

★ CHAPTER 14

THE CARD GAME



In *The Tactics Guide* we discussed the fundamentals of the card game and the correct usage of the Tactic cards. Now we are going to integrate the cards into the strategic framework of the game, and discover that this board game is actually a card game.

COUNT CARDS

The 60 cards in a standard Memoir '44 game are divided up like this:



Types of Card	
Section Cards	40
Tactic Cards	20
Total	60

Focus on Section Cards	
Left Section	11
Center Section	13
Right Section	11
All Sections	4
<i>Pincer Move 2 - 2</i>	1
Total	40

SECTION CARDS

The difference in the number of center cards (13) and flank cards (11) comes from *Probe* (4 on each flank, 5 in the center) and *Attack* (3 on each flank, 4 in the center). Did you ever notice this slight difference in the center? We'll see how important it is.

There are also 2 *Recon* cards and 2 *Assault* cards for each section.

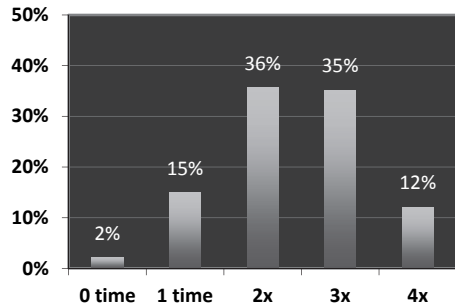
In competition, counting cards as the game progresses is essential to anticipating your opponent's future movements and responses.

THE SECTIONS

Observe the differing flexibility of 4, 5, or 6 card hands. How many turns can you activate units in a given section, for example in response to a strong assault?

4-card hands

This graph illustrates the chances of being able to play a given number of times on a given section with a 4-card hand.

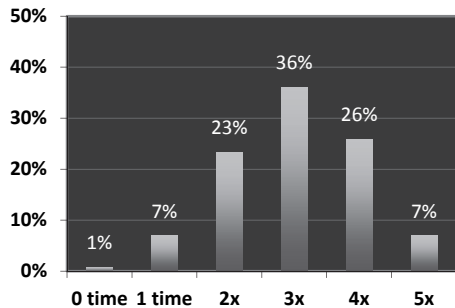


If your opponent is holding any 4 cards and you attack, hoping that he won't be able to retaliate in the same section, you'll be wrong 98 out of 100 times. Indeed, the 20 Tactical cards, *Pincer Move*, *General Advance*, and the three *Recon in Force* cards allow for surprising reactivity. 83% of 4-card hands will allow a player to play at least twice in a given section. It's clear that 4-card hands are not the defensive handicap we tend to think they are.

5-card hands

69% of 5-card hands allow a player to play in a given section at least three times in a row!

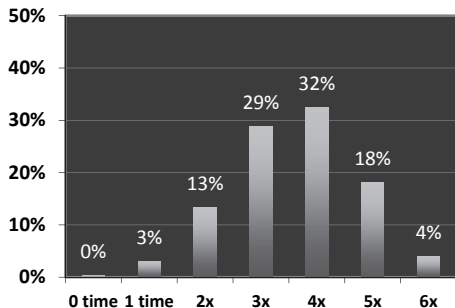
$$(36\% + 26\% + 7\% = 69\%)$$



6-card hands

84% of 6-card hands allow the player to play at least three times in a given section.

$$(29\% + 32\% + 18\% + 4\% = 84\%)$$



Nonetheless, it does happen that an entire battle is fought without even touching cards from a given section; Lady Luck might say, “Why not?”; it’s not out of the realm of possibility. There is no rule to memorize, but keep these guidelines in mind:

- ★ Don’t push your luck: if you’re attacking, play on the sections where you have strong cards, even if it’s not where you have dominance.
- ★ When defending, hold on to your Tactic cards as long as possible in order to be able to react with strength.

★ If the situation is suddenly critical, it can quickly get even worse!



This is often what happens when you’ve played your Tactic cards too quickly. Holding on to your powerful cards is difficult when the pressure is on because, more often than not, a card like *Direct from HQ* is just the perfect card for that moment, but only from a short term tactical viewpoint. In reality, and in competition especially, you have to think further ahead.

★ When defending, hold on to *Direct from HQ*, or any other highly-flexible card, as long as possible.



For example, after years of practice I have finally learned to start the first turn of an attack by using *Dig-in* on the fragile units that I want to save for the end of the game, even if I’m holding *Barrage* or *Air Power*. These two cards will be just as effective on the next turn.

A defensive card!

Play it as late as possible.



Here’s a perfect example: base game, *Saint Vith* scenario (0020), Axis side. Find the four Infantry units eligible for *Dig-in* on the first turn. The Allied side in *Operation Cobra* (0015) and *Toulon* (0023) are also illustrative.

An offensive card!

Play it as early as possible.



BATTLE TIMING

Here is a great question: how long does a battle last?

45 minutes in person, 17 minutes online. It's true, that doesn't really answer the question. This time, answer the same question in number of *turns*. Paradoxically, the most important criterion is not the number of medals. 4-medal, 5-medal, and 6-medal games take about the same amount of time in the end.

★ Most games last 15 to 30 turns.

As you see in the annotated games, my norm is that 1 move = 1 turn (it's like this in Go, but not in Chess). Consequently, each player will play between 7 and 15 times... so, every turn should result in $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 medal on average!

But every rule has an exception. Battles sometimes last fewer than 15 turns in unpredictable scenarios, but they are rarely longer than 30 or 35. I remember the *Battle of Kalatch* (5783) played in nine minutes, and, online, *Arracourt* ended in three turns: 6-0, after *Assault* followed by *Armored Assault*. But such cases are rare, and it's because of the Armor on open terrain that these two scenarios are considered to be extremely unpredictable. Most "reasonable" scenarios follow the rule.

Conclusion

Any starting hand (4 to 6 cards) can be totally renewed during the game, at least once, and up to three times.

To avoid being a slave to the cards and victim of the draw, we will deliberately replenish our hands.



