The BORODINO game system is one of the finest SPI has developed. Happily, it has not been debased by being adapted for the North Africa Quadrigame. In fact, one of the flaws of the original system — the exchange combat results — has been eliminated and quite a number of interesting innovations have been added.

The quadrigame is four games in one — four attractive half-sized maps and four sets of units dealing with various battles of the WW11 North African Campaign. There is a basic set of rules for all the games, then special and/or optional rules for the separate games and their scenarios. Play level is battalion-brigade, hexes are scaled at two to three miles and game turns represent one day. There are never more than a hundred units in play, games tend to be reasonably short, so they're good games for two players on a wet afternoon.

Most of the scenarios stick fairly closely to the basic rules. No difficulty in shifting from one game to another. The exception is Kasserine which has special weather and withdrawal rules and a rather complicated victory point scoring system and reinforcements schedule.

Kasserine deals with the German attempt to knock out the newly-arrived Americans and Cauldron is the battle of Gazala. Both have only one scenario. Supercharge (the battle of El Alamein) and Crusader (the struggle for Tobruk) both have three scenarios.

For the price it's a rich feast — far more material than one reviewer can cope with within reasonable time and space limitations, but the crux of the matter is the game system. It is still a basically simple system — no stacking, rigid Zones of Control (ZOCs) mandating combat and a play sequence of movement, then combat. There are interesting embellishments on this theme — the advance after combat rules, for instance (up to four hexes) gives the game great fluidity. After a combat phase the front line rarely looks even remotely like it was. There are usually a few deep armoured thrusts into somebody's back yard cutting off units and/or obliging one side to hastily mount a counter offensive that wasn't anticipated. It is a very realistic rule simulating the cut, thrust and parry of open desert warfare.

The Integrated Combat Results Table is a good example of how far wargame design has progressed in the few years since the advent of BORODINO. Instead of the simplistic "defender doubled for rough terrain" combat results are fine-tuned to six different situations: an attack into rough terrain; broken terrain, ridges, stream or town; bridge, grove or ditch; mixed terrain; and an attack by armour against a position supported by an anti-tank unit. It's a bloodless CRT — there are only three results of Attacker Eliminated and none of Defender Eliminated — so the same BORODINO strategy of outflanking to cut retreats is preserved. I hope to see more of these Integrated CRTs in future games.
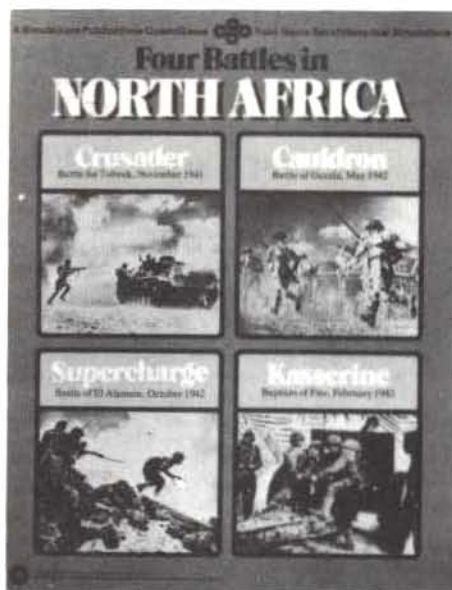
NORTH AFRICA QUADS

SPI's QUADRIGAME REVIEWED
BY RALPH VICKERS

But that's not all. Another fine rule enables a defender, after the phasing player has launched a specific attack, to bolster his defences with protective fire from his artillery and/or ground support strength (air and off-board long-range artillery). This is a far more legitimate technique of introducing uncertainty and surprise into combat results than a die roll. (I hope that SPI will continue to develop this idea to the point that one day they can try a game with no die rolls at all).

On-board artillery and ground support strength can also be used to reinforce attacks,so it isn't a one-sided rule. In fact, without impairing the "fairness" of the games it adds to the drama by enabling both players to escalate their attacks when a vital position is at stake.

Regrettably, however, this review cannot be wholly on a paen of praise. While SPI (and the other game producers as well) has made breathtaking advances in the sophistication of game mechanics, they still persist in their ancient ways of rule writing and playtesting. To err, forget and goof is human, so we can all forgive SPI for omitting a dozen units from one of the Initial Deployment Schedules and a rule here and there (all confessed in the errata) but as usual there are other sins that are harder to pardon:
(1) When is a unit's status for attack determined? At the beginning of a player's turn, or at the instant of combat? On this point the rules are mute. Yet it is a vital point and it is hard to understand how the playtesters overlooked it. I opted for the latter alternative, which seems to be the norm in SPI games today.

