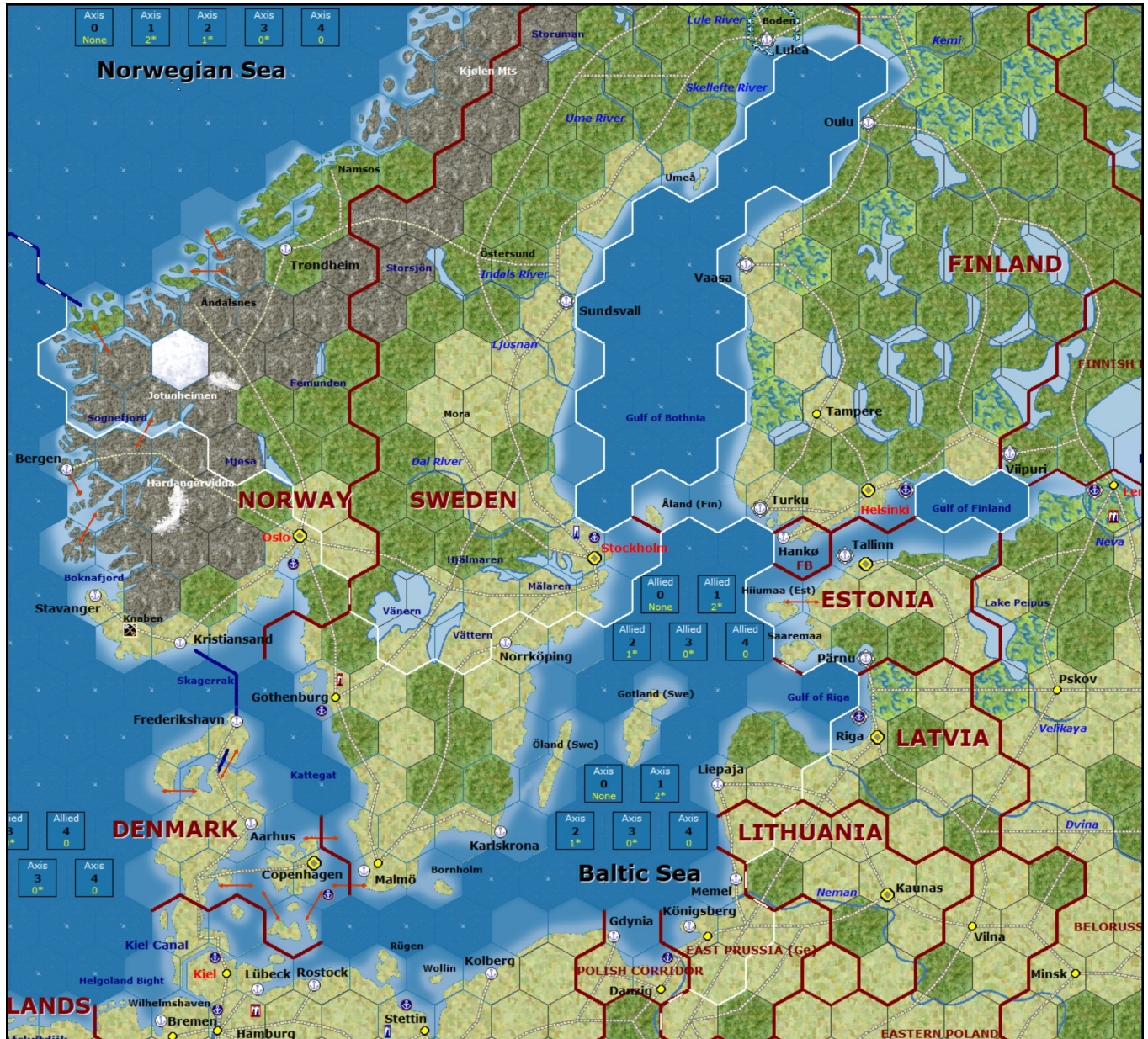


A World in Flames Mini-Tutorial: The Baltic Sea

(December 29, 2019)

Introduction

This is the first in a series of mini-tutorials I expect to create in 2020. To start, I have chosen to focus on the Baltic Sea. That is a fairly calm part of the map for most of the war, but it sees some action during the first turn of the Global War scenario. Ask experienced World in Flames players about the Baltic Sea, and they are likely to give it little thought, having worked out the pros and cons of various gambits, tactics, and strategies for the Scandinavian countries. However, for players new to the game, the Baltic can be treacherous for the Axis side.



