

New Air Variants for Britain Stands Alone

BY JAMES P. WERBANETH

There is still room for other "what ifs" in **Britain Stands Alone**, without stretching plausibility. Two variants, one for each side, can be added.

Britain Stands Alone strides the line between history and alternate history. Some observers might define it as alternate history, as *Operation Sealion* was never executed and, as some point out, had no chance of succeeding if it were. Others go so far as to define the German plans as a great big bluff, calculated to frighten the British into coming to terms with the ascendent Reich.

On the other hand, it is history. I believe wholeheartedly that *Sealion* was real, and that the preparations were made in earnest, with the goal of invading Great Britain. Two factors prevented it from being put into action. The first, and the most widely recognized, was the inability of the *Luftwaffe* to score a clear-cut victory in the Battle of Britain, gaining the air superiority needed to mount an amphibious operation. The other was that Adolf Hitler failed to order its commencement. With naval transports massed in occupied harbors, ground units earmarked and reinforced for cross-Channel invasion, and the most decisive air campaign in history mounted in the skies above, *Operation Sealion* was most certainly not the product of fevered imagination.

There is one area in which the game really departs from history, and that is the variants. These all represent events that did not happen; the Norwegian campaign consumed fewer ships, the Germans developed amphibious techniques before the war, and Britain receives more support from the Free French and the United States, for example.

There is still room for other "what ifs" in *Britain Stands Alone*, without stretching plausibility. Two variants, one for each side, can be added to the mix of those already in the game. Further-

more, players can put in a chit for no variant, adding the possibility that one side will draw fewer beneficial alternative events than the other.

Ural Bomber

The first chief of staff of the *Luftwaffe*, Walther Weyer, died in an air crash on 3 June 1936. He was succeeded by Albert Kesselring.

More than just a change in personnel, this amounted to a crucial change in philosophy for the nascent German air force. Weyer was dedicated to the concept of the *Ural Bomber*, a four-engine strategic bomber capable of hitting targets deep in the Soviet Union. His successor had a vision of a *Luftwaffe* concentrating on tactical airpower, which Kesselring saw as decisive in the sort of short and decisive campaigns of the coming *blitzkrieg*. By his reasoning, the *Ural Bomber* was conceived for a kind of war that Germany would not fight. In addition, Hermann Goring was impressed by the fact that three two-engine medium bombers could be produced for the same price as two four-engine machines.

It was a decision that the *Luftwaffe's* Technical Office protested as short-sighted, and which historians have similarly condemned. Ironic in light of the *Luftwaffe's* almost pathological independence, the sort of tactical air force constructed by Goring and

Kesselring proved ill-suited to independent operations in the Battle of Britain. Thus the failure of the *Luftwaffe* to secure the key precondition of *Operation Sealion* can be traced back to Weyer's death and a strategic road not taken.

There were two prototypes built to the *Ural Bomber's* specifications, the Dornier Do-19 and the Junkers Ju-89. Of the two, with identical payloads of 3,250 pounds, the Junkers was definitely the more inspired, with better speed. In addition, there were severe problems in trying to fit defensive armament to the Do-19's airframe.

Therefore I feel that if a *Ural Bomber* had been adopted, it would have been the Ju-89. With this variant, players can experiment for themselves with the possibilities of long-range bombing against Britain. In fact, the German player can try various mixes of heavy and medium bombers, using the same cost ratio that influenced Goring's fateful decision.

French Airpower

Britain Stands Alone permits the inclusion of Free French ground troops, and the possibility that French naval units might have actively participated in the defense of United Kingdom. However, there are no French air units anywhere in the game.

Yet it is no less possible that French airpower could have had a noticeable role. Historically, French pilots did fly with the Royal Air Force. Also, after the Germany victory over France in 1940, the RAF took possession of 227 American-built Curtiss Hawk 75A fighters ordered by their late ally. Upgunned and brought up to British standards, most were sent to India, where they remained operational through 1943.

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The best fighter in the French inventory in 1940 was the Dewoitine D 520. Though somewhat less capable than the Spitfire, it was a highly regarded aircraft that became the backbone of the Vichy French air force.

What if significant numbers of D 520 pilots had flown to Britain instead of serving under the collaborationist Vichy regime? This question is the basis of the variant.

Just as the Spitfire units in the standard counter mix also represent the Hawker Hurricane, so the D 520 incorporates other types as well. Most obvious is the Hawk 75A, this time flown by the pilots for whom it was originally procured. Thus the counter's air-to-air strength is based primarily on my estimate of the D 520's abilities, but with the range more reflective of the lower endurance of the Curtiss fighter.

Alone among all variants, this one has units and victory point values that differ between scenarios. The underlying rationale is that the French airpower in the British order of battle is the result of a one-time influx of machines and, above all, pilots. Their losses could not be made good by significant replacements, especially in terms of manpower.

At the same time, a high rate of attrition during the summer of 1940 would be certain.

Thus there are half as many D 520 points in the *Operation Sealion* scenario as there are in those for the July Invasion and the Battle of Britain. The victory point value for the September scenario are correspondingly lower, as half as much airpower is of half as valuable.

No Variant

Normally, when variants are randomly drawn, each side uses the same number of options. One new *No Variant* counter can be added to each player's pool to increase the uncertainty of the chit draw. With more possible combinations, there are more ways to play Britain Stands Alone.

Some players might find one side with a lucky draw will have a seemingly insurmountable edge. This can underline the factors that were important (and remain so) in amphibious warfare, without any artificial attempts at balance beyond the variants' victory point values.

Besides, life is often unfair, and so is war.

New Historical Variants

GERMAN

8. *Ural Bomber*: The German player is eligible to build Ju-89 airpoints. Prior to setup, he removes He 111 and/or Ju 88 airpoints in any quantity he wishes. For every three points removed, he receives two Ju-89 air points. If all airpoints of one type are removed, the German cannot receive replacement points for that aircraft (on the grounds that it was never developed to the point of operational deployment). Ju-89 replacements can be received only on odd-numbered turns. VP .15

BRITISH

8. *French Airpower*: In the *Operation Sealion* scenario, the British player receives three D 520 points, and in all others he receives six points. D 520 strength and losses have no bearing on Spitfire losses or maximum allowable strength. Finally, there are no D 520 replacements. VP +5 in *Operation Sealion*, +10 in other scenarios.

SOURCES

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