

Axis & Allies 1942.2 Strategy Guide

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Introduction

1942.2 is one of the latest in a whole series of Axis and Allies (A&A) games that came before it. It has been available in one form or another for geeks like you and me to enjoy since the 1980's. Each iteration aims to improve over the last and carry the concept forward, but the game itself is intended as a stand-alone thing. There is no "First Edition" you need to pick up prior to playing this one. Everything you need (or at least, almost everything) can be found in the box, and all you need to know (or at least, almost all you need to know) can be found in the game manual.

However, a few things in the game manual and some of the set up charts included with the boxed materials weren't 100% in line with the vision of its creator. You should check out the game FAQ and Errata for 1942.2 (which can be found in the same on-line Forum board) and maybe print it to keep on hand. Often on these boards you'll hear people use the acronym "OOB" - which means

the straight up game out of the box, by the book, or the "official" game. This is the game described in the manual + updated addendum from the FAQ/Errata.

You can always ask a question here on the boards and someone will chime in to help.

That's it! That's all you need to get started. The game and the rules! Now that we have them, lets take it back to the basics...

Plastic Armies, and Plastic Army Training

I've seen a lot of different ways that people teach this game, and reading the rulebook aloud cover to cover is probably the worst of these. It might be necessary to do at some point, but it's just not the best way to get people pumped up to play the game with you. If you take this approach to teaching, A&A can rapidly become overwhelming and tedious. Frequently they'll look to you to just "explain how to play, so we can start playing." And that's the trick.

The Start with 1941 Method

BE may want a section to include the option of starting with 41? Have put this placeholder first so as not to interfere with the connected flow of subsequent sections.

The 1942.2 Watch & Learn Method

If you have a second person in the room who knows how to play, you can do the "watch and learn" method. This is better than straight up reading the rulebook, but it can also be confusing for the new player. They will see a lot of things happening, without understanding why, and you will constantly be pausing and digressing and explaining what's happening in a somewhat haphazard and circuitous manner. It works, but it takes a while, and it requires that you have at least 2 people in the room who know what they're doing.

The Straight Into 1942.2 Method

Sometimes its just going to be you and the new guy, and when you find yourself in this situation start with the Units, the Battle Board and the Dice! The very first thing you're going to do when you open the box, and the very first thing your new players will do when they dig in, is to pick up the plastic pieces, the infantry and tanks, fighters and battleships etc. Before you bother setting up, or explaining the map, or IPCs or production, or how units move, or even unit value as it relates to these things, just grab the units and start staging mock contests on the battle board!

Rolling dice is the one surefire way to get people quickly engaged with the game, and the combat system is truly what makes A&A. It allows you to "play" plastic army men, but "with rules." You don't even need a map or a broader game architecture for this to work, all you need is the battle itself, and a simple way to connect the units with the rolls. That's the start, explaining Attack vs Defense, how "Hits" are determined, how casualties are allotted when those hits are made, and how this stuff all repeats until one side wins or the attacker withdraws.

I start with Ground. Infantry first, then add in the other ground units, explaining the principles of "heavy hitters" and "fodder" along the way. We'll see how to do this down below, once we launch into a discussion of the roster. Then I do the same thing with all the Naval combat units, then the Air Units. Then combine these unit types to showcase their different abilities in differing combinations. Introduce the transport unit, showing how they can work in amphibious assaults with bombardments, or at sea vs air. I like to talk about subs, destroyers, and aircraft towards the end, as they can be a bit tricky. Now add in the AAGun and show how it interacts with aircraft. Once you've gone through the entire unit roster this way, and have described the abilities and relative attack/defense combat values for each, pause the battles and turn to the economic/production aspect of the game. The easiest way to make this transition is with the Bomber unit. Its a good unit to showcase the concept of Unit Value/Cost.

After you've showed your friends some ways that bombers can be used in battle, you can gradually segue to a discussion about how this unit can "also be used" to Strategically Bomb Raid (SBR) factories. SBR is a way to show how units enter play. All units must be spawned at factories, so the SBR thing naturally gives rise to a more in depth discussion of what IPCs are, how they are awarded, and what they can be used for e.g. buying more units!

Here I find it helpful to draw more attention to the map itself, which until this point just serves as a backdrop and place to mess around with units, but which will now take on a more meaningful gameplay significance. It will make more sense now, since your players will start to "get" the concept that the territories on the Map=IPCs=Money=Units. And Units that must be spawned from production facilities at specific places on this map.

At this point you're still not "playing the game", what you're doing is priming your players and getting them invested in the process of "setting up the game." As someone who's played before, you might be tempted to do your players a favor a set everything up beforehand to save time, but I think this has a definite downside if someone in the group is new to A&A or even just new to the map. Pre-Setting is something you can do next time, but for the first time out I think it's really important to actually go through the process of letting each player place their starting units, and read through their set-up charts, and all the rest. Not all together, but one at time. In other words, don't just hand everyone a set up card and say "go to town." Instead, begin with the Russian set up, and get everyone involved. This will necessarily take a bit longer, but it doesn't take as long as you might expect, and it has the advantage that everyone is on the same page, get's to see all the units and all the territories involved, familiarizing themselves with names and locations and the distribution of forces, double checking to make sure that the set up for each nation is correct.

Take 5 roundels (one for each nation) out of the box, and arrange them from left to right in the sequence of the Turn Order: Russia, Germany, UK, Japan, USA and keep these off to the side somewhere where everyone can see them. Then go through the set up in that same order. You can have one player read off the locations and units from the set up card, and the other guy place them in the territories, both checking to make sure you got all the right stuff in the right place. You'll notice that when you slowly build up like this, not only does the map take shape in a more organic and resonant way for your new player, but it also increases the feeling of mutual participation and anticipation. The situation on the gameboard will start to "read" for them, in a

way that it won't if you just start slapping pieces down all over the place. This way there is a progression through and a focus on each of the nations.

And by the time you get to the USA, all of your players will have surveyed the full map and starting forces. Your new players will be so ready to rock it, you won't be able to hold them back!

You can do this in an hour, 2 hours tops (if you include all the messing around on the battle board I mentioned earlier) but it will be worth it, because now your players will be fully invested in the game. They just built it out together, and it took a while, so they'll be eager to get back to the battle board and the fun of rolling the dice!

Let's call everything I've discussed up till now just a bunch of suggestions or advice for introducing new players to the most basic appeal of A&A. You might not get in a full game this first session, but you don't really need a full game. Just making it through the set up and the first few rounds can often be enough to hook your new player and make them want to come back to finish what you've started. Or to do it again, "even better next time!" That's what you want to shoot for, get a hook in, make it fun the first time, so you can get them coming back. Most people won't have the patience to play a game like this, until they see how it just sucks you in, and once you're sucked in, it's like a happy black hole, you don't want to escape from, and couldn't even if you did.

With visions of tiny tanks dancing through their heads, they'll be going home and concocting strategies for "next time" maybe they search a few things online, try to up their game. But the whole point is to make it engaging, and in this respect I think pacing is important, part of what you're doing when you play A&A is to create a "bigger" story about what's happening on the board and with the dice. The narrative component of the gameplay, and this can take a little time, but there's no need to rush it. Historical banter and high drama, more snacks! You know the drill.

The Unit Roster

Infantry

The backbone of your army! The indispensable grunt! Boots on the ground, your GI Joe. The pawn who protects the king, or takes the king and then mates the queen! depending on which way you look at it. But whichever way you look, you're going to see a bunch of infantry! Because infantry is the most prolific and best pound-for-pound unit in the whole game!

Lets hang out with the infantry unit for a minute, and extol its virtues. Not only is infantry the cheapest unit you can buy, the one you'll have the most of at the outset, but it's also the best. Here's why: infantry attacks at 1, defends at 2, and costs 3.

Lets start with the 1-2 Punch!

Attack 1

Defend 2

For the mere investment of 3 ipcs, you buy a unit that does both the 1 and the 2 in defensive combat! Nothing else will get you as much mileage for the cost, in quite the same way as having more infantry boots on the ground. Their defensive value is solid. On D, they hit at 2 or less. On six sided dice that's a 1/3rd shot to hit and destroy the enemy!

"Power!" Each individual infantry hits on defense at a 2 or less. Two infantry defending are said to have a total "defence power" of 4. Three infantry defending together have a total defense power of 6, etc. You add up the individual "hits at" value of all defending units to get the total defense power, or defensive value or defense "points" for that force.

The defensive value of infantry is clear for the cost, but their attack value should not be underestimated either. If you consider that 4 infantry attacking together are at basically the same odds (during a single round of combat) as a bomber, you can see that their attack value for the cost is decent as well. 4 infantry on attack can also be better than a bomber in some cases, because you not only have the same chance statistically to roll a single hit in the first round of combat, but there is a chance you might even roll more than one hit. You get 4 shots after all.

4 infantry cost 12 ipcs, just like a single bomber costs 12 ipcs. We say that the total unit value or "TUV" of both forces is likewise 12 ipcs. Both forces are also said to have cumulative "attack power" of 4.

Now consider how, for just 1 more ipc than the cost of an infantry unit, you could spend 4 ipcs and buy an artillery unit. That artillery unit literally doubles the attack effectiveness of any infantry that it fights alongside. It takes a unit that costs 3 ipcs and usually hits at 1, then jumps that 1 to a 2. So that now the total attack power of 1 inf and 1 artillery together is also 4, same as a bomber! again showing how infantry can be potent on attack! More on that artillery boost ability later.

But beyond even the "Power" of the unit on defense or attack, the single most important thing you get when you buy an infantry unit for 3 ipcs, is the 1 hit that unit represents. The shot it can take before it goes down! Its "Hitpoint."

In an important sense, 4 infantry (which hit at a 1, in four chances) will always be better on attack than a single bomber (which hits at a 4 or less, in one chance). If one of those 4 infantry has to take a hit, there will still be 3 guys to fight. A single bomber on the other hand, can only take 1 hit before it dies! Both forces cost 12 ipcs, but a single infantry unit destroyed only costs you 1/4th of that total amount, whereas the bomber is worth all 12 ipcs alone. If the bomber dies you lose your whole investment and ability to attack, but if only 1 out of the 4 infantry dies, you still have 3 chances left to hit at a one. The fight can go on, even after sustaining casualties!

Now imagine instead that the bomber and the infantry are fighting together, alongside each other... the 4 infantry units each hit at a 1, and the bomber hits at 4, now you have a heavy hitter, the Bomber, with dudes to back it up, and take the hits for it. This gives you what we call in A&A the concept of "fodder."

