

Issue #14

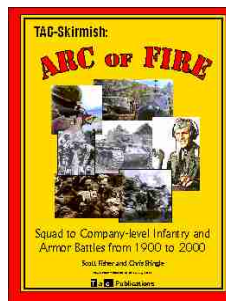
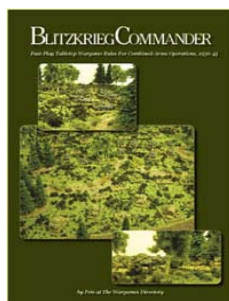
Spring 2006



WASATCH FRONT HISTORICAL GAMING SOCIETY

Warning Order

WW2 Gaming: New Directions



WW2 wargaming shares a common thread with Ancients and Napoleonics. All three are probably the most popular and most gamed periods by wargamers. They are also the most likely to cause violent arguments about rules and realism. Although there have been literally dozens of new rules out over the last few years, I'm going to take a look at four of the most popular and how they've changed our perceptions and ideas about WW2 wargaming.

With the wide range of figures being produced, from 1/285th to 25mm (and now even 1/48th), I decided to choose Blitzkrieg Commander and Flames of War for the smaller scales (1/285th to 15mm) and Arc of Fire and I Ain't Been Shot Mum! for the larger scales. But first, let's take a look back and see how we got to this point.

Back in the 70's there was a surge in WW2 gaming, no doubt helped by the excellent series of battle reports, orders of battle, and features in a magazine called Wargamer's Digest. They had their own rules, plus there was Angriff and Tractics. WRG also had two popular sets for rules, one for micro-armor and one for small scale infantry actions. These rules were the staple for many years and you could go pretty much anywhere in the U.S. and find a group that played them.

The 80's saw the rise of fantasy gaming, plus new companies producing quality figures for a variety of periods. I believe that this had the effect of diluting the WW2 gaming population as they tried other periods. Add to it the fact that there were really no new rules or innovation in the early 80's and WW2 gam-

ing entered a phase of stagnation.

The 90's saw a return to WW2 gaming, primarily due to one set of rules: Command Decision. This system had several new concepts and WW2 gamers, including our group, flocked to it and played it for years. Then, as with all wargaming rules and periods, gamers start to wander. Why this happens could be the subject for a thesis by psychology students, but suffice to say, it happens with alarmingly regularity.

By the mid-90's there was a move to Battalions in Crisis, until everyone realized that it should have been called *Tractics Redux*. WW2 gaming was about to enter another long, dark winter. At the turn of the century other rules sets came along, including Battlefront, Kampfgruppe Commander, (cont. on p. 12)

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Special points of interest:

- Interview with Sam Mustafa, designer of *Grand Armee*.
- Several battle reports for WW2, Colonial, and Napoleonic games.
- Reviews of new boardgames, miniatures, and terrain.

Interview With Sam Mustafa

Grand Armée is a recent set of Napoleonic rules that has received rave reviews. In this interview, the author, Sam Mustafa, talks about his views on command & control, the Napoleonic period, and wargaming in general.

1) Could you describe how you got into wargaming?

I'm reaching into the mists of Time here, but I think it was around the age of ten. I actually think that Avalon Hill's *Third Reich* was my first wargame. (I was an ambitious kid.) My first miniatures games were a couple of years later. I had discovered the old *Tricolor* rules. Neal Smith (nowadays of the Triangle Simulation Society) and I spray-painted our plastic Airfix WW2 figures: mine were all blue for the French. His were all red for the British. We played on my parents' living room floor. I think I lost!

Since I'm 40 now, I suppose that means I've been wargaming for thirty years.

2) What was the desire that led to writing *Grande Armée*?

I got out of wargaming altogether in the mid 1990s, when I went back to grad school. I sold thousands of figures, including huge 15mm Napoleonic armies that I had been using for *Napoleon's Battles*. I remained out of the hobby for about 5-6 years, then married a woman who is very artistic, and it was actually her interest that rekindled mine. (She painted a few figures, herself, and later did all the line-drawings for *Grande Armée*.)



When I re-entered the hobby, though, I realized that very little had changed, in terms of game rules and concepts. I wanted to do something new and fresh. I wanted to get away from strict ideas about time and scale.

3) There have always been arguments over command and control in Napoleonic wargaming. What are your thoughts on the subject and how did you try to portray them in *Grande Armée*?

Even if somebody were to do a "perfect" Kriegsspiel-like simulation of command in the horse-and-musket period, most gamers probably wouldn't like it. Despite claiming that we want more "accuracy" or "period-feel" in our games, most of us in reality want very high levels of control that no historical general ever had. (Consider all the angry reviews of Bob Jones' game *Piquet*, which does a better job than most at driving home the point that "War ain't fair, and it certainly ain't predictable.") Most gamers don't like it, though, because they can't be assured that they will get the same fair chance as their opponent.

You have to give people something that appeals to them as a fun mechanic, first and foremost. Players are willing to accept frustrations and unpredictability if they feel that

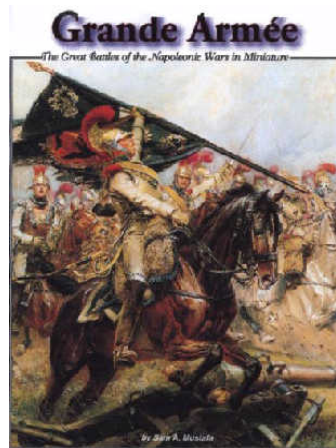
they are nonetheless in control of something, even if imperfectly. So the idea of the G.A. command system was to give players a limited amount of control, a sort of "amount" of control that they could distribute as they wished, with the knowledge that things that weren't directly controlled might or might not go as they wished.

4) It seems like after a long time without any new or innovative rules for the Napoleonic period, all of a sudden *Grande Armée* and *Age of Eagles* arrive on the scene and both are doing well. Is there something about the period that makes gamers keep coming back to it?

Well, to be fair, there were more than just those two. When I knew, in 2000, that I was going to be publishing G.A., there were more than a dozen Napoleonic releases expected imminently. There was a

promised second-edition of *Volley and Bayonet* that never materialized. There was Bill Keyser's *Age of Bonaparte*, also stillborn. Second-edition *Napoleon's Battles*, which was repeatedly delayed, and then was a disaster. Scott Bowden's latest *Empire* edition, *Revolution and Empire*, came out in 2003, shortly after G.A. There was a new edition of *Napoleonic Principles of War*, and *Piquet's Les Grog-*

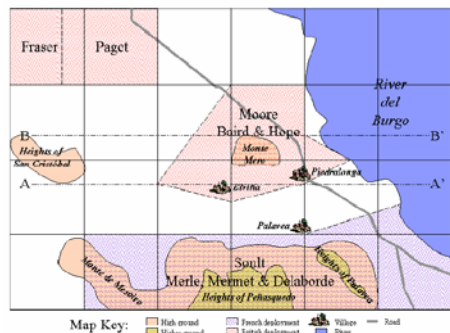
nards. Phil Barker's *Horse, Foot, and Gun*, came out at that time, albeit only on the web. There was supposed to have been a second edition of *Shako*, which is still working its way toward publication very slowly. Dave Brown's *General de Brigade* emerged in 2001, al-



Interview With Sam Mustafa (cont.)

though it took a while to get popular in the USA. There was a new edition of *Elan*, and a couple of new editions of *In the Name of Glory*. There are others that I'm probably forgetting.

The Battlefield of La Coruña:



The *Grande Armée* site has a number of professionally done scenarios for the Napoleonic period.

Of all of those, however, only three attracted large followings: *Grande Armée*, *General de Brigade*, and *Age of Eagles*. The first two because they were new and different in scale or systems, and the latter because it was carefully nurtured for many years, and built on the fan-base of its parent game, *Fire and Fury*, which was already very popular.

5) Right now in the hobby there is an ever-growing dispute about playability, complexity, and realism. Where do you think this originated from and where do you think this argument is going in the future?

