

# UP ON THE AFRICAN FRONT

## The DESERT WAR Expansion for the UP FRONT Series

By Steve Harvester

*DESERT WAR* is the latest expansion "gamette" in the *UP FRONT* system. With the addition of France and Italy, the game series now covers all seven major WWn powers. New rules for desert warfare add another dimension of excitement to existing combat scenarios. This article examines the play of the new French and Italian hands in the all-infantry scenarios, and the effect of the desert rules on all five nationalities which engaged in combat in that strange environment.

### The Italians

Okay, what's the shortest book in the world. If you answered *Italian War Heroes*, go to the rear of the class, "You obviously never heard of Julius Caesar, the Renaissance *condottiere*, or the Ariete Armored Division. Nevertheless, it is true that the Italian squad in *UP FRONT* will have a rough time of it, requiring more skill in handling than that of any squad they face. That is your challenge and the source of the fascination in playing them.

The Italians, as put forth in *DESERT WAR*, teach experientially the nature of Italian combat problems in WWII. This "learning through suffering" is what makes this system a truly instructional, historical wargame. The Italians suffer from poor leadership (a Morale 3 Squad Leader), poor equipment (rifles that are ineffective at RR1 and machineguns that break down on a red "5" or "6"), and inflexible tactics (a four-card hand with two discards only if no other action is taken). Considering all the above, it is no surprise that their overall morale is also poor: *all* split-action cards are Cover cards for the Italians. Their 18-man squad breaks at 44% (eight men) losses rather than the effective 60% for the Germans and British, 58% for Americans and 50% for the French. If they are pinned at RR5 to an unpinned enemy (Russian excepted), they surrender. Whereas the British may use Fire cards with FP one greater than that available in the group, the Italians may only use those with FP one or more *less* than a group's

printed capacity. Their average morale is 3.0 (slightly higher than the Americans), but their average Panic level is 2.4—that's 50% lower than any squad they will face.

So why the brave introduction, with reference to Caesar and Ariete? On paper, the Italians have no chance. In action, they will be clear underdogs in any firefight in which they find themselves—but they are far from hopeless. This fighter may have a glass jaw, but you other guys better watch out for the right cross.

I refer to the one unique feature of the Italians: a firebase is possible with, not one, but *two* light MGs. These guns are equivalent to the Japanese LMG. They require no crew; and with the six highest-morale riflemen joining them, they create a group capable of using FP13 cards at RR2. The "right cross"—a successful flanking maneuver—gives this group a game-ending 27FP. (Ignore Rule 46.4, prohibiting two or more LMGs in one group. This rule was necessary to prevent the 1944-45 U.S. marines, with their three BARs, from being unrealistically strong. But the same rule makes the Italians [and the Japanese] unfairly weak. For better balanced play, suspend this rule for these nationalities.)

Unlike their stronger opponents, the Italians do not have the luxury of considering a high-morale maneuver group and a high-FP, lower-morale firebase. Benito was looking for just a few good men, and in the 18-man Italian squad there are eight (excluding the fragile SL). Together, they are a small enough target, with high enough morale and more than enough firepower to win the game—if they can make it intact to RR2. This may seem like putting all one's eggs in one basket, but the Italians only have one egg.

The Italians share a common dilemma with the Japanese and Russians. Their usual opponents will be able to level attacks at RR1 of nine or ten FP. They must close in order to start trading shots on a fairly equal basis. But how?

There are no guarantees in this game, but by far the best opportunity for any of these squads to reach RR2 in good shape is at the moment when the opposing firebase makes its move. Be assured, they will move—both for Victory Points, and to bring their rifles into play at RR1. If the firefight is joined at that range, the chances of the under-armed squad drop to between slim and none. But if you can succeed in moving the groups from RRO to RR2 at one time, the odds shift drastically in your direction.

A case in point: I was taking a Russian squad up a Hill on patrol when they came under typical withering German LMG fire at RRO. I was able to rally all but one rifleman, when the Krauts leaped forward, expecting to finish us off at RR1. I had one Movement card and a lot of garbage in my hand. There was nothing for it but to voluntarily Panic the pinned man and move into the great unknown at RR2. The Germans slipped into Brush, and I remained moving so I could make a complete-hand discard. German fire pinned my group again, but not before they had found some Woods to hide in. Now the shoe was on the other foot. At RR2, my firepower was higher than his and my Morale average a full point better. My sacrifice of a single rifleman was well rewarded.

The Italians, with lower morale and an unimpressive maneuver group, need even more luck and skill than do the Russians. After putting my best eight men in a flanking position relative to the enemy firebase, I spread my remaining ten troopers in three small groups, with the Morale-3 SL in Group D. These three groups essentially tell their opposing numbers, "don't shoot—we're not worth it!" Trying to mass them for a charge is only an invitation to slaughter and an early loss.

I will spend the early rounds of the game discarding in search of the crucial cards I must have to make my one and only advance successful: a Movement card, some terrain, and some combination of Concealed, Rally and Fire cards useful at RR2. With

## CLOSING THE RANGE

No task is more daunting, and no success more sweet, than closing the range with an outgunned squad. I define as "outgunned" squads whose rifles are ineffective at RR1 versus squads whose rifles can be used at that range. I also include those whose rifles are equal to their current opponents but who face a much better machinegun and/or fixed defensive position. Russians, Japanese and Italians are almost always outgunned, as are all Allied squads when facing the German LMG.

