



Warning Order

Myths of Wargaming

In the historical miniatures gaming hobby you see and hear a lot of things about the hobby in general. Each time a new product is announced, rules are discussed, historical events analyzed, etc., you seem to run into the same old arguments on various forums. I've been in the hobby since the mid 70's and have witnessed a lot of changes, so I thought I would list some of the "myths of wargaming" that we see so often and a quick judgment about whether there is any truth to them.

Myth #1: This is the Golden Age of Gaming

Judgment: True

No one back in the 1970s looking at their Minifig Prussians and trying to figure out how to paint them as Mexicans for the 1846-48 war could have foreseen the massive amount of periods that are available in multiple scales. The amount of rules, painting guides, terrain, and miniatures that are available is simply staggering. The only problem currently is one of choice, namely

what scale, range of figures, rules, and terrain should you buy!

Myth #2: Plastic Miniatures will Revolutionize The Hobby

Judgment: False

While the boxed plastic sets that are coming out now are a good idea, there's no cost effective way for these companies to produce the wide range of figures needed for command, engineers, pack animals, limbers, etc., in plastic, so metal figures won't die. In fact, it is my contention that this will only lead to more stuff being



piled on top of the already large pile of lead that gamers already have.

Don't hold your breath waiting to see large numbers of plastic figs painted.

Myth #3: Skirmish Gaming is Taking Over The Hobby

Judgment: False

Judging by the activity on many forums and the num-

ber of products advertised you would certainly think that skirmish gaming is the pre-eminent form of historical miniatures gaming. Actually, it is just part of a bigger picture, but its supporters are a definitely more vocal and up front about promoting it. It has risen in popularity due to what I believe is the time constraint on many gamers in our 24/7 society. You only need 10-15 figs for a game, so this immediately appeals to many gamers.

Myth #4: Someday, One Rules Set Will Unite All Gamers Who Play _____

Judgment: False

Every time I see this discussed, where one rule set will unite all ancients gamers, or WW2 gamers, or any other period I laugh. In our hobby the one thing all of us can agree on is that most gamers never agree on anything! Flames of War and Fields of Glory, despite their huge success, intensive marketing campaigns, and high quality products probably have around 10% market penetration, meaning that 90% of gamers don't play them! They were probably the closest that we'll get to a
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Special points of interest:

- Two French & Indian War battle reports.
- Blitzkrieg Commander battle report.
- Age of Eagles and Phantoms battle reports.
- Several board wargame reviews.
- Building a 15mm Nile gunboat/steamer.

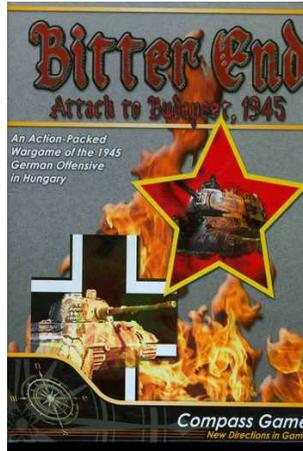
Bitter End by Compass Games

Game Review

Being a big WW2 East Front fan I've always been fascinated by the drive by the German forces to reach Budapest in January of 1945. Although there have been several games on the subject, Compass games, a new company, has put out perhaps the definitive game/simulation on the battle.

By Christmas of 1944 the Germans were still reeling under the massive Russian attacks all along the front. The 9th SS Mountain Corps and 1st Hungarian Corps are trapped in the cities of Buda and Pest, surrounded by two Soviet armies. The Germans scrape together several formations, including the 4th SS and 3rd panzer Corps for an all out attack to relieve the trapped defenders. Historically the first attack fails, then a second attack is launched a week later and almost succeeds, but the never ending flow of Russians prevents any breakthrough.