With each passing year, I am more firmly in the camp of the "impressionist" game designers. By that I mean that I want to create a gaming experience that is fun and feels right, but doesn't require strict adherence to scale or detail.

The first game that really

showed the potential for this was Arty Conliffe's *Tactica*. Right now the most successful World War Two game, *Flames of War*, is a brilliant example of what I'm talking about. If you took the FoW scale literally, then a Panzer III tank has a range of about 100 yards. That's so out of whack that it's hilarious. But play the game: it works. It works beautifully. It feels very "right." They created a system where the figure scale is totally separated from the ground scale, which is entirely internal to the game's own logic, and the time scale, which is completely absent. It really drives the Literalists nuts. They hate it. But I've been playing WW2 games for years, and I've never played a better WW2 game than FoW. Period.

I think some wargamers have very limited imaginations, which I find odd, considering that our whole hobby is about imagination. But if they don't see some literal representation of ground scale, time scale, figure scale, etc, then for them it's "Not Realistic."

They're going about it exactly the wrong way. They usually start with intense calculations about marching distances, musket ranges, divided by certain increments of time, and so on. From that mass of data, they then try to create game mechanics that will reproduce actions on the table in some way that is supposed to correspond with what they've read about historical battles.

I find that it's much better to

decide first on how you want the game to feel and play, and then decide on things like representative scales. In other words, find ways to rationalize and work the historical information into the game, instead of vice-versa. Your artillery's range, for instance, doesn't have to be "accurate" in terms of ground scale. It only has to be work correctly against enemy units, vis-à-vis those units' movement rates. So if you got the movement rates and turn-sequence right, linked with the artillery range, then who cares what the literal scales are? As long as artillery is doing what it is supposed to be doing, then you've got it right.

Designing a good game should come first.

6) Is this the golden age of miniatures wargaming? What innovative trends do you see in the future?

I would love to read some solid demographic research on wargamers. I would love to know, for instance, if there's an age bubble more or less at my age-group. Be-

cause it certainly feels like there is. Now that we're fat and middle-aged and affluent, we have a lot more disposable income, which means a much greater variety of products. So in that sense, Yes, it certainly feels like a Golden Age.

Interview continued on page 9...



The *Grande Armée* site offers a wide variety of support for the rules.

Red Vengeance

A few issues ago I was singing the praises of a little game from Avalanche Press called Defiant Russia. Now, after about ten times playing it, the game is one of my favorites. Red Vengeance is basically Defiant Russia in reverse, covering the destruction of Army Group Center in 1944 to the final siege of Berlin.

For the same \$20 price tag you get a small map, a few pages of rules, and a few hundred counters. As with Defiant Russia, the graphics aren't spectacular, but they're functional and don't adversely affect the game. There are a few more special rules than in Defiant Russia and for the first few games it might be a good idea to make some victory point objective markers and keep the rules open for the leader effects.



The game opens up with a stupendous Russian attack that shatters the German line in the East. The German player, does however, get to place his panzers before the first turn after the Russian setup, so there is some opportunity to try various strategies. The second and third turns find the Germans just trying to form some sort of line while getting continuously hammered.

Turns 4-6 see a number of breakthroughs where the Russian spearheads begin driving deep into German held territory. Again, the Germans are playing for time, trying to contain the spearheads and attacking Russian units that



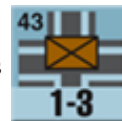
Game Review

get too far out in front.

Then the weather hits, plus by this time the Russian armor has outrun its infantry support, so the Russians need to take a few turns to get re-organized. The Germans launch a few counterattacks and get ready for the final assault.

The last few turns sees fierce fighting in Germany as the German player tries to hang on for dear life and begins to run out of units. Usually, it goes down to the last one or two turns, much like in Defiant Russia.

Overall, another good little game that is exciting to play. Playing the Germans is not for the meek! Watching your army lose 10-20 units a turn is pretty depressing! If you've played the Russians in any other East Front wargames, then you will enjoy dishing out some payback. Highly recommended.

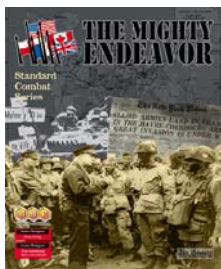


The Mighty Endeavor

D-Day and the subsequent breakout from the Normandy region has always fascinated me. Unfortunately, I've never run across too many board games on this subject. Fortress Europa was OK, The Longest Day and Atlantic Wall were too big, and Operation Cobra wasn't much fun except if you were the Allies!

MMP, who now owns The Gamers series, has released a game on the Normandy campaign in its Standard Combat Series. The SCS series of games all share the same basic, six page set of rules, with a supplement for that particular game giving special rules, OBs, options, etc.... It's a pretty straightforward system with low complexity that harkens back to the classic wargames of the 70's and 80's.

The Mighty Endeavor comes with a standard 22" x 34" map, around 300 counters (representing division sized units), and two rules booklets. The campaign covers the initial landings in June



and goes all the way to the end of the war, with the map covering all of France, the Low Countries, and about a third of Germany.

Set up is not too bad, but finding the starting hexes for the Germans is a little tedious. The one thing I do like about this treatment of the subject is the wide variety of landing options that you have. Each beach is rated for the number of units it can support for an assault, followed on landings, then the number of units that can arrive each turn. You also get a number of beach markers to enable you to conduct several landings after the main one.

I also like the air system as the Allied player receives a number of air markers that can be used to "dominate" an area or be used for column shifts in

combat as airstrikes. Dominating an area increases the power of the airstrikes, limits strategic movement, and cuts off the road bonus for German units in that zone.

Basically, the Allied player conducts a main landing somewhere along the coast, followed by a second or possibly a third landing. The Germans rush in to contain the beachheads, then the Allies have to breakout. The trick for the German player is knowing when to start falling back and what units to sacrifice. The problem for the Allied player is which port to seize, which units to ship over, and where to allocate supplies for an offensive.

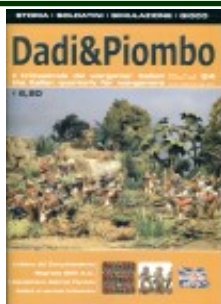
A very basic system that plays fast. I especially like the wide variety of options that both sides have and I really can't see any blowouts happening with this game as both sides are pretty evenly matched. Highly recommended.



Wargames Journal/Dadi & Piomba

Magazine Reviews

There's been a general resurgence in foreign wargaming magazines in the glossy format recently. Dadi & Piomba, which is now up to issue #24, has emerged as one of the shining stars of this new group.



Printed in Italian, but now containing

English sections, this is a well done hobby magazine. It combines good photos, interesting articles and features, plus it has that "common man" quality where the photos don't look like staged events.

I was also impressed by their web site at: <http://www.dadiapiombo.com/index.html>. There is a wealth of information and pho-



tos that are a great asset to the hobby.

Overall, there's always room for good quality magazines and this is one of them. I don't think it will replace Wargames Illustrated as the pre-eminent gaming mag, but it certainly is trying to be of value to gamers.

Crescent Root Studios

Product Review

I first learned of Crescent Root Studios through an announcement on TMP where they were offering their new line of 15mm colonial structures. Intrigued, I went to their web site and wow, I was hooked!

First, it is a well done site and other manufacturers should take note. The products, especially the 15mm Sudan



range, are beautifully displayed and there are several very inspiring photos of entire villages made up of the basic sets. The shopping cart system is easy to use and you are offered painted and unpainted versions of the same products.

I ordered a few of the unpainted versions and used PayPal, with the product arriving in only three days, so the service is outstanding.



The pieces are well sculpted, light, paint up well, and fit on the base as advertised. A gamer could quickly build up a professional looking desert village for low cost and little effort.

Overall this service receives my highest recommendation. Good products, good service, and a great site. Job well done!

All Fronts Armor Depot

Product Review

Since our group has been doing a lot of 1940/Operation Sea Lion skirmish games recently, we've been looking at adding more and more 28mm vehicles. Tamiya only has the Bren Carrier, Solido has a few items that are useful, but the Verem, Gasoline, and Quarter Kit stuff is too pricey.