OFFENSIVES

89. Stock three cards before launching an assault on a well-protected section.



An assault with insufficient support cards will quickly peter out; the attacking units could be blown to bits at close range after an initial push that lacked the orders for a prolonged assault. One or two Section cards (green background) and a few useful Tactic cards (grey background) will do the trick.

The foremost requirement is not the number of units moved on each turn, but their ability to maintain the offensive, which will force the opponent to focus his efforts in one place, despite his own plans. He might have to use precious cards, like *Counter-Attack*, *Ambush*, or *Medics & Mechanics*, which will ultimately spoil his plans on other parts of the map.

Here is an example:



Russia 1941, Leningrad – Battle of Tikhvine (jdrommel) [6/5 - 7] 2931

This is a very difficult scenario. Despite the impressive battle array, the Russians need to maintain an extended, deep offensive. Attacking in all three sections at the same time will lead to gradual defeat in this pitched battle. Besides, there's really no hope in the center.

Of course, there are other factors to take into consideration; the Russians suffer from severe time constraints everywhere, especially on the left flank, since the units there cannot retreat, and will be pounded by the enemy artillery if they remain static.

However, while building a strong offensive hand, it's better to sacrifice an immobile unit than to lose two or three that are huffing their way across the board in the middle of a poorly planned and unsupported assault. The Soviets will be ready to attack on the left (for example), as soon as they have identified a way to quickly (within three turns) eliminate at least two of the entrenched defenders on this flank. When it comes down to it, they will need to first collect at least three cards in the same section to pull this off.

Diversion is an excellent way to build your hand

While taking the time to build your hand, it's essential to remain composed and even bluff a little: setting up diversions is a great way to distract the Axis player.

If the main assault is going to take place on the left, create a diversion on the right, and vice versa. This time-consuming maneuver will also help clean up your hand of cards that are of no use to you for the main assault.

Moreover, if the Russian player is holding mostly center cards, he should play them first in order to get rid of them. His center Artillery would like nothing better. He can also win the battle by assaulting either flank, depending on his starting hand and how the game unfolds.

† FOR THE RECORD

DECEMBER 1, 1941

The Russians led a counter-attack to recapture Tikhvine, a train station that was strategically located on the Moscow-Leningrad line. The Germans were eventually forced to abandon the city after the cold and the Soviet attack got the best of them.

90. Take time and build an attack hand.

Attacking with prime board position but without the right cards is always too risky, so you need to take the time to build a hand that will help you meet your objectives; you have plenty of time to achieve this. And since your hand will be continually changing with each turn, the quality of your starting hand has no real effect on the final outcome of the battle.

A worthless hand of cards can quickly improve, and vice versa.

The solution is: STALL.

By delaying the attack and building a hand that will play to your objectives and to the strengths and weaknesses of your forces, you can limit the randomness inherent in a card-driven game like Memoir '44.

Here's how it works:



Romania 1944, Battle of Târgul Frumos (Brycie35) [6/4 – 6] 1714

As the Axis player, don't be fooled by the Red Army's overwhelming superiority; not only are there too many units in play for the Russian player, but they're poorly located: the troopers are blocked by their tanks on the right flank. The Soviet player is going to have trouble getting into position, and he only has four cards.

If Russians want to capture the three villages in the center, they'll have to mobilize their Special Forces units on the right. But their Armor is in the way, and if they attack with them, the Infantry is in danger of being left behind (Tactical Proverb 2!). The Soviet player's best bet is to build a hand for a right-flank attack. In the meantime, he can get himself into position by getting rid of his left flank cards, as well as the cards like *Barrage*, *Recon* (to activate a Plane), *Dig-in*, etc. Ideally, he will be able to stall until he draws an *Armor Assault*, allowing him to move against the concealed units on the right (Hill 372 and the Panzer lurking behind).

The Axis player will adopt a strategy of harassment, skirmishes, and badgering until his cards reveal the direction of his massive counter-attack. The two Panzer units in the center lend themselves to various tactics, while the Artillery and Planes can bombard the Russian troops with any of the Section cards. With six cards in hand, he has more flexibility in his defense strategy. In order to upset the timing of his opponent's attack, the Axis player can also pull back his Infantry on the left flank and bring them into the heart of the Artillery range (Tactical Proverb 19); the Russians will be forced to advance before they've had the chance to build a solid attack hand (Proverb 89).

The outcome of Proverb 90 is just as important: without time pressure, as the Axis, enjoy playing on secondary sections. From the benefit of this stall, take time to mobilize and position reinforcement units with accuracy, and of course build a decent hand for a massive assault or a general counter-offensive or the main targeted section.

† FOR THE RECORD

MAY 1944

The great Soviet counter-offensive began in Stalingrad in February of 1943. By March 1944, the Red Army was sweeping across the Romanian border. Two months later the Battle of Târgul Frumos heralded disaster for Germany's ex-ally. Romania surrendered in September and joined the Allies in October 1944.

91. Deep assaults work best in the center.

This is a complex proverb, already contradicted by the *Battle of Tikhvine (proverb 89)* where the starting position doesn't lend itself well to a center assault. But *Tikhvine* remains an exception for tactical reasons. Let's start with what we know.

- ★ The center section is wider, and can be easily reinforced from both flanks. You can concentrate a greater number of units in the center, which increases the power of cards like *Assault* and *Infantry Assault*.

Unfortunately it's as true for the defender as it is for the attacker. The defender can also mobilize many units in the center and increase his reactivity.

In addition, there is a phenomenon specific to the center cards: *the Card Removal Effect*.

- ★ All of the center cards that you're holding are the ones your opponent is lacking. This is not true for the flanks because of asymmetry.

Here is an example hand that will activate a large number of units on the left.



In this case, you're holding both left-flank *Assault* cards from the deck. But that doesn't mean that the opponent is not also holding an *Assault* for that same flank. His view of the board is the reverse of yours: your left is his right...



The Card Removal Effect

This term, well known to all Poker players, applies perfectly to Memoir '44, but only to the cards for the center section. If you're holding 3 of the 13 center Section cards, your opponent's ability to retaliate obviously decreases. But is it a negligible decrease, or can it actually impact the game? Once again, the math will clarify: here are the results, which prove to be vitally important but counterintuitive.