Bitter End is definitely one of the most beautiful games I've come across in terms of components. You get two 22 x 34 inch hex maps with fantastic winter art depicting the terrain around the cities, forested hills, and the numerous choke points in the area. The counters come with two versions to either use the NATO symbols for armor units or the silhouette

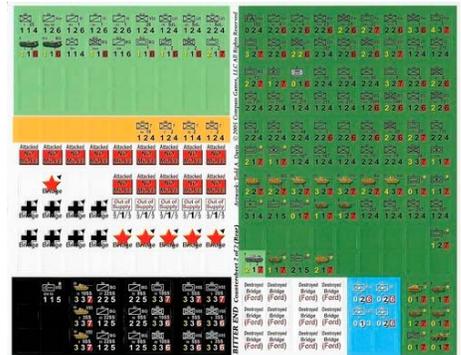


of the main tank type in the unit. I like this option and it should be encouraged more by wargame companies. Finally, there are color coded set up charts and a rules booklet. The counters are good and functional, but not as good as Clash of Arms or GMT's, but there is no arguing about the overall quality of the game components as they are outstanding.

The game system is pretty standard fare, with zones of control, movement, advance, retreat, air support, so most gamers will be able to read the rules booklet quickly, set up and start playing in no time. Where you will run into some trouble is the combat system and while it's not bad, it does take some getting use to. Unlike many games where you retreat wherever you want to, in Bitter End it is based upon the terrain that you are retreating into. So for example if you attack a Russian infantry regiment with a panzer regiment and force it to retreat a number of points, but the surrounding terrain takes too many points to enter, then the Russian infantry regiment could die right there. I agree with the designer's notion that in this kind of terrain retreating in any semblance of order would be difficult at best, but it takes getting used to after playing so many other standard combat systems.

One of the things I like about Bitter End is that it is really two games in one. On one hand you have the panzers trying to smash through the Russian defenses and race to Budapest, while on the other hand you have the Soviets trying to pound their way into the city, so the game can be played by more than two players.

I played the historical scenario and it was definitely tough on the Germans as you don't have a lot of say about where most of the good units start, but there are optional set ups and



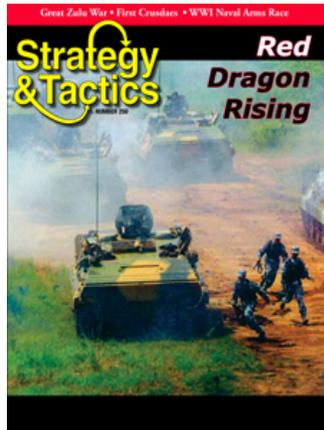
units for players who would like to try some of the alternative plans and I would strongly suggest that. In my game the SS drive got off to a bad start, but one of the southern thrusts did far better than I expected. The Russians were pounding Buda and Pest, with more and more Russians being released to join the fight. While the German panzers were making progress, the weather and terrain in some areas was unforgiving, slowing the advance to a crawl. Just as most of Buda was about to fall, a German force broke through and got close enough to the city to score some victory points and the Germans barely won the game.

There are several things that are fascinating about Bitter End. The first is the situation, namely a German drive to reach a besieged city, blocked by hordes of Russians. The second is the brutal nature of the terrain, which affects combat and planning for the major relief efforts. Finally, the German forces are a combination of elite SS units, panzers, Luftwaffe ground units, and Hungarian infantry. It is an interesting exercise in deciding which units should form the spearheads and how to watch your flanks which are under continual pressure by Russian reinforcements.

Overall, this is a strong effort on a very interesting subject. The game features first rate components and play aids with a lot of replay value. This is by no means a short game, however, and you will need to spend several long gaming sessions to finish it. Not quite a monster game even though it has two maps, but the number of units on the board, the fluid situation, and the combat system means that you won't be finished in a few hours. Highly recommended.



Since the end of the Cold War there have been relatively few modern combat board wargames. Most games go back in history such as Twilight Struggle, World at War, Harpoon: High Tide, but very few are forward looking that deal with potential conflicts. With Strategy & Tactics #250: Red Dragon Rising, there is an attempt to postulate a Pacific War in the near future.



for screening carriers, amphibious assaults, stealth aircraft, and more, so the designer has attempted to add some variety and real world factors into the equation.

Surprisingly, the rules are short and to the point for a modern warfare subject. While players will have some questions, by the end of a few games they can easily be figured out or the designer is

good at answering things on Consim-world.

Each game consists of up to 30 “Ops” or days (think in terms of turns), although the game can end by the triggering of certain events (Mid-East nuclear war, etc.) or by sudden death victory if the Chinese achieve certain objectives. Each turn consists of checking for random events, then doing one Op. There is a list of ops that both sides can do and specific items for each side. Ops could be moving forces from one sea area to another, launching an amphibious invasion, or an air attack against an enemy area. Chinese ops include starting a Korean ground war, bringing Russia into the conflict, or air-strikes against Taiwan. U.S. ops include B-2 raids, summoning reinforcements, and shifting forces to meet new threats.

