

# Amphibious Assaults in Empire of the Sun

by Steve Carey

## Introduction

*"The defences (of Betio Island in the Tarawa Atoll, 1943) began outside the beaches with mined concrete obstacles and barbed-wire barricades designed to channel landing craft into routes vulnerable to enfilading fire. On the beaches were high barricades covered by heavy and light machine-guns sited in concrete or armor-plate pillboxes, while larger pillboxes concealed field artillery and heavy and light dual-purpose guns. All this formidable array was supported by immobile tanks well dug in and armed with 37-mm quick-firing guns."*

*As for the 4,500 men who manned these defences, they were one and all tough, professional and ready and happy, even honoured to die after killing as many Americans as they could"*

*In the (actual) event they killed 1,000 Americans and wounded another 2,000, figures that caused ignorant outrage back home in the United States, where photos of corpses floating in the lagoon and sprawled on the beaches were printed in every newspaper. Nothing since Pearl Harbor opened the public's eyes wider to the realities of war in the Pacific."*

(Richard Hough, *The Longest Battle*, first Quill edition, 1986)

Amphibious Assaults were an integral part of the vast Pacific Ocean campaigns during the Second World War, and they also represent a vital component of play in Mark Henman's **Empire of the Sun (EoS)** card-driven design from GMT Games.

Early on in **EoS**, the Japanese will be expanding their empire via ship borne invasions, though resistance at this point will often be feeble due to the initial lack of Allied preparedness and the small number of troops, planes, and ships they had stationed in the Pacific Theatre. Later, when the tables have turned and it is the Allies who are on the offensive, US Marine and Army amphibious assaults will most likely face much stiffer opposition from their Imperial counterparts. The invasion of the Japanese home islands, always a daunting task (both militarily and logistically) for the Allied Player, is a very strong possibility in this game and should always be carefully prepared and planned for.

The intent of this article is to provide some rules insight and strategy tips for

would-be commanders who seek to capture enemy territory via amphibious assaults.

## Japan

Japanese players have several assets and liabilities when considering amphibious assaults.

Starting with 7 Amphibious Shipping Points (ASP), and possessing the naval and air strength for proper support, Japan has a lot of flexibility in the early stages of the game. However, odds are that as the game turns pass, Allied Strategic Submarine Warfare will start to whittle down those ASPs. Play of the Resource *Escort* cards (#37, #38) to gain a +2 Strategic Submarine Warfare drm, or to increase an existing +2DRM to a +4DRM, may be a good idea for the Japanese player who wants to preserve his ASP (and his card hand size) for as long as possible. As 3 OC cards however, these *Escorts* are far from automatic event plays — remember that *Escorts* will get reduced by a successful Allied Sub roll (11.21). Even worse for the Japanese player with escorts, the Allied card *New Submarine Doctrine* (#80) wipes them away and precludes any further hope for modifiers. In game terms, once things start going downhill for Japan, they often go downhill very quickly, though she will always retain her last ASP, which cannot be lost.

The five Imperial Naval Brigade units are small but important troops due to their intrinsic ability (7.46) to be transported by a CA, CL, or APD naval unit that they begin any operation stacked with (and both the Brigade and the Naval unit must each be chosen for activation). This allows the Japanese player to conserve his precious ASPs for use in other areas during the turn. These Brigades are best used to seize unoccupied enemy territory because they really don't stand up very well in combat, and often will take losses when making opposed landings. The transporting CA, CL, or APD unit can also provide naval support (+2DRM) for the Brigade during any ensuing land combat if no enemy naval units are present, which helps. Since all five Brigades are 'dot' units, they can never receive replacements — once lost, they're out of play for the duration. In such a case, Japan will have lost an important tool in her arsenal. If a Brigade captures a Port hex, consider keeping the transporting CA,

CL, or APD with it instead of Post-Battle Moving the ships to another port. This not only provides a naval defense for the Brigade in the event of a quick enemy counterattack, but also allows the Brigade to perform another special transport action again next turn if the opportunity presents itself.

The Japanese player also may be able to provide Barges to his fleet via the *Ants* card (#73). Though only able to transport a single ground unit across the sea into an adjacent hex when playing any 3 value card (and not allowed in reaction), Barges save on ASP and can spell the difference between a successful or failed operation; their use should not be completely overlooked. Cancelled (or even pre-empted) by Allied *PT-Boats* (card #23), Barges are a resource of only limited ability but can often prove their worth.

