

Get Me to the Bar on Time
How to Play A World at War Faster
by Bruce Harper

One of the most frequently asked questions about A World at War is “how long does it take to play a game of AWAW?” My answer is “longer than it should”. In my experience, many players waste a lot of time while playing and could easily play almost twice as fast as they do by applying some simple principles.

This article sets out a number of ways in which players can keep the game moving without any additional effort. I have not dealt with obvious, non-game related steps, such as getting to the playing session at the agreed time, not blowing two hours on dinner with your amiable Convention opponents while the game is still being played, and so on.

Be Prepared

Before starting play, the following material should be gathered together:

- Each side should have a half-inch, three-holed binder with tabs. In addition, there should be a common binder, of a different color.
- Print or photocopy the following record sheets:
 - Fall 1939 BRP record sheet (one copy, on yellow paper)
 - generic BRP record sheets (30 copies, on yellow paper)
 - 1940 YSS record sheet (one copy, on green paper)
 - generic YSS record sheets (six copies, on green paper)
 - research record sheets (one copy, on white paper)
 - enemy research record sheets (two copies, on white paper)
 - diplomatic record sheets (two copies, on white paper. Use the ones on the website, which have colored flags on them.)
 - applicable tension record sheets (one copy, on white paper)
 - force record sheets (one copy, on white paper)
 - scenario cards (one copy, on white paper)

The common binder is used for the following record sheets:

- Tab 1 is used to record the BRP and YSS levels as the game goes on. The BRP record sheet for Fall 1939, once completed, is placed in the tab. The BRP record sheet for Winter 1939 is placed on top of it, then the 1940 YSS, then Spring 1940, and so on. The BRP record sheet for the current turn is always “in play”, and the BRP or YSS record sheet for the most recent turn is easily accessible.
- Tab 2 is used for the unused BRP and YSS record sheets, so they can be found quickly.
- Tab 3 is used for the Russo-German tension record.
- Tab 4 is used for the U.S.-Axis tension record.
- Tab 5 is used for the U.S.-Japanese tension record.

Each player keeps a binder as well:

- Tab 1 is used for the diplomatic record sheet.
- Tab 2 is used for the research record sheet.
- Tab 3 is used to track enemy research results.

- Tab 4 is used for the force record sheets, to record mobilization and production results.

As far as units are concerned:

- All “At Start” units should be found and extracted from the counter mix before play starts.
- All “Fall 1939 Allowable Builds” should similarly be sorted out.
- All additional forces which are known to be in play should be placed on the appropriate time tracks (for example, the Spring 1940 British builds).
- All remaining units should be in known locations. Best of all is to magnetize your set and have all the units grouped on cookie trays or some other easily accessible holder. There is nothing worse than breaking the flow of play to look for a unit (there are 2800 of them, by the way...)

Assign tasks

One major cause of delay in playing AWAW is the failure to fairly and clearly allocate the inevitable record keeping tasks. Usually one player winds up being the “bookkeeper” for the whole game, which results in everything grinding to a halt while he dutifully records tension increases, mobilization results or BRP expenditures.

The record-keeping required to play AWAW is by no means overwhelming, especially if shared among the players. I suggest doing it this way:

- The Russian player records Russo-German tensions.
- The American player records U.S.-Axis tensions.
- The Japanese player records U.S.-Japanese tensions.
- The Axis players do the YSS while the Allied players are making their Winter player turn.
- Each player records his own mobilization and production force pool increases.
- BRP expenditures are announced by the moving players and recorded on the BRP record sheet by the opposing players.

Files which allow computerized record keeping may also be used if the players find that this speeds play.

Avoid dead time

Part of the fun of face-to-face play is the social interaction of the players, but this should not be allowed to unduly disrupt the flow of play. In a Global War game, for example, the Japanese and Allied Pacific players should discuss American foreign policy, health care or the sad state of professional sports while the Germans are executing the first turn of Barbarossa or a big naval battle in the Mediterranean is holding up play – not during a major carrier battle while the European theater players are waiting for them to finish. If a joke is going to stop play everywhere, make it a short one.