So, we saw a thread, again on TMP, with listings from a company called All Fronts Armor Depot. A quick visit to their web site showed us that they had a lot of early war vehicles in 28mm, plus around a hundred or so other selections. So far, so good. One of our guys decided to order some German vehicles and when they arrived, they were given to me

to paint.

I had two PZ-38s, two PZ IIs, two PZ Is, a Kettenkrad, and a truck. The Truck and Kettenkrad were great models, but the tanks....., that's another story.

The PZ-38s took a good deal of work with the dremel, X-acto blades, and files. There was a large amount of resin build up under the armor fenders and on the track pieces, which took a long time to clean up. The PZ IIs had the barrel and mg positions reversed!



After much difficulty I was able to get the tracks to fit to the tanks, which is no small feat. Fortunately, after painting, they look good and being three piece models, are suitable for the rough handling of gamers.

We have a second shipment of British and French vehicles coming in soon, so I'm going to reserve judgment until I see those. Until then, if you desperately need 28mm early war stuff, this is your only option.

Battles for Empire: Gunboat Rescue!

I had just finished scratch-building three colonial gunboats for the Nile, so I had to figure out a scenario for them. Although Battles for Empire, the rules which we use has gunboat rules, I was planning on adding a more detailed treatment, so the gunboats had to just sit there as a scenic effect.

A fortified town on the Nile has been under siege for a few days and yesterday the Mahdist forces created a breach in the walls. Figuring it was now or never, the Egyptian commander decided that they would sortie out against the besieging redoubts while the civilians and baggage made for the Nile. A force of gunboats and British troops had been in the area, so if they

could make it to the banks overlooking the Nile, they might be rescued.



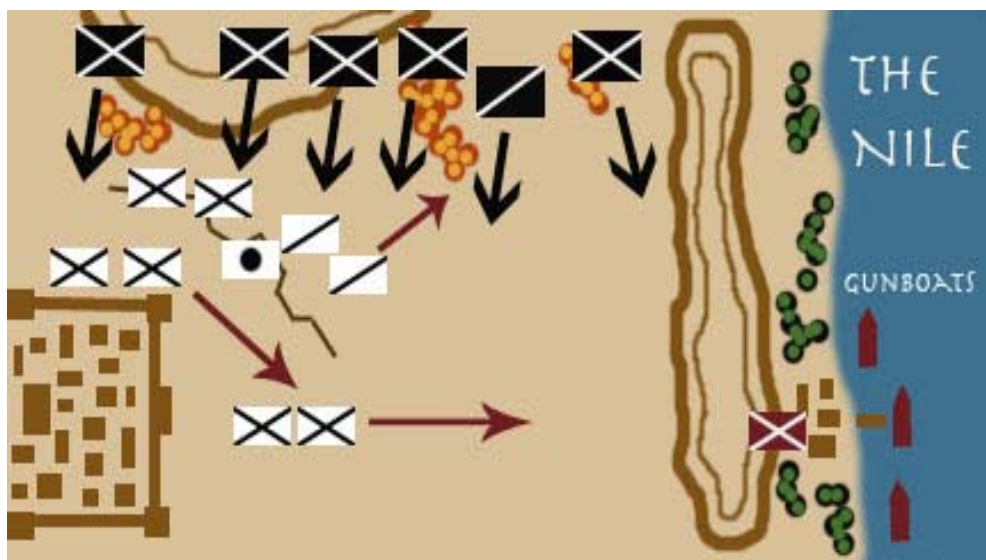
Meanwhile, The British force, consisting of four units of infantry and a Gatling gun decided that they would land and try to link up with the defenders. We established a rule that any Mahdist unit that crossed the high embankments on the river would be subject to the firepower of the gunboats, which

Scenario Replay

also worked well as an objective for the Egyptians to make it to, which would signify safety.

So the Egyptian commander broke his force into three parts. The first, led by the cavalry would sortie out against the redoubts, then screen the other two. A second, with the civilians, would go out of the main gate. Since it was closer, it got the worst troops as the escorting force. Finally, a third force would go out of the side gate and link up with the first force and try to buy time for the civilians and baggage to get away.

The first turn begins with the first Egyptian force having already seized the entrenchments and awaiting the expected counterattack by the Mahdi's forces.



The Dervish Attack

A force of about 30 Dervish and Fuzzy units, led by five camel and cavalry units, came charging onto the board and the Egyptian players had this sense of overwhelming doom. The Egyptian cavalry charged into the mass, hoping to give the 11th Sudanese time to deploy in a better position. The cavalry gave as good as it got, but was finally overwhelmed and forced back.

The Sudanese fought well and backed by a two section battery of Krupp guns, were able to slow the Mahdist attack down. By this time the second force was trying to take up positions as



well, having just come out from the side gate. The British had landed and were moving up to the embankment to see if they could screen the retreat. Finally, the Egyptian cavalry and Sudanese were swamped and the Dervishes rushed through the gaps, creating a wild melee near the redoubts.

Gunboat Rescue (cont.)

A large force of Dervish camelry and cavalry broke through and made for the baggage train coming out of the main gate. The British had offloaded from the gunboats and got to the ridge just in the nick of time to add their fire to the baggage escorts, which consisted of units of town militia and slavers. The combined fire drove the attacking force back, but it wasn't until after several volleys that the attack was finally broken.

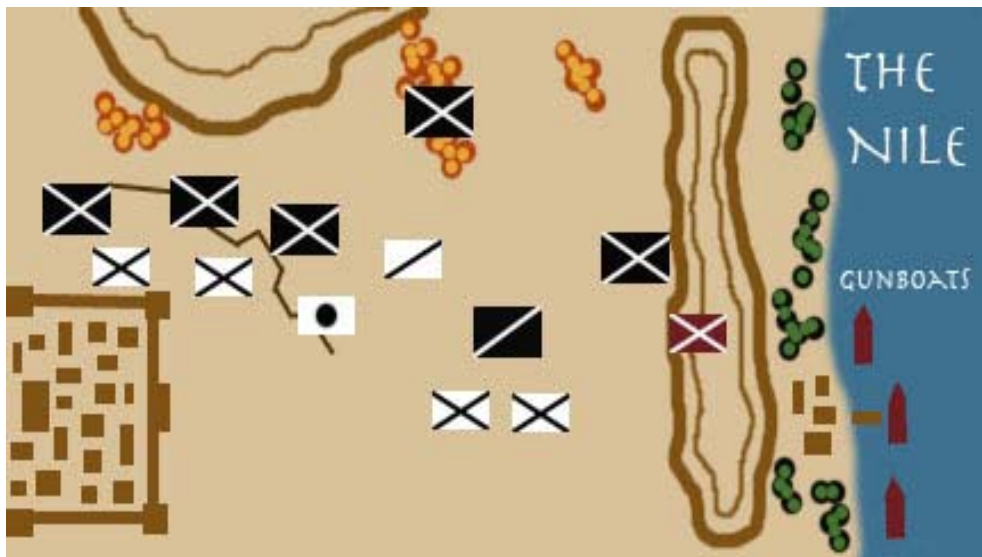
Another Dervish infantry force moved to engage the British forces on the ridge, but even after getting into melee, they were unable to break the British line. The remainder of the Dervish army spent a few turns trying to sort itself out, where massive traffic jams prevented them from bringing their superior numbers to bear.

The Egyptian force that came out of the side gate ran immediately into trouble. The large numbers of Fuzzies that swamped the Sudanese at the redoubts were now moving into the rear areas, creating havoc. The Egyptians delivered a few volleys, then got into multiple hand

to hand combats, where several of their units were wiped out.

The stage was set for the final push to prevent the civilians and baggage from reaching safety. After rallying several units, the Dervish infantry and cavalry surged forward again, determined to break the Anglo-Egyptian defenses. They were met by several volleys and a gatling gun, plus there were a few good series of die rolls that added to the carnage. The Dervishes had a few chances to rally and make the final charge, but were unable to coordinate their attack and were chopped up piecemeal.

