

Europe Engulfed – Experimental/House Rules Modifications & Discussions (v5 APR2025)

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Contributions & Ideas - Jeff Tolleson, Mark Leonard, and BGG threads (various authors)

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Europe Engulfed is a fantastic game and moreover is an excellent framework that offers a canvas to explore variants that may add realism, improve play balance, streamline play, etc.

The below discussion and experimental/house rules are intended to address some of the issues our group has seen with the game over many, many plays. Not all of them are necessarily balanced or appropriate for every group.

EE issues fall into 3 broad categories - critical, significant, and minor. The single biggest issue with EE is the time required to play it and this is linked to the scope of the game more than any other factor.

Virtually every game has seen an unstoppable Germany, typically capturing Moscow in 1941 (first turn) and Baku in 1942 and a Russian surrender in 1943 (although the game is generally conceded after both Moscow/Baku fall).

Specific issues seen:

- 1) Moscow falls in first turn of Barbarossa
- 2) Germany sees minimal impact from Russian Winter
- 3) Germany has no problems moving things strategically in Russia
- 4) Subs rise significantly faster and drop slower than historically
- 5) Regular/Automatic Early Low Country attack and Pathological France
- 6) No Russian encirclements during Barbarossa
- 7) Bombers - casualty rate too high to make useful early
- 8) Soviets can't realistically do any meaningful counterattacking in first winter (lack of Soviet strength compared to Axis, lack of Soviet special actions, places Soviet units out of position and vulnerable to counterattack)
- 9) Some of the rules appear overly grounded in historical bias, detract from the players ability to control their own destiny, and/or affect one side disproportionately. (e.g., why is Germany allowed to do an ahistorical 5 SA drive on Moscow in the first turn, but the Soviets are forced into an extremely sub-optimal up-front defense).
- 10) Britain can regularly collapse Italian morale in 1940.

Within the scope of the standard and optional rules I think a few of the optional rules should be standard (they are just too important).

- 1) Build Over Time (BOT)
- 2) Limited special action builds
- 3) Terrain stacking limitations (this is a mixed blessing and currently experimenting w/ mods)
- 4) Desert Weather

What we don't like or play with (and why)

- 1) Surprise - not a very impactful rule and it disproportionately benefits the Axis. We have lately come to appreciate this more, as it reduces the variance to the Axis of extreme results.
- 2) Most of the other non-political optionals. The chrome they add doesn't feel like it adds to the game experience and the complexity may actually detract from it. Additionally, some introduce play-balance issues (e.g., USA production - they have low production when they most need it AND their net production is negative (from vanilla) until 1945 - time value of money problem).

Any rules experimentations should not add undue complexity or overly constrain player options (i.e., avoid historical scripting)

Below is a list of things we are trying out and why...

CURRENTLY PLAYING WITH and/or STRONG CANDIDATES

Modify: Early Lend Lease (begins when Phony War ends)

Start of Lend Lease is triggered by any Axis DOW or attack* (outside Germany) after conquest of Poland. Early Lend Lease will **NOT** occur if France/Britain attacks East first (i.e., Neutrals or into Germany). While France survives, it also gets random 1d6 WERPs/turn Lend-Lease from the USA.

*This can alternatively be limited to any DOW/attack to the West (i.e., Low Countries / France), as the USA may not have reacted strongly if it didn't feel France/Britain was under threat. If Phony War limits on DOW are not enforced, this allows Germany to do an early attack on Yugoslavia without triggering Early Lend Lease. (Module supports all 3 use cases - No Early Lend Lease, Germany attacks West (only), Germany attacks outside Germany))

Rationale: The current rules do nothing meaningful to discourage taking the Low Countries in bad weather the turn before the France attack. Additionally it prevents the worst effects of "Pathological France" (see below) – which is particularly problematic with the Guns & Butter Expert rules.

Effect: For a historical attack (Low Countries and France in first turn of clear), this works exactly the same as the current rules (i.e., no change). If Germany attacks early, then both France and Britain will be a bit stronger.

[Note – We have thoroughly playtested this rule, regularly use it, and feel it is very well balanced.]

Rules Exploit: Pathological France (aka Zombie France)

(Note this is not a rules mod, but a term for a rules exploit)

Germany takes Marseille and surrounds Paris, but refuses Vichy. French units die from OOS. Germany forgoes its WERPS for Ploesti and free minor build. Gun's and Butter NEVER kicks in (as France is still in game). Britain AND Russia do not *ever* get Lend Lease, because the rules predicate Lend-Lease on France surrender/Vichy. This also keeps Italy out of the war (which has pros and cons) and denies Germany their minor allies.

Fixes: This can be addressed by using the "Early Lend Lease" rule above, and/or house ruling that the Allies can voluntarily surrender France. [**Highly recommended for play balance**]

Modify: Up-Front...

Modification: the Russian "front-line" is redefined as 2 deep. Soviets must keep 50% of blocks and all GSUs Up-Front. All 1st line spaces and Soviet home territory 2nd line spaces must be garrisoned. Latvia is part of the second line and may optionally be garrisoned.