Fodder = plastic army men destined to die, or to keep it more euphemistic and upbeat, "to be gloriously sacrificed upon the altar of battle". But these are the units that keep the battle going! They keep the bomber and other heavy hitting units alive, over the course of the combat.

Each Player/Nation starts with more than a dozen infantry at the ready, distributed across the game map. Part of the challenge in A&A is getting those Infantry forces into positions where they can link up and do the most good on defense, or the most damage on attack. Some Nations, like Russia and Germany, start with a bunch of infantry in position right away, and can produce many more over the course of the game. Other Nations like UK, Japan, and USA have their forces scattered all over the place, many out of position and they face challenges moving infantry from production centers to the front, usually having to cross the water, or buy new factories to get their infantry into the fight.

This highlights one of the few drawbacks of infantry, their lack of movement. Boots on the ground can only march so fast, and if there is an ocean in front them, boots don't really help you to swim. The Japanese and the Anglo-Americans especially, will have to buy transports (and warships for their transports) all in service of getting infantry across the water. A transport can substantially increase the range of your infantry unit, but once they touch back down on dry land, you're still looking at a movement of only 1. This is where other units come into play, such as tanks or aircraft, to support your infantry on the move. Units that can "catch up" and make your starting infantry more effective, or to turn your newly purchased infantry into a force that can do more damage to the enemy.

There is also one more important respect in which infantry is more valuable than any other land unit, and that has to do with the relationship between Infantry and Transports. We'll talk a lot about transports later on, but for now, just consider that in A&A the rules have it that Transports can transport "1 infantry + 1 other ground unit." This means that a single transport can move 2 infantry, or 1 inf + artillery, or 1 inf + 1 tank, or 1 inf + 1 AAGun. But if you only have 2 artillery (or 2 tanks, or 2 AAGuns) it takes 2 transports to move them! Anytime you are not transporting 2 units at go with your transports, you are not making the fullest use of those transports. This is why it's important to have infantry as a naval power, because you want to load transports with the max units possible, to make the greatest potential use of each transport you possess. We'll get to transports again later.

Infantry is the cheapest unit you can buy that can occupy and hold ground. Holding ground is what gets you money, money you will almost certainly be spending to purchase more infantry. To hold more ground, to make more money, to buy more infantry! And so on...

It's important to recall that the starting forces on the gameboard are more valuable than all the land, on the entire map, even put together over several rounds. The value of the starting forces in infantry alone, is worth more than any single nation's income for a single round of income collection. Just look at the overall Total Unit Value (TUV) of the starting forces for each nation, vs each nation's starting income.

Axis: 667 starting TUV, but only 71 ipcs starting Income.

Allies: 714 starting TUV, but only 97 ipcs starting Income.

Germany: 362 TUV, 41 income.

Japan: 305 TUV, 30 income

Russia: 180 TUV, 24 income.

UK: 283 TUV, 31 income.

USA: 251 TUV, 42 income.

This means that, in a very real sense, your units are worth a lot more than the land they're sitting on. In most cases, a good portion of the starting total unit value is infantry. They make up roughly a third of the TUV in each Nation's starting forces. That means that the replacement cost of your starting plastic army men is often more than the value of the whole world. What seems at first glance, to be one of your most "expendable" units, turns out to be your most valuable resource!

If you're going to sacrifice it, best make damn sure it's doing you some good in the process.

Pushing your starting infantry at the outset is the best way to start winning early overall, which sets you up to win big later on. If you can get your starting infantry on the move quickly, and get them marching towards their main objectives without taking too many casualties along the way, and destroying as many of the enemy as possible in the process, that is ideal.

If you can sacrifice a pawn to take a pawn, that's a fair trade, but if you can sacrifice a pawn to take a knight that's much better! And well, if you can do either without losing your pawn in the first place, at no sacrifice, then you're really killing it.

That's how we want to use our infantry. They are there to take the hits when they have to, but the more of them you can keep around the better off you're going to be. Which is why what you really want to do is back them up, and to sometimes invest in other units that will make your infantry more effective over time.

Artillery

The big guns! Like Napoleon, and military strategists before and after, who have understood the merits of lobbing explosives at each other over longer distances, artillery is going to give your infantry units the back-up they need to start making an impact! It does everything an infantry unit can do, but makes a stronger attack and still beefs up your defense, for just a cost of 1 ipc more than a regular infantry unit.

4 ipc's invested gets you the double deuce, hits at a 2 on both attack and defense! And not only this, but it has the special ability to boost 1 infantry unit to attack at 2 as well! This is fairly huge, just think if all those starting infantry had artillery to back them up, the whole force would be twice as effective on attack. Using the concept of fodder, even if the infantry unit goes down, the surviving artillery would still attack at a 2. This means that for just 1 ipc more, you could potentially make all your fodder exchanges at a better value.

3 infantry grouped together on attack gives you 3 separate chances to hit at a 1. Basically a 50/50 shot that you'll score at least 1 hit in the first round of combat. If one of these guys dies, your odds drop down to just a 1/3rd shot.

2 infantry and 1 artillery grouped together on attack, gives two chances to hit at a 2, and one guy left over to hit at 1. This is better than an 80% shot at a hit in the first round. And in the next round, if one of the infantry dies, you still have a 2/3rds shot.

Now say that you win the battle and take the territory with a single surviving unit. Sure, if that unit is an artillery piece, it's 4 ipc's at risk on counter attacker, rather than 3 ipc's for an infantry unit. But that's still just 1 ipc more. Not to diminish the value of 1 ipc too much (sometimes a single ipc can make a big difference) if you can destroy more TUV than you had to risk, and take the land, it's pretty easy to make up the difference at just 1 ipc. Weighing the odds of victory vs defeat, it often makes a lot of sense to use artillery in your light trades, even if they end up getting sacrificed during counter attacks.

Here's a good example

2 infantry vs 1 infantry is a little better than 65% odds to the attacker.

1 infantry + 1 artillery vs 1 infantry is over 85% odds to the attacker!

The first attack force costs 6 ipc's, the second costs 7 ipc's. But over the long haul, that 1 ipc could save you much more TUV in the trade, because it increases the odds not just that you will win, but that you will win sooner. If you can kill the enemy without taking as many fodder hits in the process, and do this consistently, you shift the pressure onto your enemy.

The hard and fast rule of thumb is that, if it's just infantry alone, you need to bring about twice as many infantry on attack as the number of defenders you're trying to destroy. But if its infantry +artillery, you can attack at roughly equal forces, and still have equal odds.

So for example, if it's just infantry, you need to send 4 infantry on attack vs 2 infantry defenders, to have a reasonable chance of success. That's 12 ipc's TUV vs 6 ipc's TUV.

But if you have artillery in the mix, just 1 infantry + 1 artillery is roughly equal on attack vs 2 infantry defenders. That's 7 ipc's TUV vs 6 ipc's TUV.

When you scale things up, the contrast becomes even more stark. Often, when the stacks of infantry really get large, it becomes numerically impossible to send twice as many attacking infantry vs infantry defenders, and that's when artillery really comes into play. You need a way to even the odds, and reduce the number of casualties you are likely to sustain as the attacker, over each round of the combat phase. The more artillery you invest in early, the more effective your infantry stacks will be on attack, and they'll still be just as effective on defense, (perhaps a bit more expensive on defense, since you don't get any special boost, but at least you're not losing anything to the odds on D.)

Tanks

Armor! For the Blitz!

The tank unit is your best available "heavy hitter" on the ground, and it has many important uses in the game. The most important of these takes advantage of the tank's ability to move two spaces across the ground. Air units have an expanded reach as well, but aircraft can't take and hold territory, so for the purposes of claiming territory, the tank is your go-to heavy hitter.

Attack 3

Defend 3

Move 2

Now a single tank costs twice as much as a single infantry unit, at 6 ipc's, but a single tank is significantly better on attack than a single infantry unit, slightly better on defense, and can move twice as far. More than anything, it is that last aspect, the tank's movement advantage, that sets it apart from infantry and artillery. In a given combat, infantry and artillery are better for the cost both on attack and defense, but it's the tank's ability to "get to the battle quickly" that offsets its rather expensive price tag. This is very important to keep in mind, especially when considering whether to purchase tanks over infantry or artillery.

Just looking at the raw numbers 2 infantry are better on attack than a single tank, and significantly better than a single tank on defense. Here are some simple battles with the odds to show you what I mean...

2 inf on attack vs 1 inf on defense = over 65% odds to the Attacker.

1 tank on attack vs 1 inf on defense = 50% odds to the Attacker.

Here it is the fact the infantry get more potential chances to hit, and more opportunities to prolong the combat, because the force has 2 total hitpoints compared to the tank's single hitpoint. The purchase cost or TUV for both attacking forces is the same at 6 ipc's, but two infantry is a better all-around attack force for the price than the lone tank.

3 inf on attack vs 2 inf on defense= 50% odds to the attacker

1 inf + 1 tank on attack vs 2 inf on defense = 50% odds to the attacker.

The cost/TUV is again the same, without much difference to the overall attack advantage. But there is also a slightly better chance that the defender will fight you to a draw if you use the 1 inf + 1 tank force over the 3 infantry force to attack, this due to the fact that the tank force has less total hitpoints.

4 infantry on attack vs 2 infantry on defense = over 75% to the attacker.

2 tanks on attack vs 2 infantry on defense = roughly 60% odds to the attacker

Once again the cost of the attacking force is the same, but the odds on attack drop even lower, and the odds that the defender will fight you to a draw are even higher, because of the hitpoints.

Here's one that might seem even less intuitive...

2 inf + 1 tank on attack vs 3 inf on defense = only about 45% odds to the attacker!
2 inf + 1 tank on attack vs 1 inf + 1 tank on defense = now 70% odds to the attacker
4 in on attack vs 1 inf + 1 tank on defense = still about 65% odds to the attacker.

You're better off with the extra infantry and the extra hitpoint, on both attack and defense. And for the same total cost, the defensive value of tanks is just dwarfed by the power of max infantry over the long haul, due to the hitpoint aspect. Without taking movement into consideration, the tank is a weaker attack unit for the cost than the same amount of ipc's spent on infantry. Now take a look at the tanks when compared to artillery, for the same cost...

3 artillery on attack vs 2 infantry on defense = 80% odds to the attacker.
2 tanks on attack vs 2 infantry on defense = less than 65% odds to the attacker.

