SCENARIO DESIGN TUTORIALS!

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This guide is compiled from a series of weekly (more or less) posts that Wild Bill Wilder had made on the Matrix Games SPWaW Forum in 2000 & 2001 plus tips solicitied from gamers on that forum. I have the privilige to compile this with the permission and assistance of Wild Bill. My contribution is solely to format that information into a single HTML document. I can claim credit for none of the intellectual property here but all the format errors are mine. My intent in preparing this is to capture this great information and make it readily accesible to the game in one place, instead of having to search old forum threads for each lesson.

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Lesson #1 Getting Started

Well, my hearties! It's time to start. We are beginning our first class on scenario design. This one is open to all, aspiring designers and veterans of the art.

Where do we begin? We begin with an attitude and a desire. The attitude is positive. "I can do this!" And you can. Believe it. When this is over, you'll not only believe it, you'll know it.

The desire is to be creative. Any healthy human being loves to be creative. A wargamer and a lover of military history wants to create. He wants to create or recreate the feeling of battle, what is like to be there, to command, to make decisions and live by them, good or bad.

So where do we begin?

We begin by choosing something to create. Let's create a battle in World War II, using SPWAW as our tool.

I'll give you principles and ideas. You use them in practice.

The first major step in building a scenario is - CHOOSE YOUR BATTLE.

I could choose one but it might not be one that you particularly care to work on. So choose your own.

Let me suggest here that you pick something that appeals to you. It might be a big or small battle. And be specific. Not just the Battle of the Bulge, or Kursk, which are actually hundreds of small battles.

Pick one. Or at least pick a big one from which you'll make your small one.

Remember, SPWAW is battalion sized or smaller battles. We are not after size here.

Of course, it can be hypothetical. Even so, you would want it within the parameters of a particular time and place. So research is important either way.

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1. This brings me to my first rule. Size is NOT important. "Bigger" is not always "better."

It is more difficult to create a small battle than it is a big one. In a big one you can cover mistakes. You can't do that very well in a small one.

What area appeals to you? Pacific, Western Europe, North Africa, East Front? From there be more specific. Or is there a particular fight you've always wanted to see in Steel Panthers? Well, why don't you make it?

This will mean some research. You will need to get some background information on the battle.

Where do you get that? Lots of places. Many internet sites offer good info on battles of World War II, some of them based on specific units, such as the 101st Airborne, or the Das Reich Division. Look on the web.

Or, go to your local library. Look over there military history section. See what you can find.

Or, if you have a friend or relative with books on WW2 military history, check on what they might have.

Visit some of the online bookstores, and see what they have and what it costs. Here are some with search engines. And many of them will look for a book for you for free.

http://www.sonic.net/~bstone/aberdeen/

http://www.abebooks.com/

http://www.amazon.com

http://shop.barnesandnoble.com/bookshelf/shelf_topics.asp

http://www.shop.pbs.org

http://www.scholarsbookshelf.com/

http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/online/Bookshelves/WW2-List.htm

http://home.fuse.net/nafziger/

http://www.afterthebattle.mcmail.com/home.htm

http://www.merriam-press.com/

http://www.pacificapress.com/

http://www.rzm.com/magazines/atb/atbmap.cfm

http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/world_war_2

You can also get free catalogs from the following bookstores in the mail simply by calling or writing.

Barnes and Noble: Books by Mail 1 Pond Road, Rockleigh, NJ 07647 1-800-843-2665

THe Scholar's Bookshelf 110 Melrich Road Cranbury NJ 08512 (No 800 #)

Miitary book Club 505 Ridge Ave Hanover, Pa 17332 317-541-8920

Zenith Books Box 1, Osceola, Wi 54020 1-800-826-6600

E.R. Hamilton Falls Village, CT 06031 (This guy has fantastic prices on books but you'll have to write and request the catalog. It is worth it.)

If you can't find in one of these, you probably can't find it period!:D

So this week, just find you a battle you want to recreate.

2. The next thing you want to do is to begin thinking about how to recreate this battle in the game. Read about the battle. Picture it in your mind. Think of what it might look like in SPWAW or any other SP game. Get a feeling for what was happening.

Now remember, we are going to create a small to medium sized battle. So we may have to improvise part of the way. We will make a small section of the bigger battle.

If you pick one, post it here. See if there are suggestions from others on that subject. Let's get started.

Next week, Taking the First Steps to doing a battle.

HOMEWORK

Every week, I am going to give you some homework. I can't make you do it , but I hope you will.

I want you to write a text file that will give some background and details about your battle. This will be your text file for your scenario.

It will also focus your thinking and limit your scenario. It will be your guide to making your own battle.

We'll talk about how to fix it up and also the map editor in SPWAW.

If you need some ideas, simply look at some of the intro texts in the scenarios in SPWAW. This will help you to figure out how to do yours.

I'll see you right here then.

Wild Bill

TIPS FOR ADVANCED SCENARIO DESIGNERS

1. You can make your leader a general by going to unit deploy screen for either side. Highlight your A0 unit(or any other unit where you want a general).

Type "D"

Click on leader ratings

Click on "rank"

Type in "10"

Now you have a general in your force! This is how we make Rommel appear in numerous battles in Mega Campaign North Africa.

2. Never put objective hexes under an ammo dump or a command post. If you do the hex cannot be accessed when it is destroyed. Thus, the objective hex cannot be captured by the attacker.

Lesson #2 DON'T GIVE UP!

I was fourteen when my father finally decided it was time that I learned to drive. He was a big man, and captain of the ship, make no mistake about that! It was an old 1941 Plymouth with a big steering wheel and a hard to maneuver gearshift.