ASSAULT SIMULATION: ALLIES, 6 CARDS; AXIS, 4 CARDS

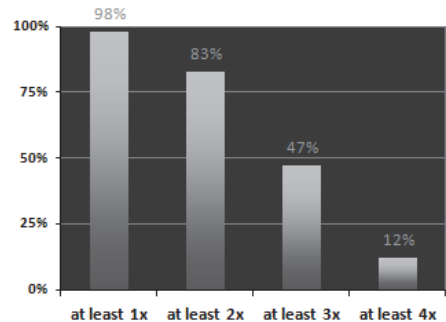
You are the Allied player and you need to seize the initiative. Here is what you can expect.

Simulation 1: general flank assault on the left (or right)

The goal is to break through on the left flank, then saturate and overwhelm the enemy defenses there. You need to know how many times the enemy will be able to return fire during your operation. The answer has little to do with your hand, since his right-flank cards correspond to your left-flank section. We can even say that the more left-flank cards you have, the more likely it is that your opponent has right-flank cards to counter your orders.

No matter how many consecutive attacks you launch on the left, the opponent's ability to return fire typically does not change: more than 80% of his possible hands give him at least two rounds to strike back in that same flank.

Average number of retaliations on the flank →



On the other hand, his ability to fire back during three successive rounds falls to 47%, less than a coin flip.

And that is also the mathematical proof behind Proverb 89: "Stock three cards before launching an assault on a well-protected section".

Simulation 2: general center assault

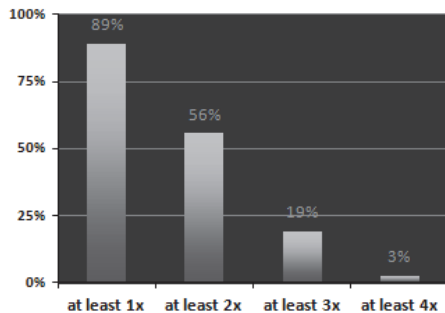
This time around, the cards that you’re holding suggest what’s available to your opponent. Here is a center attack-hand.



Look closely: there’s nothing special about this hand. You’ll be able to attack in the center, but besides *Assault*, there are no exceptionally “strong” cards (like *Behind Enemy Lines* or *Their Finest Hour*, etc.). Despite that fact, it’s really the perfect hand to crush any enemy presence in the center. There will be losses, but results are all that counts.

Compare this graph to the first simulation, “general flank assault.” What do you notice?

There is a clear shift of one card: the *coin flip* occurs for two retaliations (only), instead of three.



Average number of retaliations in the center →

In the first simulation, the opponent was able to return fire three times on the left flank in one out of two hands. Now, in the same number of hands, he can only retaliate two times! So, with 6 center cards in hand, the center will be devastated in four consecutive rounds without fear of retaliation.

The Card Saturation Effect in Memoir '44

The numbers highlight a clear and strong *Card Saturation Effect* in Memoir '44, proving the proverb: “Deep assaults work best in the center”.

INITIATIVE, REACTIVITY AND FLEXIBILITY

It's difficult to quantify the value of certain cards in Memoir '44, but experienced players agree that savvy card management goes a long way in mitigating the unpredictability of the dice.

Hone your card game skills with these three principles.

92. A good card player has to optimize either initiative, reactivity, or flexibility.

Standard scenarios (not *Overlord* or *Breakthrough*) typically allot the players four, five, or six cards. Let's begin with a unique reference system to illustrate these principles. For example:

★ In a 6-medal match, the Axis has 5 cards, the Allies have 5 cards

INITIATIVE: THE “VERTICAL” SATURATION EFFECT

Pulling together several cards for one section that you play in combination with Tactic cards in the same section will inevitably produce a “vertical” saturation effect: your opponent will run out of cards for that section and will lose all reactivity for a few turns.

Wiping out or securing an entire section is a very important objective in Memoir '44, and building a hand that generates initiative is the best way to meet it.

Prerequisite: the “strong/weak” sections

The cards can't perform miracles, so begin by determining whether or not it's possible to gain material superiority in a given target section. This is what we call a strong/weak section (from the start, you hold a material advantage over your opponent there; *it's the section where you are strong, and the opponent is weak*).

Careful initiative management can even bring success on a strong/strong or a weak/weak section. Unfortunately, there's never much hope in a weak/strong section.

Example



This is an excellent hand for building initiative on the left flank.

In order to gain an overwhelming advantage on the left section, you will need to start with the Section card *Assault*, immediately followed by *Infantry Assault* (or in the opposite order, depending on how far away the enemy is). If your opponent tries to retaliate in a different section, *Direct from HQ* will deliver a double blow: one or two units will respond in the section under fire while the rest will continue the maneuver on the left.

If your attack runs out of steam, *Recon* will allow you to stall (return fire in the center, advance an Artillery unit, get a center unit marching toward the left flank), then choose the best of the two cards that you draw. There's a good chance that one of them will let you play on the left section again (exactly 83%, in fact).

Finally, after four turns in the same flank, *Medics & Mechanics* will give new life to a weak offensive unit; the troops will be able to engage immediately, with the bonus of delivering a serious blow to your adversary's morale.

To secure a flank, you typically need to play three or four cards in quick succession. To completely wipe it out, it would take at least five, and that's if everything goes your way.

The influence of the Political Commissar (Nation Card 2, Red Army)


The Political Commissar can't diminish your initiative because nothing can stop you from carrying out several consecutive attacks in one section.

REACTIVITY: “HORIZONTAL” DEFENSIVE STRUCTURE

This is the inverse principle of the initiative. In Memoir '44, possessing and defending a terrain advantage is the equivalent of being one or two medals ahead at the beginning of the game, depending on the scenario.

However, with experience, we have seen that the attacker usually ends up ousting the defender, even if his losses are more significant at the start of his offensive operation. Why? Because the number of cards in the defender’s hand is insufficient for maximum reactivity in every possible assault situation; in short, the player with the initiative will ultimately destroy units that, by definition, can no longer fight back.

