



WWIII

A Review of GDW's Third World War and Southern Front

by Marion Bates

World War III may not be at all inevitable. It is nonetheless thinkable merely by token of the fact that NATO and the Warsaw Pact exist. These organizations have been formed, propaganda aside, in consideration of a conflict between the two. Such a conflict, considering the military power and the widespread political interests of the principles, cannot fail to become a global one.

In such a war a conflict in Central Europe would become the primary theater of operations, according to popular writers and wargame designers. Treatments of this subject at various levels have been frequent and popular. Recently, we have been blessed with such titles as Yaquinto's *The Red Storm*, Victory's *NATO*, and the subject of consideration here, Game Designer's Workshop's *The Third World War* and its companion games.

GDW's Frank Chadwick has taken on the rather daunting task of creating four new games dealing with the different aspects of our hypothetical Third World War that are all playable separately and also mateable to create larger games on the subject. As of this writing only two of the games have seen publication. The first, *The Third World War*, deals with the conflict in Central Europe only. The second, *Southern Front*, adds the Balkans with scenarios for that front as well as one to combine it with the Third World War. Due for release soon are *Arctic Twilight* which will add Scandinavia, and *Persian Gulf* which will extend the game into the Middle East. This is expected to cover the primary land based fighting in the conflict.

Certainly this project is an ambitious one and, in light of the recent decline in interest in more complex games and so-called "monstergames," even daring. However, GDW has a reputation for producing serious historical game designs without slavish regard for size or

commercial considerations. A look at the Europa project is a dead tip off. Also, the subject is a very popular one, meaning that games on it generally sell very well. The addition of the fronts generally considered peripheral to Central Europe is novel enough to attract a certain amount of interest as well. Finally, Frank Chadwick's reputation as an extremely competent designer commends the game to our attention.

THE GAME SYSTEM

It would have been simple enough to present familiar mechanics in *The Third World War* series and trusted the salability of the subject and the comprehensiveness of the treatment to do the rest. There are quite a few companies who would probably have done so in the past. We are reluctant to speak ill of the dead but SPI regularly resorted to this sort of ploy due to their prolific production schedule and made it somewhat respectable.

GDW, on the other hand, has not made this practice a habit nor have they adopted it for this series of games. Comrade Chadwick has created a variety of mechanical innovations to deal with the variety of novel aspects of the subject. Additionally he has not merely adopted a conventional mechanic merely because it worked "good enough." Indeed there are enough unconventional ideas here to keep even the most experienced historical gamer on his toes. Of course, convention has not been thrown entirely to the wind and has been kept in many instances. The maps for example are overlaid by a standard hex grid.

Each game turn represents one week of real time. Each hex is 45 kilometers across. Ground Combat units are mostly of divisional size through some brigades and regiments are represented where appropriate. Air units represent about 100 aircraft and each is designated according to the dominant type of aircraft in the formation.

The turn sequence is extremely asymmetrical in order to reflect the differing doctrines of the belligerents. Both

sides have two impulses during which to conduct their respective operation. However, each Warsaw Pact impulse provides two sub-impulses during which its units may conceivably move and have combat. The NATO player's include only a single opportunity to move and fight. On the other hand, there is a NATO reserve impulse between the two Warsaw Pact impulses. The Pact is blessed with no such additional impulse.

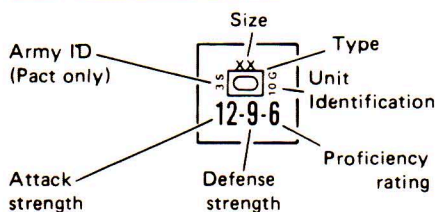
The perfectly reasonable assumption here is that the Pact will adhere to its doctrine of a consistent crushing advance in order to keep the war a short one. This leaves little room for tactical finesse and neither does the sequence of play. NATO doctrine on the other hand is primarily defensive and reactionary which puts a considerable value on subtlety of operations. While being pummeled during the Pact impulses will certainly not be very pleasant for the NATO player, his options for frustrating his opponent will be frequent.

Another tip-off that this system is not at all your average wargame shoot 'em up are the data on the counters themselves. First of all there are no movement factors as all units are assumed to have six movement points and merely expend them differently depending on the type of unit and the terrain being traversed. Now this is not really novel and in fact it barely qualifies as non-standard. The combat factors on the ground units on the other hand are quite unusual. They represent only a factoring of the crude firepower without consideration of matters such as morale and training. This procedure is virtually unheard of in a game of this scale. Why, this is no more than gun-counting.