The baggage and civilians reached the ridge, just out of reach of the last Dervish force for an Anglo-Egyptian victory.



Summary/Final Thoughts

As most of our Battles For Empire games go, this one was a closely fought contest. Both sides played well and certainly had their chances to win the game. The Dervish advantage in numbers was offset by the creation of several traffic jams at the worst possible times. There were also a few tense moments when some of the worst Egyptian troops actually held the line and threw back attack after attack.

If you have not tried BFE I would certainly give it a try. The combat and movement systems are easily picked up after the first few turns and it is certainly suitable for large groups. We had 8 players and well over 1,000 figures, but were able to play about a dozen turns in under five hours. We hope to add a few more gunboats to our collection, plus an armada of some native dhows for future actions along the Nile.



Memoirs of a Historical Miniature & Board Gamer Pt. 1

Back in the early days of Miniature Wargames magazine, a gamer by the name of Mel Gosling outlined his involvement in historical miniatures from his youth. It was a great series of articles and I still re-read them every so often to take a trip back to the past. I thought I would try the same thing and hopefully provide a few gamers with a chance to remember the "Good Ole Days!"

I can remember back in the 70's when they use to show the Victory at Sea episodes on Saturday afternoons, which caused me to use some of my lawn cutting money I had earned to order some of those "war" games at the back of the comic books. They came with a game mat, plastic ships, tanks, and planes with a set of markers. Those games were great, but there was always that feeling of wanting something more.

When I turned 15 my father, who served in the Air Force, was stationed at Edwards AFB in southern California. Just a block from our house on the base was a series of stores, including a second hand thrift store. I was in there one day, looking at sci-fi magazines(my other true love-but that's another story!) when I saw at the back of one of the issues an ad for Strategy & Tactics magazine and a game called Sixth Fleet. There was a cool picture of a ship, modern jets, and a description of the game. After seeing that all I knew is that I wanted that game!

I found a hobby store in Lancaster, California that carried SPI products and convinced my parents to take me there. I was overwhelmed by the number of Avalon Hill and SPI games, plus miniatures that were in the store, but I went with Sixth Fleet anyway. I plopped down my \$12(which was a lot in 1977) and went home to unwrap my prize.

Unfortunately, little did I know that I had chosen one of the most complex games that they had designed! I was impressed by the map, counters, and here finally were

rules talking about real modern combat. Obviously, this wargaming thing was a little more complex than I had thought. I stuck with it, though, and played a few solo games, which were immensely satisfying.

That same week there was an ad in the base newspaper for a wargames club that was looking for members. The meetings were in the NCO Club and to come by on a Sunday afternoon to try it. I went there with my Sixth Fleet game, upon which several of the members expressed that I should not have chosen that as my first game! There were about 20 guys there and they were going to play several games. I played in an invasion of Poland board game, but I had a chance to go out and look around. Three guys were playing Dungeons and Dragons, four others a micro-armor game, and still more playing other board games. I went home thinking that this was the coolest hobby ever.

As I earned more money I continued to buy board games, from the hobby store, members of the group, as well as finding a few second hand in that base thrift store. By the time school started in my sophomore year I had about a dozen games and was lucky enough to find three guys in my class that were interested as well.

When I look back now I think that getting the Sixth Fleet game was an advantage. In the future, complexity for me was never an issue, so I had no problems with games like Air War, rules sets like Tractics, or spending days prepping for a game. It also showed me that gaming could produce long friendships and that generally your other interests like sports, sci-fi, etc..., were shared by other gamers. It seemed then, much as it does today, that for a few hours every so often you can forget about the real world and not only enjoy the hobby, but some great friendships.

I also found an ad in one of my sci-fi mags about a new company called Metagaming. They had this new series of microgames for \$3 each and the first one was called Ogre. I bought it and to this day it and

the several add on games remain some of my favorites. It also became a catalyst for my occasional forays into fantasy and sci-fi gaming.

Just before my junior year my father got transferred to the new F-16 program at Hill AFB in Utah. After much searching around I did find a hobby store in Roy, Utah that sold wargames and a local toy store chain that had some of the Avalon Hill games. In those days you didn't have the Internet, Yahoo Groups, or email to review products, so you ended up buying some stinkers. My biggest problem is that I could not find anyone to game with and there was no one in my school that seemed interested.

Fortunately, a guy who had been in the Edwards AFB club got transferred to Hill and got a house three blocks from mine. Talk about luck! The big problem? He was a miniatures guy with very little interest in board games. He was also big into ancients and I wasn't, plus he wasn't that really interested in WW2, so I thought that this would be a short friendship.

I've been extremely lucky in finding great gaming buddies, however, and this was one of those times. We went over to a place in Salt Lake City called McEwan Miniatures, creator of the Starguard line of figures and rules. I bought some sci-fi figures, some dwarves, and then we picked up a couple of packs at a game store in the mall. I was hooked.

For the next two years, we played ancients, fantasy battles, some sci-fi raids, ACW(with my Airfix plastic armies), and some role-playing. A local store, Intermountain Models, also started carrying figs and board games, with some games being played at the store on Saturdays. I had a great time going there every Saturday and playing Tractics, WRG Ancients, and a lot of WW2 skirmishes. We also attended a one day mini-con at McEwan Miniatures where I had a chance to watch a lot of sci-fi games and WW2 air combat.

Continued next issue...



Interview With Sam Mustafa (cont.)

I have been surprised, though, to see that computers have not had a bigger influence on miniatures gaming. I would have thought, by now, that we'd all be playing from Blackberries or Palm Pilots, or some sort of hand-held device, where we kept our data and rolled our dice, and all we needed on the table was the figures. I had high hopes last year for Bob Jones' new *Battage* concept, using Apple I-Pods, but it appears to have fizzled.

7) We are seeing an increasing number of figure scales emerging in the hobby, with 10mm, 40mm, and even 1/48th gaming entering the hobby. What scale do you prefer and do you think that some scales are better for certain periods?

This is always personal and subjective, but for me, the large-scale 28mm figures are my favorites for those horse-and-musket and earlier periods, when men really dressed to kill. I love to paint the colorful,

elaborate uniforms, and I love to see those drummers drumming and those big flags flying. Glorious!

For the "drab" uniforms of the modern age, I happily scale down to 15mm.



8) Do you miss MWAN and the discussions you had in those pages?

I miss MWAN terribly. I know that many, many people do. It was more like a club than a magazine.

Alas, I think the era of the

printed hobby magazine is over, anyway. The web is the way of the future. In some ways Bill Armintrout's *The Miniatures Page* has taken over as a new sort of e-MWAN: a big gaming community full of noise and happy chaos.

9) What do you have planned in the future for Grande Armée?

10) Are you working on or interested in doing any other rules for other periods?

The answer to both of these questions is the same. My project for 2006 is a Seven Years War game that began its life as a G.A. spinoff, but has really taken on a character of its own now. I'm very happy with it. It's being playtested this Spring and Summer, and by Autumn I'll decide what I want to do with it, in terms of publication.

If you're interested, visit the GA website from time to time for updates.

Black Hat Miniatures



One of the weird things about colonial wargaming in 15mm is that currently there are no Bashi-Bazouks! In my eternal search for some I recently came across an Ottoman army range from Black Hat Miniatures.

I ordered several packs from the Napoleon in Egypt range as from the web site, the figures looked like they would stand in well as Turks, Syrians, and



other Arabs that formed the rank and file of the Bashi Bazouk units in the Sudan. I ordered the packs from Scale Creep Miniatures in the U.S., who has amazing service. Within a few days I had my packs and was ready to start painting!

Although they are a little more expensive than Old Glory, they do serve a niche, particularly their 15mm Martain range, so no complaints there. The figures are of the 17-18mm variety, so they will



fit in well with Old Glory or Essex, but are a little large for Peter Pig in the same units.

The castings are clean, little to no flash, and are somewhat similar to Minifigs in that they have the bare

minimum for equipment. There are a variety of poses in the packs and the command pack was well done.

Overall, these figures fill gaps in many other ranges, and although not perfect, they work well.