Here is a simple but reliable formula.

- ★ **Opening:** advantage to the defender → **Reactivity**
- ★ **Mid-game:** advantage to the attacker → **Initiative**
- ★ **Endgame** → **Flexibility**, but keep an eye on the score. 

You can see that a passive strategy entirely focused on reactivity will fail in the end: you will always be one step behind. How can you react when the opponent has just captured his final medal? The game is over! Reactivity is simply the capacity to react to imminent threats, in the opening and the mid-game.



Here is a sample defensive hand that has strong reactive potential. It has little offensive strength, because the cards are spread over the three sections, and we know that it’s important to avoid Front Line formation in Memoir '44 (remember Chapter 2, assault on Sword Beach, page 28). But at least it will allow you to react several times in each section.

This is also a good starting hand for an offensive deployment and repositioning in many scenarios, because it will allow you to advance units *into cover* as long as they don't come in contact with the enemy. Exception: cards like these will be disastrous in *Omaha Beach* and other landing scenarios, where it is impossible to advance into cover.

- ★ **Phase 1 “landing and advance”**: the units land and advance safely into all sections.
- ★ **Phase 2 “assault”**: identify your strong/weak section based on the potential for initiative that the cards drawn during phase one offer. Then start a brutal assault in the section you identified.

The influence of the Political Commissar (Nation Card 2, Red Army)

Quite the opposite of initiative situations, the Political Commissar's effect on reactivity is truly disastrous. In a manner of speaking, he divides your degree of reactivity by three, because whenever you place a Section card under the Commissar chip, there is a two-in-three chance that your opponent will seize the initiative on one of the other sections.

Later we will analyze in detail a few dramatic and challenging scenarios where Russians defend with only four cards and a burdensome Political Commissar.

FLEXIBILITY

What do you think of this hand?



None of the cards are extremely strong (like *Barrage*, *Behind Enemy Lines*, *Their Finest Hour* would be). However, sometimes a series of mediocre cards can work together to do something amazing, and that's the case here.

- ★ **Reactivity:** it's definitely a strong defensive hand. Three cards (the first three) can be played in all three sections, and the other two cover two-thirds of the board.
- ★ **Initiative:** the hand will also facilitate a deep center-attack, since four cards can be played successively. Overall, it has decent potential for initiative.

Actually, I would gladly take this hand over a random deal in just about any five-card scenario... therefore:

93. Initiative + Reactivity = Flexibility

So, is flexibility the Holy Grail in a Memoir '44 hand? Actually (and surprisingly), no. It all depends on the scenario.

In a landing scenario initiative is essential, and from our examples above, the first hand (initiative) will generally be superior to the third hand (flexibility), and we already saw that the second hand (reactivity) is unsuitable. In a highly-defensive scenario (*Okinawa, Hellfire Pass, Liberation of Paris*), the Axis player will do best with a reactive hand. Flexibility is second priority, at least at the start of the game, when it's too early to contemplate counter-attacking.

THE CARD GAME IN ACTION

To minimize the effects of unpredictable card draws, ask yourself the following question before each move and before getting rid of a card: how will this choice affect my initiative, reactivity, and flexibility? Depending on the scenario and the positioning, there is generally one choice that will lead to ruin. For example, suppose you're desperately in need of initiative before launching an assault in a given section. In this case, you should stall and play in a different section in order to build up the initiative in your hand for the section where you want to attack.

- ★ When in doubt, focus on increasing the flexibility of your hand.
- ★ Few situations require you to increase your reactivity.

Let's take another look at the left-flank attack hand.



How do the three principles evolve based in which card you play? Once you've chosen, will the card you draw cause an increase or loss of initiative, reactivity, or flexibility?

- ★ *Direct from HQ* → Loss of flexibility, because this is the most flexible card in the deck! It allows you to move any kind of unit in any section, or even in two different sections. Once you've played it, you'll need to work to maintain flexibility with the rest of the cards in your hand. Corollary: if there are other usable cards to play, it's always best to hold on to *Direct from HQ* for as long as possible.
- ★ *Assault* → Probable loss of initiative (one less strong card for the section where you plan to attack), a likely increase in reactivity and flexibility.
- ★ *Infantry Assault* → Probable increase in flexibility (if you draw a Tactic card) and reactivity (if you draw a left-flank or center card).
- ★ *Medics & Mechanics* → Same as above—a likely increase in flexibility.
- ★ *Recon* → Potential increase in initiative, if you draw a Tactic card or a left-flank Section card.

If your position requires reinforcing one of the three—for example, shoring up your reactive capacity when playing with the Political Commissar—you should play a card that, while it doesn't have the greatest tactical influence on the battlefield at the time, guarantees the reactivity of your hand against the enemy retaliation that will follow. The Political Commissar's presence on the Eastern Front often requires you to make this kind of decision.

94. The consistency of your hand takes precedence over tactical performance on the battlefield.

This proverb mainly applies when you are tied or slightly ahead at the beginning of the game. The goal is to maintain a hand that entirely gives you initiative, reactivity, or flexibility, depending on your objectives. There are two exceptions:

- ★ **If the enemy is ahead**, take risks. The hunt for medals justifies a temporary loss of consistency in your hand and a momentary break in troop cohesion.
- ★ **In the endgame**, 1 or 2 points from victory or defeat, managing the remaining medals takes precedence over hand management or any other operational or tactical consideration.

Chapter 15, “The Phases of the Game,” and Chapter 17, “Block Theory,” will delve into these points further.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CARDS ON THE GAME

The Tactic cards (grey background) can be played in any section, which elicits the following question for the hand below: if you look ahead a few turns, will you use the Tactic cards to compensate for the lack of Section cards on your weak section, or will you hammer home a highly-active section?



The flexibility of this hand, aided by the Tactic cards, allows you to play five times on the right, three in the center, or three on the left. Alternately, from a defensive point of view, it's a highly reactive hand. If you only play reactively you'll fall into a “horizontal” Front Line shape – something to be avoided in the mid-game whenever possible. From an offensive point of view, this hand will generate a terrifying amount of initiative on the right, with at least five consecutive attacks guaranteed in that section, and that's without counting cards from subsequent draws! The configuration of this battle becomes more “vertical”, allowing swift advancement, close combat, exploitation and ultimate destruction of the right section. If positioning justifies it, this is a clear initiative hand.

