

TAC NEWS

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“FOR WANT OF A NAIL....”

How World War II *might* have lasted a LOT longer

For sure we all remember the old poem saying,

"For want of a nail the shoe was lost,
For want of a shoe the horse was lost,
For want of a horse the knight was lost,
For want of the knight the battle was lost,
With the loss of the battle the war was lost."

Many decisions made during World War II were seminal events that could have greatly altered history had the leaders chosen different options.

In the case of the war in Europe, it's hard to make the case that Germany could have won. However, making the case that they could have prolonged the war substantially is quite possible. Many books and articles have been written in recent years about individual decisions and how they could have impacted the war and its eventual outcomes.

No individual decision would have altered the outcome, but there were key decisions made by leaders that, cumulatively, could have had profound effects.

The single most important decision Hitler made that sealed the fate of Germany was declaring war on the United States on December 11, 1941. At the time the US was very isolationist. Roosevelt had a tough time justifying helping the British as much as the United States did. There was in that time, as there is now, a significant anti-war sentiment in the American populous. Many famous and influential citizens, including Charles Lindbergh, were anti-war activists.

When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 it surely galvanized the American people against the Japanese, but not against the Germans. In his famous address before a joint session of Congress, Roosevelt declared "that a state of war exists between the

United States and Japan." There was at that time no conceivable justification for the United States to declare war on Germany. Roosevelt couldn't have, and wouldn't have. Congress couldn't have voted for it, particularly since the nation was now forced into a war with Japan.

If Hitler hadn't declared war on the US on December 11th, there wouldn't have been a decision that Europe was the main priority of the war. All efforts would have been directed toward defeating Japan immediately. That course would have been chosen for the whole industrial war effort. US conflict with Germany would have been delayed at least a year. The lend lease program to Britain would have been far less, possibly, no tanks to Montgomery before the battles around el Alamein. There would probably have been at least a year delay in aid to the Soviet Union, as well.

The US Army Air Force entered the strategic bombing as quickly as they could following the Nazi declaration of war. Had this not occurred in 1942 or early 1943, would have meant no necessity for 2 million men to be used in the anti-aircraft defense of Germany. More people worked in anti-aircraft defense forces than worked in the aircraft industry. Between 10,000-15,000 additional fighters could have been built from the aluminum used instead for anti-aircraft protection. There would have been substantially more tanks and aircraft rolling off assembly lines in Germany since strategic bombing reduced aircraft production by 48% and 42% in tanks. In short, Germany would have been a far stronger opponent while England's and Russia's capacities would have been less.

The Mediterranean Option

Had Germany not attacked Russia on June 21, 1941 and instead sought to control the Mediterranean, Germany could have secured its southern flank.

Rommel arrived in North Africa February 2, 1941 with a handful of troops. With 2 more divisions, he would most likely have taken Cairo by the end of June. Malta would have easily fallen, as well as Crete. There would have been no Allied attack to take back Syria. The Iraqi revolt could have been sustained. Iraq would have been an Axis ally.

Moving from Greece and Egypt, Germany could have controlled the newly developed Saudi oil fields. Through this time there would have been more oil for the Italian fleet to operate and train effectively, possibly avoiding punishing losses at Taranto and Matapan. Having secured the Mediterranean, Germany would have been in a much stronger position to attack Russia in 1942.

Russia Attacked in 1942 or 1943

Had Germany waited until Britain was defeated in the Mediterranean, they would have been in a much better position to attack Russia, particularly without the United States entering the war during this time. The Russians would have been better armed and mobilized as well. However, a strong case can be made that Russia's main problems and failures in the first year of the war were organizational and operational. These were only corrected by gaining experience against the Germans and by buying time by giving up land and throwing huge numbers of troops in the way of the German advance. It probably would have been the same learning curve in 1942 or 1943.

Also, had Germany come into the Soviet Union selling itself as a liberator from Stalin and Communism rather than as brutal conquerors, particularly in the Ukraine and Caucasus areas, they could have recruited millions to their side. As it was, as harsh as the Germans were, they used at least 2 million, with estimates as high as 3 million, volunteers employed as farmers, factory workers, anti-partisan fighters, and fighting troops. Many German units recruited Russian fighters to replace losses and take advantage of the hatred against Stalin. Of course, this was totally against Nazi policy, but was commonly done under the noses of the Gestapo and SS. All one has to look at is the example of Bronislav Kaminski and the Lokoty Self-Governing District to see the potential. He eventually was put in charge of the Russian People's Army of the Liberation (RONA) with its own artillery and T-34 tanks. General Ernst Koestring estimated that 500,000-600,000 Soviets served in the German army in 1942-43, including as pilots and air crew in their own volunteer air force. Instead of 2 Cossack divisions, imagine 15 to 20 Ukrainian, Georgian, Uzbek, and Turkistanian divisions.