Overview

There are 10 countries bordering the Baltic Sea. To the south there is Germany and a sliver of Poland: the Polish Corridor. Germany has two major ports and five minor ports on the Baltic. After the conquest of Poland, it acquires another of each. Although it may have to repair Danzig to restore it to being a major port.



On the west, there is Denmark, a passage through the Kattegat to Norway, and the long Swedish coastline, circling around to the north.



From the northern tip of the Baltic Sea, where Sweden meets Finland, the northeastern coastline of the Baltic is controlled by Finland, all the way down and around to Viipuri.

Next in this circumnavigation of the coastline is Leningrad, the USSR's sole port on the Baltic Sea.



Lastly, to the southeast, are the Baltic States: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.



Each of these 10 countries has a role to play during the war. They range in importance from minor to critical. Poland's importance is at the low end. It appears on the stage in the opening act of the war, then quickly departs. Of critical importance is Germany, which bookends the entire war in Europe, from its beginning through to its end.

Importance

The strategic value of the Baltic Sea to Germany is as a conduit of resources from the Scandinavian countries to the German factories. Sweden has a permanent trade agreement to provide 3 iron resources from its mines in the north to Germany. When the weather is fair, those are transported by rail to Lulea, Sweden, and then overseas to, say, Stettin, Germany. To make that happen, Germany needs to have 3 convoys in the Baltic Sea. In bad weather, those same 3 resources are railed northward to Narvik, Norway, and then southward through the Norwegian coastal waters to the Baltic Sea. World in Flames models that by simply requiring either Norway to be neutral, or the Axis to control Narvik. If either of those conditions is met, and the Axis has 3 convoy points in the Baltic, then Germany receives the 3 Swedish resources. Control of other hexes in Norway is irrelevant. While some players may argue that more rules about controlling the inland Norwegian coastal waterway are warranted, the existing simple rules work well enough, and do not introduce needless complexity to the game.



Another resource that Germany typically receives from the north is the Finnish nickel from Petsamo. Its journey goes down the Arctic Highway to Hanko (which does not get iced-in and is useable year-round), then via convoy to Stettin, Germany. The Axis now needs 4 convoys in the Baltic.



If Norway gets involved in the war, Germany may gain control of the Norwegian molybdenum resource, as happened historically. That resource is shipped by rail to Kristiansand, Norway and then convoyed through the Baltic to Stettin. We are now up to a possible 5 convoy points required in the Baltic Sea for Germany to receive all the Scandinavian resources.



Personally, I set up Germany with 4 convoy points in the Baltic Sea. 3 of them are to convoy the Swedish iron resources. The fourth is because I begrudge taking a Combined (or god forbid, a Naval!) action for Germany to move a fourth convoy out into the Baltic once Finland is aligned to Germany. Usually Norway remains neutral in my games, and should it happen to enter the war, Germany will be moving units into the Baltic to attack or defend land operations in Norway. A fifth convoy can be added at that time. I put the 4 German convoys in the Baltic to start the game and hope they sit there unmolested year after year. Even should some German convoys be destroyed by the Allies, Germany starts the game with extras, which can be used as replacements.

Germany Seals the Baltic Sea

Unless the Axis player messes it up, the Baltic Sea should be an Axis lake for almost the entire war. That is crucial for Germany to succeed. Should the Allied side be able to contest the Baltic, Germany will be distracted from its major tasks: conquering the Lowlands and France, supporting Italy in the Mediterranean, keeping the Commonwealth busy defending its convoy pipelines to the United Kingdom, and invading the USSR. The German player wants to expend the absolute minimal time, effort, and resources in the Baltic. Yet simultaneously, he wants to dominant it both totally and permanently so the Scandinavian resources flow continuously to German factories.