Though Mountain hexes are prohibited from being amphibiously assaulted, the updated rules have clarified that Port Moresby is an exception. This opens up the possibility of a daring Japanese opening move of hitting Port Moresby on Turn 1 with the Naval Brigades stationed in the mandates. If Port Moresby is captured, it would represent a deep dagger thrust towards Australia. But even on the first turn, Port Moresby is no easy target since the scrappy defending Australians (5-5) gain the +3 amphibious defense DRM while the Japanese suffer the -3 mountain terrain DRM. This can be offset partially with a +2DRM from an escorting vessel, and the *Ryujo can* sail from its starting position in Palau to lend a +2DRM for air superiority to help increase the chance of Imperial success.

Later in the game, Japan will often lack the ground, air, and naval assets to conduct coordinated amphibious assaults, especially after its military forces have suffered attrition as a result of continuous Allied offenses. This does not mean that Japan cannot launch a surprise invasion in 1944 or '45, but timing and location must be carefully considered. For example, in one game as the Allies I was caught up in my own plans for re-conquest, and carelessly left Hawaii without any defending ground troops. Holding card #9 (*Rear Admiral Matami Ugaki*) to activate his main fleet, my opponent saw an opportunity and mounted a daring assault upon the

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Hawaiian Islands as his final card play during a turn. After eliminating light air and naval opposition at Pearl Harbor, he then easily captured Oahu with a single army. Besides the embarrassment of such an oversight, I lost the aforementioned units in the combat, suffered the -1 PW penalty, had my best HQ removed from the board, and also forfeited US naval replacements. When the occupying enemy army finally faded away due to lack of supply, the damage had already been done. Losing Pearl Harbor also proved to be quite distracting, and took away from the main Allied efforts at pushing forward. Most of us would agree that it was a very good use of resources by the Japanese player to initiate such an extended amphibious assault.

The *New Operational Doctrine* card (#31) is very valuable to the Japanese Player due to the permanent +1DRM that it conveys to ground combat (even Japanese Offensives) on one-hex islands that they occupy. Absent unusual circumstances, this card should almost always be played as the event as it can have a lasting effect on the game.

And finally recall that the dreaded Inter-Service Rivalry (ISR) also negates half of Japan's available ASP per 14.2(B). This effect is especially damaging early in the game when Imperial troops are on missions of conquest. Saving an anti-ISR card as a Future Offensive is a prudent move that experienced players are now beginning to understand.

## Allies

Like Japan, the Allies have some pros and some cons to consider when contemplating amphibious assaults.

By the time that the Allies start to seriously consider amphibious operations (usually around Turn 4), they will often find tough Japanese opposition already facing them, and there won't be enough ASP to get the job done. This can partially be offset by playing an event like *Edwin Booz* (#18) to gain additional ASP, if you are lucky enough with your draw. Also, the Allies should try to capture hexes elsewhere (e.g., Burma) to help towards Progress of War goals until sufficient ASP are available for multiple island conquests. A great card for the Allies to help with Progress of War is card #28 which allows Allied control markers to be placed on unoccupied enemy adjacent one hex islands after a successful invasion. Avoid frivolous use this card as an OC if at all possible. Indeed, *Operation*

*Cascade* makes for a good Future Offensive play in the mid-game. Finally, the Allies should use general Offensives to hammer the Japanese ground, air, and naval assets, making things easier later on when they finally have enough ASP to put the Allied invasion machine into full gear.

Another handicap that the Allies labor under is rule 7.45(D) which requires US Marines to lead the way for the Army ground troops when invading Japanese controlled and occupied one hex islands. This can eat up precious ASPs, though oftentimes the Allied player will need such force anyway to press for a victorious amphibious assault. In some instances where a key location is heavily defended, the Allies will need up to 4 ground units just to capture the hex and avoid a catastrophe (failed invasion). Such heavily defended locations should seriously be examined as candidates to be bypassed, which many times will cause a Japanese player to subsequently withdraw his forces before they get surrounded and cut off.