What if Ultra had not been available?

We know now that the Allies had broken the Axis Enigma encryption system. Had this not occurred, the war would have looked quite different. Here are a few of the ways:

- Lord Gort's army probably would have been included in France in 1940 and wouldn't have been evacuated at Dunkirk. This was a large part of the army employed in North Africa and later in Europe.
- At both Alam Halfa and Alamein, British victory was largely won because of the loss of virtually every Axis supply vessel, especially tankers, due to Ultra intercepts.
- The battleship Bismarck would probably have made it to the sanctuary of the port of Brest unharmed.
- The German wolf packs would have been far more effective and suffered far less devastating losses.
- Many instances of intelligence gained by Ultra in the Northwest Europe campaign aided the allies.

Given this collection of "horseshoe nail" changes, we could have faced a far more potent and formidable foe to attempt to roll back in 1945, rather than invading in 1944:

- One possibly possessing a larger army made up of additional divisions of allied former Soviet nationalists.
- Probably one with a secure supply of oil and other raw materials from more friendly conquered territories.

It is possible; it could have been a Germany capable by 1944 or 1945 of having its own long range bombing offensive capabilities. Imagine what that war would have been like in 1945, 1946, and 1947?

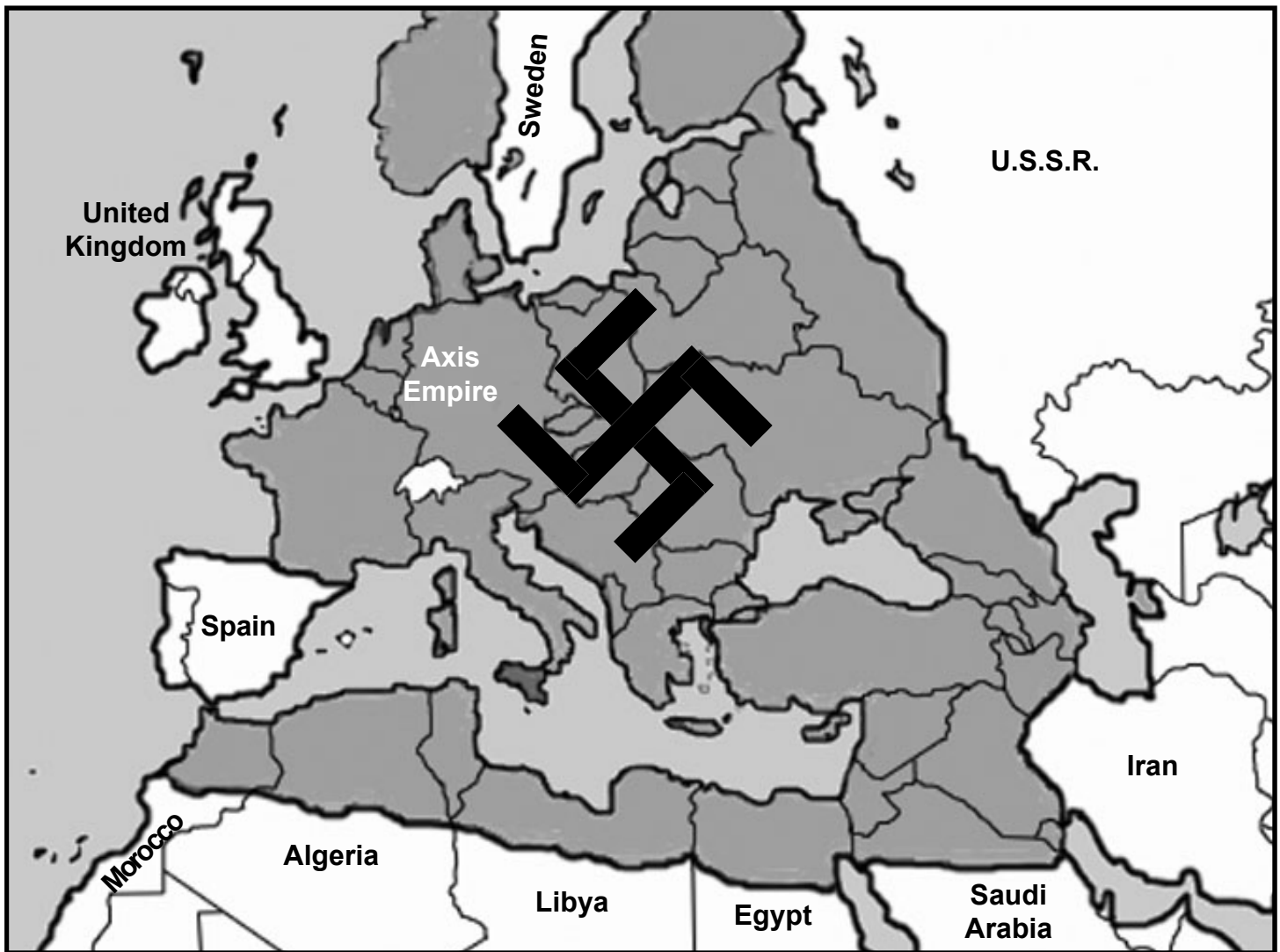
Further Reading:

Fry, Stephen, *Making History*, 1997.