PRESSING YOUR LUCK

95. Take your chances with the dice, not with the cards.

Taking chances with the dice

If Armor attacks a no-retreat 3-fig. Infantry unit with 3 dice, it's reasonable to hope all 3 figures will be eliminated. This hope will be satisfied exactly 30% of the time. It's not great, but it's not negligible either. Now we know.

- What's to gain?

The complete destruction of a powerful enemy unit.

- What's to lose?

One last retaliation?
Not much, actually.

Taking chances with the cards

If you're leading a massive assault without the necessary cards to maintain it, is it reasonable to risk sending forward all of your troops with the hope of drawing the right activation cards as the assault progresses?

- What's to gain?

The rewards of a typical assault, which is already difficult enough when you're holding the right cards.

- What's to lose?

Every single one of your whole units, paralyzed when face-to-face with the enemy because of the lack of orders, will be pulverized within two turns.

Comparing risk vs. reward when pressing your luck with the cards vs. with the dice offers radically different conclusions; hence the proverb. Nonetheless, the cards aren't always disappointing, which the prospects of the draw will demonstrate now.

THE DRAW

- ★ In one draw: you have at least a 55% chance of being able to activate the section of your choice.



Example

You're attacking on the left, but you run out of steam. Thanks to the left-flank Section and Tactic cards that are still in the pile, your chances of drawing a card that will allow you to activate at least one unit on the left hovers between 55% and 66%, depending on the number of left-flank cards you're already holding.

- ★ This phenomenon is reduced in the middle and end game phases, when many or most of the cards have already been drawn (Card Removal Effect, again). Of course, the proverb evolves as the cards are played, especially if their order is unusual. In the end, it's better to count cards than to blindly lean on statistics.

★ In two draws: you have at least an 80% chance of being able to activate the section of your choice.



Depending on the number of cards for the same section in your hand, two successive draws will lead to a card for that section 80% to 89% of the time, with the same restriction in the middle and end game. You can see that your chances of drawing a useful card are not completely hopeless, which means you can take some risks with the cards, as long as you keep in mind the repercussions of failure.

Recon's reactivity in defense

Here is an interesting result that supports Proverb 39, "Play Recon when things are going badly" (with the same nuance as before).

★ Playing *Recon* guarantees 80% (and up to 89%) reactivity on a given section on the following turn, as opposed to 55% (and 66% maximum) for any other card.



GET RID OF CARDS WITH LOW POTENTIAL

We're still talking about the opening or mid-game. If you don't have many units in one section (on the right, let's say), but you're holding several right-flank cards and have no time constraints, the best move is to play those right-flank cards. You will get rid of your "dead weight," as well as increasing your hand's flexibility and initiative. Let's examine a great illustration of this principle.

Section Cards with low potential



Normandy 1944, Counter-attack on Mortain (Official M44) [5/6 - 4] 0016

This scenario is included in the base game and has very unusual conditions for victory; there are a lot of units on very complex terrain, and yet it’s only a 4-medal battle. This means that if you blow the opening phase and give up a “dry” medal without compensation, it will be almost impossible to catch up.

The Axis player needs to deploy his troops quickly in his strong sections—the center and on the right. Here is his opening hand (the cards match your point of view of the board—left-flank cards will be played on your left). The Axis has the honor of launching the hostilities.



What do you think of this hand? Is it disappointing, average, or strong?

It’s actually extremely strong, as long as it’s played well, but just one error could mean defeat. At first glance, the two cards on the left are unimpressive, whereas the Tactic cards suggest a massive German attack on the right, where he is strong. If it’s a short scenario, why not? Shouldn’t he jump right in?

Strategy 1: the so-called “natural” strategy

Here is an initial plan for a “natural” or “default” strategy:

(1) *Air Power* (on the four units in the lower-left), (2) followed by *Infantry Assault* (in the center or on the right), (3) and then *Armored Assault* to close out the operation. What do you think?

Here’s what might happen with the above strategy:

- ★ The Allied front line will be shaken, and maybe you’ll even get a key medal.
- ★ On the other hand, your cards might look very different after three turns:



At the end of the fourth turn, your hand now has three cards on the left flank, the least viable section of the board. It has lost all potential: no initiative for the main assault that was launched in the center or on the right and those forward units are now out of position with no orders. There’s no reactive potential either, unless you can manage to resurrect a unit with *Medics & Mechanics*. Lastly, it has zero flexibility.

However, the score is only **1 to 0** and the Allies aren’t going to just sit there. The balance can quickly shift to **2-1** or even **3-1** for the Allies, without compensation, in only two or three turns.

In other words, it’s clear that the game is lost. In fact, I was sure of it on the first turn because of bad choices and faulty card management.

Strategy 2

Here is a second plan. There are no serious time constraints because the Allied Artillery is distant and can only fire with 1 die. The Axis player has plenty of time to build his hand and get rid of his left-flank cards. The benefits are two-fold:

- ★ Increase initiative by trading weak cards for strong ones.
- ★ Activate units that appear to have no purpose. By bringing the left-flank units into the center, they will participate in the center *Infantry Assault* later.

It's absolutely necessary to play *Probe* on the two left-flank units on the first turn, beginning the first Infantry migration toward the center. The Armor can move one hex near Chérence village, then fire.

Continue in the same way on the second turn: play *Attack* on the left. The Infantry units can continue to move to the right. One will break into the center and join the *Infantry Assault* that is in the works. The left Armor can fire with 1 die again.

Note: sending these units to the left toward Chérence would be a mistake. They would be too close to the American troops, and especially to their Artillery.

Now the *Infantry Assault* in the center will be truly awesome!

The main offensive can begin. The troops are stronger and better organized, but more than anything, the hand is flexible, with strong initiative potential. The Axis player will likely be able to bring the score to **2-0**, all while sustaining initiative (*Medics & Mechanics*) and flexibility (*Recon*).