It is also important to make sure that unrelated actions occur simultaneously, not sequentially, despite the theoretical application of the sequence of play. The Japanese player should not wait for the European Axis player to finish his unit construction before doing the Japanese redeployments, especially if they will take longer than the European Axis redeployments. Just do them and finish your turn. I have also seen a 1940 or 1941 turn finish in the European theater, only to have the game go on hold while everyone waits for the Japanese and Chinese to move.

Watching (and helping) in the other theater is part of the game, but business before pleasure – never let it be you who holds up the game.

The YSS

As mentioned earlier, the Axis player should do as much of the YSS as possible during the Allied Winter player turn. But usually it is not the YSS calculations themselves that take the time (and these can be speeded up by referring to the previous YSS for the conquest totals, as these are often fairly stable), but rather the allocation of RPs and DPs by the players. One list member expressed concern that his opponents at the convention might take two hours for their YSS!

These allocations should take closer to 10 minutes. Use some or all of the following techniques:

- If you are doing a long term project, work out the RP allocations well in advance, possibly even before the game, then pencil them in. This will not only save time, but will ensure that you don't forget to allocate RPs in the heat of battle.
- Separate your RP allocations into "mandatory" and "discretionary" categories. For example, in 1939, the Western Allies will always put an RP in ASW research. Pencil it in. Once you've done this (and the number of "mandatory" allocations will vary), you will find you actually have fewer RPs to think about than it seemed.
- Once "mandatory" RPs have been allocated, allocate RPs to general research, then to "discretionary" projects.
- Decide how many DPs you will allocate to intelligence, then allocate the rest to diplomacy.
- When allocating DPs to diplomacy, be sure that all ineligible targets have their diplomatic record sheet boxes for that year shaded (for example, if a minor country has been conquered, take a highlighter and shade in the boxes for that minor country for the rest of the game).
- If there are diplomatic targets which are of no interest in a particular year, even though you could legally allocate DPs to them, put a little "x" by them (for example, the Ukraine in 1940 or Italy in 1941).
- Once these steps have been taken, you will have narrowed your diplomatic choices considerably and can allocate your DPs much more quickly (although not necessarily less painfully).

The sequence of play

Some players are more slavish in their adherence to the sequence of play than others. Generally speaking, the more experienced a player is and the more comfortable a player is with the rules, the more they ignore the sequence of play in the interest of faster play. This is because experienced players aren't concerned that they'll make an illegal move or get an unfair advantage by streamlining play.

Here are some examples of how a flexible interpretation of the sequence of play can speed things up:

- Placing airbases and staging air units after moving ground units.

When the moving player is carrying out a major offensive, such as in Russia, it is faster and easier to defer staging air units until ground movement is completed and the exact nature of the ground attacks to be conducted becomes apparent. Usually this takes the form of adjusting staging that has already taken place in order to get the right number of air factors in range of the critical hexes.

It is important not to improperly obtain an advantage by doing this. But it is much easier to see where the air should be once the ground attacks are set up, provided there are sufficient air bases to handle the air units involved, and the attacker has enough air to counter any defensive air that might be flown.

- Adjusting air placements while resolving attacks.

Sometimes the attacker will miscount and find he is one or two air factors short of what is required for the anticipated odds. Adjustments should be allowed, provided they don't materially affect other attacks. These avoids the need for the moving player to take another five or ten minutes for his move. The opponent should always allow the rectification of errors that can be avoided by slower moves.

- Telescoping unit construction and redeployments.

I suggest using the following procedure:

- The moving player transfers each type of newly constructed unit from his scenario card to on open space on the board (for example, European Axis units can be lined up in the Mediterranean), announcing the BRP cost for each type of unit as he does so.
- The moving player then redeploys each unit as permitted, without bothering to put in his home country. Both players must check that there are enough objectives available to allow such SRs (there almost always are).
- Units that don't redeploy following construction are placed on the board in a hex in their home country.