4 4 5 BB Oktyabr'skay Revolutsiya 1 2 2	2 6 7 CA Kirov 1 2 1	2 3 7 Submarine 0 3 0
	5 4 5 BB Marat 1 2 2	2 4 8 Submarine 0 2 0

To prevent the Allied player from intruding on this happy vision, Germany needs to control the entrance to the Baltic from the west. Later in the game, once the USSR is at war with Germany, the USSR naval units in Baltic ports might be a concern worthy of some attention. But the USSR wants to take Land actions virtually all the time once it is engaged with Germany's land forces. Another factor reducing the USSR's involvement in the Baltic is that Leningrad can be iced in, preventing naval units from setting out to sea. Even when they can get out into the Baltic, the USSR player has to be careful that they aren't stuck out there if the weather is Snow or

Blizzard at the end of the turn. Should that happen, the USSR naval units at sea would be destroyed - unless they can miraculously find a friendly non-iced-in port to which to return to base (e.g., Liepaja in Latvia, or Hanko in Finland).

Western Entrances

Now about the western entrances to the Baltic Sea. World in Flames rules state that satisfying two of three conditions can prevent the direct movement of naval units (i.e., both surface ships and submarines) between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. Those conditions are control of: the Kiel Canal, Copenhagen, and Oslo.



Germany starts the war with control of the 4 hexes bordering the Kiel Canal. That permits Germany to freely move naval units between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea in both directions. Unless the Allies invade Germany, the Kiel Canal is going to remain the property of the Axis.

To stop Allied naval units from entering the Baltic, or leaving it heading west, Germany needs to also control either Copenhagen or Oslo. The former is easily captured by Germany in Fine weather, since it is 4 land movement points from a hex in Germany, and Denmark has zero land combat units to place on the map should Germany declare war on Denmark. Achieving the conquest of Denmark can happen in one impulse if Germany has a land unit capable of moving 4 hexes starting on the Danish border and the weather is reasonable: Fine or even Snow. The numbers in the adjacent figure show the movement costs for 3 German land units to conquer Denmark, take control of all the Danish ports, and convert all the hexes of western Denmark to German control.

Germany DOWs Denmark, moves a unit into Copenhagen, and then the Allied side cannot move units directly between the North Sea and the Baltic. Going after Oslo is much more adventurous. Historically, that is what Germany did. In most World in Flames games, the effort required is not worth the benefit for the Axis.



Neutral Scandinavian Forces

Denmark only has naval units to set up when it enters the war. The sole land unit is a Reserve, as indicated by the R in its upper right hand corner. That unit arrives as a reinforcement on the turn after Denmark enters the war - assuming Denmark hasn't been conquered at the end of the first turn. Most of the convoys should be placed in Iceland or the Faeroes. They will become Commonwealth units once Denmark is conquered. Because the rules state that at least half of a minor country's units must set up in its home country, some naval units will need to be placed in Denmark. Those should set up in Frederikshavn, where they will be free to escape through the North Sea to the United Kingdom when they are overrun; providing they roll well enough to escape and not be destroyed or captured by the Germans.

1	3	7	10	3	10
DEN				DEN	
CA Peder Skram					
1	1	0	0	3	0
1	3	7		XXX	R
DEN					
CA Niels Juel					
0	2	0		2-2	

Norway should not be attacked by Germany. It is possible to conquer it, if the Germans organize everything well and gets some good die rolls for the weather and various combats. The major drawback to attacking Norway is the immense naval reinforcements that gives the Commonwealth. Look at all those convoys! Plus two more transports. The Commonwealth only has 4 transports to start the war, so the addition of 2 more will be greeted with great joy by the Allied player. The rest of the Norwegian navy is mostly worthless. But the 2 land units can put up some defense. Note that the third land unit is a reserve that will only arrive as a reinforcement if the Allied player can hold onto Oslo through the end of the first turn that Norway enters the war.