I was not at all sure of myself and that uncertainty was not helping matters. The gears moaned and gnashed their teeth as I shoved it into first. I leaned forward so I could see. It was the famous death stare - death grip kind of driving all first-timers have.

I'd only gone a short distance when an intersection with a stop sign loomed before me. I pressed on the brake pedal very gently, too gently. "Brakes!" my father shouted and his shouts always brought immediate reaction.

My father was also an amateur auto mechanic. He prided himself most of all on his brake jobs. I hit the brakes - hard! I stopped. Oh, did I stop! As he unpeeled himself from the dash and windshield he informed me in his inimitable, colorful way that lesson number one was now at an end.

DON'T GIVE UP!

Scenario design within the Steel Panthers Series of games has about the same effect when you first begin to do it. No doubt many of you have wanted to try your hand at it, but have just never really gotten started. Your first efforts you felt were so inadequate, so "amateurish," that you just gave up in dismay.

So let's give it a try, maybe for you another try. Don't expect perfection. That rarely, if ever happens. Don't expect it now.

I hope you did your homework. It is the foundation. What I am giving you now are the building blocks. If you are just joining us, then go back and read the earlier post "Scenario Design 101 - Art of War#1." Then come back here.

So, you know what you want to do. Now, how do you do it? Well, the first building block is Making the Map.

BATTLEFIELDS ARE IMPORTANT

Some people consider this insignificant in the process. Not so! Not so! The battlefield has often determined the victory of a battle, even more than the opponents caught up in the life and death struggle.

The battlefield was one of the key reasons the Germans lost in the Battle of the Bulge. It was what slowed down Marine advances through the island chains of the Pacific. It can have strong effect on the outcome of any battle.

So don't minimize map making. It is very important. And don't try to pass off a game generated map as a creation. Here, as in so many areas of life, ain't nothing like the real thing, baby.

"I'M NO ARTIST!"

"But," you say, "I am no artist." you don't have to be. The artwork is done. It is now a matter of learning

how to utilize it properly. Did you look up at least something on the terrain of the battle you want to create?

What time of year? Was it hilly? Rough? Was it desert, or hedgerows? Start picturing that terrain in your mind. See if you can even find pictures of that type of terrain.

You may not be able to create an exact likeness of the area of the fight, but you should be able to find out the general lay of the land. If you can't do that, then you need to think of another theme for your scenario.

Before you begin, however, I want you to take a day or two and just look around. Many of you live in big cities. Some live in "the country."

HOW DOES THE REAL THING LOOK?

How do things look? How are hills shaped? Why do roads and rivers have twists and turns?

Remember, both natural and man-made terrain and objects are that way for a reason. Roads bend for a reason; rivers and streams snake their way across the land for a reason.

Road builders would much prefer long flat straight stretches of road. Most curves in a road are there because it is easier to curve the road than to overcome whatever is in front of it. Trains will go around a steep hill if possible. If not, they excavate a tunnel. Waterways will go around high ground.

Why say all of this? Because many people make maps in the game with twisting roads and rivers when there is no reason for it. It just does not look natural.

Riverbanks invariably have foliage, sometimes thick foliage. Where there is water, there will be trees or plant life in abundance. And even forests have breaks in them. Only a few (like the Hurtgen) are so thickly packed with large trees.

What I am getting at is that you want a "natural" looking map. If there are hills, they are nearly always more than a "bump" on the map. Hills slope gradually and they follow a contour level with an occasional dip or twist.

I could go on and on but you get the point.

Keeping all that in mind, I want you to now consider your map. But before you begin designing it, I am going to ask you to do the following. This is a step I want you to take in nearly each step of this process.

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Open the SPWAW editor. Start the game; go to solitaire play, then editor.

Then pick in the center of the screen "Summer (It should already be set to summer - that is the default setting)." Then click on edit. Notice in passing that there are five types of terrain. There is Desert, Summer, Winter, Jungle and Rough. Only this version of Steel Panthers has so many choices in this area. You'll want to look at all of them.

Now what do you see opening to "Summer" - "Edit?" Just green, lots of green. Okay, that is your canvas. You are now going to paint a map, but before you do, I want you to learn all the buttons on your right,

or at least know what they do.

Some are merely tools. Others are terrain graphics and many of them have more than one choice.

YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Your assignment for this week is to take the time to use ALL of these buttons and see just what they do. Try them all. Try all the options.

When you have filled up that map, simply click the erase button, type "y" and start over.

If you ever get something you like and want to keep, click on the diskette (save) button. Then save it to an open map slot, giving any name you choose.

For some ideas of what can be done, browse through the maps you have in your version of SPWAW and get some ideas.

MORE ON SAVING TO COME LATER

Now I will touch upon "saving" your work next week in more detail. It is not a big concern as yet but it will be, believe me as we go further in this process.

LEARNING BY DOING

Remember, this will only help you by doing. Just reading is NOT enough. You must also DO. You'll never be a good mapmaker, driver, musician or lover ;) , unless you practice. I got better using the brakes in the car because I practiced.

You'll begin to get the feel for map making by using it. And keep practicing this week. Get comfortable with what it will do and won't do. Some things won't work. Find out for yourself what will and what won't.

I learned how to make maps by trial and error. So did every other designer. So will you. There is no shortcut...no magic. You gotta "do" to learn.

QUESTION?

Now, you have your assignment. Please do it. If you have questions about the process of map making, post them here this week and I or other competent scenario designers will do our best to answer them for you. Remember to look at some of the sample maps already in the SPWAW game for some suggestions as to what you might do.