Play intelligently

There will be players who will do (or claim to do) all of the above, and will still take (or their opponents will claim they take) two hours per move. In my experience, there are several reasons for such absurdly long turns (although on rare occasions it might be necessary to take this long). Here's a list of dos and don'ts.:

- Don't be greedy. The single, greatest reason for slow play, in my view, is that players are trying to do the impossible. They will agonize over a position, trying to squeeze ever last advantage out of their units. The game doesn't work this way. If you don't maximize your potential in a specific turn, you will usually have more possibilities in the next turn. So you could isolate one more Russian 1-3 – that almost never matters and certainly isn't worth another half an hour. But usually players are just trying to do something that is impossible. As players get more experienced, they learn that France can't be taken in a single turn, Russia will last into 1942, and you shouldn't do a full offensive every turn. If you play within the position, things go much more quickly.

- Avoid perfectionism. Related to greed, perfectionism causes players to torture themselves over their moves, checking every single possibility, no matter how remote. There are two antidotes to this sort of obsessive-compulsive behavior. First of all, learn to trust your position. If you have an adequate reserve and have a sound defense, the opponent will be able to take what he's entitled to, but no more. Secondly, if you've made an obvious blunder, your opponent should let you correct it, rather than forcing you to take half an hour to see it. I almost always end my turn by saying "unless I've done something really stupid, go ahead". I am not embarrassed to correct an oversight (like leaving a beach empty, or a gap in the ZoCs in Russia), and I am generous in allowing my opponents to make such corrections. In this area, as elsewhere, it is more blessed to give than to receive.
- Keep your focus. Focus on one area of the board at a time, and then move. If you're playing the Allies in Europe, do your Russian builds and redeployments, finish the Russian turn, then do the same for the Allies. Most players have a pretty good idea of where the units are for both sides, including those under other units, provided they don't hop around from front to front randomly, so as to lose their train of thought.
- Use your "quiet time". Both at the Convention and elsewhere, there are opportunities to take your time and thoroughly assess the position. Use them, rather than wasting your opponents' time to do so. If it's your move at the end of the day at the Convention, take an extra hour that night or the next morning and sort out your units, check your mobilizations, study the position, discuss strategy with your partner, and try to figure out what you'll be doing in the next session.
- Always have one team at the board. When it is your move, your opponents should leave the room so you can discuss the position with your partner. But your opponents should use this time to work out their strategy, so when they return to the board they have a good idea of what they want to do in their next turn.

Rule knowledge

Some players, especially those who play slowly, have convinced themselves that it is only the rule "demi-gods" who can play quickly. While it is true that you play faster as you learn the rules better, this is not the main cause of slow play, as I have explained above.

Knowing the rules helps because you don't try to make illegal moves (which just wastes time) and because you don't have to look up rules as often. But it is not as difficult to avoid these pitfalls as you might think. If you're in any doubt about a rule, look it up while your opponents are making their move. It's just that simple. While it's nice to know all the rules (I don't), it's more important to know where to find a specific rule in the rulebook. The rules are actually fairly comprehensive and comprehensible, and the specific rule which may allow you to pull off a nice tactic is almost certainly there somewhere. As far as speeding play, the important thing is not to waste your opponent's time by reading the rules instead of moving.

The main reason experienced players play more quickly (or at least should play more quickly!) is not that they know the rules better, but rather that they have a better understanding, in general, of what is or isn't possible in any given position. Fortunately the possibilities in AWAW are almost endless, and even the most experienced player is going to have to think in every game.

Conclusion

To answer the question posed at the start of this article, a full-length Global War campaign game can easily be finished at the Convention (about four days) if the players follow the suggestions in this article. How many sessions in your basement or garage will be required depends on the length of each session, but normally you should be able to play three or four moves in an evening. Most importantly, this can be done without the players exhausting themselves or turning the game into an ordeal.

And the less time you take for each game, the sooner you can start the next one.