Rationale: Moscow shouldn't typically fall in the first turn of Barbarossa AND there are no encirclements (other than the silly stack in Bessarabia) - the entire Russian line dissolves with the initial attack. Historically, a bit part of the reason Germany didn't get to Moscow is that they were busy encircling and destroying pockets of Russians.

Effect: Germany has incentive to spend it's first turn encircling/destroying the up-front Russians. Otherwise, it significantly increases the risk of a first turn capture of Moscow.

New: Russian Winter Paralysis

Axis units may not move in Russia during the standard operational and strategic movement phases for the JF-1942 turn (they can still spend SA). Finnish units (only) are exempted.

Rationale: Historically, the biggest effect of the initial Russian winter was not the casualties, but the virtual paralysis of the German Army.

Effect: A little less freedom for Germany during the historical bad winter.

Modify: Terrain Stacking

Terrain Stacking limits are modified as follows: All nations have equal stacking limits in swamp/mountains. The lower stacking limit applies other than when attacking. When attacking, the higher stacking limit applies. Overstacking is resolved at the end of the player turn by eliminating excess units.

Rationale: This rule appears to exist to allow the attacker to be able to chew through rough terrain. However, it effectively prevents the Soviets from being able to re-capture swamp/mountains because they cannot ever bring numerical superiority to bear. This eliminates the discrimination against Soviet units and aligns the rough terrain stacking with how fortress battles work (can exceed stacking limit on attacks).

MODERATE/LIKELY CANDIDATES

New: Russian Roads/Rails

Axis Strategic moves limited to half (round down) in the Soviet Union USSR (i.e., Red Territory) during bad weather (snow/mud).

Rationale: Historically, Germany had a lot of logistics problems in Russia during bad weather due to the limitations of Russian Rails and (especially) poor roads.

Effect: Harder for Germany to move massive troops from E to W to counter an invasion.

Modify: Interceptors

Modification: change interceptors such that they hit on a base 6. Excess interceptors (> escorts) get a +1. Note this is basically how fleet combat works.

Rationale: Interceptors are currently so deadly that it's really not worth using bombers until you max bombers/escorts AND are in at least 1943. This is very ahistorical as bombers were used extensively all during the war by the Allies. Additionally, even interceptors that aren't shot down by escorts, will have their effectiveness significantly reduced by escorting fighters (i.e., air superiority matters).

Modify: Strategic Air War Costs

Modification: Reduce Bomber Cost (3 or 4) and possibly Fighter cost (2)

Rationale: Air assets are currently so expensive (in relation to effect): (a) the Axis has no incentive to ever consider buying bombers, (b) Axis fighters are typically a place of "last resort" to use WERPs, (c) it consumes a disproportionate amount of the US production to get the Allies air force to a point of even having a trivial economic effect on Germany

New: French Ports for Uboats

Modification: Until Germany controls (supplied) Normandy or Bordeaux, ASW rolls are at +1 and Sub rolls are at -1.

Rationale: Historically, Germany placed a priority on getting western French ports (i.e., not English Channel) for Uboats to reduce their need to transit the waters near England, where they were far more likely to be spotted and sunk.

EE Carriers / Naval Aviation (variant rule)

The basic rules do not allow GSUs to participate in fleet combat. In combination with the minimal ability of the Axis to build/replace fleets, this makes the Axis fleets extremely fragile (i.e., intolerant of losses) and effectively shuts down both an invasion of Sealion or Malta and/or operational movement when subject to interception. The impact on the Allies is much less given they generally have a superiority in fleets and the ability to replace losses.

The optional rule permits GSUs to act as fleets for both combat purposes and to absorb losses. A 3-1 fighter requirement for Britain/France makes it difficult for the Axis to conduct Sealion. There are a number of unsatisfying features of this rule, including Allied Fleets getting a hit bonus during interception (apparently purely for play balance), Germany being able to (unrealistically) use all their GSUs at full effect in fleet combat, thus making a German invasion effectively immune from naval losses, etc.

This variant attempts to make GSU fleet interactions both more interesting and address some of the most egregious features of the optional rule.

The optional rule **14.46 Ground-Support Units Affecting Naval Combat** is modified as follows:

- GSUs located in a Sea zone are considered “Naval Aviation.”
- All powers may commit GSUs as naval aviation subject to following limits:
 - 1 GSU per 3 fleets in service (round to nearest).
 - Note naval aviation limits are calculated by fleets in a sea zone.
 - Naval Aviation GSUs must be of same nationality as fleets (both GB and/or USA GSUs may be used for Western Allied fleets).
 - If the number of fleets are insufficient, excess naval aviation is eliminated.
- The Western Allies do **not** get a combat hit bonus on interceptions
- The Western Allies do get +1 bonus to intercept rolls (Ultra) (both at sea and port)
- Naval Aviation GSUs act as fleets for strategic move interdiction purposes
- Naval Aviation does not require supply or maintenance (i.e., do not reduce WERPS)
- Naval Aviation may change sea zones in same manner as fleets and count against limits
- Only Naval Aviation may take losses in lieu of fleets (not ground based GSUs)
- Interceptions may occur at Sea or Destination Port (see original optional rule)
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- GSUs may be converted to/from Naval Aviation in any of:
 - New Construction (oceans adjacent to home territory)
 - FINAL fleet transfers (only) [to/from uncontested supplied port]
- Each Naval Aviation GSU may be used as follows:
 - Naval Combat
 - Combat Air Patrol (CAP) (i.e., dogfight)
 - Naval Attack (torpedo/dive bomb)
 - Both CAP and Naval Attack GSUs are eligible to take fleet losses
 - Invasion Support (only)