Robert Crowley (ed.), *What If...The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been*, 1999. (Includes the essay "How Hitler Could Have Won the War" by John Keegan)

Harold Charles Deutsch (ed.) & Dennis Schowalter (ed.), *What If...Strategic Alternatives in WWII*, 1997.

Hypothetical Frontiers of the Axis Empire, 1947



This suggests what the map of Europe may have looked like as described in this TACNEWS article. Active fronts could have been between the British Empire, based in India, advancing toward Iraq, Allied invasion fronts anywhere the navies could land forces, and all along the Russian Front.

Your version of the "War that Never Was" could be different.

GHQ welcomes you to post your alternative histories on the Military Forum at www.ghqmodels.com

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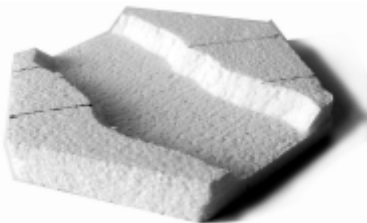
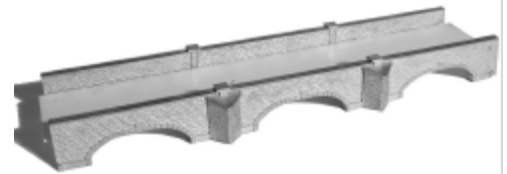


USING GHQ BRIDGES ON TERRAIN MAKER® STREAM AND RIVER HEXES



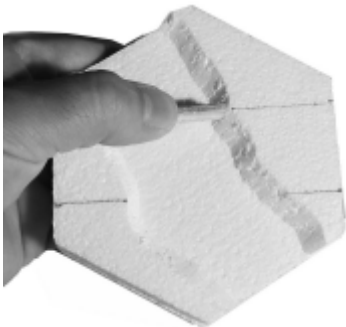
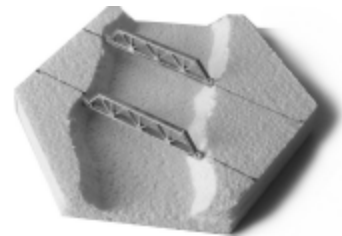
Create your own deck out of styrene plastic, cardstock, or any other material you like to work with. GHQ suggests that the width of the deck should correspond to your roads, and be about 1/4" wider than your mounting stands

When a bridge is going straight across a river, the pewter sides, in this case GHQ's TMB22 the Three Arch Stone Bridge, should be lined in as shown at right. But in the hexagonally based Terrain Maker, most bridges cross the stream at an angle....



This steam hex is ready for mounting a bridge. Note that the location of the roadway has been marked out. Make sure to use a pencil on Terrain Maker® hexes - never use a pen. The pen ink will bleed through the latex paint used in finishing the hex, while pencil marks will be covered.

Line up the sides of the bridge before creating a deck. This image shows how the sides of this Single Span Truss Bridge (GHQ's TMB76) will sit on the hex. Measure both how wide the deck should be, and how long the total deck needs to be - add at least 1" to the maximum span of the sides.



If you are using the Single Span Stone Arch Bridge, the sides need to be 'buried' into the sloping bank of the streambed. The image at left shows just how easy this is. Align the interior edge of the side of the bridge with the pencil lines that mark the roadway. When line up properly, apply some pressure with your thumb, creating indentations in the steam bank. Now remove the bridge piece, and 'excavate' the indentation using a hobby knife with a #11 blade. Make the excavation down to the base 1/4" TM2 hex.

Test fit all the pieces in place before gluing or painting anything! If it all lines up to your satisfaction, mark the deck where the sides go, and then use super glue to assemble the bridge. Now paint the bridge as a 'stand alone' model. Finish the stream hex, using the standard Terrain Maker® techniques.

Test fit the bridge in place on the hex. A bit more 'excavation' may be needed to get the ends of the bridge deck to lay flush with the road surface. If needed, a bit of Durham® Water Putty can be used to smooth the transition. Using white glue (NOT super glue!), cement the bridge in place on the hex. Touch up the paint job if needed.

Now your infantry can cross the creek without getting their boots wet!