Advanced Tips:

1. Does that dull "clunk" sound annoy you each time you click on the map or in the game?

You can remove it by going to the SND directory of SPWAW and moving the 1.wav file to the save directory. I did not delete mine, just moved it to another directory. Now when I click in SPWAW, no "clunk!" I like that!

2. You know of course, that you can mix terrain features. For late fall, early winter, or early spring, I use a mix of summer and winter terrain features.

I would suggest practicing with it and see how it looks. Don't overdo it. Also use winter trees for the above mentioned seasons.

3. Speaking of trees, there are winter trees that looked "burned out." Pick the ones with no snow, and notice that they have no foliage. These are good for shelled areas. I also use them for areas like Tunisia where a lot of foliage is just not abundantly green.

4. Then if you want some interesting terrain, mix your rough terrain using the desert rough for Pacific islands, coral reef, and underneath runways. It gives a good effect.

5. Want a building, even a multihex building on fire? It can be done. Pick the building you want. Click in a tree icon in the same hex. Keep clicking until you get a small one that fits under the building nicely.

Then smash it with a large crater. Click on it two or three times until you get the level of fire you want.

I find this very effective when use "multi-hex" rubbled buildings. It leaves a smoldering effect in the ruins.

Wild Bill

Lesson #5 Settings

Man, we have covered a lot of ground, but I'm sure it hasn't been fast enough for those of you anxious to get your own battle completed.

I hope you finished your map last week. You should have added any details you wanted, mud around the riverbank, maybe a few rough hexes on those hills, and those farms done.

Well now, it is time to review that text file we published a few weeks ago. Do you remember it? It gives us the scope and intent of the battle. The text file should be your guideline in making your map, picking your units and setting your objectives.

Here it is again, to refresh your memory :

_____THE BREAKOUT*
*
_____Meeting Engagement:*
_____US Army vs Germany*
*
_St Pois, France, Aug. 5, 1944*
Location: Near St. Pois, France*
_____Turns:10*
*
Scenario Design:
**
The massive bombing raids near St. Lo have left most of the German defenders either stunned or dead.**
This is your chance as part of the US 70th Tank Battalion for the breakout from the hedgerows into open country.**
You will take your tank forces and move south. You are to seek out German armored forces, remnants of 2nd Panzer Division that might be in the area.*
When you find them, you are to destroy them and take the objectives
*

What we are about to do now is probably the most important part of the scenario design. We are going to feed into this scenario all the particular data of this battle. You will want to double check all of these settings to be sure that they are correct. Let's start the editor, load our map and get to work. Once the map is loaded, you will work for the moment in the main scenario editor screen.

The Opponents

Using the text file as our guide, the first thing we want to do is set the nationalities. Who is fighting whom in this scenario? Read the text file and see.

Now, whichever side you prefer be used by the human player should be the first nationality. We know that the combatants are the US and Germany. For the sake of uniformity let's make the US the human player (Nationality #1).

Click on the first nationality flag (should be German right now) and then click on the US flag. Change the second one to German in the same way.

The Type of Battle

In the center you want to be sure that you set the scenario as a meeting engagement.

Briefly, you have three types of battles: meeting engagements, advance and delay, and assault and defend. Their names tell it all. A meeting engagement means that both sides are moving and headed toward each other. In this type of scenario, the objectives are usually neutral.

The other two are offensive setups with one player defending objectives while the other player tries to take them. In this case the objectives would initially belong to the defender.

Now as you develop your skills, you will learn how to mix these in scenarios by using the tools within the editor. You can then have one side defending and build in a counterattacking force for the defender. But that is for later.

The Other Settings

Look at the bottom of the main editing screen and you'll see the places to set the date, time, weather, sighting distance and the number of turns. Most of this information we have already decided upon and put into the text file. We don't have the exact hour but we can set it for a day battle.

REMEMBER! If you want a night battle, you must set the time between Midnight and 6AM or from 20:00 Hours (8 PM) to Midnight. When you do that, adjust your sight distance accordingly.

1. Date: This is very important because the game looks at the date you have set and allows you to pick units appropriate to that time frame. You can't have a Tiger or a Pershing tank in 1941. So set the date as August 5th, 1944.

2. Scenario Hour: Since we don't know the exact hour of the battle, let's set it for 3PM (13 - military time).

3. Scenario Length: We have already determined that we want the scenario to be 10 turns in length.

4. Visibility: This setting determines just how far your units can see, discounting line of sight (LOS) obstacles. I use "20" as my default visibility setting. More on that in a moment.

5. Scenario Weather: The numbers here represent the type of weather you want, 1 being ideal weather and 5 being the worst kind of weather. The numbers 2,3 and 4 vary the possibility of inclement weather. As the number gets higher, the greater the possibility is of bad weather.

Here again, bad weather can affect visibility just as the time of day (or night). Keep that in mind when you set this. Let's set ours as a beautiful summer day in France. We'll set it at "1."

Now look to the right of the editing screen and you'll see a bar titled, "Battle Location." This tells the player just where the battle occurred. What is the location? Read your text file again. Okay, now click on the bar, type in "Near St. Pois" and hit enter

Well now, our scenario is set up and we are ready to pick our units. Question: Why do we do this first? Think about it. How will the settings affect how we pick and deploy units? I'll let you answer this one yourself.

If you have followed the text file you should have the date as August 5, 1944, the time as 13 (1300 hours or 3PM), length of scenario, 10 turns, visibility =20, and the weather as "1." And we have given our battle a location.

One more thing to do in this lesson. Look to the upper right of your editing screen. Click on the "buy" button under the US flag. A new screen pops up with an US HQ unit. That is a default purchase that the computer will ALWAYS make. Don't buy any units. Just click on exit.

Do the same for the German side. Click exit and go back to main editing screen.