The key to successfully closing the range lies in the initial squad deployment. For beginners whose familiarity with the *UP FRONT* card deck is still uncertain, the standard formations first suggested back in Mr. Greenwood's article in Vol. 21, No. 1 of *The GENERAL* are useful. For those expert enough to have a surer sense of battlefield timing, I believe I have come up with a radically different approach which will greatly improve the chances of winning with an outgunned squad.

Squad deployment involves a fine balancing of offensive and defensive considerations. Unlike most Avalon Hill war-games, adding another unit to the *UP FRONT* group does not necessarily strengthen both its offensive and defensive capabilities. In *UF-BANZ-DW*, a RNC is drawn for each member of a group which is being fired upon. A solitary soldier firing at a ten-man group draws ten cards, if he happens to have a playable Fire card. If even one man in the group is pinned, the whole group suffers substantial penalties. The group cannot entrench; it cannot remove Wire cards played on its position; it cannot move (although you may play terrain cards if moving already). The only alternative to a Rally card is the desperate act of voluntarily panicking die pinned men and losing them for the game. Therefore, while each additional man in a group increases its potential firepower, it also increases the group's vulnerability at the same time. The lower the morale of the additional man, the higher the price paid in group fragility in exchange for that extra gun.

When playing a squad with few movement opportunities, such as the French or Americans, it is tempting to consider creating a ten-man firebase and gambling that fate will produce an early Movement card combined with some strong terrain for cover. Once ensconced at RR1 in Woods or Building or on a Hill, such a group with its RR1 firepower of "11" or "12" would seem tough to dislodge. That was, in fact, my early tactic with the French. But while often effective against the Italians, such a ploy against the Germans is extremely problematic. A 4-6 German formation has more than enough firepower potential at RR1 to keep plenty of lead flying towards the Allied firebase, with ten chances of a pin each attack. The smaller, tougher German firebase is far more likely to stay unpinned, free to entrench, remove Wire, move in flanking positions, and use its full firepower potential. The Allied group, on the other hand, is likely to spend lots of time looking for Rally cards while slowly degenerating into a paralyzed, helpless mob.

My new approach with outgunned squads is one I call "clustering". I use the full four-group width of the *UP FRONT* battlefield to initially deploy small, low-FP, hard-to-pin clusters of two to six men each. Only after reaching good terrain at RR1 do I use individual transfers to augment my offensive punch. Here is the full procedure for the cluster formation:

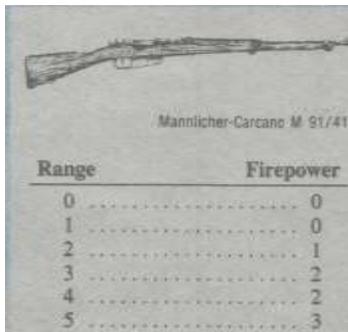
1) Form the five or six highest-morale men (excluding the SL) into a firebase as Group B. This group will always include the ASL for smoke and/or individual transfers, and usually the LMG or BAR. You want the smallest, toughest possible target which can still cause your opponent trouble if he moves for ward too freely.

2) Place the SL in Group D with one or two low-morale men. A third man in this group will lower the odds of a Sniper drawing a bead on Sarge from 50% down to 33%. This group's main task is to keep the SL out of trouble. They may also draw sniper fire away from Group B, which rarely has time for a sniper check. Group D may well put the enemy sniper to bed for keeps. Odd jobs for Group D include using up surplus Movement cards with sideways movement, or a daring dash forward into a Gully for some victory points; expending useless Smoke cards, if the SL has mat capability; and playing low Fire cards, freeing up the firebase for other actions and shifting the risk of a malfunction to where it will hurt the least.

(The only nationality with which I will risk placing the SL with Group A, using the leader as an active combatant, are the Japanese with Okimoto, and the British with Vasey against the Japanese or Italians. The Morale 3 and Morale 4 SLs need all the peace and quiet you can possibly provide them—so they go in Group D.)

### Cluster Formations for Scenario A:

Nationality	Personality Cards in Group:			
	A	B	C	D
Italian	6-7-11-12	2-3-4-8-9-18	10-13-14-16	1-5-15-17
Japanese	1-5-8	2-3-4-6-7	10-11-13	9-12
French	6-8-12	2-3-4-7-9	10-11	1-5
British	6-8	2-3-4-5	9-10	1-7
American	5-7	2-3-4-9-11	8-12	1-6-10
Russian	5-6-15	2-3-4-8-12-13	7-11-14	1-9-10
German	Never	outgunned in the	Patrol	scenario



3) The remaining men are split evenly between groups A and C, with the braver lads in Group A ready to challenge a charge towards victory conditions by any enemy maneuver group.

The way these principles might be played out in the Patrol Scenario are illustrated in the accompanying chart. Compared to traditional groupings, clusters appear so weak offensively that no hope of victory would seem possible. For a neophyte unsure of his card play, this is undoubtedly true. But for experienced players, clusters offer the best way to even up the odds against superior long-range firepower.

