

Battles at the NEC

Pevans plays *Memoir '44* at the UK Games Expo

My Saturday at this year's UK Games Expo was largely taken up with the *Memoir '44* tournament, which I signed up for after enjoying last year's event. For those who don't know it, *Memoir '44* is Richard Borg's game of WW2 battles using his simple, card-driven wargame system (also used in GMT's *Commands and Colors*, Hasbro's *Battle Cry* and Days of Wonder's *Battlelore*) and published by Days of Wonder.

For the tournament, players are randomly designated as Axis or Allied and play a set of scenarios as that side against different opponents. Players are then ranked according to their performance and matched against the equally placed player of the opposing faction in a playoff, playing one scenario from both sides. This year I drew Axis. The only drawback to this was that I had my back to the huge windows that gave a terrific view over the lake between the hotels on the NEC site. It was great to have plenty of natural light for the tournament.

My first battle was the "Battle for the Bridgehead" scenario. Set just after D-day in the Normandy countryside, a Canadian force advances from the beaches only to meet stiff opposition from SS Panzer and Panzer-Grenadier units. The scenario has the Axis forces in woods and villages in the centre and (their) right with another force in the left corner. The Canadians have slightly more units on a broad front.

My opponent shifted some of his units from his centre to his left flank and attacked hard on this flank. I defended with what I had, trading unit for unit. The downside was that he still had units left when my force had been eliminated. This allowed him to roll up my centre to make the final score 4:6 to him. It was a slightly disappointing start.



At the moment it's even-stevens, but what's left of my right flank is about to disappear

The second scenario was "Russian Breakout" and I was grateful to be playing Axis. This is because the 'Commissar' rule really hampers the Russian player – essentially, they have to play their Command card a turn in advance. Set a few weeks after the start of



Round 2 starting as the sunshine works its way round

Operation Barbarossa, the scenario has surrounded Russian forces trying to break through the German lines. This means the Allied player is expected to attack with infantry across open ground at an Axis force with plenty of armour and artillery. Ouch! It is a very unbalanced scenario (the online statistics show that the Allied player wins only 16% of the time). As expected, it was an easy win for me, but my opponent got some lucky rolls to make it 6:3.

The third scenario was the most interesting. “The Battle of Hong Kong” is the Japanese attack on the British colony in December 1941. This means the Axis force is making an



The Japanese forces ready to invade Hong Kong

amphibious landing, reversing *Memoir '44's* hallmark – the D-day invasion. The invading Japanese have a large infantry force backed with some armour and even a couple of artillery batteries – if they manage to get to the beach.

The defending British, Canadians and Indians are outnumbered, but are well dug in – with some bunkers and a lot of barbed wire – to provide a defensive position. They even have a little armour and artillery. In play, I had a series of centre/right flank cards that allowed me to push up the right-hand side of the beach and then clear out the central defenders. It was not one-sided, though, and the final score was 6:3 to me. Interestingly, the online statistics show this as an Allied victory 57% of the time.

With the results collated, there was a three-way tie for best Axis player, based on the scenario results. Counting up medals won and lost left two of us tied, so it went to a count of pieces won and lost, leaving me the second best Axis player!



Operation Spring as the Allies and it's all over, despite having the upper hand on the right

The final battle was “Operation Spring” featuring more Canadians attacking dug-in German defenders in Normandy a few weeks after D-day. It looks like another hiding for the Allied player and that's how it turned out (it's 71% an Axis victory, according to the online stats). I played Axis first and thought I'd got a decent result in winning 6:4. However, switching sides saw me go down 2:6. My opponent got his armour into play quickly, while I couldn't finish off the battered Axis units that littered the battlefield. This made the aggregate score 8:10 and a loss for me.

My final position was fourth – just off the podium! Congratulations to Bill R, this year's winner, who beat Dean, the man who pipped me to best Axis player. Most importantly, the tournament was good fun and we played some interesting scenarios. Many thanks to organiser Barry Ingram for his hard work.

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