I believe the one thing that makes the game interesting and offers huge replay value are the random events. These range from revolts in Tibet, Japan pulling out of the war, Iran making trouble in the Gulf,

The premise is that the Chinese, for a variety of reasons, feel the time is right to strike and they begin the war with a massive missile strike against Taiwan and this is considered to be turn zero in the game. The Chinese then attempt to seize a variety of objectives that they think would force the U.S. and its allies to enter into peace talks or negotiate an end to the hostilities.

The designer clearly states that Avalon Hill’s popular War at Sea system was the basis for this game and that is clearly seen in the map design. The map stretches from Russia’s Far East naval bases to Singapore, with China broken into three movement areas. Movement is by sea zones or land areas, and while there are some questions about bases and positioning of forces, the movement is pretty easy to grasp. The map, while colorful, is functional, but won’t win any graphics awards. The Ops and Events tracks plus set up information is printed on the map for both players.

The counters are very well done, with each one representing a brigade of troops, a wing of aircraft, surface action group of 3-4 ships, or a carrier. Each counter is rated for ground combat, air/anti-air combat, ASW, and anti-ship. Combat is simple as both sides match up forces and roll a D6, with a number equal to or less than the combat rating required to eliminate a unit. This makes combat quick and deadly, with very few units having a second step. There are additional rules

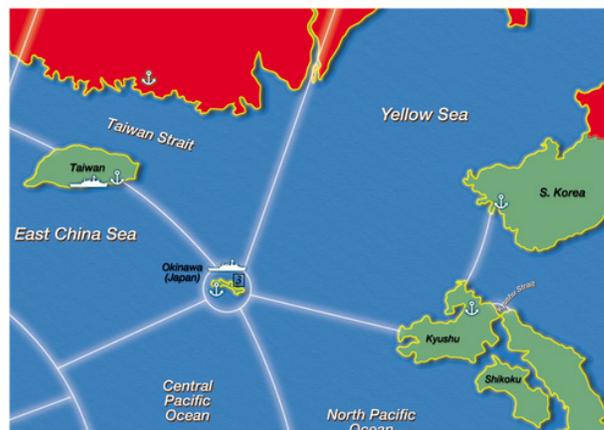
US 2 5 5 5	CVN	US 1 2 2 2	CVN	SK 1 3 0 3	FIG
RU 0 0 4 4	SSN	PRC 1 4 0 4	Tu22M LR	PRC 0 3 0 2	Amph

and more. All of the events can have a profound effect on reinforcements, pulling out units, losing forces and allies, and essentially keeping the game at a fast and furious pace.

The game plays fast and even a full 30 op war might only take a little over two hours. Most games will be decided in 90 minutes or less, which means that you can quickly set it up and play again. On one Sunday afternoon I played three games in just under five hours! This is the game’s greatest strength, namely the ability to play it again with new strategies and events, which keeps both players on edge. I’ve found that playing the Chinese is easier the first few games, then as the U.S. side gets some experience with strategies the games get closer each time.

If you’re buying this game thinking that it will be similar to Harpoon, Victory’s Fleet series, or other complex modern combat games you’ve chosen the wrong thing. This is an operational (bordering on strategic), low complexity game about a modern conflict stretching across a wide area of the Pacific. I’m not sure I agree with all of the designer’s assumptions about modern warfare and you can certainly question the odds of certain chains of random events that could happen in some games, but these things were obviously done for playability and it works.

If you are looking for a good modern combat game, especially one that allows B-2s, CVNs, Australian and British forces, large air raids, and more, than this is the game for you. It is simple to get into, a hard habit to break, and is a great gateway game for new gamers or to get someone interested in modern combat, plus the price is hard to beat. Hopefully more games like this will follow. Highly recommended.



With some of our games approaching 9-10 players at time, we tend to get our battles pretty spread out. So when the AOE scenario book (reviewed elsewhere in this issue) we were stunned by how closely packed the battles were. There were no wide open flanks, few reserves, or any one of a hundred points to choose from to launch an attack. Instead, there was a lot of close terrain with one or two avenues of attack with your forces arrayed in depth. Naturally, we decided to do something similar with the forces that we have on hand.