First, consider that outgunned squads cannot, by definition, expect to win an early firefight between groups of equal size. The standard six-to-ten man firebase will almost never get to use its full potential firepower. They only allow each fire card played by the superior enemy to wreak maximum possible havoc. The outgunned squad must avoid such unequal contests and bend its entire will to the single preliminary objective of closing the range in good terrain with minimum casualties.

The early portion of the game for outgunned squads will consist of edging first one cluster forward, then another, all the while waiting for the critical moment when Group B can advance with greatest certainty into strong RR1 terrain. The optimal situation would be towards the end of the first deck, with all the Stream and Wire cards accounted for, a playable -3 Building in hand, and the enemy firebase partially pinned. All this rarely happens at once, of course, but it's good to keep in mind what you are aiming for.

Once (if ever) all four clusters have reached RR1, the real strength of the compact firebase with maximum supporting groups becomes apparent. With the ASL in Group B, individual transfers from A to B and from C to B are both allowable. Such transfers utilize a Movement card without the risk of intervening Wire or Stream. The compact firebase, now firmly established in VP-producing terrain, can gradually become a *big* firebase as Fire cards require and Movement cards permit.

Of course, your ASL is mortal, and if killed your SL will need to leave his safe perch on the right flank if you want to keep reinforcements coming. (But then, I didn't claim this was the perfect strategy—just the best I've come up with for outgunned squads.) Most outgunned squads are superior in numbers to their opponents, and often are blessed with higher morale as well. The outnumbered squad cannot allow a slugging match with all groups at RR2 to each other to continue indefinitely; the larger squad will win on Aggressive-action points if he does. Sooner or later, he will be forced to make that terrible leap to RR3. When he does, you must be ready for him.

For the endgame, have in hand at least one Fire card useable at RR3 of FP6 or higher. Ideally, two such cards and/or Wire or Stream should be retained. That's enough to overwhelm the high Concealment card he surely has in hand and force him to choose between rallying on the move at RR3 or arriving in terrain pinned and unable to return effective fire. After that, your patience throughout the game will pay juicy dividends as you play one Fire card after another on your opponent's stricken group. Very soon he will want to resign. Don't let him! You waited a long time for this and you deserve to savor every minute. Enjoy the feeling of bettering the superior enemy with your outgunned squad.

extra Movement cards, I may move a low-morale group forward, just to keep heat off my firebase. With 18 men, I do have some cannon fodder available.

Having arrived safely at RR2, the firefight can continue on fairly equal terms. Now you can start looking for another kind of "pat" hand: terrain, a Concealed or Rally card, a Flank card, and a F7 or F8 card. Playing one of these babies is the equivalent in chess of saying "Mate in four". Now that you can use any Fire card in the deck, you simply keep shooting longer than he can keep rallying. With two LMGs, you've got what it takes to make quick mincemeat of anyone—even the British.

As if the Italians didn't have enough problems, they also have to deal with a special Surrender rule applicable only to them. They are more subject to capture anyway due to their Rout numbers; but in addition to this, any group which is totally pinned at any range will surrender! Fortunately, this isn't as devastating as it appears because they are not irretrievably lost until an opponent infiltrates the group to capture them. So long as they keep their distance, the Italians can regain their nerve by transfer of an unpinned man into the afflicted group. This little national quirk does discourage use of small groups or sending a group alone far ahead of the others.

## The French

The French squad underwent an extreme metamorphosis during play testing. Originally, the French played with a five-card hand. One discard was permitted, only when no other action was taken. Commenting on this at the time, I wrote:

The French squad makes a great history lesson, but a lousy hour of play. Here's the history lesson: give soldiers the best equipment, fine morale, strong numbers, and no flexibility in tactics. Then watch them die. The French squad in this system is like the kid in high school with the sign on his back reading "Kick Me". He's a good-looking, helpless giant.

There are 12 men in the French squad. Eleven carry bolt-action rifles equal to those of the British or Germans. The Chatterault LMG is a fine weapon, more powerful at RR5 than the German MG34 when the firepower of the riflemen not needed to crew it is added in. The average French morale is 3.2, equal to the Germans and better than the British or Americans. They can put out 14FP at RR1 and 15FP at RR2, where most games are decided—that's better than the Germans by two FP. Nevertheless, the French are by far the worst squad to handle of the seven.

Their fatal flaw was inflexibility. They had a five-card hand, and use of the German split-action cards. But they can make only one discard, and that only when no other action is taken. Combine this with a Morale 3 SL, a squad that breaks with just six men lost (out of twelve) and an average Panic level of just 3.8 and you have a debacle waiting to happen.

The first time I playtested the French, I knew instinctively they would need to make just one move—to RR1 in good terrain. Then I hoped to win by attrition with my better weapons. I also saw that this move would have to be made ultra-safe: moving out of covering terrain with a second Movement card, Woods or Hill, and Concealed, Rally or a good RR1 Fire card in hand. "If this group gets pinned in the open," I thought, "their chances of getting out alive are as good as a chicken's at Frank Perdue's place." So, to make the anticipated advance as safe as I could, I made a sideways move in place towards a Woods I had in hand.

