



## A DECADE OF SHUFFLING ALONG

By Don Hawthorne

This summer marks the tenth anniversary of an event dear to my heart. Way back when, at Origins '83, to be exact, Avalon Hill unveiled a game which was new and different in every sense of the words. That game was *UP FRONT*, and while it failed to set the gaming world aflame, the staunch support of its developer, Don Greenwood, and vocal enthusiasm of its fans around the world have helped to keep the game and its expansions in print.

I say around the world, because *UP FRONT* has managed to carve out several niches for itself in the worldwide gaming community. Ulrich Blennemann, editor and publisher of Germany's *Der Musketier*, has conducted a survey which reveals *UP FRONT* to be the single most popular wargame in Germany (where, by the way, it must be sold literally under the counter, to customers specifically requesting it, and in generic packaging, in order to comply with German laws regarding depictions of Nazi regalia; the SS runes on the soldier's collar, to be exact). Emanuele Oriano, one of the officers of the Overlord Gaming Club in Italy, declares *UP FRONT* to be the consistent favorite of his associates and even his family. Stateside, Pat Cook conducts a regular convention for the California *UP FRONT* State Championships, and the officers of southern California's *Strategicon*, producer of no less than three major conventions a year, offer an *UP FRONT* tournament at each one, and to my knowledge have always had to make room for additional players. At *AVALON-CON '92*, fifty-three gamers devoted their Saturday to a fight for the *UP FRONT* tournament plaque. This is a game with a devoted following, and it deserves to be supported. Hence, in answer to many requests (and my own avowed prejudice for what coincidentally happens to be my favorite game), and in honor of its tenth anniversary, this new column in *The GENERAL*.

*UP FRONT* deserves credit for a lot of "firsts". First true wargame without a board; first tactical wargame system to provide gamers with the Japanese forces of World War Two; and first wargame to truly and accurately model the problems and even in many ways the experience of small unit command and control in combat (more about this later).

Before *UP FRONT*, card-driven game systems were rare and simplistic in the extreme. But the last ten years have seen systems very closely related to *UP FRONT* gain prominence both as "engines" for game systems and as integral parts of existing games.

Even so, among many gamers, *UP FRONT* is regarded as sort of the "problem child" of the Avalon Hill family. No mapboard—shudder! No perfect situational intelligence—horrors! Troops who won't march blithely to their deaths at their commanding player's whim (not even the Brits)—preposterous! And thirty-six pages of rules? For a *card game*! Well, twenty-four, actually, the rest being optional rules, TO&Es, scenarios and Designer's Notes (...you *do* all read the Designer's Notes, I trust? If you haven't, do so now. I'll wait...)

Despite these admitted drawbacks, however, the game is finally beginning to achieve the popularity it so richly deserves. In spite of its woes, the "problem child" is being revealed instead to be simply a "late bloomer". Let's take a look at some of the reasons why.

First, as stated above, *UP FRONT* is the first—and in many ways, still the only—accurate portrayal of small-unit command and control. The game's lack of a mapboard actually enhances its simulation of reality, if you remember while playing that *your point of view is that of the men in your squad*.

Terrain does not "magically appear" when your opponent discards it upon one of your moving groups; rather, for that phase of play, your opponent has become part of the game system, his discard not simply a "random factor" beyond your control, but in fact representing his (temporarily, at least) superior knowledge of the surrounding terrain; your men "blundered" into it, while his did not.

An example from personal experience: I've been good friends with Jim Murphy, the person who taught me to play *UP FRONT*, for many years; one of our adventures together was playing paint-gun games when they first started to get popular. Our first time out, we decided to head for some prominent high ground (let's call it a Hill card, shall we?) to get a look at the field. Crashing through high grass (a Brush card), we broke out of the thicket to see before us, blocking our path to the hilltop, a wide gully with a wet ditch along its bottom (a Stream card). Grinning, we turned to each other and declared simultaneously: "It's just like *UP FRONTS*"

Nor did the similarities end there. Getting us and our teammates into firing range (playing Movement and Fire cards) necessitated their exposure to the opposing team's paintballs (no Concealed cards). Guess what they were reluctant to do? And these people were only playing a game; they risked, not the life and limb of real combatants, but only the time they would lose

sitting out the game until the next one could start. And once people stopped moving and were pinned down in one place (a lack of Rally cards), it was only a matter of time before they were picked off, while whoever was leading them at the moment could only shout uselessly at the slackers and depend wholly on those unpredictable few (Hero cards) who might or might not advance when called upon to do so.