Sea Lion: German Armored Assault

It is September of 1940 and Operation Sea Lion, the German invasion of England is well under way. The German mech forces from the beaches have pushed inland and linked up with the airborne forces near a critical junction. The Germans have been reorganizing in a village, but have been receiving heavy fire from a farmhouse nearby. The Germans hastily assemble a kampgruppe and move out from the village to destroy any local resistance.

German Forces

- (1) Mech Infantry Platoon with (3) infantry squads, (1) platoon command section, and (4) SDKFZ 251 half-tracks.
- (1) Armored platoon consisting of (2) PZ



IIs and (2) PZ-38s.

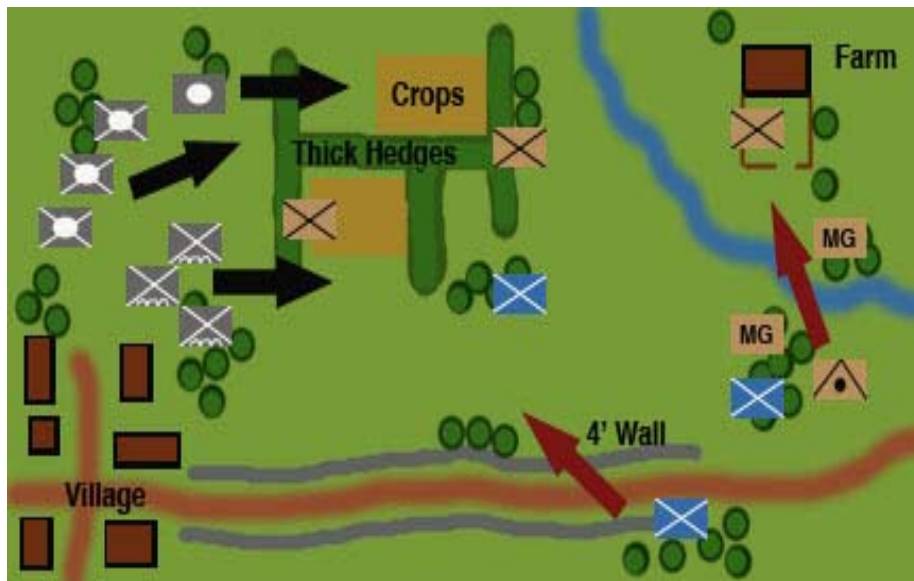
- (1) Para platoon with (3) para squads plus (1) heavy weapons section consisting of (2) flamethrowers, (2) ATRs, and (2) 50mm mortars and (1) platoon command section.

Arc of Fire Replay

British Forces

- (1) Home Guard platoon with (3) squads and (1) platoon command team
- (1) RAF ground platoon with (3) squads and (1) platoon command team
- (1) 2pdr AT gun/crew with (1) Bren Carrier.
- (1) British Regular infantry heavy weapons platoon with (2) MMGs, (1) 81mm mortar, and (2) Boys ATRs with a command team.

The British were allowed to deploy anywhere within 24 inches of the village, while the Germans had to deploy from the two village road exits. The German objective was to clear the board of any British units.



Inside Story Headline

The battle opened up with the Germans deciding on assaulting up the left flank, led by the armor, then the halftracks. The German paras moved up to the first hedges in an effort to clear the fields and provide flank security for the armor.

The British opened up with some Boys ATRs, which missed



badly the first few shots. The Germans orientated themselves towards the direction of the fire and let loose a devastating barrage. The British troops in that area then began to fall back to their second

defensive positions.

The paras moved through the hedges as the British re-positioned themselves to meet the new axis of advance. Small arms fire broke out between the German paras and the British defenders in the fields. The German armor continued to move around the left flank, searching for targets and forcing the British to shift their defenses.

Arc of Fire Replay (cont.)

The main phase of the battle now got underway. Huge firefights erupted along the hedges as the German paras tried to push through. A counterattack by an RAF squad was repulsed with dreadful losses, although the German paras were beginning to take casualties as well.



positions were in danger of being outflanked.

Finally, the AT gun scored a direct hit on a halftrack. This seemed to be the signal for the Germans that they had enough of this and brought everything to bear on the

The 2 pounder AT gun finally opened up, but missed it's first several shots! The German halftracks moved up to bring fire down on the position of the AT gun. The British defenders around the fields and hedges were slowly being forced back to the main line of defense as their

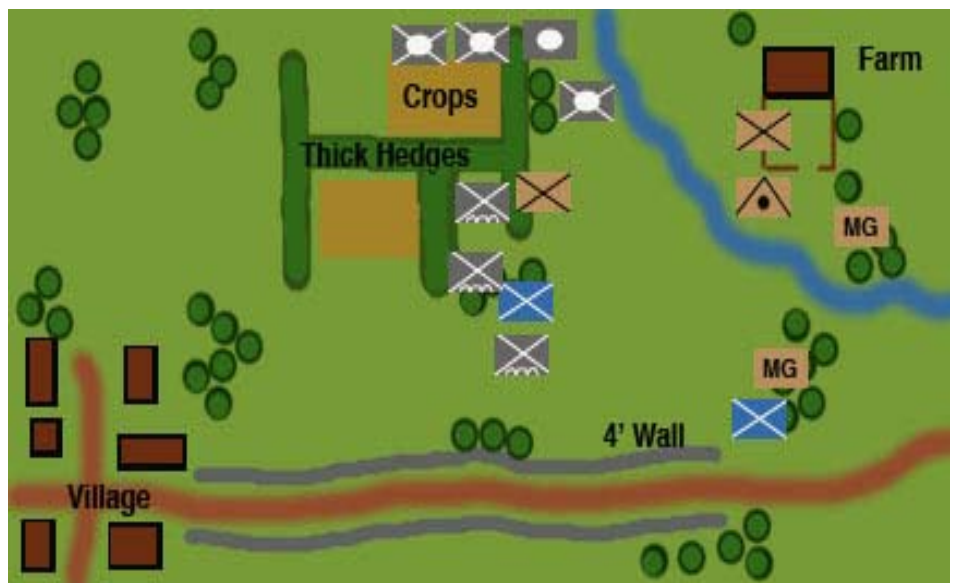
AT gun. The At gun fired one more shot then the crew were wiped out to the man. The British MGs now came into play, but the German paras were by this time firmly established in the hedges and were in range of the farmhouse.

The final British counterattack went

in, but the Boys ATRs just could not score any hits. The Panzers kept rolling along, adding their fire to that of the German infantry to overwhelm any defensive positions that were encountered.

The British were down to their main defense line with little to no AT weapons left. The Germans were pressing on to the farmhouse and there seemed to be little in the way of stopping them. The mechanized attack had come in a direction that the British players weren't expecting, so redeploying the infantry reserves was taking too much time.

Finally, after the last ATR team was taken out, it was apparent that the British had no way to stop the German mech forces and the game was called as a German victory.



Summary

Although it was a German decisive victory, it wasn't for lack of effort on the British part! The British had a good defensive plan and had their units in good positions. Although outclassed and with few AT weapons, it would have been fairly representative of the situation after the retreat from Dunkirk. After all, most real life battles weren't fair or balanced!

The biggest problem with the British

were the horrible die rolls for their AT weapons. The Boys ATRs were fired ten times with no hits and it took the 2 lbr. Seven shots to destroy the first German vehicle! When the German return fire came it was devastating and the German players did a good job of advancing through the hedge areas and putting pressure on the British infantry. Next time there will be more armor and more AT weapons for the British!



WW2 Gaming: New Directions (cont.)

(cont. from page 1) Rapid Fire, and many others. While some of these have devoted followers, none really caught the attention of the gaming masses.

So, with the advent of a huge variety of WW2 figures in 28mm, several companies doing large selections of 15mm, and GHQ well established in the micro-scale area, WW2 gaming was ripe for another series of rules.