Now save your scenario setup. Remember, up until now we have only saved our map. Now we are saving the entire scenario, at least as far as we have taken it. Look over your settings one more time to be sure they are right, then hit the save button. Scroll your list of scenarios until you find the slot where you want to put it.

Remember to put it into a blank slot. If you click on a slot that already has a scenario name in it, you will overwrite it. So be careful where you click!

When you click on the slot a black screen will appear. You are going to type in the name of your scenario. What did we name it? "The Breakout." Okay, that will be the name you will type now. After typing it in, hit the enter key. Now your work to this point is saved.

All right! Good job. Let's double check our work so far. You should be back in the main editing screen. Click on the load button to the right, just above "Battle Location." Scroll (or with version 5.0 type in the scenario number) till you find your scenario. Click on the name you just typed in. Boom! You are back at the main editing screen but your scenario is loaded.

Remember, you can do anything you want with this scenario, anything, and it will not affect your previous work until you click on the "save" button.

We have done enough for today. Click now the exit button. In version 5.0 you will be asked if you want to save the scenario. Just type N because you have already saved it and nothing has changed.

Next week, we will pick the forces for both sides. Be thinking about what kind of units should be included. Do some research on the breakout at St. Lo and also try to find out what types of units were involved on both sides.

Lesson #6 Choosing Units-Modification

 Up until now we have done our background study, made our map, set the scenario parameters (the settings, date, etc) and now we come to what I consider the best part.

I have my battleground, but I need warriors. To try to be as accurate as possible, I find the names of the battalion sized groups involved in the fighting and then go to my source books to find out just what units are incorporated into these formations.

For this kind of information, you will need books or other documents that give listings of the contents of military formations for the various countries. For US forces, Gerald Stanton's "U.S. Army of Battle in World War II" does quite nicely.

For German orders of battle, a number of sources are available including Nafziger's books of the very well done "Panzertruppen 1 and 2," by Jentz.

As you know SPWAW allows you to have individual tanks and small squad sized units on a very realistic looking map. You are looking down on them as though you were viewing the scene from an airplane. I like that feel of close-in fighting, and this new game gives a realistic look to tanks and vehicles like they've never had before.

Usually in the case of larger numbers of units, I write down in a spiral notebook I keep handy the formation names. Then I figure out what units go under each formation. Once I determined what the units for both sides were as nearly as possible, I went back to the Scenario Editor and began choosing them.

I like this part of the building process. I have the feeling of just having walked into this big, very big supply depot and pointing to this tank, saying, "I'll have three platoons of those Shermans and two platoons of those M-10 tank destroyers, and…oh, give me about a dozen of those half tracks. No, those over there, the ones with two machine guns."

Picking units can be a highpoint, but I try to stick within the confines of what I am sure was really involved in the battle.

This process is not as long as preparing a map and is probably more fun. To pick units for both sides requires anywhere from one to four hours, more or less. All of it again depends on the size of the battle I am trying to portray. I have to keep in mind, however, that without that good map, all those units are a wasted effort. So I am building, one step at a time.

In the scenarios I create, I am rarely ever happy with many of the original settings or lower formations as they appear in the game. For that reason I am constantly changing these. For example, I try to show battle losses. In a squad that normally has a complement of eleven, I will change the number to eight. Very few infantry squads that had been in battle very long still had all of its complement. Wounds, death, illness, all take their toll and replacements are not always forthcoming.

The same is true with tank platoons and other formations. Often I will remove a tank from a five tank platoon. Here again, repairs and losses take their toll.

I also enjoy renaming the units to their historical equivalent. The game will not allow me to always type in every detail, but I can put in enough to give a unit its own identity.

It is a simple process. Once the units are chosen, simply click on a unit, then hit the "d" key on your

keyboard. This brings up the data screen. By clicking on the space that says name, the ID of the unit can be changed what is appropriate for the battle. Now they begin to take on an identity of their own.

I often vary their fighting capabilities, such as morale and battle proficiency, which affects their performance. This I do in the same way. From the unit data screen, I click on proficiency and type in a number. The same is true with morale. As a guideline, green units have lower morale and proficiency.

More experienced units will have higher numbers. And elite forces, such as engineers, marines, SS and rangers will have even a higher number. I rarely go past 100. It's easy to recreate Sgt. Rock and his band of hardy warriors with careless use of numbers. Here again, trial and error is the key to the learning process.

Occasionally, I will go a step farther and even go as far as to change the flag in the main editor screen (or simply use the "nationality" button on the pick screen), then replace, say a German tank with a French one and use it as a captured French vehicle.

Another little trick that works in Steel Panthers is to change a unit for another. On some occasions I only want one tank in a formation. A single tank is not an option in the unit choices in the game. So I choose a sniper. Then once all units are chosen, I go back to that sniper. I click on the "Replace" button in the unit deployment screen and choose a tank in place of the sniper.

Once I have done that, however, I must open the data screen and modify the unit's armor capabilities. He still has sniper capabilities (high infantry proficiency – low armor proficiency). I usually just reverse the numbers. Now I have my single tank unit.

Invariably, I use numerous methods within the editor to accomplish a unique scenario for the player. I am sure that most who fight these battles are never aware of these changes. They are there, however, as anyone who opens the scenario for viewing in the scenario editor will discover.

We'll go over the picking process in more detail next week.

Till then...Wild Bill

Lesson #7-Objectives-Unit Placement

Patience, my avid scenario designers. We are getting there. This week I want to talk a little more about purchasing units. This is one of the most important parts of the process.

Your Warriors:

As I said earlier, this is one of the parts of scenario design I enjoy most. So many things to buy! Make your purchases carefully, however, as they will largely be the determining factor of your victory or defeat.

