

Slouch Hats and Eggshells has evolved through several versions. The original 1970s Abwehr Publications version (published as **Syria, 1941**) was inadequate, and the 1980s Quarterdeck Games version was a map graphics mess. This edition clarifies and corrects a great deal and greatly expands the scope. It was challenging just to reorganize the old rules according to today's standards and to do so without changing too much. Yet as the project progressed, it became obvious much enhancement would be required to convey the proper sense of the historical campaign. You may find some traces of the original game, but quiriness and fussiness had to be dropped for the sake of clarity. This game deals with effectively the entire campaign in Syria and Lebanon.

Players will note there are a handful of rules that are of marginal utility, one example being the provision for port levels. These restrictions are present in **Rommel's War, (RW)**, and remain in this game in large part to smooth transition when combining this game with **RW**. Over the years I have appreciated that gamers like to speculate and one of these would likely involve deploying a German panzer division to Syria. No matter how unrealistic this is, gamers will do it. If so, port condition will suddenly become very important. If instead you do not want to play with these, then feel free to drop the rules concerning port levels, port demolition, and port recovery.

The problem of logistics received much design attention in **RW**. While this game is obliged to follow **RW** in this design area, it is nevertheless a valid situational limitation. Both sides experienced shortages of the supplies and fuel necessary for a full campaign. The approach followed in **RW** gets to the essential point about logistics without time consuming counting and measuring, and that system works just as well here too.

Since this was a small and comparatively short campaign, odd situations appeared and historical effects could turn on just a unit or two. We use the **RW** game system to describe the more mundane of these since its scale and analysis sufficiently addresses such issues as artillery units, anti-aircraft units, or uncertain bomber strength. These might otherwise have been averaged into other game effects if this game used a unique system. Certain campaign aspects though are better addressed through random events. These are the true odd events that could otherwise encumber a game like this, but if treated this way can become far more entertaining, perhaps even more realistic.

While we have worked in considerable OoB detail for both sides, it nevertheless reflects some consolidation. One example of this is found with the Light units. They approximate the many improvised or small scale units put together by both sides for the campaign. The Allies in particular committed the last of their strategic reserves. As mentioned earlier, we seek general effects, not unnecessary detail. That this campaign was fought at a tactical level, the company being the basic unit of maneuver for the historical campaign, explains why it is difficult to translate to a larger operational scale.

A few OoB differences with **RW** deserve mention. The 5 Indian Brigade is semi-motorized for **RW** but here it gave up its trucks and fought primarily on foot with the non-mountain-trained component split out. The same need for detail applies also to the Free French units. We also found the same situation applied to British 4 Brigade (1st Cavalry Div.); this was the return of the relief column sent to Iraq during May. It later was renamed 9th Armoured Brigade and campaigned in Iran starting late August (with no tanks). The rest of 1st Cavalry was by now so bereft of vehicles and heavy equipment that the only way to show them is as Light troops. Overall, both sides were very short on vehicles.

Interestingly, the Arab Legion unit was formed during the 1920s largely to protect against raids by Wahabists (religious zealots even today) from Saudi Arabia. Recruited primarily from desert Bedouin, the Legion functioned reliably and effectively.

We judged the British reaction to German Intervention would likely have been strong. After all, the British were invading Syria to pre-empt such a German move. While the exact composition of the reaction force would be speculative, some guidance is found in the original plan for invasion. That called for two infantry divisions, an armored division, and some armored brigades. Since such a large force could not be found in 1941 it would be reasonable to assume they would have provided at least a shadow of it; here, perhaps a reinforced brigade of British 7th Armored Division. More likely to go would be the Polish Brigade Group. It was not then engaged with the Germans in Egypt and had the advantage of already having been in Syria (during 1940).

The Vichy French had few reinforcement options. Practically all help would have to come from France and this depended on running the British blockade. The grandest proposal called for a large battleship escorted convoy [see Axis Special Event N]. Other reinforcements might come from arming more minority natives but there would be no time for training. Such personnel would not be steady in battle. The Alawi units [Special Event A] in this game, and part of the Druze, really represent the “Fazaa,” essentially an armed militia. Many of these people had already been recruited for the “Levant” battalions. Other armed tribal groups existed among the majority Sunni Muslims but these were controlled by local sheikhs many of whom saw the war as an opportunity to better arm themselves and make money bartering information between both the British and the French.

The big reinforcement question, of course, is what if the Germans arrived in large numbers, much like they did in Vichy-held Tunisia in November 1942. But this was not to be. The Vichy French rejected even small offers of aid fearing British intrusion in French territories around the globe. Real German plans for entering the Middle East were not outlined until July by which time the French here were really hurting. Alas, no panzers for this game. Such an intervention would have been in October at the earliest, and so lies well outside the scope of this game with multiple maps and highly speculative forces. The German units we do show are ones easily at hand had the French been more receptive.

Interestingly, victory in this campaign is far more an onus on the Allies as it is their level of performance under limited conditions that is being assessed. Vichy strategy was limited to defense and a limited German intervention would have resulted in only a delay of historical results. Therefore, it is the Allied player who must force a conclusion to the campaign, particularly if Axis troops try to hold out in Syria and Lebanon. Finally, we end the game in late August because of the Allied need to secure a supply route to the Soviet Union through Iran. Here, yet another campaign would have to be fought.

In closing, I thank this edition’s publishers for their confidence in the subject and commend them for their willingness to publish so many difficult topics for our hobby.

- Vance von Borries