The basic premise is that a major campaign and battle are occurring in the Spring of 1813 in Central Germany. The Emperor's main attack is to the French right and the French players are tasked with a pinning attack that needs to reach a road exit in a fixed amount of time. If successful, the enemy's flank will have been turned and the French victorious. If not, then the Allies can focus on the center and thwart the French plans.

The French had two reinforced infantry corps with numerous attached artillery batteries plus a cavalry corps. The road was defended by two corps of Prussians with attached artillery and an additional cavalry division. The French began on the edge of the board while the Prussians were already deployed along the road near the village.

The terrain consisted of some undulating hills with a firm ridge just in front of the village, so basically the French attack would be mostly on open ground. The village near the river and the hill in back of the village would be substantial obstacles to any flanking force. While the river could be crossed, actually crossing it, maneuvering to the flank, then re-crossing it again in the face of an active defense would be very difficult in the context of this time based scenario.

I was not present for the first night, which mainly consisted of the set up and the initial moves. The French



were going to hit the Prussians all along the defense line while at the same time trying an attack through the village. The hope was that the Prussian line could not take the battering and a hole would open that would allow the French cavalry to ride through and win the day. The Prussians, with the benefit of shorter lines, were determined to hold the French attack with a series of lines and shuffling reserves in and out to keep the lines solid and to plug any holes. The Prussian cavalry took up the flank to watch for any

French flanking attempt.

On the first night the French launched a division sized infantry attack on the extreme French right. The entire affair had a see-saw atmosphere to it with the French gaining an initial advantage, then the Prussians counterattacking to stabilize the situation. The other French divisions were having bad command rolls, so they were unable to attack along the length of the Prussian line all at once. Each time the French infantry began to make progress on the large ridge, the Prussians would attack and drive them back.

When I was able to make the second night I was given command of the French left, where the attack had trouble moving up due to bad command rolls. I was able to get the leading division deployed and moved up the second division in reserve in case an opportunity presented itself. I sent the light cavalry around the flank to see if the village could be turned from the side or rear.

The battle for the ridge began again as both sides moved up more infantry and





artillery. The French again had some initial success, but were thrown back by a series of Prussian counterattacks. The center was now coming into play and a long range artillery duel began for control of that section of the ridge.

My corps began its attack by going directly at the village. The leading brigades were thrown back by determined Prussian resistance (The Prussians rolled six 10s on a D10 during melee in one turn!) and on the far right the French again were beaten back. The reserve divisions were now moving forward and began to engage the Prussians, who were also shifting reserves to meet the new attacks. Both sides were now locked in a fierce struggle to maintain control of the central ridge. The French has their cavalry ready to move in and exploit any

opening so that they could fulfill their victory conditions.

A division of French cavalry did maneuver around the village and launched an attack on the hill directly behind the village, but they were repulsed by the Prussian cavalry stationed on that side. The French infantry renewed their attack on the village, but despite causing some casualties they were defeated yet again.

At this point the Prussians were holding firm, but running out of reserves. The French had thrown everything at them, but were unable to break the line. The attack on the village had been costly and the French were still nowhere near gaining control of the ridge. Not only that, but time was running out.

Just when things looked bleak and the

French were ready to concede, one more attack on the French right went in. The attack shattered the Prussian flank on that side and the French could see the way to victory. More aggressive attacks by the French in that area continued to push back the Prussians, but just when victory was near time ran out and the game was called a Prussian victory.

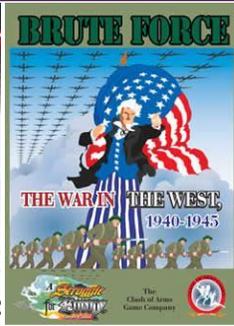
This was definitely a titanic struggle that saw some wild swings of fortune. Where the Prussians could do no wrong early, their luck nearly ran out at the end of the game. The large number of 9s and 10s rolled at first gave way to 1s and 2s at the end! One of the things we enjoy so much about playing AOE is that it does give you a sense of desperate fighting on a large scale. That, coupled with a lot of troops on a small frontage presented us with a unique battle and a very enjoyable gaming experience.