Now I have never been in actual combat; I frankly have no desire to do so if it can at all be avoided. The paint-gun games are as close as I ever need to come. But I do have friends who have "seen the elephant", most of whom are wargamers, some of whom play *UP FRONT*, and all of whom vouch for its accuracy.

The point is, despite the prejudices of many who prefer complete control over all aspects of their gaming, in a true model of tactical combat, such control is, by definition, impossible. There is simply *no way* to tell what you will find in your path when heading for your objective. Likewise, it is impossible to tell which men will behave like lions and which like lambs. Tactical combat is random and unsure, and most participants stumble into victory more through sheer tenacity than anything like skill. In *UP FRONT*, this is frequently modelled by simply holding your squad together until the other player makes a critical error.

Thus the game has the appearance of being utterly random or, if you prefer, "luck-oriented". As a gamer who believes whole-heartedly in luck, I have no problem with that, but possibly the greatest prejudice against *UP FRONT* stems from this perception. In fact, the game is no more random than combat at this level really is, a point which Courtney Allen and Don Greenwood make abundantly clear in their Designer's Notes (which you just read).

As a player, therefore, you are thrown into an essentially chaotic environment and expected to impose some level of control over the situation (any former Marine who is reading this has heard these words before). And that is exactly what command and control in combat is. Gamers who claim stacks of dumbly obedient counters and volumes of rules are a better model of reality *at this level* are deluding themselves.

Of course, a lot of us play wargames just for that Grand Illusion of Control. Many gamers actively dislike the stress imposed by the chaos of tactical combat reality, particularly in a tournament environment (and like a high-stakes game of *Poker*, a hard-fought engagement in *UP*

## 28-3/A3. THE END IN SIGHT - Battle at the Reichschancellery

**Set Up 1st**  
1(SSGT), 2, 4-6, 8-10, 13, 15, 17-19, 22, 27, Extra "Sniper" & Three Panzerfausts

**Set Up 2nd**  
Guards: 1, 19, 28, 3-9, 11-15, One Demolition Charge & One Radio (Fire Strength 7)

**Set Up 3rd**  
Guards: 26, 20-25 & 39

**Play First**

No cards are removed from the Action Deck.

### SPECIAL RULES:

**A3.1** The German player receives three -3 Buildings cards prior to play for use on any of his groups. In addition, he also receives the Pillbox, which is treated as a -4 Building and may hold any number of men. The rest of the Buildings cards are removed from the Action Deck and placed in a separate Draw Pile, from which the German player may randomly select them as terrain for any of his groups when such placement of a Terrain Card could normally be performed on those groups. The Russian player may make use of this draw pile for any of his groups which have reached Range Chit 3 or greater.

**A3.2** All Woods and Brush cards are considered to be Rubbled Buildings. Their TEMs remain unchanged, but they are otherwise treated in all respects as Buildings Cards. Vehicles which overrun units occupying Rubbled Buildings make Bog Checks normally. Stream, Gully and Marsh Cards represent large craters and extensive street damage; their use is unchanged from the basic game. Minefields are Cover cards.

**A3.3** The German squad has an extra "Sniper" capability; in effect, he must suffer two "Sniper Lost" results before he loses his ability to play Sniper cards. Also, the *UP FRONT* countermix contains only two Panzerfaust counters; use the German ATR chit to represent the third Panzerfaust.

**A3.4** Each Russian player may use Sniper cards normally until the German player has made two separate Sniper Checks which have inflicted two "Sniper Lost" results. These Sniper Checks and "Sniper Lost" results may be against the same or different Russian players.