1	3	7	10	3	10
NOR				NOR	
CA Tordenskjold					
0	1	0	0	3	0
1	3	7	0	3	5
NOR				NOR	
CA Hvald				Transport	
0	1	0	0	3	0
1	3	8	0	4	5
NOR				NOR	
CA Norge				Transport	
0	2	0	0	3	0
1	3	8		XXX	R
NOR					
CA Eidsvold					
1	2	0			

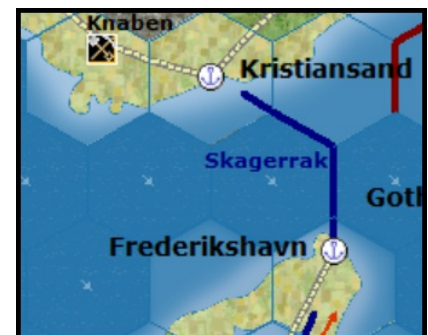
Should the Allies DOW Norway, then things look much different for Germany. The Allies want to control Kristiansand, for the purpose describe in the next section. But Germany can use their naval transport and AMPH to get a couple of corps sized units into Norway. Their air transport can take over the paratroop unit and/or the mountain unit. The surface fleet can provide defensive bombardment from the Baltic (if that optional rule is being used) and can transport infantry divisions over too (if that optional rule is being used). Air units based in Denmark can participate in the defense and help any counterattack as well. The Allies sometimes DOW Norway late in the war, when they have sufficient units to hope for success. However, Norway remains neutral in most games of World in Flames.

3CR42bis	3	4	6	1	3	7	1	5	9	1st Ski Div	XX	XXX	XXX	XXX
SWE				SWE			SWE			SWE		SWE	SWE	SWE
CA Sverige				CA Manligheten			CL Gotland							
1	3	0	2	1	1	0	1	2	0	2-4	5-4	3-3		
1	3	7	2	4	6	1	3	8	0	4	5	XXXXX	XXX	XXX
SWE			SWE			SWE			SWE			SWE	SWE	SWE
CA Aran			CA Gustaf V			CA Oscar II			Transport			Gustaf V	IV Inf	VI Garr
1	1	0	1	2	1	1	2	0	0	3	0	4(2)3	6-3	4-1
1	3	7	2	4	6	1	4	8	10	3	10	Stockholm	XXX	XXX
SWE			SWE			SWE				SWE		SWE	SWE	SWE
CA Tapperheten			CA Dröptning Victoria			CA Fylgia						Stockholm	Alp Mtn	V Garr
0	1	0	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	3	0	4-2	5-4	5-1

Sweden is simply too strong to attack. The 6 corps and 1 division that set up on the map when they enter the war can defend Stockholm for a long time. Lulea is also a fortified hex on its 5 land hexsides. Destroying all those units will not only take time, it is also likely to incur German losses. And for what purpose? The 3 Swedish resources are flowing to Germany through the trade agreement. German units are even permitted to rail through Sweden. I once had a corps rail move from Oslo to Viipuri.

Indirect Movement Into the Baltic Sea

While the conquest of Denmark prevents the direct movement of naval units between the North Sea and the Baltic Sea, there remains the possibility of moving naval units indirectly between the two sea areas. To do that, the naval units would have to start or stop their movement in either Frederikshavn or Kristiansand. Those two ports border both the sea areas - they bracket the Skagerrak. For instance, should the Allied player control Frederikshavn, he could move naval units from the North Sea into that port. Then, in the following turn, after they are reorganized, he could move them into the Baltic. One tricky way to do this in a single turn is to land an HQ unit in Frederikshavn and use its reorganization capability to reorganize naval units in the port. That would enable them to move again in the same turn - although in a future impulse.