Even successful invasions can be costly in political terms to the Allies because if a US division or corps sized ground unit that's capable of receiving replacements (i.e., not 'dot' units) is eliminated, a -1 PW penalty is incurred (16.45). Though limited to once per turn, such a PW loss can have long-term effects on the game. With a single reduced Japanese 9-12 army capable of inflicting a "two times" loss (i.e., 18 hits) base 40% of the time (with the +3 DRM invasion modifier), this is a distinct possibility for any amphibious assault.

If you're getting taxed with other PW reductions, a few of these casualty penalties can be lethal. Again, consider the option to bypass (and isolate) over-defended enemy locations. It's important to note that use of Allied troops (Australians, British, New Zealanders) are immune to PW penalties when lost, though it does take a Joint HQ activation to get them to the invasion site.

*Operation Coronet* (card #9), the invasion of Japan, is obviously a big card for the Allies. The temporary 4 extra ASP that it offers is vital, even if the Allies are not actually going all-out for the enemy Home Islands. All the card mandates is a single invasion hex in Japan, so it is allowed for the Allied player to launch a distraction raid and use the rest of the ASP somewhere else. Such a Home Island raid is ideally suited for a Marine Brigade since the player does not want to incur the negative casualty PW penalty mentioned above (if the penalty has already been

suffered this turn, then you can use whatever ground unit you don't mind losing). Depending on the chosen location, if lucky this 'raid' can gain a foothold in Japan and will give the Imperial player something new to think about.

Speaking of Allied troops, don't overlook the potential for a quick Australian/New Zealand strike back against Japan via an amphibious assault, especially if you have the right card (for example, the surprise attack *Operation Squarepeg*, #44). An amphibious dash out of New Guinea or the Solomons can be quite unpleasant to a Japanese player who is focusing his attentions elsewhere.

The China/Burma/India (CBI) Theatre offers less opportunity for a Commonwealth amphibious assault. The extended Malayan Peninsula is in essence a barrier to expeditious sea movement against Japanese held targets. Ports aren't that abundant, and most Commonwealth troops will be tied up in ground fighting anyway. But the Royal Navy has some potential and if the right opportunity presents itself, a British amphibious assault will most likely take any Japanese player by complete surprise.

Lastly, remember that Indian, Dutch, and Chinese units cannot amphibiously assault, and as clarified in the Living Rules, they importantly cannot Strategic Transport either. This of course can hamper any Commonwealth invasion planning.

## Generalities

There will exist the temptation at times for both players to conduct an amphibious assault on the cheap, i.e., just using a single naval unit or aircraft carrier to escort a landing against a weakly held enemy position. This is one of the more common mistakes made by new players because when their opponent reacts, the battle is invariably lost with high losses. Also remember that the Offensive player must win the immediately preceding Air-Naval battle or his amphibious assaulting troops won't participate in the combat (8.13). It is certainly possible that you may actually inflict more hits on a reacting enemy, but that's irrelevant for invasion because the victor of any Air-Naval battle is decided by the most remaining *attack* factors present. This mechanic neatly reflects troopships heading back home in the face of determined (and superior) enemy forces.

The Special Reaction Move rule (6.27) deserves close attention — this is an important game function for both sides to

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understand. Why? Because such a Special Reaction Move also includes the ability of the Reaction Player to use an amphibious move (well, if he has the ASP to do so) to counter an enemy move into certain unoccupied locations. Now, such a reacting unit that amphibiously moves into the hex would *not* get the +3 DRM against the enemy amphibious assault because it did not occupy the hex *prior* to the Offensive play being made (refer to rule 8.4, "Reaction Player Modifiers"). However, such a reacting unit would still get the defensive terrain modifier (if any) for the battle hex, which of course helps. It takes a lot to perform a Special Reaction Move (including passing a special intelligence roll and a naval unit present in the same hex as the reacting ground unit), but when done effectively such a move can have dramatic effects on your opponent's operation.

There indeed are some one hex islands on the map which can be best described as worthless dirt; they're not a port, airfield, or a resource space, and they aren't strategically located. They're also not valid targets to subdue in an attempt to manipulate Progress of War. Simply stated, in game terms such hexes shouldn't be bothered with (but note the Alaska Political Will exception, 16.42).