**A3.5** The German squad represents the remnants of a French SS unit, little motivated to do anything but survive another hour. Basically an *ad hoc* unit, they do not receive the Elite status capabilities of regular SS units, but having no delusions as to their fate at the hands of the Soviets should they be captured, they will break only after having suffered over 75% casualties (i.e., 12 out of their original 15 men). They do have the advantage of being led by a Senior Sergeant, entitling them to a six-card hand so long as he remains in the game and unpinning.

**A3.6** Both Soviet Groups are Polish Guards units, extremely well-motivated and determined to capture the Reichschancellery. For game purposes, they are considered to be Russians, and are entitled to all Elite status capabilities for their nationality. Although controlled by two players, the Russian force is considered to be a single squad for purposes of breaking from casualties. Thus, both Russian players may continue the game (assuming either has any personality and/or vehicle cards remaining) until total Russian casualties exceed 51% of their starting forces, or 12 out of 23 personality cards (including the vehicle). To fill out the Soviet OB (and add spice to the battle), they have been given the support of a JS-II for this assault.

**A3.7** The Russian players may communicate and compare hands only after establishing Radio Contact (*UP FRONT* Yule 41.7). For game purposes, the Russian Players are entitled to maintain such contact so long as their Radio Chit is operating and Russian Player Two's AFV is functional and CE. Should the AFV Button Up or the Radio Chit malfunction, Radio Contact is lost until re-established as per 41.7. If the AFV suffers a "Commander Killed" result, Radio Contact is lost permanently. In addition, see **SSR A3.8**, below.

**A3.8 THREE-PLAYER GAME SET-UP:** German player sets up first, using Group ID chits A through D, inclusive, and must have at least four starting groups. Russian Player One then sets up. He must set up using Group ID chits Z, A and B, and have at least three groups. Russian Player Two then sets up, using Group ID chits C, D and E, and having at least three groups. Both Russian players must take their turns in numerical order (i.e., Russian Player One must complete all of his groups' actions before Russian Player Two begins his turn) before the German player takes his turn. If the Russian Players have established Radio Contact as per **SSR A3.7** above, they may conduct their groups' actions in any order desired.

**A3.9 VICTORY CONDITIONS:** The Russian side wins by having an infantry group of any size infiltrate and capture the "Pillbox" without being itself infiltrated by any German soldiers. The German player wins by avoiding the Russian players' victory conditions. The German player automatically loses if at any time he voluntarily vacates the Pillbox (in effect forfeiting the game).

**A3.10 OPTIONAL RULES:** Environmental Conditions: *Fair Visibility*. All Fire Attacks have their Fire strength reduced by one (1); all Ordnance Attacks have their To-Hit number reduced by one (1), and may only acquire their targets if their To-Hit number drawn for an attack was also Black. Infiltration attempts receive a one-column shift to the left, in addition to any other modifiers for Terrain or Concealment cards.

*FRONT* can have you sweating bullets). Some go so far as to declare that *UP FRONT* is too close to the real thing to be entertaining. I really wouldn't know. I *do* know that I've tried just about every game there is at one time or another, but there are only a precious few that I keep coming back to. And on that very short list, *UP FRONT* is number one.

So, in the interests of getting more people out there to play and enjoy *UP FRONT*, this column enjoins those of you who know the game to teach it to those who don't. As I believe those twenty-four pages of rules are better taught than learned on one's own, the following scenarios are provided as, among other things, a means for two players familiar with the system to introduce it to a third who is not.

Therefore, if you are a fan of *UP FRONT* (and the amount of letters we receive indicate that many of you are), here's your mission: Get your usual *UP FRONT* opponent and invite a third person who doesn't know the game to sit in. Give the new person one of the two team squads and help them along to learn the game. Go easy on them the first few times and be patient; there's a lot of stuff in these variant scenarios that isn't part of the Basic Game.

Remember that the mechanics of *UP FRONT* are inherently logical; most of what you think you *should* be able to do in reality, you *can* do in the game, given the necessary cards and a proper grasp of the rules. Make sure your pupil is aware of that. When you're done, wind down with a game of *A Meeting of Patrols* between the new person and an experienced player, with the extra person providing help and commentary. Of course, if you have someone eager to learn the game who is completely intimidated by these scenarios, by all means, skip to step two.