They never made it to the Woods. Generally speaking, I don't worry about Wire dropped on my groups at RRO. Enemy fire is too light at that range to discomfit me much while I find the Movement

card necessary to free myself. But the French are not your "general" combat squad. While I started searching, one card at a time, for a Movement card, the Germans moved forward, found a Wall, and started blasting away with 9FP. While I started searching, one card at a time, for a Rally card, the Germans moved forward with their maneuver group and hit me with a crossfire: FP3, then FP9. By the time they had run out of Fire cards, I had run out of men. It was the shortest game of *UP FRONT* I had ever played—or should I say, endured.

Since my playtesting was not done at Central HQ in Baltimore, I do not know the reasons behind giving the French a sixth card. Did the five-card French hand represent a historically inaccurate picture of actual combat capability? Or was the squad simply no fun to play? My own interest in *UP FRONT* centers on its high level of excitement. From that point of view, this change is all for the better, whatever the historical accuracy.

The six-card French squad retains all the other features mentioned above: 12 well-equipped men with relatively good morale and use of the German split-action cards. Their weaknesses remain the low panic values, a squad that breaks easily (at six rather than seven losses), a Morale-3 SL, and of course the single discard. With a five-card hand, the discard limitation was nearly always fatal; the availability of that sixth card changes things enormously.

Like the Americans, British and Italians, the French discard at the cost of doing absolutely nothing else that turn. The French pay twice, however, because they will take in half die cards the others will for the same number of turns lost. It is therefore twice as important for the French to have some action available to them each turn. As long as they can keep *playing* cards, the fact that they can only discard one will be irrelevant.

Here is the significance of that sixth card in the French hand: every time the French are fired on, there is a 16.7% higher chance they will have a Concealed card to play. Every time a man is pinned, there is the same increased possibility of a Rally card in hand. The same holds true for groups needing to move, needing to fire, looking for terrain, and every other action in *UP FRONT*. Over the course of a game, the cumulative effect is enormous. If a full three-deck game is played out, 486 cards will pass through play. Discounting cards used for RNC/PC, somewhere between 150 and 200 cards will pass through each player's hand. On average, a player with six cards will have the appropriate card at the right moment 25-30 times more often per game than a player with five cards and the same number of chances. ("Same number of chances" explains why the German five-card hand is still the best; they can take one or more actions *and* still discard every turn, making a three-card German draw more the norm than the exception.)

The six-card French, therefore, are nobody's patsy. If you can keep them moving, they should win as often as not. If they get pinned in the open without a Rally, they may never get out. So, advance with caution. Keep a Movement card in reserve as long as there is Wire unaccounted for. Remember that the Germans—your usual enemy—can hit you with pinning fire and a Wire or Stream all at once, so you'd best pin their firebase or have a darn good Concealment card in hand before advancing. Against the Italians, on the other hand, advance to RR1 and destroy them.

## The Fiery Sands

When your *UP FRONT* opponent agrees to play a scenario with you employing the new *DESERT WAR* terrain rules, you enter a whole new world. The Woods, Buildings and Walls you hold in your hand become something entirely different from what

the pictures indicate. This can produce some amusing situations. In my first desert playtest, my opponent laid a Stream card on my advancing group; the smirk on his face disappeared when I reminded him that my group was now in a Wadi with a -1 protection against all attacks! Later on, I placed a second Wadi on my own group. In the desert, any cover at all is a godsend.

The best cover is now an Oasis—unless, of course, it's a mirage. A Woods card is removed from play if discarded or played as a RPC/RNC. But if held in hand, it may be played on a moving group. A black RNC lands them in entrenchable -2 terrain, with a +1 for Morale and Panic ratings due to the secure water supply. Such an opportunity is well worth the 50% chance your group will instead find itself a red RNC, and be left clutching at a mirage while still moving.

Entrenching in general is more difficult in the desert. In *UP FRONT*'s original terrain, any "0" RNC would result in successful entrenching—a 27% likelihood. In the desert, a "1" RNC is required; you'll get one 22% of the time. On a Hill (usually a dune crest or rocky outcropping in the desert), a Black "1" RNC is needed—hardly worth trying for at 11%. Still, the +1 attack modification is potentially decisive in a game where your opponent will more often than not be running over open sand. On the other hand, -2 Buildings (now Escarpment) cannot be entrenched in; digging into solid rock is rarely helpful I guess.

Walls are now called "Ridges", but retain all the properties of their original designation. Marsh (now representing Soft Sand) cannot be rejected. Unlike Marsh, afflicted groups can fire their weapons normally. But they get no protection either, except a — 1 on HE attacks, and cannot entrench. Vehicles and Infantry Guns would do well to stay out of it: the vehicles must make a Bog Check with a two-column shift to the left; Guns must make a Morale Check immediately upon entry, and after each Movement card they play while still in Soft Sand. You get out the same way you get out of a Marsh—slowly.

Wadis (the Stream cards) prevent a direct advance, but otherwise aid the occupant. There is no fire restriction out, and a — 1 on any fire in. No Ford card is needed, but exit must be made with the sideways play of a Movement card.