Well, all this is mitigated by the inclusion of an additional factor which is a representation of the unit's proficiency. Put simply, units with a higher proficiency will perform better in combat and endure more adverse results. By refusing to disguise his conjectures by factoring them into combat strengths the designer has shown quite a bit of courage and will no doubt be subject to all brands of second-guessing — but not in this article.

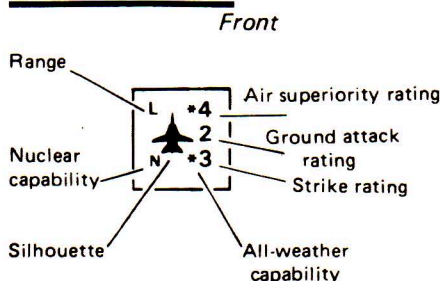
Southern Front Counters

Ground Unit Information

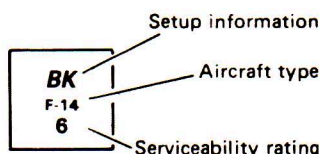


The back of the counter provides setup information

Air Unit Information



Back



Markers

	Disruption
	Strike
	Nuclear Strike
	Devastated City
	Unsupplied
	Odds

“This game is not...your average wargame shoot 'em up.”

This mechanic is a highly educational one and allows respective forces to be analysed by the players in a manner less abstract than is typical of other games. Still, if you think the East Germans are overrated in comparison to their allies (and their opponents) it is not a difficult thing to apply your own modification. Generally, the assessments seem reasonable given the highly conjectural nature of the speculation on the performance of troops who have yet to see action.

Combat between ground units is voluntary and initiated by the phasing player. A fairly conventional odds ratio table is used to resolve combat with such factors as terrain and proficiency modifying the odds column to be used. Combat losses are taken as cumulative disruptions. Each disruption that a unit takes reduces its effective proficiency by one. If a unit's proficiency is reduced to zero it is eliminated. Neat, heh? Also, units that are not eliminated may recover from disruption by not moving or engaging in combat during a friendly impulse.

Given merely the hex scale of the game, a rule allowing units to exert control on adjacent hexes is not really obviously necessary. In Central Europe with the high density of troops we can expect a divisional frontage of 45 kilometers or so is not unreasonable. The problem that Frank Chadwick undoubtedly encountered was that in other theaters where troop density is significantly less divisional frontages would have to be extended. Now to avoid different rules for different theaters we have all-encompassing rule for zones of control.

Every unit has a zone of control that extends into most hexes adjacent to it. Beyond the standard zone of control possessed by most units are airmobile zones that are exerted by units designated as airmobile and by all U.S. divisions. Airmobile zones extend into and through terrain that standard zones of control do not. Zones of control are not at all rigid however. Units moving through enemy zones are merely required to pay extra movement points depending on the mobility class of the moving unit and the type of zone. This helps keep things from getting totally bogged down in areas where counter density is high but all restricts fluidity of movement elsewhere.

One criticism that can be leveled here though is that all units regardless of size exert the same zone of control. This is a

bit hard to swallow since it its difficult to imagine a brigade with the same frontage as a full division. Also, French divisions are quite small compared to other NATO divisions. This should be recognized however as the sort of compromise that must be made once in a while if a game is ever to become a final product. The rule could be fine tuned by players so inclined but failure to do so will not affect play in any noticeably adverse way and that's what's really important, isn't it?

While this is primarily a land combat game the effects of air operations have been carefully considered in its mechanics. The air rules are not as complex or detailed as they might be but they do have profound effect on how things operate. In fact a real balance has been struck here between simulation necessity and play value.

Air units are based off the board according to which theater they are assigned. Different units have different ranges which dictate whether they may operate out of their theater or perform deep strikes into enemy territory. Each air unit is rated in three separate categories. The first is its air superiority rating. This is a measure of an air unit's capabilities against other air units. Next is the ground attack rating. This is a quantification of its effectiveness in providing close attack support for friendly ground units. Finally, each unit has a strike rating which is a measure of the unit's capabilities in a variety of air-to-ground missions. Of course how a unit is used is based on where its strengths lie.

There are a broad spectrum of missions including air superiority, logistical strike, runway cratering, strike / interdiction, as well as ground attack. Air units performing missions are also subject to air defense fire after they survive air superiority missions. Players will do well to husband their air forces carefully as they can have a critical effect on the outcome of the game and they can prove extremely vulnerable.