The call has been answered by about two dozen new rules sets in the last few years. Of these, judging by the amount of threads on TMP, games at conventions, email discussions, activity on Yahoo Groups, etc..., I've boiled it down to what appears to be the two most popular sets of rules for 15mm/micro-armor and the two most popular sets of rules for 20/28mm skirmish gaming in the United States. We'll start with the operational level rules first and analyze their strengths and weaknesses.

Blitzkrieg Commander

Taking the popular Warmaster system as it's basis, Pete Jones refined it into a set of WW2 rules. If you've never played Warmaster, either the fantasy or the ancients versions, the game revolves around the command and control system. Basically, each commander has a rating and you need to roll 2D6 and end up with a result under that rating to succeed. You can keep sending orders until you fail a command roll. Simple, but very, very effective. The combat system involves rolling large numbers of dice, but it works and the gamers seem to have a lot of fun with it.

Format: Large size, bound rulebook with many excellent color photographs. The rules are clearly laid out with many examples and optional rules. A great feature is a set of armies lists for nearly every front during WW2.

Cost: \$25

Scale: Can be played either at 1:1 or where one stand equals a platoon.

Figures: 1/285th or 10mm(1/200th) work best, but 15mm could be used as well.

Web Support: There's an active Yahoo

group, plus a dedicated site with battle reports, a gallery, and an army builder program.

Additional Materials: There's a modern version in the works, but so far no additional WW2 supplements.

Command & Control: As described above, it is simple and very effective, creating unique situations and requires some planning for when things go wrong, and they will.

Game Systems: Movement is tied to the command system and is fairly straightforward. Combat involves a lot of die rolling and luck, but it works and can be fun. Artillery and air support can be devastating.

Best Rule: The optional rule for recon is outstanding, making recon a vital element in WW2 combat, which it should be.

Complexity: On a scale of 1 to 5, probably a 3. Once you get the hang of it the turns move quickly.

Group Play: BKC is an excellent set of rules for group play.

Realism: Although the game stats are pretty abstracted, the army lists do limit players from creating "super armies" of just King Tiger tanks. Artillery and air strikes are very nasty, which is as it should be. The game feels right for the level of play, plus the command system gives a good idea of tempo in operational level armored combat.

Pros: A very fluid game with a novel command system. The game does give the feel of operational level WW2 combat and even though our group has had a few games turn out to be one sided contests, both sides always have fun. The rules are clearly laid out with examples and once you get the hang of it, turns can really fly by.

Cons: For those who like a lot of control over your forces, then this game is not for you. We've had games where extremely bad die rolls have limited one side's movement and combat options. Having said that, though, most of our games have been pretty enjoyable and there is a growing, dedicated part of our group for these rules.

Flames of War

It would be really hard to think of another rules set that has been this influential in historical gaming for a long time. Flames of War has proven to be a gateway into WW2 gaming for a great deal of new gamers and those that have primarily been in sci-fi or fantasy gaming. It has all the hallmarks of a professionally packaged program, namely rules, figures, web site, etc.... The comparisons to Games Workshop are frequent and there is some element of truth in them. The biggest debate over the rules are the realism factor and whether or not that this is just WH40K in disguise.

Format: Large size, bound rulebook with many color photos. In fact, the color photos in many of the rule books and supplements help drive the sales. The rules reference sheet is pretty much all you need to play the game. Hard to argue with the quality of the books.



Cost: \$35-40

Scale: Pretty much 1:1 scale, with each infantry or gun crew stand representing a half squad or crew, so a platoon of 40 men will have 40 figures on 6-10 stands of varying size.

Figures: Specifically designed for 15mm, but many gamers use 10mm and up to 20mm.

Web Support: In one word, outstanding. The site has continual new content, plenty of photographs, a forum, plus rules, battle reports, painting guides, etc....

Additional Materials: Supported by a large and ever growing number of books designed for a specific army for a set time frame. Same layout and quality as the original rulebook. What really helps to

WW2 Gaming: New Directions (cont.)

sell the product are the large numbers of color pictures throughout the books.

Command & Control: Yes, it's there, but it is very simplistic and there's really no ill effects if you're not in command range.

Game Systems: Movement is very simple and combat relies on a number of D6s depending upon whether a unit moved or not. Artillery and aircraft are simple to use and are treated almost like events. Units get saving throws if infantry or a defense roll if armor, followed by a fire-power roll from the attacker to cause casualties.

Best Rule: The bulletproof cover rule for infantry in towns makes them tough to force out of a town or village, as it should be.

Complexity: I would rate it a 2 out of 5. After the first few turns you can run the game from the reference card, which makes the game ideal for beginners.

Group Play: In my opinion, while FOW does work for group play, it was primarily designed as a one on one game for tournament type play. Groups will have to adjust the morale break points, but it can be played with groups.

Realism: If you want to receive death threats, try starting a topic on TMP about FOW and realism! If I had to rate it on a scale of 1 to 10, I would choose a 2. No opportunity fire rules lead to some bizarre situations on the tabletop, plus there's enough gimmicks to keep most WH40K players happy for a long time. Many FOW gamers spend more time trying to figure out how to use their armies' tricks than using actual tactics.

Pros: A lot. Well designed rule book, supplements, miniatures, and incredible web support. For gamers just getting into the WW2 era, there is a lot here to be positive about. These guys have learned well from Games Workshop about marketing and should be congratulated. Units sold in sets, books designed to encourage gamers to buy more miniatures, easily adaptable to tournaments, etc.... Battlefront has set a standard that few companies can match.

Cons: The large amount of special rules,

limited direct fire range for artillery, and no opportunity fire can create some really strange situations on the tabletop. I've played in battles where each side circled the other, trying to get a shot at the rear armor. I've seen PZIVs with the short 75mm bombard an artillery battery that was out of range to fire back. Also, I didn't know that it was preferable in WW2 to have British Shermans sit at long range and engage the enemy instead of closing with them! Some people can live with these as the price to be paid for a simple, fast game, but many WW2 gamers won't like it.

Arc of Fire

If you're ever looking for a WW2 version of The Sword and the Flame, Arc of Fire is probably the closest thing that you will find. It is a true 1:1 skirmish game, with each player able to command a platoon or more. AOF uses a card activation system and has many optional rules such as random events and hit locations for targets. One great facet of the rules is that it can be used from the Boxer Rebellion to present day, plus it includes scenarios from the Victorian Colonial, WW2, and late 20th century. You can play small scale, where a rifle can shoot out to around 40 inches and large scale, where that same rifle can reach out to around 80 inches.

Format: Large size rulebook with six scenarios and two reference cards for both scales. The rules are well laid out with many examples and optional rules to increase the complexity/realism.

Cost: \$20

Scale: 1:1, with each turn representing around one minute.

Figures: Designed for 15, 20, and 25mm.

Web Support: There is a Arc of Fire page on the TACC publications site with a few additional rules, plus a Yahoo Group. Not as much support as BKC or FOW, however.



Additional Material: There are the Skirmish Campaigns scenario books from the same company which are ideal for this set of rules.

Command & Control: Basically, each figure must stay within a few inches of someone else in the squad or platoon if using vehicles. Each unit can be either in Defense, Advanced, or Confused mode which gives you a range of options each turn.

Systems: Movement is very easy and the firing system is quick and painless. There are optional rules for critical hits and severity of wounds, which is recommended for smaller games. The Morale system takes some getting used to, but it works.

Best Rule: The Optional Events section is highly recommended and adds some realistic situations for skirmish games.

Complexity: I would rate it a 2 out of 5, but bordering on a 3 if use the many optional rules that are included.

Group Play: With each player commanding a platoon, broken down into movement and firing by squads, you start getting a little sluggish with more than six players.

Also, as is common with many rules for this level of play, there's really no higher level command structure.

Realism: AOF does a good job of portraying WW2 combat at this level without a lot of complexity. The firing system, while simple, works and produces good results.

Pros: Like FOW, there is a lot to be positive about here. You can grasp the systems fairly easily and the rules are well written. By the second game you pretty much can go through the turns quickly and play with several platoons. While not as professionally produced as (cont. on p. 14)

WW Gaming: New Directions (cont.)

the other rules in this feature, for \$20 it's more than worth it.