Let's begin by loading your saved scenario into the editor. By now you are familiar with that process. Once loaded, you are going to "buy" units for both sides. Notice under the flags that there are some buttons. The two that are of interest to you are "buy" and "deploy." The first one allows you to purchase your units. The second one lets you place them as you think best. Both factors are very important.

Making Purchases: No Credit!

Just before you begin picking and choosing, there are a couple of things to keep in mind.

The Amount of Units in the Scenario: Except for campaign or battle scenarios, the purchase points have no relevance. You are only limited by what the game can handle. A couple of words of caution here. Don't make your first scenario a monster. Keep it manageable. I would suggest limiting yourself to 40-60 units for both sides in your first attempt.

The natural inclination is to buy, buy, buy ("Oh," you say to yourself, "I just gotta have another platoon of tanks!"). Avoid this in the beginning. Once you improve your expertise, you can expand your horizons. Keep it simple. It's already difficult enough without adding to your grief. Big scenarios are not always good scenarios!

Keep in the back of your mind the resume you have written for your scenario. It will serve as your guide in setting up your scenario. Ever read a resume that has little relationship to what is happening on the computer screen. You don't want that.

If it is historical (or even hypothetical), you need to be cognizant of what weapons were available during that time period (the choices you are allowed are not always accurate), the type of units involved and the type of battle you are developing. For example, don't give one side all tanks and the other side only infantry unless the historical situation calls for those kinds of units.

Another reminder: Be sure the date for your scenario is correct. This will generally offer you the weaponry and unit organizations available during that time period. In the newest version of SPWAW, units that are unavailable are now in red. Generally these are pretty accurate, and this will help those who do not have an in depth knowledge of just what units might or might not be available.

Note: There are a number of enterprising SP enthusiasts who have developed their own unit and weapon files. They are called "OOB" files. OOB stands for Order of Battle. There is an OOB file for each country represented in any SP game.

The modified OOB files can be put into your Steel Panthers main directory and may (or may not!) give you more accurate men, materials, and limitations. I hesitate to recommend any particular set of these. Ask around, especially on the SPWAW Discussion forum. The guys who have done these are more than

willing to provide them for you along with instructions as to how to use them.

If you do use outside OOB files, it is important to remember that only other gamers with these same files installed can play the scenarios as you design them if you use OOBs different from the game.

I would also urge you to zip up the current OOB files and save them in a separate directory. I make one and call it "Default." There I keep any files that come with the game in a special zip file. For example, I would name this file OOBdefaultSPWAW.zip.

The Basic Setup:

With all of this roaming around in your head, look at the main editor interface. You will see the "Buy" under each flag. Click on this and another screen appears. This one will vary, depending on the particular SP game for which you are designing your scenario.

In the original SP, Sp2 and SP3, the process is slightly different. In SPWAW it is straightforward and easy to do. Remember your resume. What kind of units do you need?

In the game most of you are playing, units may or may not come with transport. It depends on your choices.

Before going any further, browse through some of the lists, clicking on units to see what is included. Don't buy right now. You are just "looking." You'll find this very interesting.

You will have lists of units, based on classifications. The basic classifications are four in number. They include armor, artillery, infantry and miscellaneous (you put everything into miscellaneous when it does not fit somewhere else!). I would recommend that you jot down a few notes as to what kind of units you will want to include in your fighting force.

In a tank-heavy scenario, you will have little of infantry, except as perhaps support for the armor. It might be a mixed armor-infantry type of engagement. Rely upon your expertise in military history for your choices or ask here on the forum from those you know to be good scenario designers. These guys are more than willing to help you.

There are a number of books on the subject of orders of battle. Mr. Scott Grasse has done an excellent job on units for World War II. They are an integral part of SPWAW. The Nafziger collection is also another good source for most beginners.

Warning: In SP and SP2, if you click on that famous "buy" button after you have selected your units, the list is erased and you must start over. So the advice is once you have purchased your troops, do not touch the "buy" function again. In SP3 you can.

Of course, in SPWAW these inherent problems have been eliminated. You can buy, delete, and add without having to start over. This is a great feature!

Your Choices:

Now it is time for action. Begin picking your units. Choose carefully and be sure and save your work before you begin to fiddle with your choices. Balance your forces depending on the type of scenario you are designing. A good basic rule of thumb is 2 to 1 in advance or assault scenarios. This means two attacking units for every one defending unit.

"But how can I balance a scenario?" That is a good question. Balance in a scenario depends on so many factors that there is just no cut and dried formula for success. You will learn how to balance scenarios only by trial and error.

As a basic rule of thumb, in meeting engagements, I choose units on both sides that total up to the same amount of "purchase points" (purchase points are what a unit costs to "buy"). If I use 2,500 purchase points for side A, then I would do the same for side B.

On the other hand in advance-delay or assault-defend scenarios, I usually give the attacker at least a 1.5 advantage over the defender, sometimes more.

All of this will vary somewhat depending on the type and quality of the units. For example, two M-5 Stuart tanks are not really the equivalent of one Panther tank. Here you might want a platoon of M-5s (and that probably is not enough!). A couple of Sherman Jumbos might be better!

If you have some question about the units and their capabilities, consult the encyclopedia of weapons included with the game. It has been updated in 5.1. While not filled with detail, you will have a better idea of just what the unit is and can do.

One more thing - After I purchase my units for both sides and go to "deploy" I find them all crowded into the left and right extremities of the map.

I start with the A0 unit of each side and place them in the middle of the map in order and by formation. Of course, I am going to move them later, but for now by doing this I can see much better just what each side has. I can also pick units easier for any modifications I wish to make to them.