Why do I suggest throwing the neophyte directly into such complicated scenarios at all? Because most wargamers disdain *UP FRONT* as simplistic; show the new player that every aspect of tactical combat is available in *UP FRONT*: Artillery support, assault weapons, armor. Support their ideas and let them try any tactics they like, and allow them to learn from the consequences. Once they see *UP FRONT* as a *system*, they will be able to assimilate the simpler *Patrol* scenario much more easily.

You may find it tougher to teach "old hands" than those who've never seen a wargame before. To the latter, *UP FRONT*'s concepts can seem positively friendly when compared to hexes, lines-of-sight and half-inch counters with teeny-tiny type; to the former *UP FRONT* flies in the face of a lot of gaming conventions we've gotten (too) used to over the years. But don't lose patience, and don't lose heart.

Nobody ever learned to play *THIRD REICH*, *EMPIRES INARMS*, *ADVANCED SQUAD LEADER* or any of the *FLEET* Series games the first time through, but neither did anybody ever walk away from those games once they'd discovered what great fun they can be.

# DOING AWAY WITH SCENARIO J

## Alternative 3-Player Scenarios for *UP FRONT*

My good friend Scott Steinmann once told me: "Many's the time there were three of us sitting around the game table, trying to decide what to play, wishing one of us would leave so the other two could play *UP FRONT*." Having myself played a couple of sessions of Scenario J, *Free for All*, I understood why Scott and his group were not inclined to avail themselves of that particular solution. To me, the sole value of Scenario J is that it makes *three* people available to figure out the Night Rules at one sitting, thus increasing the likelihood that somebody will know what's going on by the end of the game.

In the end, though, *Free for All* inevitably degenerates into a bully-fest bloodbath as two players blast a third into chutney before turning their guns on one another. Not a lot of fun. So as an alternative, I designed some three-player scenarios based more or less on historical incidents. They took a bit of tuning, but there was no lack of enthusiastic *UP FRONT* fans to play them and offer suggestions (it seemed Scott and his group were not alone). We now had some three-player *UP FRONT* scenarios which would allow a sort of "Team Play" without requiring an extra copy of the game (the fact that each of us already owned at least one copy of *UP FRONT*, *BANZAI* and later, *DESERT WAR* was beside the point). These scenarios were especially helpful in teaching others the *UP FRONT* system.

The first of these scenarios appeared in the short-lived *UP FRONT Newsletter*, where it generated overall favorable responses from those gamers who saw it. This brought more suggestions which resulted in more improvements. I am indebted to Scott and all those other *UP FRONT* players who suffered through these scenarios in their early incarnations to bring them to a level where I felt I could inflict them on the gaming public at large.

Most of the unusual rules are the result of my desire to make the scenarios better-balanced and more fun for all three players.


In the meantime, however, here are two of those three-player scenarios. Both require only one copy of *UP FRONT* to play. Future columns will include three-player (and other) scenarios for *BANZAI* and *DESERT WAR*, variants and discussion of various aspects of play.



Readers' comments on these scenarios and rules are welcome, and of course, any players out there with new and different *UP FRONT* scenarios of their own are heartily encouraged to request a set of our *Guidelines* so that they may submit them to The *GENERAL* to be considered for publication.



## 28-3/B3. A LITTLE CORNER OF HELL

### Assault on Bastogne

Set Up ✚ 1st	Set Up ✚ 2nd	Set Up ☆ 3rd
SS: 1, 2, 6, 10, 12, 15, 17, 19, 26, 2 and One Radio (See SSR)	SS: 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 23, 24, 35	Paratroopers: 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18(SSGT), 20, 21, 23, 25, 30 and One Radio (See SSR)
 No cards are removed from the Action Deck.		

 Play First  
 4

#### SPECIAL RULES:

**B3.1** The American player receives three -3 Buildings cards prior to play for use on any of his groups. In addition, he also receives the Pillbox, which is treated as a -4 Building and may hold any number of men. The rest of the Buildings cards are considered to be Scenario-Defined Cover Cards, and are unusable by any player. The German players may only occupy Buildings cards which they have captured from the Americans by Infiltration and Close Combat.