- Act as GSU at invasion site (returns to fleet at end of combat) Does not count against invasion limits.
 - GSUs used in this manner may not take losses as result of Naval Combat for that player turn.
- A single GSU may may not participate in both Naval Combat and Invasion Support in the same player turn.
- For GSUs that shoot at fleets:
 - Naval Aviation is treated as a fleet (i.e., equal fleets hit 1/6; excess hit 2/6)
 - Ground GSUs hit 1/6 regardless of numbers
- Ground based GSUs
 - The 3-1 fighter requirement for Britain/France applies only to ground GSUs and not Naval Aviation
 - Ground GSUs of both sides within range of destination port may join (see original rule 14.46), including limitations on move/combat afterwards
 - Ground based GSUs do not participate in interceptions at sea
- For fights involving both Naval Aviation and Ground based GSU of the same nation, the owning player decides how to allocate any dogfight losses.

UNLIKELY CANDIDATES

Modify: Less restrictive Allied Invasions

Allies only need politically-driven "combined invasions" (British & USA, requiring both to spend a SA) when invading the European mainland. Non-mainland invasions can be done by either in isolation (requiring only a single SA).

Rationale: Original rule makes sense for big political invasions, but 3 exceptions already exist (Morocco/Marsellies - US, Egypt - Britain)

Effect: Makes Allied invasions of secondary targets a bit easier and eliminates the exception for Morocco/Egypt. This also makes the cost of invading Norway the same before or after the USA joins the war.

Modify: Let Them Freeze!

This modifies the Axis first winter casualties. Finns and Axis armor cadres (only) are immune from freeze losses. Alternately, keep armor immune but do not make infantry cadres immune. All other units will take a step loss, including elimination if at cadre level.

Rationale: Axis suffers minimal losses from the historically brutal winter. The Axis will often spend all their Strat moves to pull out infantry, leaving only cadre's (immune from loss) and a handful of infantry.

New: I'm too cold to fight

All Axis forces (other than Finns), shoot half dice on snow turns when on defense, when in Russian home territory during the first Russian winter (ND1941 - MA1942).

Modify: Reduced Subs or Scaling Sub Cost

Modification: lower German build from 8 to 6, alternately increase cost for builds 5-8 to 2 each.

Rationale: Historically, the worst year for subs was 1942. In game, subs ratchet to the top in (very) early 1941

New: Light Infantry

Modification: For all nations (Russia, Italy, France) INF-2 cadre costs are NOT double.

Rationale: These units represent smaller (and often non-regular) formations that lack the support vehicles (as evidenced by inability to use SA to engage) of larger regular formations. This will have the effect of giving these powers slightly reduced WERP costs for the least effective units in their inventory. Note also, that these powers lack the militia units of the larger nations.

New: Colonial Forces

Modification: Size 2 units (of all types) are considered "Colonial Forces" and may be built to full strength anywhere. The vanilla rules provide only disadvantages with no corresponding advantages to small units. Smaller lighter forces are less logistically burdensome to maintain. This variant provides rationale for why these smaller forces exist and gives some incentive for deploying them to remote locations.

New: Soviet Partisans

Modification: All Soviet INF-2 are designated as "partisans". While in Soviet home territory, they are immune from supply effects. These units may be constructed normally, but additionally up to TBD (Snow/Mud 3; Clear 2???) steps of these units may be constructed "behind enemy lines" in German controlled area (in USSR home territories only) at a cost of 1 WERP each (cadre/step),

subject to the following: in empty clear territory or in city/swamp/mountains even if Axis units are present, excepting that German elites prohibit partisan builds. Note that this is a tweak of the optional Yugoslavia partisans optional rule applied to USSR.

New: Special Action Scaling Cost

Modification: The cost of a SA depends on how many you already have when you buy the next one. Each additional SA costs +1 WERP. (note this cost does not depend on how many bought in a turn, but how many that nation possesses when the next is purchased). This could potentially serve as an alternative to the Guns and Butter Rule, but impacts all powers equitably and scales with special actions.

Example: Germany has 0 SA and they buy 5 SA; $\text{cost} = 5 + 6 + 7 + 8 + 9 = 35$ (i.e., 10 more than normal).

Rationale: Even with Guns & Butter, Germany's economy is extremely strong. Additionally, in real life there is a non-trivial cost to stocking & maintaining reserves supplies and the cost is often non-linear (i.e., each additional one costs more than the last).

Please note - I don't claim these are all necessary or balanced, but things we are experimenting with – either to make the game more interesting or address perceived imbalances (i.e., Germany too strong). Nor are these balanced to use all together... Again, these are **experimental** house rules.

Note – none of these are hard coded into the Vassal 3.0 module.