Struggle For Europe Revisited

Game Series Review

Recently I've been going back and playing the Struggle For Europe series from Clash of Arms games. Although I've reviewed each of the games separately, I've never reviewed the series as a whole and I thought it would be good for gamers to take a second look at this series before it goes out of print.



The game system could be likened to the old Europa system from GDW years ago, except without the massive stacks of counters. All three games share the same standard rules and scale, meaning that they all linkup together to form one massive campaign if you want to play it that way. Each comes with a booklet of exclusive rules, scenarios, and campaigns, so the games can be played individually and there are a number of scenarios such as the invasion of Poland and Norway 1940 that make great learning games for new players.

The maps are nothing short of beautiful, with minor and major cities, ports, major airbases, and rail lines clearly marked. The counters are not as graphically enhanced as some games, but they still look good with a great combination of colors for Siberian units, Finnish, Belgian, etc., with units being corps, armies, groups of 150 aircraft, and groups of naval vessels. There are several play aids such as combat results tables, replacement tracks, and more. Overall, the games have excellent components and look good set up on the table.

For the size of the games (both War Without Mercy and Brute Force have two 22 x 34 maps each) and the number of counters (840 each for the above men-

tioned games, you might expect a long, drawn out slugfest with tedious play and continual rules checking. However, that is not the case as the standard rules play quickly, especially for games of this size.

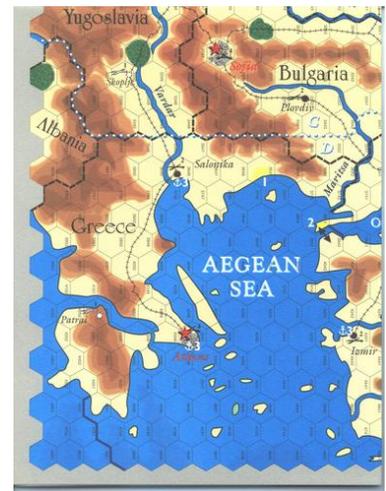
Each turn consists of one player moving units, then combat, then exploitation, with the second player repeating the same sequence. Definitely old school, but it works well and keeps the game moving along. There is a detailed air system and this is where the game series has received a lot of criticism. Air units can escort, attack airbases, provide offensive and defensive support for ground units, attack naval units, and transport troops and supplies. Although the air combat system is detailed, I've found nothing like the huge air combats that are detailed in the rules, so my experience is that while it adds a few minutes here and there, it's not as bad as it first sounds.

The game series is not just generic either, as there are rules for leaders, supply in difficult theaters (North Africa and Norway), forts (Atlantic Wall and Siegfried Line), partisans, surprise turns (opening of Barbarossa or France '40) and a lot more that provide some flavor to the games. Supply is pretty basic and there are rules to build forts and airbases as your forces advance. The combat table is pretty bloody, especially after you get past 3:1 odds, so large piles of counters begin to accumulate on the replacement holding cards. With each turn being two weeks you won't get a lot of those forces back, so after a few months of combat armies can become shells of their former selves.

I still have not played the campaign game that links up all three games, but the rules cover everything from strategic warfare to upgrades to when countries

can enter the war. In Struggle For Europe the players are placed in the position of supreme commander, so the economic production and politics is done for you, unlike in many other monster games on similar subjects. Some players may not like this, but it does let you focus entirely on combat operations across Europe.

I have played most of the scenarios and two of the separate campaigns, which seemed to be finely balanced. War Without Mercy is a great East Front game for anyone who wishes to step up from something like AH's or L2's Russian Campaign, but doesn't want to go as far as SPI's War in the East. Brute Force covers the Norway campaign, France 1940, and Operation Over-



lord in 1944, so there's a lot of replay value. The Med offers the North African campaign, plus it has the Fall Blau scenario for the East Front, and all of the rules to link all three games. When joined, the map covers all of Europe, stretches to Iran and the Middle East, then over to North Africa, Malta, and Spain.

Overall, this is a wonderful series and I think many gamers have missed out on playing it. There are no cards, counters with 20+ graphics, or unique systems for a selling point, but there is a good, basic wargame system here that allows you to play the major campaigns of WW2 in a reasonable time frame and still have a lot of fun doing it.