Unit Modifications:

Now for the more advanced scenario designers the possibility exists to (a) replace a unit, (b) reconstruct (modify) a unit, or (3) replace a unit that has been chosen. I don't recommend this for beginners. Stick with the basics. But I'll include a few ideas for that day when it comes.

REPLACING A UNIT:

If you click on the top right button in the button list to your right (the "H" button), you will see a listing of your units by formation. These are the forces with which you will fight your battles. Before placing them, however, you may wish to change a unit, either to another of the same type, or one that is completely different. For example, if you have a platoon of M4A1s, you may want to change them to M4A3s for the increased benefits of a later model of Sherman.

The process is simple. For an entire formation, simply go to the buy menu, delete the unit and then choose the platoon of M4A3 tanks. It will pop right into the slot left vacant by the deletion of the M4A1 formation. To change an individual unit, first click on the unit you wish to change while the map is in front of you. You will have to do it one unit at a time.

After you click on that unit, look at the deploy buttons on the right. Look for the one with a tiny "R." I call it the "replace" button. Click on it. A list of possible substitutes will appear. Choose the unit you prefer and then return to the deploy screen. Your unit has been changed. Note: When you do this in SP3, you will have to re-click on the hex where the original unit was to make the new unit appear in that space.

You can do this at any time in the editor. Perhaps after testing your scenario, you may want stronger or

weaker units. Simply use this process and replace the forces and then save into the same slot. If you are unsure of any changes, you can also save this new scenario in a different slot. If you like the changes, you can delete the older scenario and replace it with the newer. Then simply delete the material in the second slot.

Reconstructing Units:

But what if you replace artillery with tanks? Is the process the same? Well, yes, for the most part. There is one extra step, however, when you replace a unit with another that is a different type. You will have to open the new unit's detailed information. To do that, click on the button just to the right of the Replace button. I call this one the "Data" button. It allows you to modify the unit to your taste.

With the new unit highlighted, click on the data button. A new screen with the attributes of the unit will now be in front of you. Many of these attributes or characteristics can be changed. For example, by clicking on the name of the unit, you can then put a new name in its place. Weapons, armor values, the number of men in a unit can be modified to your specs. You can effect changes to make a unit stronger or weaker, according to history or the need of your scenario. This is a very useful feature when balancing your scenario.

A unit, in addition to its weapons, radio, and other features, has four values. These are its morale, infantry, artillery, and armor capabilities. These can be changed to make a unit stronger or weaker in each of these aspects. Notice that an infantry unit has a higher infantry capability than artillery or armor. This number refers to the unit's skill and proficiency in that field.

I use the number 70 for all of these attributes as the average. Anything above 70 makes a unit stronger. Anything less than 70 debilitates the unit. So if you want an elite, well-trained tank crew, you would give them an armor value of 85-95. You can make the number even higher if you wish. The higher the number, the less chance they have of being killed and the better chance they have of killing the enemy. Anything over 150 makes the unit nearly invulnerable. Its skill is seen in making kills and avoiding being killed.

Morale, on the other hand, is the unit's staying power. The higher the number, the less is the possibility that the unit will be pinned or routed. A unit with a morale of 40 or less will just about break whenever it is fired upon, whether it suffers casualties or not. A number over 90 makes it a tough, "hang in there" kind of unit.

You can also change an infantry unit in number. Instead of a squad of thirteen men, you can change it to reflect casualties that have not been replaced (which was often the case in the real war). You may want it to have 10 men in the squad. Using this feature you can make a squad a team. In SP3 you can make platoons into squads, changing the number from 33 to 11. The possibilities are many.

By the way, you can modify your leader the same way. Click on the button for your leader. A similar screen appears. Make the leader stronger if you wish. The first unit in a formation (Letter) 0 is the leader of that formation and will influence the rest of the formation. By making a leader stronger, you automatically increase quality of the units under his command, as long as they stay in contact with him.

All of these features will help you to balance your scenario and mold the scenario to your needs.

Reassigning Units:

The SP series offers one more great feature. You can reassign units from one formation to another. If, let's say, you have a platoon of four tanks and you want to add a fifth, you can purchase a sniper unit, convert it to a tank of the same type, and then assign it to that formation. Of course this skips letters in

the formation Ids, but it does not affect the game in any way.

Open your scenario with the deploy button if it is not already open. Look at the list of buttons on the right. See the one with the little soldier saluting and an arrow? That is it. Now follow these simple steps.

Click on the unit you wish to reassign.

Click on the Reassign button.

Click on any unit of the formation to which you wish to attach the new unit.

You will see a small screen that tells you it has been changed. You can verify that by looking at the roster list (top button, right hand side). It should show the unit as being reassigned to the new formation.

Here is an example. I want to add a squad to infantry formation B. I purchase a sniper and he comes up with the designation of S0 (S zero). I first change him to the infantry squad I want by using the replace button.

Now I click on S0. Then I click on the reassign button. Now I click on one of the units in formation B. And that is it!

I find this very handy when I wish to have an HQ unit for a platoon. By adding a squad I can go back to the first unit of the formation and replace it with an HQ unit of that nationality. Thus I have the platoon HQ and the proper amount of squads.

I recommend that you make these changes before deploying the units. Sometimes it is difficult to find the formation to which you wish to attach another unit when they are scattered all over the map. You can do it, however, by clicking on a unit of the formation in the roster list, then exiting to the map. The cursor should be resting on the unit of that formation.

These are some simple steps to replacing, reassigning and reconstructing your units before you position them out on the map. This is the next step.