Logistic considerations are typically included in a game at this scale but the treatment here is anything by typical. Supply is not, as in other games, available in unlimited amounts subject only to the maintenance of a supply line. Indeed, maintaining a supply line is not really essential at all. The only thing resembling such a convention is a rule requiring units to be able to trace a line of communications to a friendly supply

“There are enough unconventional ideas here to keep even the most experienced wargamer on his toes.”

source in order to avoid isolation. This however has nothing to do with supply and its effects are a temporary reduction in proficiency and an inability to recover from disruption.

Units become unsupplied as a result of logistical air strikes or optionally in the case of strategic nuclear exchange or Pact logistical breakdown (more on these later). During the supply phase of a turn, each player resolves the above procedures to discover how many enemy units (in brigades) are unsupplied. Then the players pick which enemy units they are. At that point the owning player may provide emergency supply for these units by putting other friendly units out of supply on a two for one basis. That's the sort of thing that can really take the punch out of an offensive build up.

Of course there are strategic and political considerations. For example, many countries such as Austria and Yugoslavia begin the game as neutral but may later become belligerents due to the pressure of events. Incidentally, only Albania will join the Warsaw Pact. This may happen as a result of being invaded, the draw of a chit, or the behavior of neighboring countries. Also, it is possible for some of the belligerents to withdraw partially or entirely due to unacceptably high losses. Countries may also surrender.

A game on the next war would hardly be complete without rules dealing with the possibility of such a conflict becoming nuclear. Whether it is a pleasant thought or not, it is a definite possibility considering the sheer numbers of nuclear weapons available to both sides. According to designer Chadwick, it would be realistic to play with them but their effects would tend to dominate every aspect of the game. In play we have discovered that the use of these rules creates a whole new game bearing little resemblance to the non-nuclear game. It might behoove players to try it both ways.

The most striking feature of the rules on nuclear warfare is how little control the players have on the outbreak, escalation, and de-escalation. Conflict levels may vary from level 0 (no nukes) to level 5 (strategic nuclear exchange). Each turn the die must be rolled twice in turn to see if the level of conflict increases or decreases. At this time either player may modify either or both die rolls by one up or down. The die roll needed is additionally affected by the current level of conflict. The higher the

current level of conflict is the more likely escalation is to take place.

The level of conflict dictates how many nuclear attack points (NAP's) each player has during the current game turn. These may be delivered by field artillery, theater nuclear missiles and aircraft. In fact, any aircraft designated as nuclear capable can make a logistical strike / interdiction mission a nuclear one. The effects are predictably devastating. If conflict level 5 is reached then things become extremely dodgy. First, each side may only recover disruptions from two units per phase. During each supply phase the players roll one die to determine the number of air units grounded for the phase due to lack of supply and another die roll for ground units unsupplied. As for reinforcements, they just stop showing up at all. In addition, each player may launch a strategic strike on one of his opponent's cities. The city is then considered devastated. No unit may enter that city during the next turn and any units entering it subsequently must pay an additional two movement points. Any units unfortunate enough to occupy the city at the time of the strike are eliminated.

THE THIRD WORLD WAR

COMPONENTS: Two 17" x 22" map-sheets, 480 die cut counters, one 8 1/2" by 11" 16 page rulebook, one reference / background booklet, one Unit Identification chart, two player aid cards, two Aircraft Status Charts, and a six sided die.

While of the two games of the series considered here **The Third World War** is the more complex, it manages to offer the most straight forward scenarios. The Warsaw Pact player must attempt to bludgeon the NATO player into submission early in the game with his superior numbers thus endeavouring to force the issue before reinforcements, particularly from the United States, become a problem. The standard scenario is played in eight turns but frequently decided much earlier. The fact is that if the Pact player fails to achieve most of his objectives early on in the game he will likely never do so. In order to win he must earn victory points which can be had only by the possession of cities.

Nonetheless, the Pact player must not fall into the trap of orienting his strategy strictly toward the capture of geographic objectives. While there may be no vic-

tory points in the destruction of enemy units, this will decrease his ability to effectively counterattack in the later stages of the game.

The NATO player must be quite a bit more subtle in his play. He should conduct a mobile defense in general trading territory for time at a careful rate. His air power will be critical and must be used with finesse. While the system practically guarantees the NATO player air superiority in any turn he cares to have it, he must take care when to actually contest the issue. Air units are difficult to replace and impossible to survive without. They are NATO's most important force multiplier and trading the NATO air forces for the Pact air forces will lead invariably to a defeat for the NATO player.