Cons: The large scale game, where shooting can go out to a couple of hundred inches ended up as a game in which the armor sat on the edge of the board and killed anything that tried to move! Using the alternate scale solved this problem, however. Also, the text needs to be broken up into columns to read the rules a bit more easier.

I Ain't Been Shot Mum!

IABSM, as it called by it's supporters, is a new outlook on WW2 skirmish gaming. Using a card activation system, each squad gets a variable number of dice, usually 4D6 that can be used for movement and shooting, which gives the players a wide variety of options. Key to the system, however, is the use of "Big Men", or heroes, who add extra dice, rally troops, and provide the inspiration seen in hundreds of WW2 films. IABSM is backed up by numerous supplements and a very active Yahoo group.

Format: I ordered the PDF version and bound it myself, but you can order a bound version. The layout is pretty simple and constantly changes from professional looking to amateurish.

Cost: \$25 or about \$10 for PDF

Scale: 1:1 scale, although it is recommended that you base several figures on a stand to ease the movement for large games.

Figures: 20 or 25mm probably work best, but a growing number of gamers are using their FOW stands and vehicles for IABSM games.

Web Support: The Yahoo group has rules updates, extra cards, scenarios, and more.

Additional Materials: There are a lot of supplements and annual issues that have come out. I bought the Sea Lion supplement and it had about 20 well thought out scenarios in it.

Command & Control: C&C is pretty basic, usually with the "Big Men" being the focus. Placement of these figures can

be critical to success as they add extra dice, can rally troops, and remove wounds.

Game Systems: The card deck drives who gets to move, along with special events like air support, blitzkrieg moves, events, etc... Combat is the result of how many dice each squad or vehicle uses besides movement. Results are usually in terms of wounds, which decrease a squad's effectiveness by limiting how many dice they get. The vehicle combat system is pretty fun to use and gives options for using dice to aim, move turrets, etc... .

Best Rule: using "Blinds" or large markers that may or may not contain units, is the best way I've seen to handle hidden movement in skirmish games.

Complexity: On a scale of 1 to 5, probably a 2. Once you've gotten the hang of the shooting and movement, everything else is just adding options into the game.

Group Play: Our first game had three players and went extremely well. The second had seven and it bogged down at times. I think the game system is ideal for 4-6 players.

Realism: At times it seems like real WW2 combat, then it can revert to a Hollywood action film with a Big man leading a squad through a building, clearing out everything in sight! The card system drives the game and depending upon the draw the action can ebb and flow.

Pros: I think the most important facet of IABSM is that gamers seem to enjoy playing the game and it can be fun. The dice concept for movement and combat gives you a lot of choices, plus the use of Big Men adds flavor to the game. The system is easily expandable with extra cards, scenario books, additional rules, etc..., which enables the game designer to create virtually any type of WW2 combat action.

Cons: The rules are similar to TSATF in

that there are a lot of gaps in the rules that can be subject to interpretation. If you play with a lot of rules lawyers, then IABSM is a bad idea. The cards that can be inserted into the deck can have a profound influence and could quickly imbalance the game, so the scenario designer needs to carefully plan out the deck. Since the turn can end anytime, in large games you can have the situation where a player's units may not move for several turns, which in real time could be an hour or more of just sitting around. In our second game one player did not have his platoon card pulled for three turns, of which two were quite long, so for about an hour he just sat there and wasn't too happy about it.

Final Thoughts

Compared to the 70s and 80s, where pretty much all the WW2 rules were variations of the same theme, we have a multitude of innovative systems to choose from today. The search for realism in WW2 rules has given way to playability, which is both a blessing and a curse. Gamers can now play a variety of WW2 miniatures games and achieve a result in a few hours without needing a physics degree to decipher ballistics charts. On the other hand, some of the recent games I've seen and been a part of seem more like Hollywood than WW2 combat.

So, what about the future of WW2 gaming? No doubt there will be more sets of rules, each trying to define what the author thinks how WW2 armored combat should be. There will be new supplements, figures, terrain, etc..., but it's my belief that we've come close to reaching the ceiling for WW2 gaming with these four sets of rules. They have presented a whole new series of innovations that have pretty much exhausted the limits of what can be done in WW2 gaming.



Battleground

Game Review by Jeff Geisler

Battleground is non-collectible (how refreshing) card game that amounts to a set of simple but subtle miniature rules you can play with cards.



There are currently three factions (men, orcs, and undead) with two decks for each, a basic and advanced set. The factions are fantasy, but historical die-hards could play with just the Men of Hawkshold deck. The rules come in the box but are also available online (www.yourmovegames.com) – unfortunately, no bigger than the printed set. All you need to play is in the basic set. In fact, you can try the combat mechanics out with the starter rules of about 650 words.

The deck consists of unit cards, command cards, and the player chart cards, such as special rules for the army and the sample army lists. The unit cards are overhead depictions of groups of figures that looks like a base of, say, 15 mm fantasy figures from above. The back has a drawing of an individual from the unit, and any special rules. These have the unnatural sheen of computer-generated art for a video game, and not very appealing art at that. While functional, they will not quicken the heartbeat of any dyed-in-the-wool miniature painters I know.

The back edge of the card has a unit roster. This has the stats for the unit, such as attack and defense. There is no particular distinction in weapons or armor - better armor would just have a higher defense number, for example. There are colored boxes to represent the staying power of the unit, both in number of hits and in morale. Units with more members might have more boxes (more hits). Units take morale checks when they have used up their good morale boxes. So elite units have fewer total boxes, but more are good morale. This is a nifty method to represent the brittleness of such units.

Command cards are special abilities, customized for each army. They mostly affect combat, making your hits more telling or adding to a unit's defense.

Aside from the fact that armies are made up of standard fantasy types, this is the closest thing to magic that the game has to offer. You want to preserve them for critical combats or particularly tough opposing units. At the start of the turn, you have the option to spend command points to buy more. I will have more to say about this in a moment.

There is a nicely selected, minimal set of situational modifiers summarized on the player-aid card. Starter armies are about 1500 points and have different themes, emphasizing cavalry or shooting, for instance. Units are in the 200-400 point range, so these armies have about 10 maneuver elements in them. Unit costs are calculated to single digits; if the game proves to be balanced, someone did a lot of play testing to refine point values so exactly.



Set up and scenarios, at least in the basic game, are very simple. (Terrain effects are in the advanced game rules.) At start, you give your units one of three orders: Hold, Range, or Close. Hold is obvious. Range, which can only be given to missile armed troops, means move into range and start firing. Close is the most interesting order. It means "Move at fastest speed to close with the nearest enemy." You must take a bit of care in issuing this order and its relationship to deployment. Not all units move at the same speed. If you order Close all along the line, some units may get ahead of others. Once within charge range of the enemy, they must engage. This may open flanking opportunities for your opponent. On the other hand, you can use maneuver to force charges and dislocate the enemy in turn.

The move to Close rules hinge on who is the "nearest enemy." The rules describ-



ing this are not the best – usually, it is "nearest enemy to the front." My opponent and I interpreted the language about "farthest corner away from the enemy" to be a way to express how far the unit would have to move to engage, that is, the wheeling distance if attacking on a flank or the move ahead distance to attack to the front. This part of the rules is both important and subtle; more examples would have been helpful.

You have an opportunity to change the orders of a unit at the start of each turn. This costs a command point. You get one command point for every 500 points of troops, so they are scarce. You also want to use them to draw command cards. You can also take command of any individual unit for one turn per command point. They are also used for rallies. This suggests that the object of the game is to dislocate the enemy and cost him command points, while your better planning lets them accrue in your favor, giving you more command cards helpful for swaying combat to your advantage.

The game is IGO-UGO, starting with the command phase, then movement. Combat is simultaneous, so you have to keep track of the turn in which casualties were inflicted. This is messy, but superior to games (unmentioned, or is it unmentionable?) in which the charging troops always get first blow, and obliterate the front rank of someone's poor little goblins, so they don't even get a chance to fight back – not that I *mind* really, (sniff, sniff).