**B3.12** After Set-Up and Prepare for Play, mark all Buildings cards (and the Pillbox, if used) with unused RR "0" Chits. Each time an Ordnance attack with an Un-Boxed Fire Strength of 4 or greater hits a Building, replace the chit with one of the next highest value. When a Building has suffered four such hits, it is considered *Rubbed*; mark it with a Blank counter. Thereafter, the Building is treated in all respects as a Wall card. It no longer counts as a Building for Victory Conditions, but remains in play until vacated.

**B3.2** Buildings cards (including the Pillbox) which are vacated by the American are returned to the Action Deck, and thereafter are treated as Scenario-Defined Cover Cards. Minefields are Cover cards. Sniper and Wire cards are Cover Cards for the Germans only; they may be used normally by the American.

**B3.4 RADIOS:** The German Radio may call in artillery attacks of Fire Strength 7 during the first deck, Fire Strength 6 during the second, and Fire Strength 5 during the third. It has no value from the beginning of Deck Four until the end of the game. The American radio has no value during the first deck of the game; it may call in artillery strikes of Fire Strength 5 during the second deck, Fire Strength 6 during the third deck, and Fire Strength 7 during the fourth deck.

**B3.5** Both German Player's squads are SS units, and entitled to Elite status capabilities for their nationality. Although controlled by two players, the German force is considered to be a single squad for purposes of breaking from casualties. Thus, both German players may continue the game (assuming either has any personality and/or vehicle cards remaining) until total German casualties exceed 51% of their starting forces, or 10 out of 18 personality cards (including the vehicle).

**B3.6** The American forces are US paratroopers, an element of the 82nd Airborne. They are considered to be Elite (of course), and are entitled to the Elite status capabilities of their nationality. In addition, the American SL is considered to be a Senior Sergeant, entitling the American Player to a seven-card hand so long as he remains in the game and unpinned.

**B3.7** The German players may communicate and compare hands only after establishing Radio Contact (*UP FRONT* rule 41.7). For game purposes, the German Players are entitled to maintain such contact so long as their Radio Chit is operating and German Player Two's AFV is functional and CE. Should the AFV Button Up or the Radio Chit malfunction, Radio Contact is lost until re-established as per 41.7. If the AFV suffers a "Commander Killed" result, Radio Contact is lost permanently. In addition, see **SSR A3.8**, below.

**B3.8 THREE-PLAYER GAME SET-UP:** German Player One sets up first. He must set up using Group ID chits Z, A and B, and have at least three groups. German Player Two then sets up, using Group ID chits C, D and E, and also have at least three groups. The American player then sets up, using Group ID chits A through D, inclusive, and must have at least four starting groups. Both German players must take their turns in numerical order (i.e., German Player One must complete all of his groups' actions before German Player Two begins his turn) before the American player takes his turn. If the German Players have established Radio Contact as per **SSR A3.7** above, they may conduct their groups' actions in any order desired.

**B3.9 VICTORY CONDITIONS:** The German side wins by capturing, through Infiltration and Close Combat, a greater number of intact Buildings cards than are occupied by the American forces. A Building may have been severely "damaged" by Ordnance, but so long as it is not "Rubbed", it counts as a Building for Victory Conditions. In addition, if the German AFV has reached Range Chit 8, the German side can win by occupying a number of intact Buildings *equal to* or greater than those held by the Americans. The American player wins by avoiding the German victory conditions while occupying at least one intact Buildings card or the Pillbox at the end of the game. Thus, the American player automatically loses if at any time he voluntarily vacates all Buildings cards (including the Pillbox), in effect forfeiting the game. Any result other than those above, including breaking the enemy squad, counts as a draw.

**B3.10 OPTIONAL RULE:** *Heavy Snow; Fair Visibility:* Stream and Marsh are Scenario-defined Cover cards for Infantry *only*, they may be discarded normally on a moving AFV, which must still refuse Marsh (tanks would break through where men would not). A sideways movement card must be placed before any movement card may be played to change range. AFVs must check for "Bog" for each Terrain card placed on them. Infantry guns may not be moved. Entrenchment attempts are successful on a RNC draw of "0" or "1". Subtract "1" from the strength of all Fire Attacks and the Fire Strength of Un-Boxed Ordnance.