

OPERATIONAL COMBAT SERIES

BALTIC GAP

SEABORNE ASSAULT OPTION

By John Kisner

Baltic Gap ends in October 1944 with about 500,000 Germans trapped in Courland. They would hold the approximate line shown on the accompanying map until the end of the war the following May. By surviving, they denied the Soviets the decisive victory that had once looked inevitable.

In designing this game, I fell into the trap of mostly thinking in terms of what those doomed Germans might have done differently to improve their situation. Looking back, I regret not adding one rule in particular to allow for a bolder end-game move by the Soviets. Thus I've decided to add an official option adding the possibility of amphibious landings behind German lines in October.

To set the stage, let me point out that there is no disputing the Soviet amphibious capability during this period in the Baltic Sea. Indeed, early October saw two Soviet rifle corps land on the big islands north of Riga. In less than a week they drove the reinforced German division holding the islands back to Saaremaa's Sworbe Peninsula. About 10,000 Germans would cling to this strategic spit of land until 23 November (well past our game's end), at which time they were successfully evacuated.

Now admittedly a landing would have been greatly hindered by Germans holding Sworbe, which juts toward Courland, but the island battle could have played out differently and the Soviets could have run greater risks.

Originally, my redesign of *Baltic Gap* included quite a bit of naval action, including possible assaults across Lake Peipus and the literal portrayal of landings on Saaremaa. Most of those mechanics were left on the cutting room floor, so at a personal level it's kind of fun to let some more naval action creep back into the last few turns. Anchors Aweigh, my boys!

SEABORNE ASSAULT OPTION

Soviet landings on Saaremaa are abstractly handled by a random event signaling the Red Navy's arrival in the Gulf of Riga. Under this new option, the Saaremaa Event will also trigger a Soviet Seaborne Assault capability on every turn remaining in the campaign. This allows troops and SP to invade the coast using a simplified version of the OCS amphibious landing rules. Each of the following new rules is applied:

a) Only troops in the Saaremaa Box can make Seaborne Assaults, and only after their period of Delay (1.4d).

SP arriving at Entry H can optionally be added to these landings. (It looks strange, but the SP are arriving from northern Estonia.)

b) Each turn the lift capacity (in terms of REs, figured per OCS 4.7) is determined by the roll of one die. After making this roll, the player can decide whether or not to conduct a Seaborne Assault this turn.

c) The landings must be on unoccupied coastal hexes more than 5 hexes (judged as the crow flies, not as a ship sails) from any German-controlled major port. (We're assuming a healthy respect for the German coastal batteries and other defenses.) Note also that Seaborne Assaults can't be made west of the Saaremaa Event Shipping Boundary.

d) Landings are made during the Soviet Movement Phase, with no advanced planning needed. The landing hex (or hexes) can be of any terrain. There is no ALT roll; success is automatic. Combat units are landed in Combat or Move Mode; SP are just placed in the hex even if there is no port. There is no movement after landing.

e) Soviet naval flotillas have a new capability when using this rule: they become a trace supply source when in a minor port hex.