Things are not much different in the short scenario of three turns or the extended one of twelve. The only difference really is how long you have to stare at the map. The three turn scenario is an excellent way to familiarize oneself with the game system. It also gives you some experience handling the substantial stacks of counters. It is not particularly delightful to play as it is not long enough to really get a good feel for the subject and the strategies. In the extended scenario both players may observe the eventual collapse of the Pact offensive, assuming that it hasn't already achieved smashing success early in the game, and a major NATO counteroffensive. It's an interesting experience but one requiring a great deal of time and stamina.

All above comments are based on the non-nuclear game. Playing with nuclear rules will give a more realistic scenario but play will be completely unpredictable and, as stated before, the nuclear aspect of the conflict will come to dominate things after a while. There will be no winners in a nuclear war and the rules should only be used to examine the ramifications of the use of these weapons on the modern battlefield. Their play value is minimal.

Southern Front

COMPONENTS: Two 17" by 22" and one 8" by 17" map sections, 360 die cut counters, one 16 page 8 1/2" by 11" rulebook, one reference / background booklet, two player aid cards, one Unit Identification Chart, two Air Status Charts, and two six sided dice.

What **Southern Front** lacks in counter density and massive troop movements it

more than makes up for in subtlety of play. The war for the Balkans provides tremendous military and political possibilities and the game reflects many of them.

The most notable factor in the game after struggling with **The Third World War** is the lack of counters. In fact, in most of the scenarios both players will be hard pressed to maintain a continuous front and this will make for some very mobile fighting. In addition, where there are so few ground units air power plays a disproportionately large role. Fortunately though there are also many fewer air units for both sides.

The standard scenario is again eight turns long. It assumes that Rumania, Hungary, and Bulgaria will stand fast with their Soviet allies and that Turkey and Greece will honor their NATO commitments and stand shoulder-to-shoulder to stem the Red Tide. Now the prospect of Greece and Turkey fighting anyone but each other is an odd one but not necessarily impossible. In addition, it is a pretty high order of probability that Yugoslavia will join against the Warsaw Pact. Conversely that Albania may join the Pact. These variables are established by the draw of a chit.

The standard scenario is a real change from the one in **The Third World War**. In-

stead of an irresistible Warsaw Pact juggernaut you get some extraordinarily mobile fighting in which the Pact forces may suffer serious reverses in the early stages. Only later with the arrival of Soviet reinforcements will the Pact be able to prosecute much of an offensive. And this might be pointless if he needs to recapture substantial tracts of real estate in Bulgaria and Rumania.

The Balkan Entente scenario is one that seldom plays the same way twice. This assumes that Rumania, Greece, and Yugoslavia, have entered into a loose confederation and declared their neutrality. This leaves only Bulgaria and Turkey in direct contact and nearly compels a Soviet invasion of Rumania in order to maintain a war effort against Turkey. However, hostile military activity against one member of the entente carries with it the danger of bringing the other members into the struggle.

The Pact player who simultaneously finds himself at war with Turkey, Rumania, Greece, and Yugoslavia will have a formidable challenge indeed. However, this scenario also creates the possibility of the Pact eliminating his potential foes one at a time. It is at times something of a crapshoot but makes for a pretty wild game.

Other scenarios are also suggested. Some of the suggestions include a neutral Rumania with Greece an active belligerent from the outset or even the opposite. It is pointed out in the rules, "Balkan politics are sufficiently uncertain that no combination is beyond the realm of possibility." Indeed, any study of the history and the contemporary politics of the region would seem to bear this out. Players should allow their imaginations to run free and just ignore the victory conditions in some of the wilder possibilities.

In Tandem

There is a scenario for playing **The Third World War** and **Southern Front** together. On the surface it seems to add a lot of possibilities but in play it proved to add little more than space and time.

First of all, only the Pact player has the reasonable option of diverting troops from the Central Front to the Balkans or vice versa. However, there is little value in doing so. The tandem scenario is most likely to be won on the Central Front anyway though the Pact cannot afford to weaken defenses in the Balkans. Certainly players may experiment with these possibilities but our experience

Example of Play: The Fall of Denmark

All in all, the first turn has gone well for the Pact Player. His main thrust through the North German Plain met heavy resistance but he succeeded in capturing both Lübeck and Kiel which secures the Baltic for Amphibious activities. In addition Hannover is in Communist hands, Hamburg is invested and isolated, and Bremen under attack. A feeble NATO counter-attack against Hannover succeeded only in bleeding several U.S. units white. Air losses in the first turn were high for both sides but this will be more of a difficulty for the NATO player.

