

Hints on Developing Scenarios for PL/PB (Or Any Wargame for that Matter!)

By Peirce Eichelberger

Introduction

Thanks again to Greg and Ward for their websites on PL/PB. Their help with boards and counters makes the development of scenarios much easier. I did want to share with you some ideas about scenario development for PL/PB/AIW. While I have focused on PL these comments should apply to other wargames as well too.

Step Number One

Read, read and then read some more! As I read about any military event of interest I ask myself--Has anyone ever gamed it or developed a scenario for it? On first reading you think about the ability to visualize the battle. What units were involved, how long did the battle take and over how large or small an area? It's also best to read different works at different scale.

I'm just finishing Army at Dawn because I realized I really knew very little about the North Africa campaigns of WWII. With that overview it got me interested in many of aspects of the battle:

Did you know that:

When the Allies landed they fought the Vichy French for most of a week?

Some Free French forces did fight with the allies

North Africa was the debut of both the Sherman and the Tiger tanks

Several seaborne and riverborne assaults took place

The Allied notion of combined arms was learned by trial and error

A jumbled command structure was as much an enemy as the Germans.

From Atkinson's book I definitely want to know more about the Grant tanks (could both the 37mm and the 75mm be fired at the same time--in the same turn?) and the Long Range Desert Group activities deep behind German and Italian lines. WOW, we may get a neat opportunity to show the Jeeps in action in the desert in lighting fast raids. Some of the Jeeps had 3-4 forward firing MG's!

Kasserine seemed like a turning point, not because the Allies were beginning to prevail, but the German supply situation dictated the inevitable. Thank goodness the Allies had a chance to learn from their mistakes and could build an army.

Step Number Two

As you are reading, always have a map open and follow along. Get the largest scale map (covers the smallest area) that you can. You might need a small scale map (covering the largest area) first then with more detailed maps later. Pay attention to cities towns, physical features and road names as you read. Begin to get sense of the flow of the battle from what direction did it begin and from what direction did it play out? Try to get a map that also shows the landforms....the

hills and the valleys and where the roads went. The Michelin maps are great, find a good map store or use the web for sources. Even the National Geographic magazine maps can be quite useful.

The terrain so often meant the battle's outcome. The force that understood the effective use of terrain on offense and defense usually prevailed.

Step Number Three

As you finish one source, check the references, you will find other sources worth reading. The After the Battle publications can be great sources for scenario development. There are many great source references that are a must The Handbook of German and Japanese forces are a must have. The American Arsenal is another great reference. Military History Quarterly and Strategy and Tactics are good, if you can find the appropriate back issues of interest?

Go to any museums that are handy and take pictures. The Canadian War Museum in Ottawa was a great source for Dieppe materials, the new Marine Museum in Quantico is a must see. The D-Day (WWII) museum in New Orleans was very valuable with its Higgins boats (for Tarawa). The armor museum at Aberdeen, MD is a must see as well. Next Spring I am hoping to visit Dieppe and the Maginot sites--some are in danger of being lost

Do more reading, before I even attempted the Dieppe scenarios I read seven or eight books, they all provide important details missed in other volumes. Takes notes, as you've read a half-dozen sources or so you will begin to visualize the scenarios taking shape. Always start with a historical scenario first--no need to make material up, but as you read you will note how the outcome could have been different, that is where the "what if's" come into focus.

Use the maps from your readings to visualize what boards may be used. With Greg and Ward's material, many more maps and counters are ready for scenario development now.

Step Number Four

Start play testing yourself before you have anybody else check work. Be careful with too many special rules and try to be consistent with the existing game structure. Use the PL reference materials for number of units and composition of opposing forces.

Pick boards that reflect the topography of the situation as much as possible, don't be afraid to use multiple boards of the same type, ex--in Dieppe I am using three "B" boards, they do replicate Dieppe and the shore batteries very well.

If this is interesting to people I will expand these topics later with much more detail?

Again thanks to Greg for his encouragement and his hard work with the web site.

Possible future PL scenarios might cover more Pacific Island campaigns, I'd like to see a Wake Island set, Peleliu, Iwo, etc. The British defeat in the Malay campaign and fall of Singapore. A Panama Canal invasion what if by the Japanese could be very interesting as might a Japanese home island invasion.

Enjoy!