(2) Does the list of omitted units for initial deployment in the Crusader errata apply to *all* scenarios?

(3) Just like they did in PanzerArmee Africa the art department all over the map drew trails and roads running parallel but not touching through the same hexes. Again the rules are mute on how much, if anything, it costs to switch from one to the other. (I'm certain this is a detail that will fox many players, particularly the uninitiated.) Well, in PAA the errata ruled that if you moved into such a double-trail hex paying normal terrain costs you could claim to be on whatever trail or road suited you. But if you move into a hex along a trail or road and want to switch over to a parallel line, then you have to pay normal terrain costs. A lot of dirt that could have been avoided by running parallel roads through separate hex rows, surely?

(4) The basic rules say ground support points and reinforcements are listed on the Turn Record Tracks; they are not. (Suggestion: to keep score on ground support points expended, use a pile of discarded units on the track like chips).

(5) The Dash to the Wire scenario of Crusader begins in mid-turn. The British player is assumed to have completed his phase. A natural question left unanswered is whether the British player expended any of his ground support points or not. This should have been mentioned, even if the British player is assumed not to have expended any. Just because the rules say nothing it doesn't assure me that for play balance a "no expenditure" answer is fair.

(6) Rule 7.97 has a diagram demonstrating the mechanics of advance after combat. I think that the majority of players will assume that this diagram depicts a segment of the battleline. Let's assume that it does. The diagram depicts units A, B and C advancing along an enemy's Path of Retreat — all advancing illegally and no doubt causing endless confusion and arguements among players not wise in the ways of interpreting wargame rules. A, B and C have all advanced out of supply (even a friendly occupied hex does not negate an enemy ZOC in respect to supply) and Rule 12.24 states: "No unit may move into an unsupplied position during an advance after combat..." Do they really mean this or not? My guess is it's the diagram that is wrong, not Rule 12.24.

Of course, it can be argued that this diagram isn't part of a continuous line, that in this case the supply path of the advancing units comes around the bottom or top of the diagram etc. etc. Okay, but my point is that the confusion wrought here is unnecessary — the diagram could easily have been changed one way or another. Remember, a diagram has more impact than a thousand words.

The truth is that this is the sort of error — let's call a spade a spade — that will continue to creep into rules so long as the game publishers continue to playtest in their old ways. It is no good having "Friday night

playtesting sessions" by players who are already familiar with the game. And worse, with the anxious designer hovering over their shoulders "explaining" everything.

Games have to be finished, then playtested by bright, independent people who have never seen the game. And the game designer should be locked up in another room. All those willing to pay a few pence more to cover these costs, please write to your favourite game publisher.

Here I must confess that when I faced this multi-game I had to decide on one of two review strategies — either skim through all the games, or concentrate on one. Right or wrong, I elected to concentrate on one. I picked at random Crusader: Dash to the Wire. It was the game I *didn't* want to study because it looked to me like a static seige of Tobruk. I am elated to report that the designers were much more crafty than I expected. If all the games and scenarios are typical of this one, then all are first rate.

There is a seige of Tobruk, but the Axis don't win a single victory point even if they overrun the fortress. The main battle takes place in the open desert where allied relief columns are attempting to push through. The Axis win points for desroying and/or cutting supply to allied units. The allies also receive points for destroying the enemy but their big payoff is for reaching Tobruk.

Tobruk is in the upper left hand corner of the map, surrounded by Italians who must keep the feisty Tobruk garrison penned up. To be sure thay do, the Axis player must assign the Italians a backbone of German units that he can ill spare. The main concentration of German power is massed in the desert about forty miles southeast of Tobruk. The allies are confronting this strong force with a line stretching in a semi-circle from the south to the seacoast in the north. On the far right is another pocket of Germans defending Bardia. This is a weak but constant threat to the British "corridor" running to the coast. Everybody is almost surrounded by everybody else. A fascinating game situation.

For the allies the best approach to Tobruk is along the coast. But how much strength can they afford to commit there and still contain the panzers in the south?

On the other hand, should the Axis try to push their panzers along the south, joining with Bardia and cutting supply to the allies in the north, or should they switch their strength to the north to meet the allied advance head on? They certainly cannot afford to have their northern front sandwiched between the allied relief column and the Tobruk defenders. Yet they have got to guard their southerly supply lines against a swift allied strike. It is a delicate situation for both sides and meanwhile those Italians around Tobruk keep tangling with the garrison and screaming for reinforcements. On the other hand, Tobruk cannot hold out indefinitely. Really intriguing!

If the other games and scenarios are half as good, then North Africa Quadrigame is going to be popular for a long time.