By far the most interesting variation on the standard *UP FRONT* play is the new use for the two Minefield cards. Minefields were used extensively in the desert, but so were "dummy minefields". In desert scenarios, therefore, the Minefields are always in play—but not always real. A player can always reject a Minefield card discarded upon him, but if he accepts it he must immediately draw a RNC to determine if it is a fake or not. If he draws a red or black \* 0", or any red RNC, he has proven himself to be a daring and brilliant tactician. If he draws a black RNC of "1" or higher, he has made what is likely to be his last mistake. This minefield choice will reward players able to keep track of red and black RNCs over the course of a deck.

For those of us who prefer to play on instinct, such a risk should be taken only if the rewards are very, very high. I might chance a Minefield if I was about to achieve the Victory Conditions, or lay down a devastating Flank attack. Otherwise, I'll choose the better part of valor.

New rules on weapon malfunctions may seem innocuous at first, but in fact they cut the Italian's chances of winning in a desert scenario by about half. That's because all weapons have their breakdown range increased by one, and the Italian LMGs will suffer far more than those of their opponents. All German, British and American weapons normally break with a red "6" RNC; make that a red "5-6" in the desert, and their breakdown odds go from 1.9% to 4.9%. The Italian LMGs go from

4.9% to 9.9%. Firing at a six-man group, the chances of firing through the whole group without a breakdown are about 50-50; and the weapon which breaks will be a LMG approximately 64% of the time. If the Italians fire at RRO or RR1, any malfunction applies automatically to the LMG. Italians in the desert would do well to hold their fire unless the potential effect is lethal. That, of course, will allow their opponent almost unhindered maneuver at RRO and RR1. Until he's counted a good number of high red RNCs go by, however, the Italian player really has no choice.

The new joker in the pack is the possibility of a "Sandstorm" at the end of every deck. If a black "6" RNC is drawn, the game ends as the elements take over. Victory points are then used to determine the winner at that point. An ultra-cautious player might, taking this possibility into account, make sure that none of his groups are moving at the end of each deck to ensure the maximum possible VP in case of a storm. But as far as I'm concerned, any squad leader who would delay an advance because of a 1.9% possibility should stick to safer games—like tic-tac-toe.

## Shifting Sands, Shifting Tactics

Because of their fragile LMGs, desert terrain has a more drastic effect on the Italians than on any other nationality. But each squad must make some adjustments; here are a few points:

### *The Germans:*

One hidden advantage the Germans enjoy in regular terrain is their ability, when nothing better offers, to attempt entrenchments and still make a discard. All opponents other than the Russians must choose between the two. This edge is made smaller in the desert, since those extra entrenching attempts will be successful less often.

A second debit is the comparative unimportance of submachine gun fire in desert terrain. With covering terrain so hard to find, the chances of a fire-fight erupting at RR4 or closer are much smaller than they would be in northern climes. In a normal patrol, I will often put both MPs in my German maneuver group, giving them FP16 at RR5. In the desert, I will always use the ASL or SL to crew the LMG, recognizing that the MPs will likely never fire.

Outweighing these problems by far is the vastly increased importance of fire effectiveness at RRO. The German ability to put out four FP at long range is magnified in terrain which will normally allow attacks to come in at full value. It is more likely than ever, in desert scenarios, that the Germans will thoroughly pin their enemy at RRO and then move unhindered to RR1 for the kill with 9FP or more. With Streams no longer a threat to such an advance, only the Wire cards and Minefield cards are available to a pinned defender hoping to save himself from disaster. The Germans are, in any terrain, still the best. In the desert, they are better yet.

### *The Americans:*

If the lessened importance of MP fire is a bother for the Germans, it is doubly a pain for the GIs. Their BAR needs no crew, leaving them with two men who will likely do nothing in the desert but toss smoke grenades. As with the Germans, I will often put both MPs together in normal terrain for potential killing fire at RR5. This despite the fact that it will leave my firebase without possible smoke cover in emergencies. (I don't worry about this with the Germans; they get use of smoke less often—and need it less often than that.) In the desert, the ASL always accompanies the firebase for smoke use. With entrenching more difficult and natural cover at a premium, the large American smoke capacity becomes magnified in its importance. They

will need it to reach RR1 against the Germans—an advance which they must be less conservative in making, now that they are likely sitting in the open while bullets start to fly. Against the Italians, try a ten-man firebase with FP11. You may well destroy them at RR1 before they can make an effective response.

#### *The British:*

The British have only one MP to regret having, and they share the big American supply of smoke grenades. Their Bren gun can attack with 3FP at RRO, second only to the German MG34. Like the Americans, their inability to both attempt entrenching and discard will hurt less in the desert. The biggest drawback they face are lack of numbers and an inflexible five-card hand. If the Germans fire at RRO, they have less chance than the Americans of finding the Concealed, Rally and return Fire cards needed to come through it intact to RR1. With just ten men to deploy, the British player cannot emulate the American tactic of either starting the firebase in A and switching a maneuver group from C to D (see my piece in Vol. 25, No. 3) or putting the firebase in C where it can outflank a German Group B and not be outflanked itself. The British must form a firebase with firepower at least equal to the Germans', and then hope that they get the good terrain and Fire cards first.

Against the Italians, British (as well as American) prospects are naturally much higher. The Italian LMGs can together put out FP3 at RRO, but they would be crazy to try. Any intelligent Italian player will hold his fire until RR2, so that if a malfunction does occur it won't necessarily be a LMG that goes. That gives you the opportunity to advance unhindered to RR1 and rip them apart before they fire a shot. Just be sure they are well-pinned before you advance, to avoid a simultaneous move forward by the Italians. At RR2, they have more guns than anyone.