Those two forces cost the same amount of money, 12 ipc's, but the all artillery buy nets you more hitpoints and the stronger attack advantage over all. In fact, because of the "infantry boost" ability of the artillery unit, you can achieve the same attacking power for one less ipc. Since 1 infantry and 2 artillery have the same cumulative attack points as a force of 3 artillery. The total attack power of both forces is 6. So again, when it comes to the isolated battle, Infantry and Artillery are both superior to Tanks for the cost. Moreover, 2 infantry could conceivably launch 2 separate attacks in opposite directions, whereas a single tank must still fight one battle at a time.

So why buy Tanks at all?

The reason to buy tanks over those other ground units is not attack power per se, or the raw odds in a given battle, but rather the "Power Projection" of the units. Tanks can move 2 spaces, they are able to threaten more territories with potential attacks from the same position. They can "project" their power "farther", than a force of ground units. Infantry and Artillery can only threaten territories that are immediately adjacent to them, but tanks can potentially threaten territories up to another full space out. Tanks can blitz, meaning that they can take 2 territories at a time (provided the first territory on the path is empty of defending units). They can rush across a friendly territory and into a hostile one, to join the battle. Equally important, they can "double back" if they have to, and rapidly redirect pressure from one front to another in the region where they are operating.

For this reason alone, it's helpful to think of the tank as a "strategically" advantageous unit, rather than a "tactically" advantageous one. It gives you options. It's not going to get you a better attack advantage than inf/artillery for the cost in any individual battle, but it can give you the choice to launch more potential battles, over a greater distance, or fewer game rounds, than the other ground units would allow. The tank can get twice as far as Infantry or Artillery. An infantry unit produced at Berlin takes 4 rounds to reach Moscow, but a tank produced in this same location can get to Moscow in 2 rounds! That is why you buy tanks!

When you buy a tank (instead of more infantry or artillery for the same cost), you trade a slightly diminished total attack, defense, and hitpoint value, for an increased "movement" value. Axis and

Allies is a turn based game, meaning that this trade-off can be well worth it, provided you know how to rush your tanks to the front, or rush them back from the front, in the event you need to bolster your own defenses somewhere rather than pressing the attack on the enemy.

There is another reason why you might consider buying tanks over inf/art, and that is because of a production limitation. If a factory territory has a low production value, or if the factory is severely damaged by SBR, it could make a lot of sense to buy a tank over 2 infantry, since you can squeeze more attack/defense/movement out of your purchase.

Let's look at Karelia as an example. Say Germany controls this territory and wants to make the best use of the 2 production points that the territory is worth. A pair of infantry is cheaper for a cost of 6 ipc's, than a pair of tanks at a cost of 12 ipc's, but the infantry can only threaten territories immediately adjacent to Karelia. The cumulative attack power of the infantry buy is a mere 2 points. Whereas if you buy tanks the cumulative attack power is 6! Three times as much power!

Sure it costs more, and you don't get the fodder hitpoints, but in a situation where production is limited and you need to get the most out of the space, that extra expenditure can make sense, and then you buy tanks rather than infantry.

But never lose sight of the fact that tanks are damned expensive!

Any time you buy a heavy hitter, you want to protect it with weaker and less valuable fodder units. You don't want to throw these tanks away on attack, or put them at risk of counter attack by the enemy, unless you absolutely have to. As a general rule, you should never attack with "naked" armor (ie. tanks that have no fodder cover) unless the attack is critical to the war effort. Likewise, if you see that a defender has left their armor naked, you should always try to attack it and trade infantry for tanks if you can.

To really show the best way to do all this, how to use armor (and other ground) to the greatest possible effect in "the territory trade", we first need to bring Aircraft into the equation. But before we get there, I want to turn to the Naval units, and have a look at some comparisons between ground units and naval units.

Ships and Sea Zones

In Axis and Allies 1942.2 there are 65 sea zones (szs) in play, and unlike land territories, most of which have an IPC or "production value", those szs are economically worthless.

Instead, the "value" of szs comes from the need to move land units across water. This means that we need to think about "controlling" or "contesting" szs quite a bit differently than the way we think about land territories. All naval actions are subordinated to land actions in A&A! When you purchase a ship in A&A, it is to expand your land unit movement options across the water, or else to limit the movements of your enemy. Every ship you buy is ultimately bought for the purpose of either protecting transports, or destroying them. Well, with the possible exception of carriers that is.

Carriers exist primarily for the defense of transports, and as a way to facilitate the expanded movement of fighters across the game board. Every other warship in the roster can be thought of as existing either to protect transports directly, or to protect the carriers, which themselves provide the max defense possible for transports (or key transport lanes from coastal production centres) via the carrier's ability to house fighters.

Warships defend your own transports/carriers, or they threaten enemy transports/carriers. Ideally you'd like to do both at the same time, by just having one massive floating armada parked adjacent to a large factory in a "home" sea zone, but this is rarely possible to maintain. Often you will be required to break your fleet apart, either for your own immediate transport/carrier needs, or else to support those of an Ally, or perhaps to exploit some weakness of the enemy. But when the need invariably arises to put your fleet on the move, sometimes you really have to pick a focus, either fleet defense, or fleet attack.

Naval forces need to be used in very creative and focused ways, usually in conjunction with Aircraft and Ground as well, to be effective.

Transports and Carriers are among the most important units in A&A! but they might also be the most complicated, so lets not get to them just quite yet, first I'm going to talk about Destroyers, Cruisers and Battleships!

Destroyers, Cruisers, Battleships

The Destroyer - the infantry unit of the sea!

If I'm trying to work through this with someone who's never played before, I like to start with the Destroyer, the DD, and think about it a bit like a naval Infantry unit. Its not exactly the cheapest naval unit (that distinction is reserved for the Submarine) but it is the cheapest naval unit capable of hitting aircraft on defense, and the cheapest unit you can buy that will reliably "block" the enemy's naval movement, by turning a sea zone "hostile." It also has a complex relationship with submarines and aircraft, allowing the latter to attack the former when a destroyer is present. And the destroyer is the only unit that can effectively counter the submarine on defense, by preventing its opening strike and submerge abilities. So the destroyer is the only naval unit that can "hit all" other units conceivably present in a sz battle.

Just like the Infantry unit is at the core of any strong Ground force, the destroyer unit is key to any strong Naval force! The core of your naval battle group is the true heavy hitting transport defender, the Carrier loaded with Fighters. But destroyers are vital as part of a carrier defense force, particularly against submarines.

Battleships, by contrast, are not essential to your survival.

Earlier I suggested a possible distinction between Fleet Attack and Fleet defense, the destroyer has a critical role to play in both. Lets look at Fleet attack for a second. The destroyer next to the cruiser and the battleship...

Destroyers cost 8 ipc's: attack and defend at 2.
Cruisers cost 12 ipc's: attack and defend at 3.
Battleships cost 20 ipc's: attack and defend at 4.

2 destroyers attacking vs 1 cruiser defending = around 75% odds to the attacker.
The attacker has to spend +4 ipc's at purchase, (for a total of 16 ipc's TUV risked) to destroy 12 ipc's TUV of the enemy's.

3 destroyers attacking vs 2 cruisers defending = around 65% odds to the attacker. Here the attacker spends the same amount on TUV as the defender (24 ipc's risked, to destroy 24 ipc's) again still at decent odds.

3 destroyers attacking vs 1 battleship defending = around 75% odds to the attacker. Once more, the attacker spends +4 ipc's at purchase (for 24 ipc's TUV risked) to destroy 20 ipc's TUV of the enemy's at odds.

Pound for pound, having a larger force of just destroyers is better (albeit slightly more expensive in some cases) than a similar amount of IPCs spent on just cruisers or battleships. In this respect the destroyer vs these other two ships, is a bit like infantry vs tanks. If you have more destroyers you can overcome a defender who concentrates on Cruisers or Battleships, because you will have more total hitpoints, and more shots in a given combat round.

There is one very clear advantage beyond the basic TUV trade. In addition to offering a better hit-point/shot ratio, 2 or more destroyers can also occupy separate sea zones, whereas a single Cruiser or Battleship unit cannot. The destroyers give you the option to mass together for defense, and then later, to fan out and make multiple attacks or blocking maneuvers.

So why would you ever buy a Cruiser or a Battleship?

There are some "specialized" instances where it might make sense to purchase cruisers or battleships...

A. Pure intimidation: buying cruisers or battleships, just to psych out your opponent. The Battleship in particular, is the most expensive unit in the game, so buying a bunch of them over time will surely demoralize your opponent, or so the logic goes. This assumes a certain degree of ineptitude or naivete on the part of your opponent, since, as I will show in a moment, this sort of purchasing strategy is fairly simple to counter.

B. A specific plan for the coastal bombardment bonus. Cruisers and Battleships have a unique ability to bombard coastlines and peel off defending units during amphibious invasions. While potentially advantageous, it's important to recall that each bombardment is tied to the presence of invading ground units 1:1. Also defending units destroyed by bombardment still get to "return fire" meaning that the Cruiser or Battleship bombardment hit could be all-for-nought, if the defender is rolling hot with their ground troops defensively.

C. A specific production limitation at a coastal factory. As described above on land (when limited production might encourage the purchase of tanks over inf/artillery) can apply on water, where limited production could lead to purchase of Battleships or Cruisers over Destroyers.

D. A specific need for more potent fodder. This last may seem a bit weird, looking at expensive units like cruisers to play a fodder role, but in certain cases it can be necessary to sacrifice a cruiser in order to keep a fighter or carrier deck alive (so that fighters can have a place to land). In even rarer cases, it might even be necessary to sacrifice a Battleship, although with battleships, the fodder aspect usually comes from its ability to absorb one hit.

It takes 2 hits during combat to sink a battleship. The Battleship can take one hit, and then repair this immediately at the end of their turn for free, provided it survives the combat. This gives battleships a built-in fodder aspect. That is the justification for their high price tag. This absorption however, is not quite as potent as one might think at first glance. Sure, the advantage of a bunch of free fodder hits via battleship absorption sounds fantastic, if you could develop a nice stack of battleships at the center of your fleet. Just imagine an armada of 3 or 4 battleships working together, to absorb hits in the first round of combat! That's like free fodder units that you don't even have to replace! It almost seems like 20 ipc's is a totally worthwhile investment. Until you start to consider all the other unit combinations that could be purchased for that same cost in IPCs...

20 ipc's = 1 Battleship: attack 4, with 2 hitpoints, but only a single shot per round of the combat phase.

20 ipc's = 1 Cruiser + 1 Destroyer: cumulative attack of 5, with 2 hitpoints, and 2 shots per round.

20 ipc's = 1 Destroyer + 1 bomber: attack 6, with 2 hitpoints, and 2 shots per round.