Homework: I want you to read again the text file for our scenario, "Breakout." Now I want you to pick for both sides a mixed armor-infantry force. Keep your scenario small. This is a company-sized engagement. I would recommend probably a platoon or two of mechanized infantry, 2 or 3 platoons of armor and some recon vehicles.

When choosing, it is very important to remember the superior quality of German tanks over American ones at this point in the war. Remember also that the US counted on numbers or "quantity" to often overcome "quality."

I'll show you my picks next week and then we will place them.

Till then, my students of war!

Wild Bill

Lesson #8 Units-Objectives

We are almost done with this battle beauty of yours. Remember that the example scenario is related to the Allied breakout from St. Lo and involves the 2nd Armored Division and assorted German forces.

Last week we picked our units. When you open your scenario in the editor, you should see them lined up on both edges of the map.

1. Sorting Them Out

The first step I take is to sort out these units by formation somewhere on the map. I put the B formation units together, the C formation units together, etc.

Now instead of a "clump" of units, I have them arranged neatly in parade order. I do this for both sides.

2. Editing and Setting Objectives

The next step is setting the objectives. Remember you place units always in relation to objectives, not vice versa. You can do it the other way, but the way I am suggesting is best. Trust me :D .

Objectives are marked by flags. There are 21 flags. You can see them now on your map probably in groups. Some may be German, some US and some neutral.

So there are three types of objective flags. In a meeting engagement I often set objectives as neutral.

How do you edit these objective flags as you want them? This is simple. In the unit deploy screen look the buttons to your right. You'll see one in the lower left hand column with 2 flags on it. When you find it, click on it.

Nationality

Now a new screen appears and flag "0" is highlighted. For our scenario, we are going to set all objectives to neutral (the white flag with a "v" in the middle of it). So we change the flag by clicking on the second button from the top on the left. Click it. Notice the first flag. It changed, didn't it?

Now we are going to make them all neutral. Click the first flag to neutral, type "n" and do the same with the next flag. Continue till all are neutral.

Value

Usually all objectives have an initial value of "0." That is not always true. No matter, go back to your first objective flag and set the value. But how much? The value of each objective is dependent upon a lot of factors. I usually follow a mental scale. For each 20 units on a side I add 50 points to each flag.

Here is an example. There are 55 units on the US side. So I would make each objective flag worth 150 points.

Other factors you might want to consider are the value of the units (high-low), type of scenario, number of turns, and the level of difficulty.

So set your objective points for each using the same procedure that you used for setting the nationalities.

Placement

Now where do you put these once they are ready? Normally I choose what I consider would be real historical military objectives. These would include crossroads, high ground, bridges or fords, key streets or buildings in an urban complex (but not in buildings...perhaps beside them).

In the map we have designed for this "Breakout" Scenario I would place my objective flags in these locations. Flags 0-6 (total of 7) in hex 28,14. The next seven (7-13) would go in hex 27,30. The final group of seven (14-20) would go to hex 35,20.

You can see how they are laid out here.

3. Placing the Units

The last step in this section is placing the units. You have them now sorted out nice and neat. The next

step is to put them into their starting positions for the battle.

Before placing them, you may want to modify or change some of them. This is the time to do it. Here are some points of change you might want to consider.

a. Changing morale and proficiency of units if necessary.

b. Replacing the type of the unit if warranted c. Adjusting unit capabilities according to the changes made.

I am not going to detail where each unit should go. That I will leave up to you. In this kind of scenario, however, there are some general rules.

a. Place both sides equidistant (the same distance) from the objectives.

b. Use a military type setup with units of a formation relatively close together

c. If you plan on the human player only taking one side, then put the AI forces closer to the objectives. Why? Simply because the AI is more cautious in its advance. It takes longer to get to the objectives than the human player.

d. If LOS (line of sight) is important, check it when placing each unit. e. When you are done, check the edges of the map to make sure you did not leave a unit. You can look at the smaller strategic map and tell by the tiny colored dots just where your units are. If you see any on the edges, you might want to check.

That is it. Of course, remember to be saving all the time. Save every 15 minutes or so. Don't count on the stability of the game, your computer, or your electric power. Save often.

We are almost there. Next week we'll talk more in detail about balance. Then I'll give you a simple scenario checklist to use for future design. Till then, Warriors, get your men ready for the attack!

Wild Bill

Lesson #9 Battle Balance

At this point you have everything you need and everything you should do to create your battle done, IF you have followed the lesson plans.

You have your text (which is your guide), your map, your settings, your units purchased and placed, and your objectives locked down.

What is next?

The next step is testing that fine creation of yours.

By testing I mean you are to now play it yourself. The first time you do, just look for mistakes. Don't worry about anything else.

See any units still at map edge?

Did you place all units properly?

Were there some errors on your map (missing roads, invisible buildings, etc.)?

Are your objectives achievable and realistic? Did you award enough points to be able to achieve a good victory?

Those are some of the things you look for. The weird thing is, even after checking and rechecking, you are going to find some things that need to be corrected, improved, or redone.

Your scenario may not have enough turns. It may have too many. You'll only know this by playing your own scenario.

There is one point that has always been difficult for me to understand. If I design my own scenario, why would I not want to play it? This is my work. Now I can see if it "works." And I see it first, thus avoiding any embarrassment or correction. I can correct myself.

Believe this or not, but there are designers out there who never play their own scenarios. They design them, then farm them out, sometimes without even having them tested at all!

The sad thing is that it shows...it always shows. To anyone with experience in scenario design, such a mistake is soon apparent.

Here is a clue. The very best way to learn about scenario design is to test scenarios for someone else. It will teach you as much and more than I ever could. Many scenario testers eventually design their own battles and they are almost always very good work.

