changes to a more conventional form with a new sequence of play and introducing the bulk of the game rules. Briefly the turn consists of the following phases:

### A. Weather Determination Phase:

This is only rolled on a.m. game turns when the state of the weather for the whole day is determined. The weather can be either clear, overcast, heavy overcast or storm conditions, these affecting the availability of Air Factors and the supplies available during the 'Mulberry Phase'. My only gripe here is that in storm conditions I feel the smaller Allied ships i.e. destroyers and monitors, should have their naval ground support strength halved as they were hard pressed to get any form of fire control in such conditions due to the ship's instability in rough seas. No rules cover this as the game now stands.

### B. Allied Mulberry Phase:

On a.m. turns the Allied player rolls a die and consults the 'Mulberry' table to see how many supply points he has available for that day. As mentioned, weather can affect this availability. Each of these supply points can supply one Allied H.Q. unit to which subordinate units must trace a supply line. This, in fact, gives supply to one division. Units out of supply have their combat and movement factors affected to varying degrees depending on the type of unit involved.

### C. Mutual Air Allocation Phase:

Each air unit has strengths for ground support, interdiction and air superiority, the latter applying only to fighters. In this phase both players distribute their various available air points to the various missions shown on the air tracks. Neither player reveals the allocation of the air units. The Allies can allocate units to air superiority, ground support or interdiction; the Germans only to the first two. On night turns only night fighter units are used. Once each side have allocated their air units they reveal their dispositions — much to your opponents horror at times!

The Germans have massive problems as their air power is very limited but just once in a while they can cause a surprise to the Allied player.

### D. Mutual Artillery Supply Phase:

On a.m. turns each player can resupply his artillery units. When resupplied these units can use their full barrage strength only twice per day (two missions). They are back printed to allow one to keep track of missions used and when both have been used the unit has an 'out of ammo' marker put on it.

E. After these stages that I have described in some detail the Allied player goes through a sequence involving movement and breakdown/build-up of units; he can emplace units into improved positions and entrenchments, bring on reinforcements/replacements and have combat. The German player then has a similar phase following which the Allied player can move his naval units (some of which have to go back to or return from England!).

The general rules which pertain to this section are long and detailed and, in some cases, muddled; one assumes the errata sheet will put this to rights. Amongst the rules are some interesting ones allowing units to move either tactically or strategically, only the latter giving a road bonus. Units that move strategically can't enter enemy controlled hexes and are subject to the interdiction of air units; this can reduce their movement ability quite drastically at times. Terrain effects both types of movement to varying degrees depending upon the type of unit being moved.

For combat no more than 1 battalion and 2 companies (or three company size units) can attack from one hex. Combined armour and infantry attacks shift the odds but these rules are rather unclear and a rewrite is necessary. Regimental integrity also boosts attack odds. Conversely units can attack at low odds using 'diversionary attacks' to allow other units better odds against adjacent units — this is similar to soak off rules seen in earlier games.

Well produced rules for air power, naval units, use of delay markers by the Germans, battle groups, interallied co-operation all go to make this a very stimulating game. It would take several long articles to go into the myriad details included in the rules and the players' tactics when using them but I will content myself in glossing over a few tactical points:

1. The Allies must get ashore and get the beaches operating by the end of the first day if possible and must then push inland at the first opportunity. However he must be careful of strong German counterattacks which can cut off units that stick their noses too far inland in the early stages. Invasion Stage notes have been given earlier in the article.

2. Parachutists plus air interdiction are needed to slow the strong German units from getting to the beaches early on.

3. Once in the bocage it is a hard slog for both sides and a good use of armour/infantry plus air/naval support is essential for the Allies.

4. Watch your supply lines, one wants to keep units at full combat strength as much as possible so gain control of vital roads — movement through the bocage is very slow unless on roads.

5. When you want to defend an area use improved positions/entrenchments where possible to give substance to a defence line.

6. Build units up into battalion size units where attacks are to be made as they can, with added single companies, form strong attack forces from one hex.

7. The German player must, if he gets the opportunity early on, try and destroy one or more beach areas before the Allies get too strong. Failing this, build a good defence line and hit the Allies wherever possible. If he sticks units forward try and pinch them out.

8. Pray for lousy weather as Allied air units are devastating at times. Watch for the features the Allied player needs for victory in the scenario being played.

9. The Allies should get delay markers into place, they help slow down the German push.

Overall I feel the game is better than a lot of the monsters and given the smaller scenarios there is room for it on the shelf of any gamer interested in this period. **Atlantic Wall** is a bold project not without fault but considering what the designer is trying to create it is a worthy effort — I suggest one gets a copy of the errata sheet before tackling the game!

Good luck and I look forward to hearing other player's comments on this package in due course.