By their very nature, opposed amphibious assaults are bloody affairs, especially to the Offensive player whose units are halved on defense while invading. It really behooves players to fully support their amphibious operations as much as possible, but this of course costs you resources. In the presence of enemy air, the Offensive player must have air support anyway to even qualify for an amphibious assault. Aircraft Carriers often will be the obvious choice to provide escort for the troop transports. If only the Offensive player has air units in the assault hex after any battle, he gains a +2 DRM. Surface ships alone in the battle hex can also impart a +2 DRM to the Offensive player. This means that an unchallenged Offensive CV in the battle hex can impart a +4 DRM by itself—this is powerful support for any troops that are landing, if you can pull it off. These DRMs can help offset defensive terrain modifiers, and also provide some extra punch to balance out the +3 DRM that the Reaction player receives while defending against the amphibious attack.

In the excitement of the contest, an important rule that is prone to be overlooked is that if the target hex to be

### Empire of the Sun

#### The Pacific War, 1941-1945

Card Driven Game System

Published: 2005 by GMT Games LLC

Game Design: Mark Herman

Game Developer: Stephen Newberg

Art Director: Rodger B. MacGowan

Map Art: Mark Simonitch

Counter Art: Simonitch and MacGowan

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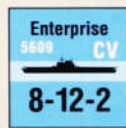
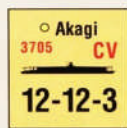
Two sets of counters (1/2 & 5/8 inch); One 22x34 inch Map; Two Card Decks; One die; Rulebook; 2-Player Aid Cards; Bookcase Box

Time Scale: Four months per turn

Map Scale: One Hex = 150 miles

Unit Scale: Brigade, Division, Corps & Army

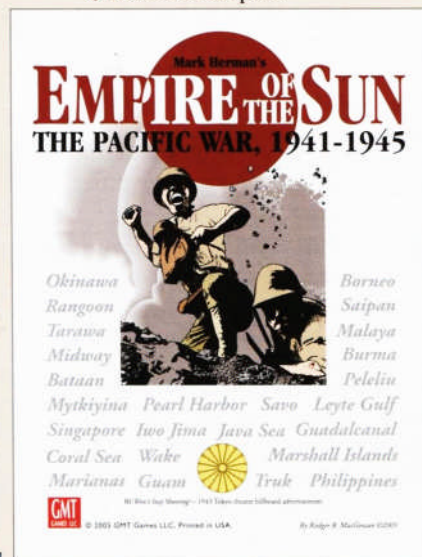
Players: 1-2



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◆ Best World War II Boardgame

◆ Best Game Graphics



amphibiously assaulted contains any enemy naval unit(s), Offensive naval escort *must* move with the invading troops for the *entire* move. In other words, the naval escort must start the operation stacked with invading ground troops. This same restriction also applies to special reactions as already discussed under 6.27. This rule prevents some gamey tactics, and correctly reflects the fact that amphibious assaults historically required substantial planning and coordination, such granularity being abstractly represented by this rule requirement.

It is also very important to note that while Inter-Service Rivalry (ISR) does not prevent Army ground units from amphibious assaulting per 7.45, they will be very vulnerable when doing so because they cannot receive naval escort. Obviously any type of invasions under ISR must be carefully evaluated because unescorted landings are simply an invitation to disaster. However, it can be done—for instance, play low value OC cards to restrict the distance and number of units that your opponent could react with. Japan can use her Brigades under ISR when the Navy activates, while the Allies of course can still use the Marines during their own Navy activations. The Allies also have the option of using a Joint HQ to coordinate forces, but this often requires some shuffling around of resources and isn't that

easy to accomplish. Again, if possible consider saving one of the anti-ISR cards as a Future Offensive just in case your opponent plays one of those oppressive ISR cards on you.

### Conclusion

**Empire of the Sun** is a grand-strategic game by design, but it successfully and faithfully captures many of the nuances of WWII Pacific operations and combats, including the all-important amphibious invasions. While the game thankfully abstracts out the small details of such mammoth undertakings, it still manages to convey the tense feelings that are associated with those types of operations.

After experiencing **EoS**—no matter what your level of historical expertise is in this particular theatre—names like Guadalcanal, Tarawa, Okinawa, and Iwo Jima will take on a new meaning because while playing the game it will seem like *you were in command and you were there*.

**EoS** is a remarkable design—I'm certain to enjoy it often for many years to come.



### Editor's Note:

In issue Nr17 of C3i Magazine you will find an in-depth article on Strategy Concepts for Empire of the Sun by game designer Mark Herman.