Drawing a left-flank *Assault* is not great news, but at least the hand retains its offensive power, and *Assault* actually increases reactivity if used later in defensive operations.

† FOR THE RECORD

AUGUST 7, 1944

Led by Hitler himself, Operation Lüttich preceded the Allied attempt to surround the enemy at the Falaise Pocket. The goal, which was never achieved, was an Armor breakthrough all the way to Avranches. They hoped to cut off the supply corridor for General Patton's 3rd US Army, which, shortly after, fanned out into an irresistible wave toward Brittany and inland France.

Tactic Cards with low potential

Tactic cards can sometimes lose their potential if they're misused or played at the wrong moment.

Certain allegedly “strong” cards will weigh down your hand if you hold on to them too long.

Close Assault is at the top of that list:

How many players have found themselves still holding this card at the end of the game because they never saw the “perfect” moment to play it?



Other cards to be aware of: *Armored Assault*, *Behind Enemy Lines* (it's really a shame to reach the end of the game with this card in your hand, but it's even worse to play it too late, when you're about to fall into an *Ambush*), *Ambush*, *Firefight*, *Dig-in* (a shame, because it's a really interesting card).



Conclusion: develop good instincts

Here is the good player's checklist.

The Card Player's Checklist

- ★ Constantly evaluate your hand's potential for **initiative, reactivity** and **flexibility**.
- ★ Always be thinking two turns ahead, evaluating the possible outcomes.
- ★ Avoid falling into the trap of seeking flexibility above any other quality, which causes you to inadvertently create a "horizontal" Front Line by playing uniformly in all three sections. Such a position is manageable, but very vulnerable—it's only recommended for highly-defensive situations.
- ★ If positioning allows it, favor initiative, concentrating several playable cards in one section. Create vertical offensive operations with the ultimate goal (idealistic though it may be) of decimating an entire section. Always evaluate the risk and return of such a strategy.
- ★ Trust the luck of the dice but not of the cards. A lot of units are at stake.
- ★ Get rid of low-potential cards as soon as time constraints allow.

It is important for beginners to remember that the cards in and of themselves are not strong.

They're only powerful when played together and at the right time and place on the battlefield.

You might love cards like *Air Power*, *Behind Enemy Lines*, *Armored Assault*, or *Barrage*...

OK, but they need to be played in the context of an overall plan. We'll come back to this.



DEGREES OF CONSTRAINT

Modifying your hand's flexibility is much easier with 6 cards than with 4 or 5. Let's look at the most restrictive: a 4-card hand.

THE 4-CARD HAND



Ethiopia 1940, Gallabat-Metememma (Official TP) [4/4 - 4] 1289/3704

This 4-medal scenario was published with the *Terrain Pack*. It recreates a rapid and highly tactical battle in which both players have only 4 cards. Taking advantage of your adversary's lack of flexibility is the key; the player with the initiative at any given moment can ravage the enemy ranks, which often lack reactivity. This one is definitely worth trying.

† FOR THE RECORD

NOVEMBER 6, 1940

The campaign in Eritrea led to the defeat and eventual surrender of all the Italian forces in East Africa in 1941.

96. A 4-card hand can be bluffed.

In fact, it's possible to take the initiative in a section where you're not necessarily very strong if you think that your enemy's hand lacks reactivity. The best times to bluff are:

- ★ At the beginning of the game (dangerous): launch an assault in a section, hoping the opponent's starting hand has low reactivity.
- ★ When your opponent is ahead, in the opening or mid-game: you've got to take risks.
- ★ After your opponent has played several consecutive Tactic cards or twice in the same section. Unlike the dice, the cards do "remember". The more he plays in the center, the fewer center cards remain in the deck. The same goes for his hand: the more right-flank cards he has played, the fewer he can be holding.

There are very few scenarios where both players have only four cards. The ones that do exist are therefore especially educational.

ID	Theater	Author	Scenario
1289/3704	1940 – Ethiopia	Official TP	<i>Gallabat & Metemma</i>
4149	1941 – Barbarossa	Yangtze	<i>Pripet Marsh</i>
2240	1942 - Mediterranean	Brycie35	<i>Battle of Alam Halfa</i>
2140	1943 – Italy	Oddball	<i>Istria – Blood Red Snow part II</i>
6314	1944 – France	Brumbar44	<i>Hellcats Road to Noville</i>
0019	1944 – France	Official	<i>Vassieux</i>

Not a complete list


4-CARD VERSUS 6-CARD BATTLES

Experience shows that 6-card hands are almost always flexible: the player can focus on offensive operations (initiative) or on defensive efforts (reactivity), with plenty of opportunities to play both sides of the map (flexibility).



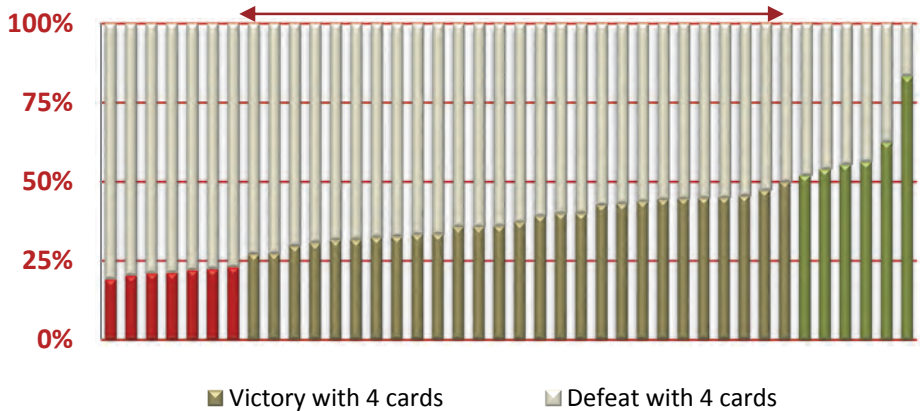
The conflict changes significantly when the cards are dealt at 6-4; one of the players has 6 cards and all of the flexibility that comes along with them and the other has 4 cards and all of the constraints that naturally result. An analysis of 6-versus 4-card games will ultimately demonstrate the true power of the cards.