An invasion of Denmark is a good idea at this point. It will gain the Pact player Kobenhavn and secure his left flank. In addition it will permit him to use his Marine units which otherwise will be wasted.

The defense of Denmark is in the hands of the Jutland Division which has suffered three disruptions during its operations during turn one. It has limped back to its starting point on the southern

border of Denmark (0917). The 1st and 2nd Zealand Mechanized brigades defend the capital of Kobenhavn.

In order to compel the surrender of Denmark the Pact must capture all her cities. This is made especially difficult by the fact that the bridges to the Danish islands containing Odense and Kobenhavn are considered full sea hex sides due to the fall of Kiel and Lübeck. The Pact player decides that a combined amphibious / airborne assault is in order.

On the first impulse, first echelon movement the Pact player sends two fresh divisions from the 1st Guard Tank Army (the 6th and the 11th) to mop up the Jutland division and the Danish mainland. The 7th Guard Mechanized Airborne division attempts a landing at Odense (1019), the 103rd mechanized Airborne at 0820, and the Polish 6th Airborne at Arhus (1219), the 103rd mechanized Airborne at 0821, and the Polish 6th Air-

borne at Arhus (1219). Much to the NATO player's amusement, the Polish 6th Airborne fails in its attempt and is compelled to return to Poland. Also, the Baltic Marines land at 1020.

The only combat at this point is the Soviet 11th and 6th guard versus the Jutland Division. The basic odds are determined to be 3 to 1. The Pact player declines to add air support while the NATO player commits an A-10 unit to aid the Danish unit in its defense. The A-10s survive subsequent air defense fire.

When the final odds are figured the difference between the effective proficiencies of the Soviet units (6) and the Danish unit (2, thanks to three disruptions) gives the Pact player an offensive odds shift of 3 columns. The A-10 gives the NATO player a shift of 2 columns. The final odds are 4 to 1. The die roll is 3 resulting in no effect to the attackers while the Jutland division suffers an additional disruption and must retreat two hexes (to 118).

During the second echelon movement of the impulse the 6th and the 11th guard divisions pursue the Jutland division to 1017. The combined Airborne / Amphibious force moves in to at-

seems to dictate that there is little value in them.

Of course there is the addition of Italy which is not available in **The Third World War** and is not of much use in **Southern Front**. The fact though is that little if any fighting will take place there.

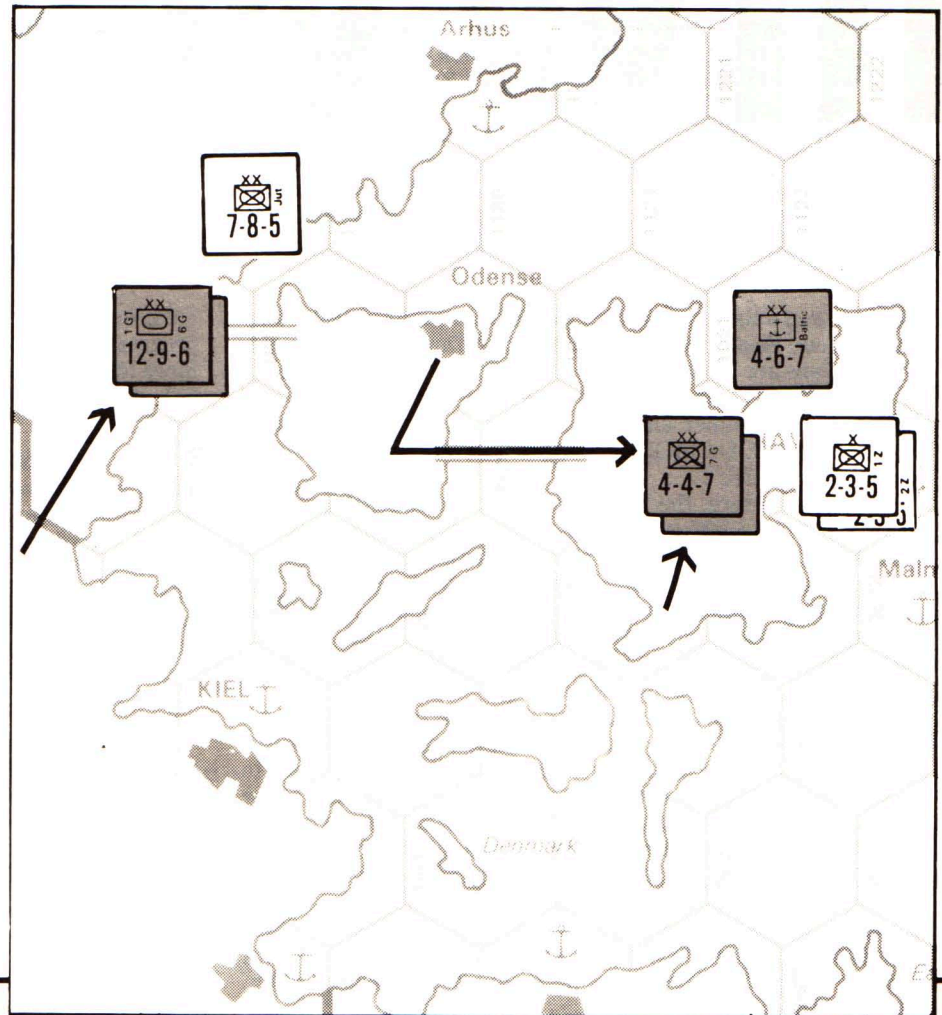
Perhaps with the addition of the other two modules in the series and some rules for strategic deployment we can look forward to a fascinating strategic monster. The first two games played together offer little more than the game played separately. However, it might be worth your while if you have more than two players, a good amount of time, and ample space.