20 ipc's = 2 Fighters: attack 6, with 2 hitpoints and 2 shots per round.

On attack at least, those unit combinations can counter the battleship fairly easily, or least they can make a reasonable TUV trade, sacrificing themselves for an equal value in IPCs destroyed (e.g to sink a battleship.) Some other combinations, slightly less potent, but still comparable (and cheaper) might be things like...

18 ipc's = 3 Submarines: attack 6, with 3 hitpoints. 3 shots per round, and the ability to make opening shots if the enemy has no destroyer.

18 ipc's = 1 Destroyer + 1 Fighter: attack 5, with 2 hitpoints, 2 shots per round.

16 ipc's = 1 Submarine + 1 Fighter: attack 5, with 2 hitpoints, 2 shots (and the subs surprise strike.)

16 ipc's = 2 Destroyers: attack 4, with 2 hitpoints, and 2 shots per round.

These last few combinations might not be fighting "at odds" per se, but they can still be enough to sink a battleship, if you are attempting a gambit that puts less total TUV at risk in the exchange. Especially if the first round of combat goes well for the attacker, or poorly for the defending battleship.

That starts to give you a picture from the "counter attacker" perspective. If you buy a battleship, the other guy buys 2 fighters, or a destroyer + cruiser to match you on counter attack, and you're basically already losing the naval purchasing contest! Just try to keep thinking about it from the enemy's point of view. When you switch from a "counter attack" purchasing perspective of the enemy, to a purely "defensive" purchasing perspective, the drawbacks of the battleship buy become even more stark. For example, a lone battleship attacks a lone destroyer, or a lone cruiser. The battleship "duds" in the first round of the combat phase, their opponent scores a defensive hit! Now what? Pointlessly retreat or continue and hope to hit a 4, at the risk of losing 20 ipcs TUV? You can start to get a feel for the bind that battleships put you in. As an attacking unit the extra hit absorption is of course helpful, but only getting a single shot per round of combat can become very problematic very quickly for the attacker. The defending enemy, recognizing this, can just start spamming cheaper fodder units, with comparable defensive values and comparable hitpoint values, but with more shots per round!

The battleship can't really move out and attack effectively on its own, it needs other units to cover it, and especially destroyers, to increase the number of shots your force can put up in a given round of combat, or perhaps more importantly to protect your battleship from getting swept by enemy air.

If all of this is giving you second thoughts about the Battleship, now consider the cruiser. At 12 ipcs, attack 3, defend 3, the cruiser is outclassed by both the Bomber and the Fighter. A Bomber, for the same cost as the Cruiser at 12 ipcs, hits at a 4 to the Cruiser's 3.

You can trade a 10 ipc Fighter for a 12 ipc Cruiser at equal odds and still come out ahead by 2 ipcs in the TUV trade. And these fighter units have the advantage of not being required to occupy the sz after a successful trade. They can land on a carrier in a safe sz nearby, or on land (where no naval units can threaten them on counter attack).

We're starting to move now into a real discussion of the Air advantage in A&A, but before we get there, we still need to talk a bit about Submarines, and how subs play into this whole Destroyer/Carrier dynamic.

Transports and Submarines

Run away! Dive! Dive!

These units are complicated, but there's just no escaping the depth charge or the torpedo. We have to discuss these units, before I can really explain how the full Air vs Naval dynamic works.

Transports and Submarines do not create a "hostile" sz and so do not block enemy warships. An attacking warship can choose to ignore submarines, if the subs are alone.

Subs are the cheapest naval unit at 6 ipc's, but their attack value and defense value are uneven - a bit like infantry but with attack and defence values reversed. The Sub is very strong on attack and very weak on defense for the cost...T

Submarines:

Attacks at 2

Defends at 1

Costs 6 ipc's

But subs are weird! First of all, Subs cannot hit aircraft. Ever!
Beyond this, subs have 3 unique abilities that no other unit does:

- A. They have a surprise strike "opening shot" ability vs ships.
- B. They have the ability to "dive" prior to naval combat. And finally,
- C. They can only be hit by aircraft if an enemy destroyer is present.

Attacking units can't hit submarines unless they bring a destroyer with them, as the subs choose whether to fight or dive. If you have no accompanying destroyer then your attacking aircraft can't interact with subs at all! A single enemy destroyer can negate all the special abilities for all the subs in a sz, with the destroyer's ASW (anti-sub-warfare), for as long as that destroyer stays alive in combat. If no destroyer is present, then subs behave in very different ways than all other naval units.

If these rules are starting to sound complex, it's because they are! The submarine, and its interaction with other units, introduces a lot of nuance and "exceptions to the general rules" that force you to pause and go through a lot tedium at the outset.

There is no way of getting around this stuff, as I stated up at the top there, because so many first round combats involve Subs! If you don't describe this stuff before you actually begin playing, you run the risk of really confusing your new player once those combat situations arise. On the other hand, if you do describe this stuff beforehand, you also run the risk of overwhelming the new player, by stating a bunch of complex rules up-front, without a context or solid examples. This is where the battle board comes in.

I'd suggest a good 10 to 15 minutes of battle board practice just with submarines in mixed forces, trying to show all the possible combat situations that Subs might find themselves in. You do this before you try to play things out in the actual game, so that you don't have to face that awkward situation, where your new player turns to you and says... "Hey! I didn't know that subs could do that!" or "Hey! How was I supposed to know that subs couldn't do that!?" Better to get all this complex stuff out of the way on the battle board, where you can create different scenarios, and build test cases. Set up a bunch of these sub combats, just ship on ship first, to try and show how the opening Submarine's opening shot works both on attack and defense. Once the player starts to get a handle on opening shots, then slowly bring the aircraft and destroyers into it.

And when you get to the air, here's one that you should definitely highlight: The Sub vs the fully loaded, but "naked" carrier...

1 sub vs 1 carrier and 2 fighters defending = 60% odds to the attacker! WTF? But it's true.

Because no destroyer is present, the sub is immune from the defensive fighter hits. So the Sub hitting at 2 vs a carrier defending at 1. If the Sub sinks the carrier, and there is no friendly island within the sz, or no friendly territory adjacent to the sz for the defending fighters to land, they will crash into the sea! Think about that for a second... A single sub at a cost of 6 ipcs, could readily sink 34 ipcs of enemy TUV under these conditions! If the defender wasn't careful and left his loaded carrier in open water, unescorted by a destroyer, a lone sub could just wreck it!

After you do the "naked" carrier example, then show them...

6 subs vs 1 carrier and 2 fighters + 1 destroyer. (that's 36 TUV vs 42)

The idea in this example, is to show how the destroyer negates the opening shot of subs, but only for as long that destroyer stays alive during the combat. So its very possible that during the second round of the combat phase, you end up with a situation similar to the naked Carrier one. Remember, subs cannot hit aircraft, and aircraft can only hit subs when a destroyer is present (for each round of the combat phase.) This is the point you want to hammer home, by "showing" it and playing it out with dice (which is exciting for the new player!), rather than explaining it in words (which is usually boring and more confusing for the new player!)

Transports are frequently described as "defenseless" meaning that they have essentially no role to play during the combat phase. They have no attack or defense value, and no hitpoints! A single attacking unit can destroy an infinite number of transports, if the transports are alone! Keeping with the "Subs can't hit Air" theme, here's another battle board situation to set up:

2 fighters vs 1 sub and 1 transport.

In this "combat", there is no interaction between the fighters and the sub, the transport is automatically destroyed!

2 fighters vs 1 sub and 1 transport + 1 destroyer

Again, there is no interaction between the air and the sub, if the fighters can kill the destroyer then the transport is automatically sunk, but the submarine will still be alive!

It might seem like a major time sink, going through a bunch of sub and transport situations on the battle board, but it's not. Your new player isn't going to "get" all this stuff until they see it in operation, and you don't want the first round combats to be your test cases. It takes too long to set up the map, and reset it, if you're trying to use the first round combats as guinea pigs (and the first round combats don't always show the essential concepts as clearly as we might like). The new player, unable to track all of the possible situations in their head, will just start looking to you for guidance. They are looking to you to be the Game Master, and quickly resolve rules questions

about all these complex Sub/Destroyers/Air interactions. The battle boards gives you an opportunity to refresh everyone's memory, and try to show most of the weird stuff at least one time, before you actually play the game.

After the battle board, take it back to the Map! Here we try to show some of the situations that arise, because Subs or Transports cannot create a hostile sea zone by themselves. Show how subs/transports cannot block, and how this can be used to either initiate or prevent certain combats or movements. Again it's much better to show this than it is to try and explain in words. But a solid visual and a little practice will help the ideas to stand out.

Try to touch on the stuff that might seem less intuitive. Show some situations where subs are alone defending a sz. Be sure to show how a "naked" or unescorted transport cannot move into a sz controlled by an enemy sub for the purposes of launching an amphibious combat, but how that same transport could move into a sz controlled by an enemy sub on non combat. Get all this stuff out of the way, beforehand, on the battle-board and using test examples on the map. This will save you a lot of headaches and frustration later on.

If you're the one with the game, you're expected to have read the rulebook, and serve as the Game Master for your group. The manual, tripleA, these forums etc can all help you to understand the rules, but it's up to us to find ways to translate those rules into gameplay realities, examples, and basic "strategic advice" to offer the new player. We don't want to tell them what to do, because that's like taking over the whole process, you might as well be playing a solitaire at that point. The whole novelty of it comes from the surprise and the random variability of the human element. So that's why I like to set up battle examples, for like a good hour, before you do the full game set up. It gives you a chance to run through it, and keep your player enthusiastic and rolling, instead of weighed down by onerous rules and bunch of reading and slow set up time. Start with the battle board. If you can get up to Submarines, and still keep them excited, then you're doing fantastic.

Fighters and Bombers

The Air War! Aces High!

Aircraft, Fighters and Bombers naturally lend themselves to a discussion of the broader A&A elements, like Movement across the map, using aircraft for mass defense, or mass attack, how SBR works, can-opening and a lot of other fun, but somewhat higher order concepts.

Once you've given a half hour or 45 minutes to ground and naval on the battle board, I like to pause the action, and pick up a Fighter and a Bomber, hold them up high for everyone to see, and then say something like, "now lets really talk about aircraft".

Just like airpower changed the whole nature of Warfare during WWII, understanding airpower in A&A will take your gameplay to the next level! Fighters and Bombers, your knights of the sky! Like jousting lances and clashing swords, are the key to winning this game. Every nation has a starting air force, and aircraft are involved in all aspects of the broader strategy for both sides, Axis and Allies. You can't play any nation effectively, until you've mastered the use of your starting

fighters and bombers, knowing how to coordinate them with your teammates, and then knowing when/how to build more.