#### **Loose Ends Department**

Two minor annoyances left over from *UP FRONT/BANZAI* are cleared up with the addition of *DESERT WAR*. First, it is no longer necessary to pile two range chits on top of one another when advancing beyond Range 5. The new counters include Range chits which will carry you through Range 9.

Second, you can now pit every nation's squad against every other with proper OB for each historically relevant scenario. With *DESERT WAR*, you possess a complete cross-referencing of nationalities with scenarios.

#### **Scenarios**

The French and Italians carry all their weaknesses into any scenario you may choose, but those weaknesses will be partially compensated for by reinforced squads or the parameters of some engagements, and exaggerated by others. The following suggestions will help you adjust more quickly to the national quirks as you try each scenario for the first time with the \*minor Major Powers\*.

#### *City Fight:*

Thankfully, Italian Demo Charges are just as deadly as anyone else's. Nevertheless, they actually have less chance of winning this scenario than they do of a standard Patrol. The Italians are granted a Morale "4" SL and 22 men. That still leaves the Italians with one machine pistol. The Germans, by contrast, carry five; the Americans and Soviets each have four. The Italians should therefore try to engage in a firefight at RR3, where rifles are at two FP and MPs are at one. Their DC becomes a defensive weapon, to be used against enemy maneuver

groups who succeed in closing to RR5. Maneuver groups generally number four or five men, and may well be fewer by the time they reach you. That makes them easier to infiltrate than a large group; the attempt should be made while they are still moving, despite the two-column shift penalty. Especially for the Italians, who surrender if pinned and infiltrated, getting the first blast in is crucial.

The French, on the other hand, very possibly have the best city-fighting squad in the game. To compensate for their lack of a MP, they are given a 13th man (Morale 5), plus the usual Demo Charge. I suspect that the designers didn't reckon with the fact that, except in rare instances, an *UP FRONT* submachine-gun is much inferior to a blot-action rifle. (The rare instances are those found in the Paratroop Drop and Surprise scenarios, where an MP gunner can suddenly appear at pointblank range without having to survive unanswered rifle and MG fire at RRO through RR3; otherwise, unless you get all the Gully cards in the deck, the MP-bearing man is going to catch a lot of lead before he starts dishing any out.)

In the City Fight, the French can set up an attack group of five men with an average morale of 4.4. They will be lead by Cpl. Dubois for smoke cover, individual transfers, and use of the "Rally All" card. They will also carry the Demo Charge. The City Fight French SL is Morale 4, so you enjoy the option of risking him with the firebase and kicking the RR1 support up to FP10. Even with three groups, the RR2 firepower will be FP9, enough to battle the Germans on even terms while the tough guys inch their way forward. (Against the Italians, just advance to RR1 and destroy them.)

#### *Assaulting a Pillbox:*

Francophiles might hope that defending a piece of the Maginot Line would be one scenario in which the French would do well. Such is not the case. Pillbox defense requires fast shifting by individual transfers from one threatened flank to the other. No nationality is less suited for such rapid maneuver. If the French, who are given just nine men plus a LMG, form a large firebase in A and put the SL and a low-morale man in the pillbox, they will quickly be outflanked by a high-morale group C advancing with a — 1 RR differential to the French firebase. If they put two men each in Groups A and B, and six men in Group C with the LMG, a direct assault on the pillbox from A will likely get to killing range before much of the Group C men can shift right. Remember that the attackers can make use of Wire cards, forcing the French to keep one Movement in reserve at nearly all times. To give them any chance at all, require the attacker to set up first—unrealistic as that is.

The Italians, by contrast, do quite well as pillbox defenders, doubly well if this is an Italian pillbox rather than a North African fortification. They retain their two LMGs and a 15-man squad. Since the attackers must close the range to put their heavy weapons to use, some very effective fire can be laid down. I put the low-morale SL in the pillbox with the two LMGs and shift the LMGs left or right to meet whichever threat presents itself. If the 12 riflemen are split evenly between Groups A and C, they will carry a potential 13FP at RR2 (and of 21 at RR3) once joined by the LMGs.

This is one scenario where, as attackers, the lack of machine pistols really hurts the French and Italians. Their flamethrowers are just as effective as any other, though the Italians do suffer from having theirs handled by a Morale 3 soldier. But the backup MP fire at RR5 will be sorely missed, if the attackers get that far. A four-man German, Russian or American group with three MPs and a flamethrower can put out FP9 at RR4; at RR5 it leaps to FP27 with no reduction for terrain. Since the Italians would be mad to send their Morale 3

SL into the cannon's maw, their four-man group would be the same as that of the French: FP6 at RR4 and much less likelihood of pinning the enemy firebase before getting to use a theoretical FP20 at RR5. It takes only one buddy with a MP to bring a FT attack up to 17FP; two riflemen must survive to allow a French attack at 18FP or an Italian one at 17FP.

All this makes the role of the French and Italian firebase vital for any success as attackers. Both have the potential to use FP18 cards at RR3, and all effort must go to establishing the firebase at this range before any serious threat with the FT or DC can be mounted. If they can plant themselves at that range in good terrain, the chances of an upset loom large.

