

FUTURE GEM

Rhino Game Company's

The Legend Begins

Published in 1991 • Designed by Mark Simonitch

reviewed by **Rich Erwin**

We all have our passions. For some, it's fast cars, for others it's high adventure in exotic and faraway places. For one of my gaming buddies, it's Mediterranean Theater World War II land warfare games. His opinion is that anybody can do a good American Civil War or World War II Eastern Front game, but Rommel, "the soft underbelly of Europe" and the adventures in such places as Syria or Tunisia require a lot more finesse than average.

Underneath his shrine to Vance von Borries, he keeps an amazing collection of stuff, but a gap has always existed in his mind's eye. He's never quite felt that Rommel and the Afrika Korps were as well portrayed as they could have been. Oh sure, he enjoys *Hellfire Pass*, and he'll play almost anything with the smell of the Sahara and diesel fuel in it, but there's always been a certain lack of satisfaction. The games have unrealistic rules, or supply is too big a factor, or the thing drags on too long without any feeling of action, or at least of tension. And then came the day I received a copy of *The Legend Begins* by Rhino Games, and I knew who would have to play test this little item.

For those of you who've been hiding under a rock the last two years, Mark Simonitch is the man behind the excellence of most of Command magazine's game maps, and who's also of late been doing some work for Strategy & Tactics. For the majority of his life, he's had a passion of his own; to create THE operational-level wargame on the North African Theater in World War II.

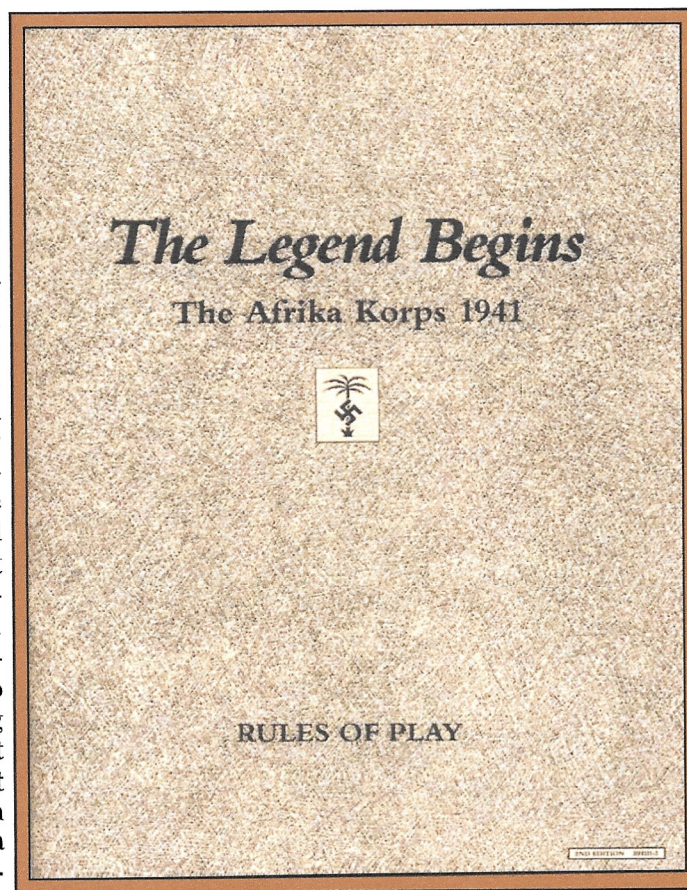
The Legend Begins is based on the period between