I've been trying to avoid making too many axiomatic statements when it comes to A&A, but here's an axiom that holds pretty consistently in all versions of the A&A game: **The side that achieves air superiority first, and maintains air dominance throughout, almost always wins in the end!**

But what exactly do I mean by "air superiority" and why does it help your side to win?

Fighter:

Attacks at 3

Defends at 4

Moves 4

Costs 10 ipc

Bomber:

Attacks at 4

Defends at 1

Moves 6

Costs 12 ipc

The most important value (for both these units) relative to cost, is their movement value.

The fighter moves twice as far as any naval unit, and the bomber moves three time as far! They can move out and attack across both land and sea, without depending on other units to make this possible. And the fighter can defend at sea via the carrier unit. Even more significant, both fighters and bombers can "fly over" water or land, regardless of whether the sz or territory in question is hostile. No other unit in A&A can do this!

Air units can get from point A to point B in far fewer turns than units that move across the ground or across the water. Consider this... over 2 game rounds, an infantry unit can move 2 spaces. A tank or a ship can move 4 spaces in that same time. But a fighter can move 8 spaces! And a bomber can move 12! As an expression of movement for the cost, no unit will get you as far, or as fast, as an air unit!

Here's another axiom to chew on: **The best "naval" units in the A&A game are, in fact, the air units! Fighters and bombers.**

Aircraft provide the best attack value vs surface warships for the cost. And fighters have the best naval defense value for the cost, when joined with the carrier unit. Fighters also provide a much more flexible naval defense than comparably priced warships, because they are able to detach from their carriers and operate independently of them. That last point is key, because if you purchase a warship with a high defense value, that investment in TUV is locked on the water. A battleship can't suddenly sprout wings and go on a wrecking mission across Eurasia, once you win the naval race. But a pair of fighters can do exactly that!

Fighters can park on a carrier deck when naval defense is required, but as soon as that requirement is finished, they are free to "fly off" and support the ground campaign. This situation will often arise, especially during the endgame, so it is advantageous to be able to rapidly transition your fighters between carrier based naval defense and ground attack/defense. What's more, you often don't need a carrier or a navy at all, to still threaten the enemy's position at sea, provided you have enough aircraft. The heavy hitting bomber unit, with its expansive range can fly out and wreck warships with its 4s, and fighters can accompany to serve as fodder cover for such attacks.

In order to pull off these sorts of Air attacks, you first need to "magnify" the Air advantage, meaning you need to buy a bunch of air units so you can group them together. Here are some sample battles showing the odds of Air vs warships to demonstrate the logic behind magnifying your air builds...

2 fighters (20 TUV) vs 3 destroyers (24 TUV) = about 25% odds to the attacker.

4 fighters (40 TUV) vs 5 destroyers (40 TUV) = about 47% odds to the attacker. 51% to the defender, with a fairly narrow chance at a draw. Sure, it's not a spectacular trade for the attacker by any stretch, but it is still the same TUV risked, and at roughly 50/50.

2 bombers (24 TUV) vs 3 destroyers (24 TUV) = about 40% odds to the attacker.

4 bombers + 2 fighters (68 TUV) vs 8 destroyers (64 TUV) = about 55% odds to the attacker!

Air, especially mixed Fighters and Bombers, can match a similar amount of TUV spent on destroyers. If the power projection is strong enough (with a good ratio of bombers to fighters) these airforces can begin to outclass the destroyer forces, even when the Destroyers have the greater numbers! Given how potent Air can be on attack vs Naval, the question naturally arises "how do I stop this from happening!?"

Perhaps it shouldn't be surprising that the answer is "More Aircraft!" Namely defensive fighters to protect the warships. This is accomplished via carriers, which allow you to put those "defensive 4s" in the water. It costs you 14 ipc's to make this happen, and you get a floating platform "the carrier deck" with 1 defense point and 1 hitpoint, on which to house a pair of fighters. The "fully loaded" carrier = a total of 9 defense points, and 3 hitpoints, for a cost of 34 ipc's. No other combination of naval units, for the same cost in ipc's, will get you as much concentrated defensive power vs a would be air attacker.

3 fighters (30 TUV) vs 1 carrier and 2 fighters (34 TUV) = about 34% to the attacker.

Already the defensive fighters are doing their job, for a pretty comparable cost in IPCs. But now lets jump up the numbers and throw some defensive destroyers into the mix...

6 fighters (60 TUV) vs 1 carrier and 2 fighters + 3 destroyers (58 TUV) = 50% to the attacker.

6 fighters (60 TUV) vs 1 carrier and 2 fighters + 4 destroyers (66 TUV) = 25% to the attacker.

Did you catch that?! A single extra destroyer for defense just dropped the odds of that attacking fighter force from 50% down to just 25%! Major! Now, what I want you to come away with here is not the exact numbers, but just the basic notion that, once you have a defensive fighter force in place (via the carrier), even a relatively small amount spent on destroyer fodder can make a big difference to your fleet's chances of survival vs Air attack. Cutting to the chase, to defend against Air attacks on the water, you need Air of your own, on the water! Otherwise there's a good chance your warships will just get smoked by the enemy from above, along with whatever transports those warships were protecting. This is a lot of time spent looking at the water though. For the sake of variety, lets turn our heads again to the ground, and ground defense, this time looking down on it from our new vantage point high up in the sky! Or put another way, lets figure how we get these fighters from the sea to the ground, and vice versa.

One of the main reasons to buy fighters, beyond just attacking or defending navies, is for their pure defensive value on the ground. The Fighter is the strongest defensive unit in the game, (next to the battleship, but cheaper) putting up a hit 4 in defensive combat.

Moving these fighters around, to get heavy hitting defensive units onto key land territories, is a huge part of the overall strategy in A&A. Imagine you are trying to get defense points from London to Moscow. For the cost of 6 ipcs, 2 infantry (with a cumulative defense value of 4) would seem to be a much better purchase, than a single fighter (also with a defense value of 4) which costs 10 ipcs. But infantry can't move from London to Moscow by themselves! There are several sz and land territories separating these locations. Which means that, in addition to the 6 ipcs spent on infantry, you also need to buy a Transport for 7 ipcs. That's already a cost of 13 ipcs for the ground, vs 10 ipcs for the fighter. But this is an oversimplification, because the transport by itself is defenseless. It can't move safely unless protected by warships, so even more ipcs invested, before you can move the ground. And what's more, all the szs between London and Moscow need to be cleared of ships in order to safely move along that sea route, there can't be any enemy blockers along the way, or it could take even longer.

Now consider how many game rounds it takes to actually get those inf units to Moscow. Taking the fastest possible route, from London to Archangel, it takes 2 rounds to get those infantry into position: 1 round transporting inf from London to Arch, and the next round marching from Arch to Moscow. OK, so that's 2 rounds for the Infantry, and the fighters can't get there any faster than 2 rounds either, seems like they're pretty even right? But what if this sz 4 route isn't available? What if the only viable route you have is sz 5 to Karelia? Now the Ground force is 3 moves from Moscow instead of 2! Lets take it a step further. Say Moscow no longer needs to be defended, and the territory that Axis are really threatening now is India! How long is it going to take your 2 infantry to get there? Three more turns!!! The fighter could get there in just one turn.

And that's just taking the London to Moscow route as an example, but what if your starting point isn't London, but Washington D.C.? Or what if you're Japan trying to get to Berlin? Clearly it's going to take a lot longer to get 2 infantry to the destination territory via transports, than it would for a fighter to just fly there outright. Now it's starting to sink in, maybe I should have just spent those 10 ipcs on a fighter, rather than start up this whole tangle of transported inf for defense.

Here's something interesting to think about using the Washington D.C. example... The fastest you can possibly move 2 inf from E. USA to Moscow with transports is along the sz 2 route - floating - then unloading into Archangel. Then from Archangel to Moscow. This is a 3 round set up. The fastest you can possibly move 1 fighter from E. USA to Moscow (without a carrier) is also 3 rounds. Either from E. USA to Greenland then via Archangel, or to Gibraltar via Caucasus. At first this might seem to run counter to my whole argument about the movement advantage of fighters, but newly purchased fighters can do something pretty cool that newly purchased infantry units cannot... they can be placed directly in a sz!

If you're the USA, and you have a carrier in sz 11, you can place 2 fighters a round straight into sz 11. You can't place infantry units directly on a transport, and even if you could, this still wouldn't give the infantry units any more range than they had already. But with a Carrier (either newly purchased, or an existing one) you CAN place Fighters directly in the water - and this increases their movement the next round by 1 space. This is huge!

Think about it...

Instead of placing the fighter in Eastern USA, then flying to Greenland (1 round), to Archangel (2 rounds), and finally to Moscow (3 rounds).

You could place the fighter directly into sz 11 on a carrier deck, then fly to Iceland (1 round) and from Iceland straight to Moscow (2 rounds!)

Haha who thought Iceland was worth anything, right? Well it is in this case, thanks to the carrier and the power of fighter movement. The fighter placed on land can set up a pretty potent repeating "transit" across the gameboard, but a fighter placed at sea can set up an even better one. To do this you need carriers in the water. Carriers (either on the front end, or back end of a transit) can cut the time it takes to get your newly purchased fighters into position by a full game round.

It is sometimes better to leave your carriers adjacent to coastal factories for exactly this purpose, as fighter launchers!

The ideal is to have a launching carrier at the start of a Fighter transit, and friendly territory or receiving carrier at the end of it. Then you switch out 2 fighters a round, to the target destination. These carrier launching plays are not always possible, given how ships often need to move around for transport defense, but if you can set them up, these are the best sort of fighter transits, giving your fighters the most flexibility, speed, and defensive coverage.

Now all that has a focus just on defensive power, but what if you don't really need all that defensive power (all those hit 4s)? What if what you really need is just a few more hitpoints? In that case, it might make sense to just buy bombers. Sure their defense is fairly terrible at 1, but sometimes you don't need defense, you just need fodder or more shots, and you can turn a huge battle on its head. Here's an example...

Germany descends on the Caucasus with 12 infantry and 2 tanks. The Russians are waiting to meet their attack with 10 Infantry and 1 fighter on defense.

This battle is roughly 50/50, with slight odds to the German attacker, somewhere around 52% to the attacker and 47% to the defender, with a narrow draw.

Now say the British decide to send just a single defensive bomber to aid the Russians in their hour of need. The German attacker's odds now drop to somewhere around 35%.