- ★ In 2010¹, there were 40 official scenarios that pit 6 cards against 4.
- ★ According to the battle reports, 8,700 matches had been played, which was a large enough sample to make some reliable interpretations.

★ The average likelihood of victory when 6 cards compete against 4 is 64% (to 36%). 

... or the equivalent of a 100 ELO point difference on Memoir '44 online.

Let's take a closer look at these battles. This chart shows the number of 4-card victories for each of the 40 scenarios.



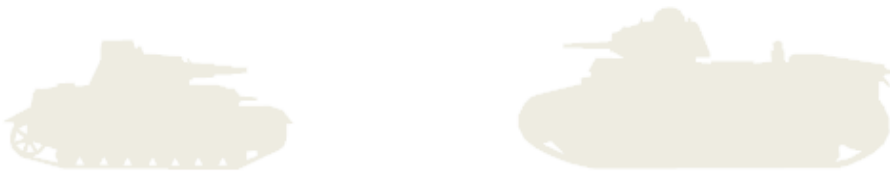
- ★ The majority of the 4-card scenarios (27 out of 40, in the center of the chart) offer feeble chances of victory: between 25% and 50%.
- ★ This proves that the cards (initiative) play a bigger role than material factors (units) in the balance of the game.

¹ The numbers presented from this Study made in 2010 (for the French edition of the *Guides*) are still relevant (+/- 5%). Feel free to review also the battles 6-cards vs 4-cards published more recently.



France 1940, Fall Gelb – Battle of Flavion (Official CB#1) [6/4 - 5] 3451

The material balance is perfectly equal on this map. 21 tank figures on both sides. So why do the Axis win two out of three times? Is it the initiative that comes from having the first move? That alone is not enough to justify such definitive battle reports. The reason for the disaster is clear: the Axis player has 6 cards and the Allies have 4.



† FOR THE RECORD

MAY 15, 1940

The Germans lost many tanks on May 15, thanks to the heroism of the French forces and the quality of the B1-bis. However, short on fuel and under fire from the Luftwaffe on exposed terrain, the 1st DCR was annihilated that day.



Barbarossa 1941, the Sea of Azov (Official EF/AP) [6/4 - 6] 1491/3734

The Soviets begin this match with a real material advantage: first-move initiative, solid entrenchments, and three Artillery units on the second line. So how can we explain the 82% (as of 2013) defeat statistic? Easy: the Soviet player has 4 cards, very little reactive ability, and his mission is greatly complicated by the presence of the Political Commissar, and up to four reinforcing Panzer units that are riding his tail (according the specific scenario rules).

The minute the Axis player gains the initiative in one section, the Soviet troops and the Political Commissar will have a tougher time reacting.

† FOR THE RECORD

SEPTEMBER 26, 1941

The disorganized Soviet counter-attack was quickly pushed back. The Germans took advantage of the situation to attack on the left flank and surround and destroy two Russian armies.

Scenarios that work to the advantage of the 4-Card player

Only six scenarios work slightly to the advantage of the 4-card player (the numbers were taken from battle reports (end of 2010). You wouldn't guess this would be the case based on a first glance at the map. Here they are:

ID	Theater	4-card victories	Scenario
1290	1940 – France	60% Allies	<i>Counter-attack at Arras</i>
0029	1944 – France	54% Axis	<i>Saverne Gap</i>
1409	1940 – Finland	54% Allies	<i>Suomussalmi</i>
1365	1943 – Kursk	57% Allies	<i>Ponyri</i>
5518	1944 – France	51% Axis	<i>Camel Blue</i>
4088	1944 – France	56% Axis	<i>Pushing Through Caen</i>



France 1940, Counter-attack at Arras (Official M44/AP) [4/6 - 6] 1290

The Allies attack without the initiative (4 cards to 6), and with a material disadvantage: 12 units to 16! And don't forget that the Blitz rules are in effect, favoring the Axis, and that each player is holding an *Air Sortie* card.

History confirms what we have already observed: “The Allied strategic goal was doomed from the start.”

And yet... things are not as grim as they seem because it’s on this very same battlefield that the Allied player, who has only four cards, has been victorious 60% of the time (2010) and still 49% (2013). Luck couldn’t create numbers like this, so how do we explain it?

For starters, it has to do with the sections. The center is the German player’s strong/weak section. They’ll attack here, but they have a long road ahead of them. While they’re busy there, the Allies will establish stable positions on the flanks, maintaining their strong terrain advantage. *Pincer Move 2- -2* seems to be the perfect opening card. The goal is to occupy a maximum number of Forest hexes, especially on the right flank, after which both flanks can quickly become strong/weak sections for the Allies.

Suddenly the Allies have a huge terrain advantage. The German units will be forced to move forward through open ground and will be vulnerable to attack by the Allied Armor in the Forest as well as their Artillery. Fans of the *Air Pack* can also strafe the German troops before they even arrive at close range.

Nonetheless, the spectacular results that players have seen on this map are still somewhat of a mystery, which confirms the tactical and strategic principles we’ve been talking about. Like *Saverne Gap* or *Suomussalmi*, *Counter-attack at Arras* is atypical, a “mutant” even, which is all the more reason to play it again, or for the very first time.

Scenarios with 4 Cards for the attacker and 6 for the defender

Finally, there are only a handful of scenarios that give 4 cards to the attacker and 6 to the defender. Knowing that a generalized offensive costs approximately two uncompensated medals at the beginning of the game, how do you think each camp will fare? These scenarios are extremely useful for improving your card management game. Play them again and again until you can win with 4 cards!

ID	Theater	4-card victories	Scenario
1490/3732	1941 – Barbarossa	23% Allies	<i>Russian Breakout</i>
4670	1941 – Barbarossa	47% Allies	<i>Rzhev</i>
4245	1941 – Desert War	43% Allies	<i>Hellfire Pass</i>
0024	1944 – France	33% Axis	<i>Arracourt</i>
0021/3687	1944 – Belgium	48% Axis	<i>Ardennes – Twin Villages</i>

Despite the disappointing numbers, *Russian Breakout* and *Arracourt* are very fun to play (and very violent!).