#### *Rear Guard Action:*

I can see no earthly reason for anyone other than a masochist to try playing the French in this scenario. In this chase, Movement cards are at a premium for both sides, and the defender is further constrained by his need for cards with a red RNC. The French will do slightly better as attackers, aided as they are by a good mortar and rifles effective at RR1. But it's a luckless German who won't pull away from this squad long before they are able to effect sustained pinning fire.

The Italians have a two-card discard to help them flee, but they are hampered (perhaps fatally) by a near-useless mortar on the attack. The Brixia has a hit effect of just one, and requires a RNC of "\*\*2" at RRO for a hit. Combine that with machineguns that break down and rifles that fire only at RR2 and you have all the makings of a very futile pursuit.

#### *Paratroop Drop:*

Admit it, you didn't know the Italians *had* paratroops. With their 16 men and Morale 4 SL, they have an excellent chance of winning this scenario, even though they are shortchanged in DYO points.

The paratroopers win this fast-paced conflict by getting five men, unpinned and uninfiltred in covering terrain, to RR3. This requires at least one individual transfer among the required four groups before a winning group can be formed. The Italians *start out* with four four-man groups. They also benefit from elite status: they may use German split-action cards and do not surrender when pinned. The defenders can often destroy one Italian group as they land, given a high Fire card and a RR4 or RR5 range. But they will be hard-pressed to stop all the threats which will simultaneously present themselves. For those of us with an Italian heritage, *this* is the scenario to play. Now, should you historian-types tell us about the real Italian daredevils?

This scenario affords the French squad its best opportunity for defeating the Germans. The defender in this scenario has an excellent chance of catching at least two enemy troopers in the open at RR4 or RR5 at the start. With a high Fire card or two, plus infiltration opportunities, these can be dispatched quickly. Especially effective is dropping the German LMG up close and infiltrating its position before he can find a "loader". Then, when the position is taken, the LMG changes hands too. The German paratroop squad has smaller FP at long range than German regulars. If the French can knock off two or three troopers at the outset, they are less likely to be pinned and wired than in other situations, and more likely to put their excellent RR1 and RR2 FP to good use.

Both French and Italians defend with their standard squads, and here the French immobility will hurt them less than in other situations. They can form a firebase at Group B strong enough to use any Fire card against a group landing at RR4 or RR5. Bring the strongest enemy group into close range, even if you momentarily lack that killer card. If you can

knock off the paratrooper SL or ASL and 30% or 40% of his total strength in the early going, your twelve guys will have an excellent chance of beating his six or seven. The Italians, with their 40FP at RR4 and 59FP at RR5 (assuming three groups) should do very well as defenders also. For both squads, the challenge will be moving forward to get close range against the remaining paratroopers after the first group is annihilated. The Italians will be hampered by their small hand and enormous supply of Cover cards. The French will be worse off with their one-card discard. And Italian morale is so fragile that even the low FP attacks the paratroopers can generate may well paralyze them. A fascinating struggle for both sides.

#### *Elite Troops on the Attack:*

The benefits accruing to the *Bersaglieri* are identical to those of the paratroopers mentioned above. The reinforced 20-man squad includes a Morale 4 SL. Their challenge, like that of elite Russians and Japanese in this scenario, will be getting past RR1 against a defender with no incentive to move forward himself. It will be impossible to "guarantee" a safe advance with a four-card hand, but the attempt must be made. I would form four groups, each capable of winning the scenario, and try one advance after another. When I'm as sure as I will ever be that the defender has spent his bullets, I will move my LMGs forward to whatever terrain I've been able to save. If they can make it to RR2, my hopes rise sharply.

Italian Second Line troops (Blackshirts) may only discard one card per turn, and only if they take no other action. Their hopes rest on numbers and their two LMGs. Unfortunately, most attacking Elite squads will have enough firepower at RR1 to make mincemeat of your bully-boys before they can fire a shot. To have a chance, therefore, you must try to make the same simultaneous jump forward with your firebase as is necessary in a Patrol. But now you have just one new card per turn to find the *necessary Movement and terrain cards*. Your chances are slim, but you get two tries. And, if you fail, will anyone fault you? On the other hand, a victory with the Blackshirts will be remembered for a long, long time.

With French Elite troops (Legionaires), you enjoy tactical flexibility besides the high morale and firepower. The 14-man Elite squad substitutes a Morale 4 SL for the basic one (Morale 3), and adds two more Morale 3 riflemen. More important, Legionaires may take one action and still make a discard each turn. This creates the potential for a pinning-fire and Wire/Stream discard combination—often decisive when accomplished at RR1 or closer. It also allows for doubled card flow when a necessary Movement, Rally or Fire card is not in hand. Playing the Legionaires is great fun, often setting me to wondering what might have been if all the troops facing Guderian in 1940 had been trained with similar *elan*. (A two-year war; no Iron Curtain; no atomic bomb; oh well . . .)

French Second-Line troops suffer only by switching a Morale-3 man for the Morale-5 man on the basic squad, and by treating all split-action cards as Cover cards. With their six-card hand and good rifles, they should do best by holding fast at RRO with a ten-man firebase and the SL and a Morale-1 man as Group A.