The Terrain Guy Gaming Mats

I had seen several ads and threads on TMP about some new products from a new company called The Terrain Guy. I had been looking to get a green/brown terrain mat for sometime as our group's mat needed some work (too green) and my green foam tiles were showing their age.



I chose a 5 x 8 green mat with some brown splattered on it, which was around \$80 then the shipping added some more on to that total. Now, I was completely surprised by the service.

Since I was going to be dropping around \$100 on this product and from of the complaints I had seen about other companies, I looked long and hard into this. The reviews were pretty positive, especially about the service for The Terrain Guy, so I decided to give it a try.

The first thing was to choose a type of mat and a size. Not only are there green, dryland, sea, and other mats, but they come in a wide variety of sizes as well. I

Not only did I get confirmation emails about my order, but an email on the status and a shipping notification as well! I was pleasantly surprised when my mat arrived in less than a week! Other companies would do well to emulate this model of service and to use the technology that is currently available.

The mat came on a long tube and is made of some type of canvas material. The flock, if you can call it that, is somehow attached to the canvas and while our

Product Review

group discussed several probabilities, we never came up with a firm answer, but it works! The flocking does not rub off and seemingly seems to be indestructible at this point. The mat lays down quickly and I have seen no problems with leaving it curled on the tube that it came with.

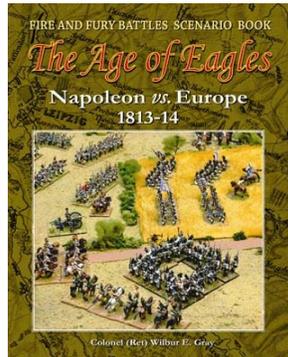
All in all a very good product and highly recommended. I have seen that they are expanding their terrain offerings and this is definitely a good thing as gamers are sorely lacking in this area.



The Terrain Guy has expanded his products to carry fields, roads, rivers, and more...

Age of Eagles Scenario Book

Age of Eagles has proved to be one of the most popular Napoleonic rules sets to come along in quite some time. The adaption of the Fire and Fury system, popularity of the period, and the visual spectacle of brigade sized units on the tabletop has been a successful combination. Finally, after a long wait the first scenario book is finally here.



a standard format that first appeared in the original rules. There is an overview of the battle, a map, and detailed orders of battle where you can copy the pages, cut out the labels, and use those for the command stands. A nice touch is listing which regiments served in which brigades so some gamers can paint the actual forces if they so

desire.

Entitled Napoleon vs. Europe 1813-14, this book is a welcome addition to the core set of rules. As described in the title this is a book of scenarios that not only covers the battles prior to Leipzig in the Spring 1813 campaigns, but the battles after where Wrede tried to block the French army and the late battles in Southern France where Soult tried to hold back the Allies one last time.

The scenarios are by now presented in

The nice thing about the selection of the scenarios is that there is something for everyone. From the massive cavalry battle of Liebertwolkwitz to the critical 1814 battle of La Rothiere, there is something here for everyone. I also liked that some of the battles were suitable for two or three players while others would be sizeable undertakings by clubs.

Product Review

You get scenarios for Kulm, Katzbach, Gross Bereen, Dennewitz, Mockern, and many more. The list runs the gamut of the important battle of the 1813 and 1814 campaigns. For those of you who have Polish, Saxon, Bavarian, and Swedish forces there are scenarios where these troops play prominent roles. Also, there is a bonus scenario for the 1800 battle of Hohenlinden included as well. Finally, if you go to the Age of Eagles web site you can download the additional bonus scenario of Craonne 1814, so it's quite a deal!

Overall, this is a professionally done publication that is essential for owners of the AOE rules or for Napoleonic gamers in general. The orders of battle are well done, there is tremendous variety, and the rules are well supported by the author, Col. Gray on the AOE site and Yahoo Group. I am already looking forward to additional books in this series.

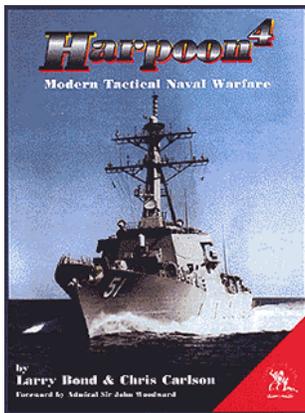
Myths of Wargaming (cont.)

universal standard, so wake me when some set of rules gets to around 50%.