Enough of that! Just be warned. You want to be proud of your work and you should feel that way. It is not arrogance, but a correct good feeling about your achievement.

So what is left? We now need to check for balance in the scenario. There are two schools of thought on this. Some go for a "pure" historical scenario (which is impossible to do anyway), results be damned! If one side has no chance, no matter. It must be historical.

With those kind I usually let the computer play itself and simply become a bystander to watch history recreated. Sadly, they almost never turn out as the real battle did. Why? Simply because there are two many factors of chance, even in war.

The second kind is the "playable" scenario. Now that is a balanced scenario. It is a battle that is challenging, but not impossible. Those who play it can win it, but they have to "sweat" a bit to do it.

Ideally, a scenario should be balanced from both sides so that no matter which side you choose, it will be a good battle. Sometimes that is not possible.

In such a case, warn the player in the text file. Let him know that either side A or side B should be the human player side.

Or you may design a scenario that is best played as a two player online or PBEM (Play be E-Mail) game. Tell 'em so in the text.

Be sure (and this is important!) to give the player any information he needs about the scenario to be able to play and enjoy it.

Of course, you can keep a few "surprises" as just that when he plays.

In most text files I have a section dealing with the computer battle as well as the real historical background (or hypothetical if that is the case).

But "Balance" is a nebulous thing. It is an invisible something out there that cannot be fit into a frame or a quick definition.

So how do you get it?

The answer is simple but not always easy. You get it by testing or trying out the scenario. This means that it may need to be tested two or more times until you get it right.

Here is the usual testing formula I use for a scenario or a campaign.

1. I let computer play computer and watch the battle develop. This is especially important in "timing" situations, where a unit is to enter the battle at just the right time, or something is to happen at a certain time.

2. I play it myself from the human side, or both sides if it is playable that way.

3. I recruit some willing gamers (there are always some good people out there on this very forum who are willing to help.) via personal e-mail or by announcing it on the SPWAW forum.

4. Once I have myself 3-5 testers, I explain to them what I need to know. That should be evident. I need to be sure that there are no map errors, unit errors, text errors and I need to know how it plays. Finally I need what the tester feels about the scenario. Did he like it? Did he hate it? Was it boring? Was it impossible?

5. I compile the results from all the testers and look for similar thoughts or opinions.

6. I correct any mistakes. Then I decide which changes I will incorporate from the list of suggestions. I

make them.

7. If I am still a little uncertain, I ask them to try it again. This is usually enough. Sometimes it isn't.

8. Once it has been thoroughly tested and a point of balance and challenge found, I run it through a final check list (coming next week) and I post it (more on that next week too).

I wish I could give you a clear cut pattern to always instantly achieve balance. It can't be done. It is only found through testing and improving.

That will do it for this class, my very capable students. The next one will finalize these sessions. We'll go over that final check list.

Wild Bill

Tutorial on Map Buttons

These 45 buttons with their options give you hundreds of different ways to make beautiful, accurate maps.
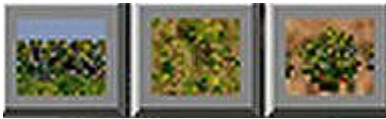

Here is a brief rundown of what these "buttons" do

These three are easy. They are Zoom in, Zoom out, or clear off the map. Careful with this last one. It will delete everything on the map. You will, however, get a "yes-no" prompt first.

This row will give you rocky terrain, a stone wall or a hedge. With rocky terrain you can choose rocks, boulders or cliffs.

With these buttons you can click in bocage, grass, or an orchard. Note that with bocage you can click in a whole line of bocage with a starting and ending hex.

Here you have vineyards, or trails (beginning-ending hexes will make a trail line for you) and mud (ideal to put along waterways or with which to surround swamps).

This first one is your "normal" terrain and also your "undo" button for anything you want to remove from the map. The others will give you swamp/marsh or rough terrain.

Three levels of hills are available to you here, each level representing some 10 meters or yards in height.

These buttons will provide you with streams/gullies/trenches (using beginning and ending hex clicks)

various depths of water, and trees.

With these you can have crops (including field, polder, which is flooded field, or a graveyard!), more fields (crops or plowed) and the last one is a "switch" button to change your green trees to become palm trees.

You can choose from hundreds of buildings. They include wooden, stone and multihex buildings. From here you can access the new rowhouses also. You'll need to practice with these to get familiar with them.
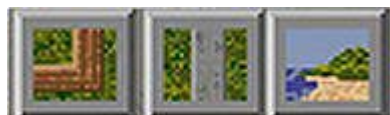
Here are your dirt roads, paved roads and a button that will convert 1/2 of your map into deep water. This has a "yes-no" choice and I advise using it with caution. It can devour half your map with one "Y."

You have a lot of choices here. With the foundation button you can choose from a number of underlying terrain features, dirt, gravel, cement, etc. Then there is the convert streams to rivers button. It has a yes-no option. Be careful with this one too. It can change a lot on your map with one click.

Finally the beach option, a level -1 with three types of beach sand.

For damage effects you can have small craters, large craters (very destructive - they'll make a building sometimes just turn into a heap of rubble) or city-grid. This one I hardly use at all. I don't always like the type of layout it gives, but try it out.

These are handy. The text button will allow you to write on your map. The "fill" and "fill range" buttons

allow you to add increased amounts of the same type of terrain instead of clicking until you get cramps.

Here are some more interesting buttons. You can cause the nationalities to switch sides on the map, convert streams into canals (yes-no choice) and lay railroad track.

These last three will let you save your map, go back to main editor screen (to change terrain type, lets say) or to display the "help" menu for making maps.

You'll get comfortable with these buttons only with practice. With them, you can make some very beautiful maps.

Wild Bill