#### *Partisans:*

Both the French and Italians offer Freedom Fighters, although the Italians are limited to post-1943 actions. The French are rarely bothered by the restriction on actions to one less than their number of groups, since they don't have the flexibility necessary to handle a three-group setup in any case. Reducing their already-low Panic values by one per man,

however, is a severe drawback. Combined with their difficulty in finding Rally cards, any pinned partisan group is likely a dead partisan group. Keep maneuver to an absolute minimum. If you are lucky enough to start the game with covering terrain, dig in and force the Germans to come to you. A seven-man Group B can put out 9FP at RR1—but be careful about using Concealed cards to augment an Ambush fire attack. Unless you are sure the result will thoroughly pin the attackers, you will need every augmented Concealment card you can get to prevent being pinned. For you a successful Rally is a rare and wonderful accomplishment. Your limited card flow will make it unlikely that you will see many opportunities for Sniper fire or Booby Traps, so blast away and try not to think about Gestapo reprisals tomorrow.

#### *Surprise Attack:*

Both French and Italians use their basic squad in this nerve-wracking scenario. The French share with the Germans the dubious distinction of being most-likely-to-be-massacred. They will be discarding one card at a time while they search for the FP1 or Hero card which will begin to free them. The sentry's ability to be able to fire at RR1 can be decisive, if you are lucky enough to have a card he can use while the attackers are still at that range.

The Italians can discard twice as fast, but from a four-card hand which is likely to be loaded with Cover cards. Their sentry cannot fire until the enemy reaches RR2. This is potentially the most humiliating scenario to play as the Italians, since they are more likely to get into a \* "surrender" situation (pinned and infiltrated) here than in any other contest. If they can manage to Rally their two LMGs in a —3 Building, however, a good resistance can be mounted.

The French make poor attackers for the same reason they are poor on defense; they will be searching one card at a time for the Movement needed to set up an effective ambush. With other nationalities, I bring both *my firebase and infiltration group* to RR2 before doubling the sentry's chances of firing by moving either group closer. With the French, I cannot count on getting four Movement cards before the enemy is aroused. I will set up a ten-man firebase in a flanking position relative to the defender's main group and move them, if possible, to good terrain at RR3. I will then try to win by massive firepower alone. The Italians have so many men that two big groups are unavoidable. With their two-card discard capability, they have a decent chance of getting both groups to RR3. The lack of MPs and poor infiltration ability (plus the prospect of untimely surrenders) causes me to halt both groups here and look for high Fire cards. With 20FP for both groups, my chances are good if I get this far.

#### **Team Play**

By now it should be clear that playing the French or Italians will pose a challenge for the most accomplished master, even against a first-time player. That is their main attraction for the true aficionado. But there are two other possibilities which should not go unmentioned: the two are great fun in a match against each other; and Team Play with the Italians and Germans facing off against one or another of the Allies is a fascinating encounter.

A French versus Italian matchup has a lot in common with a French farce or an Italian opera—great heroics, tremendous errors, and balance in the end. I remember an Italian fire attack that began at 7FP and ended up at -1 FP as one weapon after another malfunctioned. In the same game, the French sat around at RR5 to a pinned Italian group for five turns and couldn't force a surrender because they were all pinned too, and could not come up with a single Rally card! The humor in these situations

may be hard for those not among the *cognoscenti* to appreciate, but for those of us in the know it's a laugh riot.

A German/Italian team, on the other hand, is a very serious matter. In the desert they make a formidable pair; out of it, they are odds-on favorite to win against either the British or American squads. The Axis tactics revolve around two unique features of the rules for team play: the ability to fire across the LOS divider in almost all scenarios, at RRO; and the ability of each squad to transfer all or part of its group next to the LOS divider into the partner's squad.

The German LMG (with 4FP at RRO) is able in team play to fire at any group of either enemy squad with powerful effect. Outside the desert, the two Italian LMGs combined are just as strong. The Axis thus has enhanced potential for pinning both enemy firebases at RRO, allowing their own to advance unhindered. The transfer capability is a boon to the Axis team, since Italians transferred to the German player inherit the German hand capacity and flexibility. This offers a magnificent opportunity for defeating the Allies in detail. You can have, in effect, two firebases assaulting one Allied squad while a third Italian firebase holds the other enemy squad at bay. Once the first bunch is dispatched, it's time to switch back and complete the rout with supporting LMG fire.

The Allies will not passively allow all this switching back and forth to go unchallenged, of course. If they can avoid being pinned by long-range fire, they can probably destroy the Italian firebase before the full squad can return to reinforce them. They are more likely than the Italians to find the two Movement cards needed to pull off a transfer of their own. The possibilities are endless in team play, and well worth the added complexity.

*UP FRONT* has been, since its beginnings, the fastest-playing, most intense, and—on the psychological level—most realistic wargame on the market. With the addition of *DESERT WAR*, it is also the most complete. You can now reproduce any conflict of major WWII powers, on any front, of that gigantic struggle. To handle all the nations and environments for the Patrol scenario alone would require twenty rounds of play. It is different from any other kind of game you may be familiar with; if you haven't tried it already, I enthusiastically invite you to begin.