The basic combat system dices off against the difference between comparable stats. (Cont. on p18)

Age of Eagles: Fighting Withdrawal

Battle Report

With some newly painted units for the period completed, we decided to do a fictional encounter set in the Spring of 1813. A Prussian and Russian force is moving to join the main army in the Dresden area. Overnight, a sizeable gap has opened up between the Russian and Prussian groups. The Emperor, seeing a chance to divide and defeat at least one of the forces, grabs the closest units available and sends them in to block the Russians from joining the Prussians. The rest of the army will be then be brought up to finish the trapped Russians.

The order of battle is simplified here, but the French had the VII corps

under Reynier, the II Corps under Victor, and a cavalry corps, all led by Victor.

The Prussians, realizing their error, are doubling back with a corps of infantry to

help the Russians hold the vital bridge along the road. The Russian advanced guard, consisting of a cavalry division and an infantry division, are already astride

the main road. The remaining two corps of Russian infantry and a cavalry corps are entering in two places.



The French and Saxons were allowed to set up anywhere along the length of the board edge and up to a foot on the board, except no units could start on the Prussian side of the river. The Russians are strung out in columns and those that can't fit will enter as soon as possible.

The victory objectives were quite simple in that the French needed to split the Russians and Prussians, preventing the Russians escaping over the bridge.

This was a big game with nine players, including five who had never played before. Fortunately, AOE can be explained quickly and with everyone having their own charts, it would prove to be a fast moving game. After a few planning sessions and positioning of troops, the battle began.



Opening Moves

The French and Saxons got off to a bad start, failing several movement rolls and creating a traffic jam around the village. The Saxons and part of the cavalry did move out and began advancing towards the Prussians.

The Russians piled onto the road fast and furious, trying to position themselves against the inevitable French assault. The Prussians moved over the bridge and

began to stretch themselves out into a defensive crescent to protect the crossing.

The battle began with a French cavalry charge that was bloodily repulsed, then a Russian cavalry counterattack drove back the French



cavalry to the outskirts of the village. Here the French infantry and artillery fired again and again, finally forcing the Russian cavalry to retreat with serious losses. However, the charge had held up the advance in that sector for three valuable turns.

Age of Eagles: Fighting Withdrawal (cont.)

Battle Report

The Saxons and French of VII Corps now began to exchange musket and artillery fire with the Prussians on the extreme flank. The rest of the French infantry and cavalry were still trying to sort themselves out when the Russians decided to build a grand battery in the middle of the table! The first salvo severely damaged a French infantry brigade and sent the others into a mass of confusion trying to avoid it's area of fire.

In the middle there were several cavalry charges as both sides threw brigade after brigade into the swirling melee. The French finally got sorted out and began to advance on the Russian main line of defense. Meanwhile, at least one Russian corps was making it's way to the bridge with little to no resistance, ensuring at

least a draw for the Russians.

VII Corps finally made it's attack, leading with the Saxons and they sought to punch through the Prussian corps. After a heavy exchange of artillery and musketry fire, the Saxons charged in with the bayonet. Despite some successes, the Prussian line was holding. The French division of the VII Corps attacked the leading elements of another Russian force, but could not make any headway.

The Prussians maneuvered a cavalry



brigade onto the flank of the Saxons, who now had to deal with threats from two directions. The Saxon line held, then crumbled as the Prussians pressed their advantage. Elsewhere, the French cavalry had been chased off the field, the infantry was bogged down across the board, and casualties were quickly mounting.

Despite some last minute desperate attacks, the French attack fizzled out as long lines of Russians began preparations to cross the bridge in relative safety. With all the players seeing that the French were spent, the game was called as a decisive Russian victory.



Final Thoughts

The French had some horrendous die rolls to start the game and with a +4 modifier for the first turn you would think that the odds of this happening were pretty remote. The Russians took advantage of every opportunity and the several cavalry charges in the center made the French pause for a few turns.

The French just could not get their forces to strike at the same time all night

long. Bad movement die rolls continued to happen at the worst possible times, then to add insult to injury at least three times the French rolled 1s and the Russians rolled 10s in melee!

Both sides fought well, despite the French die rolling problems. The French clearly had a plan, but getting

it to work was another thing entirely!



The AOE system performed well again, with nine players and the equivalent of 7-8 corps on the table. We played 11 turns in just over four hours with several new players and had no rules problems.



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Meets every other Friday night in Salt Lake City, Utah.
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For this issue's rant, you need to look no further than many of the recent topics about figure cost and quality on some of the recent TMP threads. Any time there's a new announcement about some of the Perry's new figs, Copplestone, etc..., someone will comment on the high price. This is invariably followed by a host of responses about how "Old Glory figures suck", "I'll paint nothing but Perry's", "My army can only have the finest figs", etc... . Now, take a test. When is the last time in a gaming magazine or at your local club/store that you saw an entire army made of Perry's, Gripping Beast, or Copplestone figs? Correct! The answer is probably never. This is because the people who spout this crap are the ones who usually never paint an army or only paint 2-3 figs a year. Now, don't get me wrong, all of the above companies produce beautiful figures and I would love to have entire armies of them. But if you're a gamer that paints and you're involved in a club project and say that you need to do a force for the Sudan in 25mm composed of 60 infantry, 20 cavalry, and a couple of guns, what can you afford? You could get that force from Old Glory for about \$150. If you choose the Perry's it could run you around \$250 and up, depending upon the cost of the shipping and the currency rate. When painted by gamers who actually paint and finish things, will the extra \$100 + be noticeable on the tabletop? Probably not. When you're playing a club game and there's several hundred figs on the table, do you ever see anyone reach over, grab a unit and say, "Wow, those Gripping Beast figs sure are nice"? No, usually, it's, "Hey, move the blue guys on the left!". So, let's keep things in perspective here. If I need to do 300 25mm Crusaders, and actually paint them, not just talk about them, I'll stick with Old Glory. At least until I start making that six figure salary!

Battleground (cont.)

So, Attack 5 against defense 2 would need a 3 or less on a d6 to hit. There is a similar roll for a kill. The number of dice thrown is an attribute of the unit. Command cards and situations, such as being flanked, modify the number of dice rolled or the basic stat. If a unit breaks in combat, the enemy gets a free hack against their rear. In our limited play, this proved devastating. Aside from that, the morale rules appear conventional.

Yes, cards, but what about miniatures?

This game would adapt readily to miniatures that uses bases, rather than individual figures, as the elements. Individual figures are nice for bookkeeping –

games like this use a roster instead. Personally, I don't much like fiddling with the figures – pulling them off for casualties, knocking them from the dead pile onto the floor, trying to adjust the march attack snowboard sized swords so they rank up again.... Instead, each base gets a number of combat dice not related to the number of figures on the base. Nor are the number of hits a one-to-one relationship to the figures. This gives you the freedom to put any number of figures at whatever scale you would like on the base. As long as the base size is consistent, the game will work. As the author pointed out to me, you do not even have to use the same base size as the game, since movement rates are given in terms of the length of the base sides. (Difficult to resolve maneuver results – bases colliding with each other on the way into combat – would be diminished if the bases were square or a multiple of each other, as in Vis Magica, however.) Once you are using bases, the cards become your army roster, nicely made and quick to hand.

The card idea is a great way to prototype armies. It is easier to set up than a miniatures game, and immensely more portable. The cards have trouble staying in place when playing on a green blanket, and I have to admit that it is hard for me to maintain my interest without models. While the command cards are a substitute for magic, I miss the presence of wizards and clerics and the flavor of leader figures I can identify with as a player. Perhaps in a supplement?

The command and movement rules work nicely together to create linear battles. Whenever I read after action reports for Warhammer, I never get the sense that linear combat lasts past the first turn. Units and characters just seem to chase each other over the playing field. That will not be the case in this game

I have been waiting a long time for a set of streamlined mass fantasy combat rules, with command control and some sense of linear medieval combat. While the cards can only take me so far, once I break out my figs, I think I may have found what I was looking for.