Rzhev, *Hellfire Pass*, and *Twin Villages*, which are almost balanced despite the 4-card constraint, are genuine tactical masterpieces; this is why I've used the first (*Rzhev*) as an example in so many situations, and why the second (*Hellfire Pass*) is the scenario played in one of the Annotated Games (Chapter 6).

Educational scenarios

On the other hand, there are seven battles that offer truly pitiful chances of victory (25%) for the 4-card player but I think they are no less interesting for this fact. Give the 6-card hand to a beginner and face the 4-card challenge head-on by not dumbing down your game. These are great father-son games.

ID	Theater	4-card victories	Scenario
1433	1941 – Barbarossa	19% Allies	<i>Breakout at Klin</i>
1225/3689	1944 – France	20% Axis	<i>Carentan Causeway</i>
1490/3732	1941 – Barbarossa	23% Allies	<i>Russian Breakout</i>
1311	1941 – Barbarossa	23% Allies	<i>Bug River</i>
0042/3682	1944 – France	23% Axis	<i>Utah Beach</i>
0022	1944 – France	22% Axis	<i>Liberation of Paris</i>
1491/3734	1941 – Barbarossa	21% Allies	<i>The Sea of Azov</i>



I have no particular advice for the above scenarios. They are so difficult that I wouldn't necessarily do better than anyone else, even if I did contribute in my own small way to the 25% success rate for the Axis player in *The Liberation of Paris*. You simply have to practice, become aware of the importance of the cards independent of the battlefield, and do your best.



RUSSIAN CARDS

When in play, the *Political Commissar* imposes serious restrictions:

- ★ They are tragic in defense: the *Commissar* is not reactive.
- ★ They are decent in attack because the *Commissar* can always decide to play successively on a given section.

★ The Russians don't fear losses.



The Russians are courageous... because they have no other choice! Whatever their plan, there will always be heavy losses. In the best-case scenario, they compensate for card limitations with superior numbers and, whenever possible, terrain advantage.

Defensive scenarios, 1941 to early 1943

These are exceedingly difficult battles. Begin by optimizing the defensive capacity, focusing on the reactive potential of your hand. Be careful, though, because in defense, the *Political Commissar* can make mistakes, especially when there are too many Section cards in the hand. Whenever possible, it's important to stockpile *Tactic* or flexible cards such as *General Advance*, *Infantry Assault*, *Move Out*, *Counter-Attack*, *Their Finest Hour*, *Recon in Force*, etc. If the hand lacks reactivity, use *Recon* well; activating one unit is better than no units at all. If the defense holds, thanks to terrain advantage, you can start thinking about a Soviet counter-attack on your strong/weak section during the second phase of the battle.

THE SOVIET COUNTER-ATTACK ON THE STRONG/WEAK SECTION

Normally there is only one strong/weak section: the Russians can't be strong everywhere, nor can the Axis be weak everywhere. This means there's only one way to go about it, and it has to do with the cards.

97. "Focus" your hand on the strong/weak section before launching the Soviet counter-attack.

By “focus,” or “verticalize,” I mean collect several cards in order to play successively on the desired strong/weak section. The soldiers will lead a deep assault in the targeted section (a *vertical* assault structure) rather than trying to defend on all of the sections (a *horizontal* defensive structure).

After having taken a few hard hits and suffered from a lack of reactivity in the first phase of the game, possibly with heavy losses, the Russian player’s hand is beginning to come together and starts to look promising. If he manages to gain the initiative in the strong/weak section, he can concentrate all of his effort on saturating the Axis forces, even if the *Political Commissar* is active. However, a strong, initiative-based hand is not easy to build. In the mid-game, when the Axis advance is reaching its peak, the Russian player needs to focus on gathering cards for the target section. When he has three of them, or two plus at least one Tactic card, the counter-attack can begin. There’s no going back at this point, because *Memor ’44* games are fairly short.

Example

There are many relevant examples. I’ve chosen yangtze’s *Smolensk* (Barbarossa) from the *Campaign Book Vol. 1*, which is a particularly difficult one.



Russia 1941, Barbarossa – Smolensk (Official CB#1) [5/4 - 7-5] 1757

With 4 cards, an active *Political Commissar*, and a hopeless starting position, the first phase is going to be brutal for the Russians. They'll either pull the survivors back from the front line or sacrifice them at a very high price (the “bloody” medal strategy in chapter 17 will explain how). The Axis will continue to advance until they reach an as-of-yet undetermined front line.

This is the point where the Soviet player needs to identify a target section where he can seize the initiative, grab a few “dry” medals, and catch up to his opponent. In order to do that, he will need to:

- ★ Slowly move his second-line units toward the target section: think about using the Train!
- ★ Focus his hand: collect several cards for the target section.
- ★ Launch the counter-attack with no second thoughts.

Depending on how the game unfolds, it's entirely possible for the Soviet player to establish his superiority in one of the sections; it doesn't matter which. Let's use the center as an example:

- ★ Cards like *Pincer Move* or *Recon in Force* will allow him to gradually move reinforcements to the center.
- ★ In the meantime, he will collect precious cards like *Assault (center)*, *Attack (center)*, *Infantry Assault*, and even *Probe (center)* for his counter-attack.
- ★ While building his hand, reactive cards like *Recon*, *Ambush*, *Direct from HQ*, and *Move Out* will hold off his enemy.

This strategy should even out the disappointing (and unfair, in my opinion) results of the battle reports: 75% : 25% (in 2010) in favor of the Axis! A piece of advice: read the author's own battle report: yangtze vs. Ziggy, February 2006.

Please note: this 2006 scenario was reconfigured for the *Campaign Book* expansion. The Russians only need five medals, but don't use that as an excuse to be passive.

† FOR THE RECORD

JULY 1-30, 1941

In this key battle of Operation Barbarossa, the Russians combined several armies and launched a number of counter-attacks in order to contain the German advance. Despite their efforts, the city fell to the Germans on July 16th.