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NOTE: Screen shots and information presented in this article are based on a pre-release version of Allied General and are subject to change before final release. This article is not a review.

At the dawn of computer strategy gaming there was one company which single-handedly charted the course for the whole industry. Even the name of the organization clearly indicated its commitment to the market segment. Strategic Simulations, Inc. (SSI) released such classics as War in Russia, Kampfgruppe, and Mech Brigade. However, in the late '80s, the company shifted its focus toward a very successful line of Advanced Dungeons and Dragons titles. The market was changing, and SSI was once again at the forefront. The company continued to release the occasional strategy title, typically from Gary Grigsby, but such titles accounted for a small portion of the business.

Concerned with setting trends, as opposed to following them, last year SSI delivered another blockbuster game. The product became the talk of the industry, and its success resulted in dramatic changes being made to other games then under development. It managed to combine all the essential ingredients which appeal to a broad audience, and succeeded in the delivering Chris Crawford's earlier concept of a "wargame for the rest of us." The name of the game was Panzer General.

For those who have been clamoring to see this unique product on a PowerPC, the wait is nearly over. SSI has recently determined that it will broaden its scope of operations. The company was especially concerned that it should make a strong initial impression with its first MacOS title. Instead of treating the Macintosh gaming community to a cheap port of a game that has been released for over a year, SSI is planning to release Panzer General's successor simultaneously for both DOS-Compatible and MacOS systems.

[Overview](#)

Allied General (AG) is an operational level strategy game simulating the fighting in the European theater during World War II. Players get to direct the armies of the three principle Allies (Great Britain, the Soviet Union or the US) through a series of campaigns which follow the course of World War II. The perspective is that of the theater commander who leads all ground, air and naval forces arrayed in the region. Therefore, victory in AG belongs to the player who can best master the art of combined arms warfare.

The game provides support for play against the computer, two-player games on the same machine or Play By E-mail (PBE). The PBE option was one of the key ingredients for the success of Panzer General, and the development team decided not to mess with a good thing. While network or modem support would have been ideal, many armchair generals will be satisfied with the simplicity and convenience of the PBE option.

Another novel concept which was favorably received in the original, returns in AG essentially unchanged. Victory in the game is awarded for the capture of important cities at the earliest possible opportunity. Additionally, the player is continuously awarded a certain number of prestige points for fighting successful engagements during the battle. These points represent the players' standing with their superiors, and allows them to request reinforcements or upgrade the current equipment used by the troops under their command.

Gameplay

Players can select from one of three campaigns (Russia, North Africa and Western Europe), or they can choose one of the 39 individual scenarios depicting one of the great historic or hypothetical battles of the war. The scenarios offer the additional benefit of providing the player the option to direct the Axis forces during in the engagement.

Game preferences can be set to account for realistic supply and weather limitations, as well as implementing the "fog of war" option which hides undetected units. Two computer players are available, so that the game can cater to experts as well as novices. Finally, there is an option to modify the relative quality of the troops engaged in battle, which is a handy tool to balance games between players of different experience.

Each campaign is introduced by a montage of historic footage, which cleverly duplicates the look of news reels from WWII. The player also receives a scenario briefing, which describes the significance of the battle. The message is given simultaneously in the form of audio, which, although somewhat of a parody, does well to replicate the colloquialism and mannerisms of the three respective Allied nations.

The scale of the game is somewhat abstract, and varies substantially from battle to battle. Each unit on the map appears to represent a division or equivalently sized fighting element. The scale is approximately three to four kilometers per hex, and the time period covered in each turn can vary from a few hours to several days. The Order of Battle of the combatants can vary significantly from the historic baseline. This adds an element of surprise to each engagement, regardless of the number of times it has been fought. Best of all, the designers have had the good sense not to deviate from historic facts to such an extent that engagements lose all semblance of credibility.

This is a turn-based simulation, where players alternate issuing commands to all the troops under their control. The key to success is to concentrate forces to achieve one objective at a time. Players will come to understand the importance maximizing the effectiveness of the fighting formations, by using the strengths of one type to compensate for the weaknesses of another. Although occasionally there is the opportunity to direct naval forces such as aircraft carriers and submarines, AG is primarily a simulation of WWII air-land battles.

Units are categorized as either core or auxiliary. The designation determines whether a unit is available only for the duration of a single scenario or if it will participate in the entire campaign. In between the individual battles of a campaign, there is the opportunity to upgrade the formation with better vehicles or new weapons. Much of the ability to do so will depend on the amount of Prestige Points accumulated by the player.

Interface

Most of the action in AG takes place on the Main Game window that depicts the battlefield, framed by an Information Bar at the top, and two columns of game control buttons on either side. All the commands are accessible via the mouse. Amplifying information can be displayed on two floating windows which contain the Strategic Map and the Unit Information palette. Another important display is the Purchase Units window. This is where players get the chance to use their renown and are able to convert their prestige points into new units. The system may seem a little hokey at first, but most great generals did manage to use their popularity to get high command to place additional troops under their control.

Much of the success of Panzer General was attributed to the game's accessibility to consumers who never played a historic strategy game before. AG continues the tradition, spurning such wargaming conventions as plotted movement and stacking limits. Due to the scale of the map and the size of the units, only one formation may occupy a hex at a time. Movement is simplified through an automated plotting system. When a unit is selected, all the adjacent hexes to which it can move to are highlighted. The player simply selects the destination and the computer moves the counter to the desired location.

Graphics

This is a very good-looking game. The detail and clarity of the graphics, especially for the vehicles, is really spectacular. The maps are well executed, and although they are occasionally Spartan, they remain functional. As an option, each encounter between enemy troops can be accompanied by a magnified view of the fighting. It tends to be somewhat generic, and loses its novelty quickly. Those who enjoy looking at pretty graphics will want to leave the option on, but most players are likely to opt for the speed gained by turning it off.

Sound

Aside from the opening music and the thundering explosions which accompany the fighting, AG does not feature much sound. The one well executed exception is the use of appropriate engine noise whenever a vehicle, be it a tank or a submarine, moves on the battlefield.

Intangibles

Despite the game's apparent simplicity, AG does quite well to simulate the complexities of operational combat during WWII. Although veteran wargamers may be put off by some of the assumptions built into the game, they would do well to give it another look. The relationship between complementary troop types is handled exceptionally well and will repeatedly force the player to make very tough decisions. The game also has the distinction of rating not only the crew experience of a weapons system and its effectiveness against various target types, but also assigning it an initiative rating. This determines the order in which the units fire in combat, and can be very important since losses are taken before the enemy returns fire.

A Final Look

All those who ever wished that a game like Axis and Allies would someday make it to their computer screen, get ready! The holidays are coming, and for a change, instead of socks, you'll get exactly what you've asked for. SSI/Halestorm have slipped on their Santa suit and are getting ready to deliver a strategy product with broad appeal. Those who faulted ATOMIC's World at War series for its lack of detail will probably not be enthralled by AG either. But for all those who want to learn about the magnitude of WWII combat and prefer fast-paced action, this game is the perfect choice.

AG will quite likely establish SSI's reputation among Macintosh gamers in no time. The decision to design the game with MacOS graphics capabilities in mind pays tremendous dividends. Without a doubt, this game is a real eye catcher. When combined with a highly intuitive interface and a gaming environment which emphasizes logical thinking over knowledge of military operations, it is easy to see that Allied General will be conquering the hearts and pocketbooks of Macintosh simulation fans this Christmas season.