Now assume the Americans follow suit, adding a bomber of their own to the Russian pile. The two bombers now drop the German attackers odds all the way down to around 22% !!!

Imagine that! From a slightly better than 50/50 shot on Moscow originally, down to just a 1 in 5 shot? It's insane right? but it's true. The bombers can literally prevent the Caucasus battle from ever occurring in the first place, if the German player is paying attention to the odds. And if they're not paying close attention? Well then those bombers might just make a decisive defense and turn the tide of the entire war!

Bombers move 6, so bomber transits are faster than fighter transits, which means that you can usually get them where they need quickly. A bomber from London can reach Moscow (and beyond) in 1 move. A bomber from E. USA can reach Moscow (and beyond) in 2 moves. Not bad, if you just need to rush a defensive hitpoint to a key territory at the critical hour. And it's not like this rush defense advantage is all, because these aircraft can threaten enemy units along the way! And that's really what it comes down to right there, the air stack gives you attack options and defense options at the same time, because it can move so damn far.

Aircraft and Ground forces in "Light Trading"

Levity: With strafing bullets and bombs!

Next I'd like to look at how Aircraft are used in the ground game. How to make favorable "light trades" vs enemy ground forces on both attack and defense, by using infantry fodder. How to Airblitz, ie. attack a numerically superior ground force with a weaker ground force (or even no ground force at all), by using air to make up the difference in hits.

Light trading, the way I like to think of it, is when you aim to kill the enemy and occupy their territory for the minimum TUV invested in the attack, with the minimum TUV of your own at risk. We're talking here not just about the risk during the attack, but also afterwards, from enemy counter attack the following turn, should you actually take control of the territory as planned. Aircraft enable the attacker to make this sort of move, because unlike ground units, they can't occupy newly captured territories!

This ability, the ability "NOT to land" in spaces they're attacking, is actually one of the things that makes Aircraft so valuable in A&A. At least in terms of "trading" TUV back and forth in small engagements.

The clearest example of this value is in a Strafe. A strafe is where you attack at odds (with heavy hitters), and then withdraw after the first round of combat, or when you feel you've done enough damage, preserving those heavy units in a safe and well defended location. The term Strafe itself has an Air association built in, as "strafing" was usually an attack from the air against the ground. Technically you don't need Aircraft to pull off a successful attack/retreat move like this in A&A, and it could also be done with tanks, and this is usually described as a "strafe" as well, even if there are no aircraft involved. But Aircraft allow you to increase the attack power of this attack/retreat move! And they allow you to destroy enemy units without risking as much TUV in the resulting destruction or occupation, should the strafe attempt happen to fail. A strafe is always a dicey gambit. Making a single pass is usually safer than trying to make repeated passes (the later capture the real world sense of strafing more accurately.) In short, the more heavy hitting attack units you have, the better the odds that you'll make a strong hit in the first round.

But too many heavy hitters, all hitting at once in the first pass, and you might be forced to occupy rather than retreat! It's a bind, when your strafe fails, but it's more of bind when all the heavy hitters are tanks. With Aircraft you can always pull away to safety! They give you the "hit 3s" and "hit 4s" you need to make a nice clean strafe, but you don't have to put those units at risk to possible counter attack.

To get at the heart of why it's better to have an Air focused strafing force, than a Tank focused one, we need to picture a Dead Zone...

Imagine a situation like this: Say Russia has 2 infantry in Yakut. Japan is waiting right next door in Buryatia with a slightly larger army, say 3 infantry (BANZAI!) they are itching to destroy those Russian infantry in Yakut! It's Japan's turn!

Just behind the Russian front line at Yakut is nice stack of Soviet troops in Evenki, let's say like 6 infantry 2 tanks and 1 Fighter! Just behind the Japanese front line of Buryatia, there is a somewhat smaller Japanese force in Manchuria, maybe 5 infantry 1 tank and 1 fighter on reserve.

Now comes the dilemma, how much should the Japanese player commit to the attack against Yakut? Or put another way, should they bring the Manchurian tank into the fight? (let's assume just for simplicity that there are no other units from either side in the area.) Whatever Japanese force ends up occupying Yakut, will surely be under threat of counter attack from the superior Russian forces in Evenki. It could get ugly if Japan goes "all-in" with the tank. Maybe, Zhukov is there just waiting for the Japanese to make a foolhardy advance like this, and then crush them completely in one fell swoop!

This is a perfect example, of what we call a "Deadzone" in Axis and Allies. That large Russian force in Evenki has "deadzoned" the territory of Yakut!

A Deadzone is a space that is threatened by an "overwhelming" force, from some adjacent territory or sea zone - where your units are likely to die should they try to occupy it. The deadliness of the Deadzone isn't anything intrinsic to the space itself, but a consequence of the size and power of the forces arrayed against it.

Usually two large enemy forces will dance around each other at a slight remove, and contest the territories between them with light forces. These intermediate territories then become deadzones, as neither side is willing to occupy them in large numbers for fear of a massive counter-attack. This happens a lot on the Eastern front, where Germany and Russia are wary of getting too close to each other with their main armies, in large part because they can't rely on their own fighters for defense in those territories! (their fighters can't land in newly captured territories!) This can result in long stalemates, usually only broken by "fighter support" from a teammate, or when one side achieves a large defensive armor stack or large defensive infantry wall, basically a force that is too large to overcome at odds by a counter attack. Once you can take and hold a territory in force, it is no longer a deadzone. The lines shift, and some new territory likely becomes the deadzone at that point.

Aircraft and especially Fighters can be used to create these deadzones, to "manage them", and ultimately to defeat them. If you know what you're doing!

First lets take two really simple examples...

1 inf + 1 fighter vs 1 infantry defending.

1 inf + 1 tank vs 1 infantry defending.

Which attack force is better?

The answer is it depends on what you're trying to do. They both have an equivalent attack power of 4. If the goal is to kill the enemy and take the territory from the defender at all costs, then the Tank force is better. But if the goal is simply to destroy enemy units at favorable odds, while risking the minimal amount of your own TUV in the process, then the Fighter force is better.

Total Unit Value, TUV, that's the thing we want to hold onto. The ipc cost of the units, if you had to replace them. Say the territory in question is worthless, or nearly worthless, a 1 ipc space like Yakut. A defending Russian infantry unit in Yakut would represent 3 ipc's in TUV. In terms of total value this infantry unit is worth 3 times as much as the territory it is defending!

If you, as Japan, just really want to just mess with the Russians. You want to diminish Russian power! But you don't necessarily have the strength for an all out drive yet. Well, if the goal is simply to destroy Russian TUV at the minimal risk to yourself, it makes way more sense to attack Yakut with an inf + fighter, rather than an inf + tank. With the fighter force you can destroy 3 enemy TUV at odds, and only risk 3 TUV of your own in the process. If you both hit it's a wash - 3 for 3. If you hit and the enemy duds, then you pick up the +1 ipc's for the territory, have preserved your own 3 TUV, and destroyed 3 enemy.

But even if you dud out completely, and the enemy defender hits, it was still only 3 TUV that you risked. The fighter retreats to safety, you took a slight beating, but hey, at least you're still standing. And at least you took a shot, right!

Now compare that to the Tank force, where you're risking 9 TUV to destroy 3 TUV. Even if you win and pick up the + 1 ipc for the territory, you still leave more TUV vulnerable on counter attack, then you just won for yourself in the battle. The enemy can then use cheaper infantry and fighters of their own, to destroy your tank, and start the process all over again, except now they're ahead in the TUV trade instead of you.

But now say that the territory in question isn't some out-of-the-way frozen burg like Yakut, but the Victory City of Leningrad! The cradle of the Revolution itself, under siege by those German bastards! And Germany has just been deadzoning this spot right from the start, with their superior forces in Baltic States. Suddenly Karelia itself is under occupation, along with the VC and factory.

A lone German infantry unit, survives to defend this new conquest. So here, as the Russian player, you really want to kill that German unit AND take control of the territory, if only to prevent Germany from building out of the factory. But the huge German army in Baltic states (and its usually pretty huge) has you thinking, "damn! I really want to win this battle, but I don't want put a lot of units at risk, since I know I will need them later!" In this case, you want to think about the edge that artillery can give you in the Light trading with aircraft

1 inf, 1 art + 1 fighter is the go to combination for light trading with aircraft, if you really need to score a hit. The inf/art combo has a cumulative attack value of 4 points, the fighter has an attack value of 3, added together you get a total attack "power" of 7. That's a fairly solid chance to nail a hit in the first round of combat. In low luck, it would yield 1 auto-hit, and one remainder hit rolled at 1/6. The second hit is a long shot, but at least the auto-hit is secured, meaning that, if nothing else, you can at least count on destroying 1 enemy unit in the engagement!

2 inf + 1 fighter, only has an attack power of 5. In low luck this means that the hit is not a given, it's rolled at a 5/6 chance. Now I'm not a huge fan of low luck myself, I'm a born dice player, but this information is very useful to understand, because it shows you the value of different forces the light trade using Air. Lets throw in a bomber too just to see how this work.

1 inf, 1 artillery + 1 fighter = 17 ipcs TUV for 1 autohit (with a remainder of 1).

2 inf + 1 bomber = 18 ipcs TUV for exactly 1 autohit.

3 inf + 1 fighter = 19 ipcs for exactly 1 autohit.

The 1 inf, 1 art + 1 fig combo still gets you the best trade for the cost vs a single defending inf unit. So when you really need to take the territory, but don't want to risk too much TUV to enemy counter attacks, that's the sort of light trade you want to make with your fighter unit, and artillery boosted light trade!

In general, when you're engaging in these sorts of light trades, you always want to have more fodder cover for your attacking fighter (or bomber) than the defender has in total numbers/shots. So for example, if you are attacking 2 defending ground units, then you want your own Fighter force to include at least 2 attacking ground units, to absorb potential hits and serve as protective fodder for the fighter.

This will ensure that you never have to expose that costly 10 ipc Fighter (or even costlier 12 ipc bomber) to a defensive hit. Unless you want to that is. There are some rare cases where it might be advantageous to attack ground with aircraft, even if you don't have cheaper attacking fodder units to cover them.

I've heard this sort of move described before as an air blitz, or an air sweep, the basic idea is this: you really need to kill ground units in a particular location for some strategic reason/goal, such that you are willing to risk exposing expensive aircraft to do this.