All of these games are creditable offerings.

Conclusion

The Third World War offers as close to a definitive treatment as we are likely to get at this level that is still playable. Anyone serious about the subject will prefer GDW's treatment.

We look forward to the completion of this series. It promises a little something for just about everybody. We'll likely get four very playable and interesting games out of all this. What more could you ask?



tack Kobenhavn; the Baltic marines to 1021 and the 103rd and the 7th guards mechanized airborne to 0921. The Soviet 6th and 11th guard again attack the Jutland division at basic odds of 3 to 1. The combined amphibious / airborne force attacks the 1st and 2nd Zealand brigades at basic odds of 2 to 1.

Neither player bothers to commit any air to the attack on the Jutland division. For the Pact player it isn't necessary while the NATO player finds it pointless — almost the same thing. The adjusted odds due to the proficiency difference between the units (now 4) is 6 to 1. A 2 is rolled which eliminates the Jutland division entirely.

For the attack on Kobenhavn, the Pact player sends in a Soviet Blackjack bomber unit escorted by SU-27s. They are intercepted by a U.S. F-15 unit. In the ensuing air combat, the SU-27 unit receives a "SH" result which means that it is halved when it fires against the F-15 and then considered shot down. It fires back at the F-15 and aborts it, requiring it to return. The F-15 is not permitted to attack the Blackjack bomber. The bomber survive air defense fire as well.

The Soviet units operate with a proficiency decrease of 1 due to their isolation but this still gives them an offensive shift on their attack. The Blackjack bombers add another 4. However, the city provides a defensive shift of 2 in favor of the Danes. The final odds are 5 to 1. A 4 is rolled on the die. All the Pact units take a disruption but the Danes take 3. They would have been required to retreat as well had they not been defending in the city.

At this point the NATO player takes his Reserve Impulse but it has no bearing on the events in Denmark. The defenders in Kobenhavn wait patiently (as cardboard does) for the next Pact onslaught.

In the First Echelon movement of the second impulse, the 6th Guards unit moves into Arhus (1219) while its companion, the 11th, moves south to aid in the reduction of the Hamburg Garrison. A Disrupted Polish 6th airborne unit lands at 1021 successfully while the Polish 7th Amphibious division lands at 1022. The attack on Kobenhavn is pressed.

With the addition of the Polish units the basic odds are now 3 to 1. Neither side can spare any air units to the battle so the only modifiers are -2 for the city and +2 for the difference in proficiencies. The final odds then are also 3 to 1. This is by no means a sure thing and so the Pact player loudly prays for a high number. Fate perversely provides him with a 6: an exchange. This eliminates the defenders but also brings about the loss of the Polish reinforcements (of course). Perhaps not too high a price to pay.

During the Second Echelon movement the Baltic Marines liberate the city of Kobenhavn and bring about the surrender of Denmark. The Danish unit garrisoning the isle at 0625 surrenders. The invasion of Denmark is a success though with the loss of the Polish elite units and the SU-27s an expensive one.

Incidentally this turn also saw the fall of Hamburg and Bremen. Soviet units are poised for a thrust into the Netherlands and the Ruhr Valley. The NATO player will eventually lose this game but only by three points.