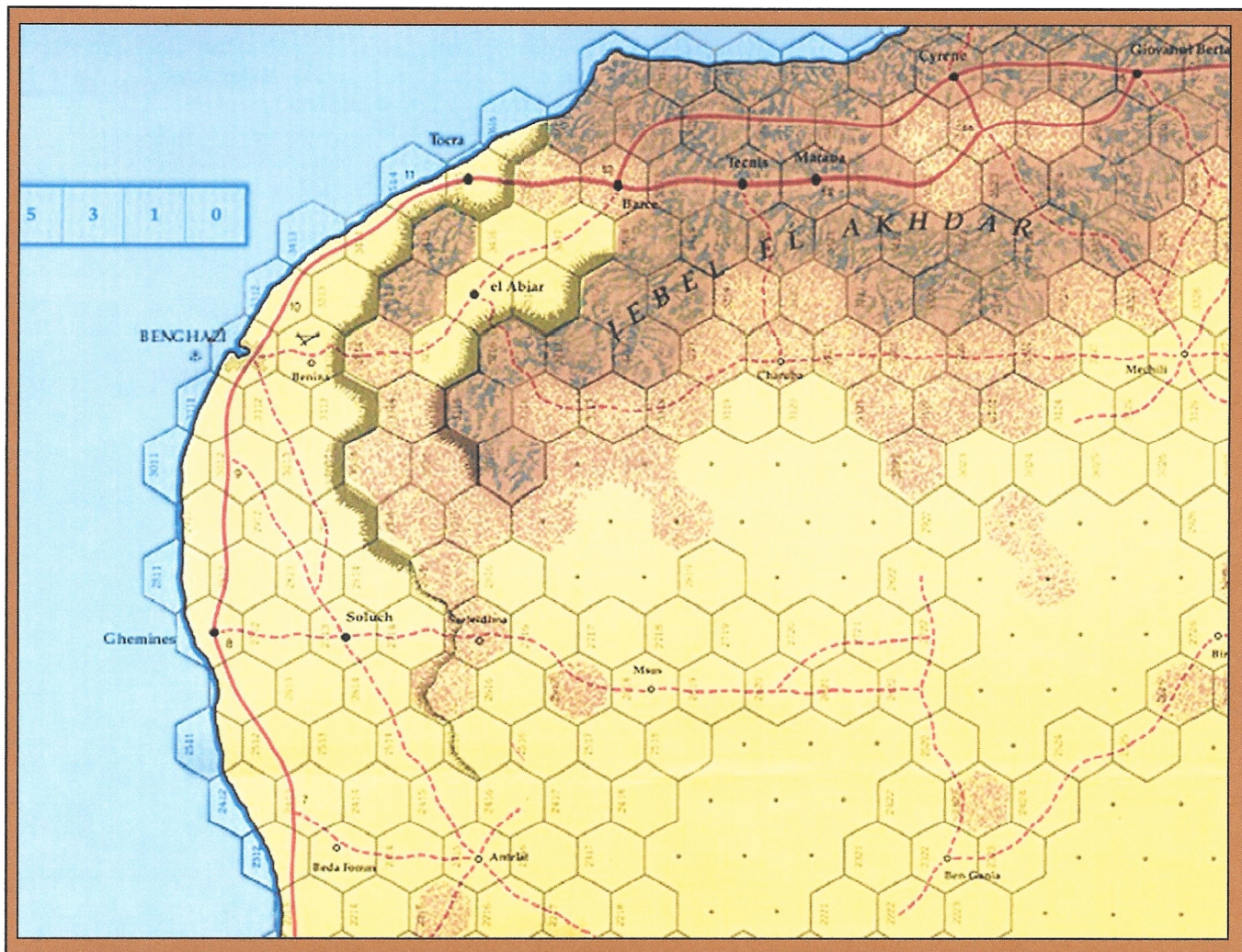
Rommel's entry into North Africa and the end of 1941, with the Crusader and Battleaxe campaigns. Such a game as this is not for beginners or for those who like simple rules. They are not as complex as some of the 1970s SPI games, but easily come into the range of GMT Games' *Operation Shoestring* and *Silver Bayonet*, where playing the introductory scenarios is mandatory. Also like the early GMT Games titles, it's amazing how quickly, given the complexity, one can learn them. Nevertheless, I cannot recommend the Crusader and Cyrenaica scenarios highly enough for learning how the game system works - there is a lot going on in this game.

The production values are nothing short of gorgeous; the components give the impression of a design by someone who put effort into the details. My only complaint would be the maps; I would have preferred a single sheet instead of three, but I have two-inch paper clips that can hold things together with a minimum of slippage. It might be worth it for Rhino Game Company to include them in future copies of this and other designs. There are also a lot of charts and tables on separate cards, but because they are each cut to their required size and no more,

they take up little additional space on a table. Of these, the best are the divisional organization cards provided to prevent toppling stacks on the battlefield and aid in the fog of war. If the cards are hidden from your opponent, they can put the fear of God into a player faced with a single counter marked 15th Panzer or 7th Armored.

Each turn begins with an Initial Phase, where reinforcements, replacements, repairs, the status of supply and of Malta are taken into account. This is





then followed by the Operations Phase, which is a variation on move-fight. To provide a sense of initiative, there are six counters, three for each player. Each set is marked Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary. One chit at a time is removed from the cup, that segment played, and the process repeated until five chits have been removed.

When combat occurs, each player receives a number of dice dependent upon the number of combat factors available for battle. One for each player is colored and represents victory determination.

Supply, always a pain to implement but necessary for the period, is handled in a simple and forthright manner. Separate supply units exist, which can be stockpiled, transported via truck units, rail, boat, and, if Malta is completely devastating Axis shipping, X Flieger Korps.

The feel of the game, once you are comfortable with the rules, is very much in the tradition of mid-1940's desert warfare. You are forced to take into account the same factors as your counterparts, and there is VERY little room for error. I know of no

game on this topic that provides the level of tension and requirement for balance of assets so well.

There is a 1942 add-on due out sometime in 1992, and a game using similar system mechanics to *The Legend Begins*, based on the battles around Stalingrad, is in the works. Mr. Simonitch should be very proud of this passion, *The Legend Begins*, coming to fruition.

(Publisher's Note: Campaign to Stalingrad is reviewed in issue #8.)