If you have enough planes, it is possible to attack a superior ground force of mostly infantry and artillery, with a much smaller one, and still sweep the space at odds due to the attack power of your air. You do this on the logic, that you will probably score more hits in the first round of combat than the defender will, and thus you will don't exactly need to match them in fodder 1:1. You might be able to match them in hits, using half the number of ground, it just depends how many aircraft you have, and how many you are willing to expose in the first round of combat.

Consider this attack. 1 inf, and 4 fighters vs 2 Inf.

Sure the defender has a pretty good chance to make a single hit in the first round of the combat phase. But if you hit heavy, you will probably end up trading 3 TUV for 6 TUV.

Now its possible the defender might even make 2 hits, and that would certainly suck, but how likely is it that both of the defender's dice hit in the opening round of the combat phase? And are you willing to take that risk, that the enemy could "get into" your fighters in order to destroy 6 enemy TUV? The odds that the enemy makes 2 misses, is actually more likely than the odds they'll make 2 hits, (since each die still has to roll at 1/3 chance to hit the deuce.) In which case you're stoked, because you destroyed 6 TUV at no cost, and occupied a territory. Sure it was risky, but it was calculated risk.

Sometimes it isn't about trading TUV at odds, but capturing a critical territory like a National Capital or a Victory City. In such cases, the air blitz, allows you to sacrifice more expensive air units to keep a single ground unit alive, in order to capture the territory. For example:

America has 1 inf and 7 fighters attacking Tokyo.

The Japanese have 8 infantry to defend their National Capital.

All things being equal, the Americans have about an 80% chance to win this fight. Which means if they are willing to sacrifice enough TUV in Air, they can probably keep that single infantry unit alive to take the territory.

Would it be worth losing potentially 70 ipc in Air TUV to keep an infantry unit alive? Well, if it knocks Japan out of the War, get's you all their money, plus Tokyo for 8 ipc with a factory, then yeah! It probably is.

You can imagine similar situations with Germany and UK. Is it worth it to trade air to steal the German purse as UK? Yes, this is almost always worth it!

Attacking with no fodder, or attacking with "Naked Air" is a little different, but even this can sometimes be worth it. Exposing aircraft to kill a unit in a key territory might be sound strategy. Like if you want to clear a lane and "can open" a territory, so that one of your teammates can then Blitz tanks through on their turn it to make some killer move.

Or perhaps you absolutely need to prevent just such a Tank Blitz move after an "Airblitz" can-opener just occurred. Imagine for example Japan has 10 tanks in Szechwan. Russia leaves 1 infantry in Kazakh, to block these tanks, but then puts their main force in Caucasus, to hold it against a German drive. Not considering the danger of the Airblitz, or how the turn order can be exploited, the Russian player leaves Moscow only lightly defended, thinking to themselves that Moscow can't be hit this round.

Now Germany's turn is up, and they fly straight to Kazakh, attacking it with naked aircraft, and landing in Szechwan. Opening up a lane for the Japanese tanks to Blitz on Moscow! Here it might make a lot of sense for UK to land a fighter in Kazakh to block. Clearly this is not an optimal use of the fighter in the TUV trade, but if the situation is dire, and you need to rescue a capital, even an air unit can "pay for itself" used just as an emergency blocker!

And recall that for such purposes bombers basically work just as well as fighters, but over a longer distance and with more attack power, for the cost of +2 ipcs per unit.

There is only one unit in the roster that the can counter the air advantage vs ground the Anti-Aircraft artillery unit! But I have such mixed feelings about it...

Anti-Aircraft Artillery - the AAgun (or AAAgun)

"ACK-ACK" I'm just going to come out and say it, I kind of hate this unit!

AAguns still play in a way that is very different from all other units. I almost never buy them, and I would probably wish them out of existence if I could, to make the game simpler. But then again, the game really does need some sort of Anti-Aircraft mechanic just to balance the sheer power of mass aircraft.

The AAgun cannot move during the combat phase!

This can be hugely annoying, because people always forget about them, and because it prevents you from loading AAguns onto transports effectively with accompanying infantry units. You are forced to wait until non com, which creates all sorts of headaches, when you're trying to move these units across the water! They have no normal attack or defense combat value (analogous to other units) but instead use their own separate combat phase. In this phase they are allowed to fire at up to 3 attacking aircraft, but only once, after which point they become essentially useless. They have a hitpoint value of 1, (meaning they can be used as fodder) but again, only on defense. If taken as a bombardment casualty they don't get to fire back.

All this combines to make a unit that is exceedingly difficult to explain, but let's give it a shot...

Attacks at 0: cannot move during combat, thus cannot take a territory.

Defends at 1: one time shot, in the opening phase of combat vs 3 attacking aircraft per AAgun.

Moves at 1: again, only on non-combat.

with 1 hitpoint: can absorb a hit as fodder.

Costs: 5 ipcs

Compared to the Air units the AAgun is meant to counter, the eminently useful Fighter and Bomber, that might not seem like a whole lot of advantage for the money. One shot, one time against three planes, for 5 ipcs? But if it manages to shoot down just a single air unit, it has basically paid for itself twice over.

The AAgun actually has some of the best odds to destroy the most TUV of any unit in a single round of the combat phase. Only a sub vs the loaded carrier can do comparable damage for the cost invested, under optimal circumstances. If the enemy sends 3 fighters against a single AAgun, that AAgun could certainly hit one plane at 50/50 odds.

To really be an effective deterrent, you probably need at least a pair of AAguns to adequately defend a large stack from an all out air assault. Most players have 2 AAguns at the outset, but when it comes to buying new guns, getting a pair costs you the same amount of cash as a shiny new fighter! A fighter that not only attacks at a solid 3, defends at a kickass 4, but moves at a 4 as well! Long term investment for the cash, and the fighter is probably way more useful than those 2 AAguns.

At most, I see maybe the investment for a second gun in India, or late in the endgame, when the attacker has mass air, and the defender has a huge defensive stack already. Usually though, players just seem to work with the AAguns they have at the start.

If you do buy AAguns, make sure you are grouping them with enough defensive power to back down a "tank sacrifice" play from your enemy. The AAgun has no defense value whatsoever in a battle where no attacking Aircraft are present. If the enemy sends just infantry/art + tanks for the heavy 3s, the best your AAgun can do is just take the first fodder hit. If your opponent sees a 5 TUV unit vulnerable to a trade, this may entice them to attack with a 6 TUV tank, rather than risk Aircraft vs AAgun. This can also be an effective bait, if your goal is to draw out enemy armor for counter attack potential, but the aagun is pretty pricey when used like that.

If your defensive power or counter attack power isn't strong enough to support an AAgun moving out vs enemy tanks, then you should probably hold the guns back. The safest place for them is in the main frontline ground stack. The stack you "can't lose!" And of course, there is always a role for them in capital defense. This last is likely the best use of AAguns, and probably the only locations where it might be worth buying new AAguns, if your starting AAguns are out of position or destroyed. Even then though, I'd still have to consider pretty carefully, whether I bought an AAgun for 5, or an infantry unit or artillery unit that can move in the combat phase and actually take land for my side.

Along this subject of Anti-Air, there is one other unit in the game that has an Anti-Aircraft ability, and that is the Factory unit...

The Factory

If you have already achieved the maximum transport capacity off your coastal factories, or achieve a level in the ground game where you are making more money than you could reasonably spend at your facilities on a mass infantry spam, it can make sense to buy new production.

The factory can also be used as bait in a contested area of the map where you have a positional advantage (thus drawing enemy units into a position where they can be destroyed, or at least distracted) or to lock down some peripheral territory or sz, or to utilise its capability as a permanent blitz blocker (but running the risk that it might be captured).

A factory purchase is usually only a consideration for the dominant nation on the map, for example when a nation achieves about +1/3rd of their starting ipc's in conquered territory. However, the advantages vary considerably between nations, so reviewing options for each:

- Japan: Starts with 30 ipc's. With 24 ipc's income you can shuck 8 inf units out of Japan, so that's only a small balance for higher value units.

When Japan achieve 40 ipc's a round, it often makes sense to buy a factory, either in a forward territory like East Indies, Borneo or French Indo-China, or the safe territory next to the home sea zone, Manchuria. This allows it to increase production to 10 or 12 units a round, 36 ipc's in infantry, again leaving a small balance for higher value units.

Once Japan gets up into the mid 50s it might make sense to have a third factory (build new or capture India) to put max ground into Eurasia immediately each round. That raises the total production up to potentially 13-15 ground units, 45 ipc's in infantry, so you really need significant income to justify this further factory.

Additional factories almost always makes sense for Japan, when they are in the ascendant. The only danger of a factory expansion comes right at the beginning under full Kill Japan First (KJF) conditions (see later section).

- USA: Starts with 42 ipc's. To get the USA all the way up to the mid 50s in ipc's (using my +1/3rd of starting income shorthand) requires that the US have either made a full Pacific press with success, or have begun landings in Europe. Then a factory buy can be advisable, especially if you're taking the money islands from Japan, but sometimes also with a Kill Germany First (KGF) strategy (see later section) at a location like Norway.
- UK: Start at 31 ipc's, but the UK is usually cash strapped, required to spend everything for max placement at existing facilities. Can occasionally benefit from a factory in South Africa, which they can't afford to fill forever, but which might deter Axis forays into Africa.

- Russia: Unlikely to benefit sufficiently from a factory purchase.
- Germany: Starts with 41 ipcs. A factory buy is unlikely, but if Germany get up to around 55 ipcs, it may tilt the balance on the eastern front, or be used to expand naval forces.

Strategic Bombing

Strategic Bombing Raids (SBRs) against Factories, can be a major part of the game, among players who are willing to risk their air for SBR versus this built-in Industrial Complex AAfire. A bomber shot down costs the enemy 12 ipcs in TUV, which can make this unit fairly potent vs bombers, if you roll those lucky 1s. Whether you strat Bomb or not, depends a bit on your own risk aversion, how many bombers you have at the ready, and whether or not your enemy is engaging in this style of play too.

Strategic bombing is basically a game resolution mechanism.

It exists to allow faster games, that conclude more quickly, by introducing a decisive/variable element into the balance by sides. SBR is unpredictable, especially in a dice game! If one side levels a catastrophic bombing run, or one side gets totally smoked by a factory AA-fire, the swing can be huge. The advantage given to one side or the other can force the game towards a clearer finish, as the side that "won" in a decisive SBR/AA vs Bomber Battle can then build on their win, and press the advantage even harder.

Otherwise, if both players content themselves to never SBR (due to risk aversion, and the idea that bombers are best used in combat) then the game can go on much longer. Games with SBR, tend to resolve in a single session more readily, whereas games with little or no SBR can go well over a dozen rounds. Or even longer, depending on how conservative the players are.