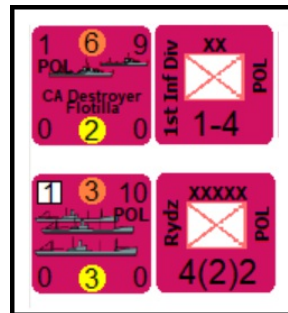


This leads to the next important task for Germany to accomplish during its first impulse of its war on Denmark: control of Frederikshavn. A land unit with 6 movement factors can start in Germany and rush northward to Frederikshavn, passing through Aarhus on the way for good measure. Some players also want to have German units pass through all the other hexes in western Denmark in the same first impulse. Otherwise the Allies can freely land units in Danish hexes - since those would still be controlled by Denmark. If the Allies get a small toehold in Denmark, they may be able to expand it and take Frederikshavn (Copenhagen is usually a straits hex too far). As shown in the earlier figure, the complete occupation of Denmark can be done with 3 German land units, provided two of them can move 6 hexes and one of them 4. You can also do it with a 4, a 5, and a 6 mover, provided you are willing to have the 5 mover be disrupted for exceeding its available movement points. Exactly how to do that, I'll leave up to you to work out.

Poland

At the start of the war, the first action in the Baltic Sea involves Polish naval units. There are only 2 Polish naval units, which can be set up in either Danzig or Gdynia. They can be placed in separate ports, or together in one port.

I show the division and the HQ in this figure because you may want to place them in one of the ports with the naval units to prevent the naval units from being overrun during the German land move phase of the war's first impulse. Because Germany has Surprise during that first impulse, on a roll of 1, the naval unit becomes captured by the major power overrunning it and enters their Repair Pool. On rolls of 2 - 4 it is destroyed. Rolls of 5 or higher let it escape, but it is forced to immediately rebase up to twice its range. So, there is a 40% chance that the Commonwealth player will lose a naval unit if it gets overrun.



Stacking the 1-4 division with the naval units makes it more difficult for Germany to overrun them, but not all that much harder. They just have to assemble 11 land combat factors for a certain land combat victory and then advance into the hex with a German land unit. The naval units would then be overrun. Adding the HQ increases the defensive strength of the hex to 6, but Germany has sufficient forces to wipe them out too if it so desires. The small gain for Poland from forcing Germany to perform a land attack on a port, is that the German units doing that aren't moving towards Lodz and Warsaw. Poland is conquered if Germany takes both of those cities. Control of the ports doesn't matter for conquering Poland. Effort expended on the ports, wastes time and effort better used to conquer Poland in the first turn.

Besides forcing a German attack on a port to overrun the naval units, what other benefit accrues to Poland if they stack the land units with the ships? Well, if Germany doesn't attack immediately, the naval units will always be able to escape, even if Poland is conquered. The die rolls to escape only occur during the surprise impulse, or if the naval units become disorganized. In addition, on the second impulse of the turn, the division can be loaded onto the Destroyer Flotilla and moved out into the North Sea, destined for the United Kingdom. The Commonwealth can take a more daring approach and move one of its naval transports out into the Baltic Sea, thereupon loading the Polish HQ. The hope is that the transport survives until the next Allied impulse - and that Germany doesn't take out Copenhagen, which would cut off the transport escape back to the United Kingdom. Yeah, it's risky. I mention it here just to give a sense of the range of possibilities that World in Flames offers players. "Step right up! Take a chance! Win a prize!". In this case the prize would be an additional division and HQ back in the United Kingdom for the Allied side to use for the rest of the war.

Committing the division and HQ to the ports seriously weakens the defense of Poland. Some players set up those two units in Lvov or Brest-Litovsk. The idea is for the USSR to claim Eastern Poland in the second impulse of the war which would 'intern' the two land units until Germany and the USSR go to war. At that time, the two land units would arrive in the Commonwealth Force Pool, should the Commonwealth player decide to do so. *Personally, I use all the Polish land units to defend Lodz and Warsaw.*

Commonwealth

The Commonwealth has a large navy at the start of the war. But typically, the Allied player complains bitterly about how few naval units he has. “Not enough, never enough.” While it’s tempting to send some out into the Baltic Sea on the second impulse of the war to attack the naked German convoys sitting placidly there, the risk is high. Aside from the danger of Copenhagen being taken by Germany in the third impulse of the game, Germany also has a nice surface and submarine fleet with which to counterattack.

5 6 3 BB Gneisenau 2 3 2	3 3 7 BB Schlesien 1 2 2	3 6 6 CA Blücher 2 3 1	3 6 6 CA Admiral Hipper 2 3 1	5 4 8 Submarine 0 2 0
6 6 3 BB Scharnhorst 2 3 2	2 3 7 BB Schleswig-Holstein 1 2 2	4 5 7 CA Deutschland 1 5 1	4 5 7 CA Graf Spee 2 5 2	3 4 7 Submarine 0 3 0

France

France can also send ships into the Baltic Sea on the second impulse of the war. The French navy is considered expendable by some Allied players. Since France is likely to be Vichyed in 1940, the navy has a short life during which it is fully employable. However, all the French cruisers can be deployed in the South Atlantic with the intent of having them go to Gabon when Vichy is declared. Thereafter (provided Gabon does not go Vichy), they can be used by the Allied side to defend the long convoy pipelines leading back to the United Kingdom. Note that the battleships should be in France proper when Vichy is declared, otherwise the risk of all the French possessions going to Vichy is far too high.

1 4 7 CV Béarn 1 3 2	5 5 4 BB Strasbourg 3 2 2	4 4 5 BB Lorraine 1 2 2	2 5 7 CA Duplex 1 3 1
5 4 5 BB Provence 1 2 2	5 4 5 BB Jean Bart 0 2 2	2 5 7 CA Foch 1 3 1	3 5 7 CA Suffren 1 2 1
5 5 4 BB Dunkerque 2 2 2	5 4 5 BB Bretagne 0 2 3	2 5 7 CA Colbert 1 3 1	1 6 8 CA Duguay Trouin 0 2 0
3 5 6 CA Algérie 2 4 1	2 6 8 CA Primaguet 1 2 1	2 6 8 CA Duquesne 1 2 1	3 6 8 CA Tourville 0 2 1

Finland

The Finnish naval is of minor importance. The few extra convoys are nice for the Germans, but rarely needed. The naval combat ships, with their ranges on 1 and combat factors of 1 and 2, are best used as escorts for the German convoys in the Baltic, freeing the better German units for more aggressive action elsewhere.

4 Fokker D.XXI FIN 4	Gd Inf XXX FIN 6-3	1 FIN 4 8 BB Ilmarinen 1 1 1	Helsinki XXX R FIN 4-3
1 FIN 4 Fokker C.X	1st Ski Div XX FIN 2-4	3 3 10 FIN 0 3 0	III Mot XXX FIN 6-5
2 FIN 4 8 BB Väinämöinen 1 1 1	Mannerhe. XXXXX FIN 5(2)3	II Inf XXX FIN 5-4	

Conclusion

That's my take on the Baltic Sea. There is also the use of air units to consider. The German naval air unit that is available at the start of the war can be deployed in either the Baltic Sea or the North Sea.. In either sea area it can attempt interceptions of units moving into or out of the Baltic. The Commonwealth gets some long range bombers with tiny air-to-sea factors that they can sometimes send into the Baltic, but only in low section boxes where their effectiveness is likely to be zilch. Lastly, the Germans can position a wimp fighter near the Baltic Sea, planning to send it into the zero section box with the German convoys should the Allied player send surface ships into the Baltic on the second impulse of the game. Its presence can be used to declare a Naval Air Combat, effectively avoiding combat altogether. The Allied side can still make if a Surface Combat, but to do so they have to have and expend 4 surprise points. World in Flames is a game of “if I do this, he can do that”, “what will the weather be?”, “please give me good search rolls in the sea area”, “when will the turn end?”, and :who will go first next turn?”. Nothing is certain, and there are innumerable decisions to be made with unknown future events.