I think SBR has fairly strong entertainment value, and it can be very useful in helping to break nations like Germany or Russia. Multiple bombing runs by two teammates against a single enemy target, over the course of a round, can really add up. Sure some of the bombers might go down, but if they don't and score some decent hits, this can set the enemy back a whole round in the purchasing contest! Especially if you think about the SBR rolls, in terms of equivalent value territories.

Hitting a 6, is almost like depriving Germany of France!

Hit 4 and it's like you just snatched West Russia and Ukraine away from them!

Hit 2, same value as Holland.

I just try to imagine it like I stole all the gold from one of those places, and then the SBR feels a bit more consequential. Of course SBR doesn't deny income directly, it does so through the Factory damage/repair system. So just because you do 6 damage to a factory, doesn't guarantee that the enemy will necessarily spend 6 ipcs to repair. They might not need the full production out of that factory this round, so they might just repair a couple points of damage.

In order for SBR to be truly effective you need to "Max-damage" a factory. The damage needs to be higher than the production value of the territory itself (ideally the damage needs to be twice as high!) To ensure that you do max damage against a high value factory, you need to bring multiple bombers into the raid at the same time. There is no way to control the outcome of this in a dice game, and the swing could be very dramatic. That's why I think the more bombing that occurs in a game, the more likely it is that one side or the other might get hammered, which leads to a timely finish.

Bombers are fairly affordable at 12 ipc's, and useful for movement on both attack and defense, as I tried to show earlier. The more bomber forces are out there, the greater the likelihood that a nation will start making bombing runs.

When the game goes into mass SBR mode, it's basically up to the dice. The potential swings in these battles are just too varied to predict with any consistency. The nation conducting the bombing run might crush with heavy 6s! Or it might get through the AA-fire only to roll a bunch of 1s. Or maybe the factory AA-fire cuts them down outright. There's no way to tell, until you throw the dice.

There is however, one thing you can do, that will definitely restrict the number of bombing runs conducted, and that is to include the Optional Fighter Escort/Intercept rules for SBR. In my view the Escort/Intercept rules change SBR to a one time major event. Basically you have to build up large numbers of both bombers and fighters, and then go for a massive strike all at once, in the hope that the enemy fighters you destroy and the bombs you drop, will be enough to overcome the potential TUV loss of dead escorting fighters. It is up to the defender to decide whether they will intercept, and this can be a costly proposition for them, so they might just let the bombers through and save their "would-be interceptors" to fight in normal combats rather than putting them at risk of destruction. One issue with the mass strike SBR under these rules, is that the payoff in bombing might not be very substantial, if the defender does intercept, then the TUV exchange is more about how many fighters/bombers go down. These battles can provide huge TUV swings, comparable to naval battles, or ground battles at a capital, which means players are probably more reluctant to engage in them. This could go either way from a game resolution standpoint. On the one hand it encourages players to wait until they're confident in their endgame and superior Air forces before they attempt to bomb, but on the other hand, SBR with Escort/Intercept can be a major TUV swing once it does occur.

Key Strategic Challenges

At this level you would be addressing the fundamental drivers of the game and opening the minds of new players to the strategic challenges they have to address.

- The need for the allies to co-ordinate.
- The threat to Russia, the value of keeping it alive, and options for doing so.
- KGF vs KJF.

- India as the UK's only imperial IPC needing to support all UK efforts outside Europe, so maximising India production each turn, plus reinforcement options, plus additional IPC options - e.g. Egypt or South Africa.
- Germany's alternative areas of strategic focus - N Atlantic, Russia, the Med, Africa - how to choose between them ...
- The challenge of getting the US engaged.
- and so on - I am sure you can add a lot of other strategic challenges to this list

Control of the Center

The player who has the most attack power covering the center of the game board - the swath of territory that separates Germany from Japan overland in Eurasia - has the overall advantage and the best chance to prevail in the endgame. If the Allies control this region (and retain London) it is difficult for Axis to win regardless of how much money they are making.

The key objective in the center is Moscow, the fate of which depends on the pivot territories immediately surrounding it, especially Caucasus with its factory, but also West Russia and Kazakh. If the Axis capture and stack any of these, the Allied position can rapidly collapse. But for so long as the Allies are able to maintain a wedge between the two Axis powers, their overall economic strength and turn order advantage (3 turns rather than 2) makes Center control relatively straight forward. But if Axis achieve economic parity, and start chiseling away at the key pivot territories and production facilities around Moscow, the balance in the war can easily start to favor Axis. All nations are trying to stack heavy ground in this region, in order to first deadzone and then dominate the center, often grouping multinational forces to project an increased attack/defense power over the course of multiple turns.

There are two schools of thought as to the strategy to adopt:

1. Long term, it is the attack/defense power of Infantry and Artillery that is the undisputed king. But during early rounds, players can use the "movement" advantage of air units and armor to try to achieve more income early on and to deny the enemy control of a key production location, or a critical choke point. Here air transits and tank drives are used to back up the movement of inf/art stacks and cover them as they push around and work to get into position. The danger is overextending yourself too early, leaving high value units without infantry support.

An initial German focus with this approach is to take a Russian factory and then hold it while you wait for the Japanese to arrive.

For the Allies it might be the transit of US and UK fighters to defend key territories in the center.

2. Push heavy infantry and artillery stacks early, then catch up in later rounds with more mobile units. This is the more conservative style of gameplay, that puts a premium on the gaining the late game advantage with larger ground numbers. Usually you'll be giving up

some territory/income early on, in the hopes of recouping it later, during the mid-game rounds, once those ground forces have moved to the front.

There are merits to either approach, and also ways to do them both in tandem, with hybrid buys over several rounds, or with a different role/purchasing focus for each nation on the team.

There is an alternative Allied strategy to controlling the center which focuses on capturing a starting Axis capital at all costs, even at the expense of losing Moscow.

Opening Moves

There are also a number of useful or otherwise opening moves, such as R1 West Russia, J1 SZ53, UK1 SZ37, etc. These will all have been discussed at length elsewhere and a list of links would be very helpful.

Bidding

I tried to put the bid section last, because I agree with you, new players probably won't play with a bid. On the other hand, I think its worth knowing what a bid is and how it is used in A&A, even if you don't employ a bidding process in your own game, if only because it's such a common house rule in Axis and Allies. I've had a lot of new players in tripleA ask me questions like "what's a bid?" or "what does bidding mean?" so I figured I'd toss it in there for good measure. This stuff might be inappropriate for new players to use in their first games, but it is relevant to a lot of the discussions on these boards, so at least from that perspective I thought it might worth touching on.

The most common House Rule.

A&A is unlike most board games. In nearly every board game, there will be some randomized "event" that occurs at the outset, which is designed to make each game more or less unique. Perhaps its something as simple as "roll the dice, to see who goes first" or "shuffle these cards, then make a random draw" or perhaps "select which spot you want to put all your forces."

A&A doesn't work this way at all. Instead, in A&A, the starting forces and the money and the turn order and all the rest, are set, because they represent World War II at a set point in time - the "start date." Here the randomized element comes later, mainly through combat rolls, or through unit movement, or unit purchase, but the opening set up is constant.

The A&A approach to game design has an upside, because it means that it is possible to "learn" from each game. Players can concoct strategies, and tease out the "best moves" or the "winning openings" etc, because each time out the board remains basically fixed.

But the A&A approach to game design has a downside too, because it means that at some point a player will learn how to exploit the opening set up for some optimal winning strategy as one

side or the other. When one side is recognized to be too dominant, and returning consistent wins (ie. "Axis always win!" or "Allies always win") and a consensus develops among experienced players, you will start to hear discussions about whether the game is "balanced".

If the desire for balance (that players should have have a roughly equal chance of winning the game vs an opponent of comparable skill, regardless of whether playing Allies or Axis) exceeds the desire to reflect the "balance of sides" in World War II experienced players will often introduce a bidding process to play one side or the other. In its most basic form, a bid is extra IPCs awarded to the side/player perceived to be at a disadvantage.

If the underdog is allowed to choose how these IPCs are distributed (what units to buy, and where they go) this is what I call an "Open Bid." Here the IPCs awarded to the underdog can be split up between the Nations on that side and used to purchase units in the same way that you would buy those units during the actual game.

The most popular way to do this now is what I call the "pre-placement" bid. These additional units are placed before the game begins.

The Open Bid is used to determine who will play which side: Axis or Allies. One player will open the the Bid, by saying something like "I will play this side for X ipcs." Then you alternate offers, either increasing the number of ipcs awarded, in an ascending bid. Or decrease them in a descending bid. Most people I play with use a descending bid.

For example, in 1942.2 player A opens: "I will play Allies for +13 ipcs"

Then player B counters: "I will play play Allies for +12 ipcs"

Player A persists: "10"

Player B demurs, "hmmm 9? "

Player A: "8!"

Player B: "OK, you can have 'em. Good luck!"

Then player A takes his 8 ipcs from the bid and decides how they want to spend them for their side. In this case Allies.

Usually there are some extra rules to restrict where the units can be placed. Most people go with these: No more than 1 unit per territory or sea zone. Must be placed in a territory you control and already occupied by units from your Nation.

The alternative to an Open Bid is a "Set Bid". In this case an adjustment or "hard change" to the unit set up will allow predetermined additional units to allocated.

Bidding is probably the most popular house rule, being widely used by experienced players. It's not discussed anywhere in the game manual. The process isn't codified and different play groups sometimes adopt different approaches to it. One popular variant, and the bid I like best, is to award IPCs purely as a bonus to starting income and not as pre-placement units! This means you still get extra money, but you have to buy the units during the normal purchase phase. Here the

Bid amounts (in IPCs) are invariably larger, but this type of bid has the advantage of not disrupting the opening battles.

There are many other house rules (HRs) that introduce various advantages to one side or the other (or both) or which create new conditions for the first round. There is a whole section dedicated to it on these forums, with interesting ideas and discussions being kicked around.

Some players are receptive to such variations, others prefer to play strictly "by the book." Some use bidding, some use Low Luck rules instead of the normal Dice rules, some have other variations they prefer. It depends on who you are playing with.

Some HRs are simply designed to make the whole game new. One minor change can achieve this. One simple example is to increase the starting income for everyone, by the same amount, say an extra 5 or 10 ipcs for each nation. This isn't about balance so much as variety.

For a first time out, don't overburden your new players with discussions about optional rules, or bids. Keep such things limited at the outset. But if there is something you must include then just set the conditions ("this is how we play at my house").