Myth #5: Complex Rules Are Gone Forever...

Judgment: False

Yes, gone are the days of playing micro-armor for 8 hours on a Saturday afternoon where you just played a scale ten minutes of battle! However, there are still gamers who like complex rules and they will (from my standpoint, thankfully) always be a part of the hobby. Seekrieg V, Harpoon 4, Face of Battle, Attack Vector: Tactical, and others have loyal followings, so the genre definitely isn't dead. You can make all kinds of arguments about realism vs. playability, but for many gamers the current crop of simplistic rules just doesn't do it for them.



Myth #6: Scenario Design is Still a Gamer's Biggest Weakness.

Judgment: True

You would think that with all the time spent on buying figs, painting, creating terrain, reading rules, etc., that gamers would spend some time on scenarios. Well, you would be wrong. Most gamers still go with the "Let's throw everything out there on the board and see what happens" mentality. For every gamer who does some research, prepares a scenario with objectives, victory conditions, forces, etc., there are a dozen who are just there to push figs, roll dice, and kill things. The scenario is just an inconvenience that gets in the way!

Myth #7: Are Campaigns Going the Way of the Dinosaurs?

Judgment: True

Again, "Back in the Day", campaigns were eagerly anticipated, there were articles in many gaming magazines, and they were a normal part of the gaming hobby.

True, you always had the problems of one side losing interest once they were beginning to lose badly or if it devolved into too much paperwork, then the campaign collapsed. Today, most gamers just don't have time for a campaign, despite the fact that with today's computers and graphics programs it is easier than ever to run one! Trying to keep a group interested in today's Golden Age of Gaming with so many distractions would be a monumental task. Each year I see fewer and fewer threads, articles, or questions about running a miniatures campaign, so I don't expect this trend to improve in the short term.

Myth #8: Painting Standards Today Are Far Better Than in the Past.

Judgment: True

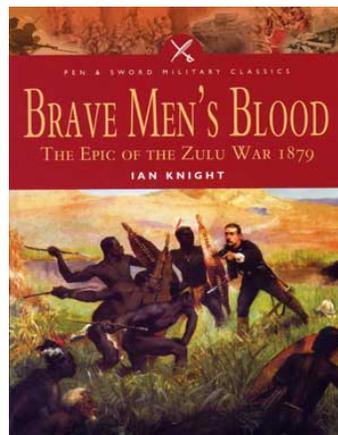
With acrylic paints, specialized inks, and dedicated colors, today's painters are far better off than their counterparts in the 70s and early 80s.

Add to that the number of Osprey books, uniform guides, painting articles, etc., and the painter of today has a vast array of resources available to them and with a little effort a good paint job can emerge. I have a lot of magazines from the old days and the pictures compared to today's paint jobs definitely show that things have improved.

Myth #9: Gamers Today Are More Knowledgeable About History Than Their Counterparts Back in the 70's and 80's.

Judgment: False

Through a combination of bad education and just plain laziness, today's historical gamers are no more knowledgeable about military history than gamers of past eras. This is despite all the books, scenario guides, board wargames, and subject material that is available. I can remember discussions in maga-



zines and in our own games about various aspects of ancient armies, tactics used during specific battles, and some serious soul searching regarding rules. Today, sometimes the most investigative comment you might hear during a game is whether or not the rules allow you to use more than 50 King Tigers at once!

Myth #10: Realism in Gaming is Simply Unattainable.

Judgment: False

Although a notable game designer once said that the best any board or miniatures game can do to simulate a real battlefield is a 2 on a scale of 1 to 10, there are degrees of realism. In fact, I think the next time I see a thread on a gaming forum where someone says that you can't have realism in miniatures gaming I may have to go postal!

What has happened is that over the years somehow the argument has gotten turned around to where if a game takes longer than 3-4 hours, then the rules are trying to "sacrifice playability for realism". In our ADD age this is simply unacceptable to most gamers. If they can't simulate the direct fire of a battalion of Shermans with less than three die rolls, then the rules are hopelessly out of touch with today's gamers. There has been a determined drive by game companies and gamers to blur the issues of playability and realism to be able to enable gamers to buy tons of figs, play Battle of the Bulge in two hours, then cry out that it was one of the most realistic games that they ever played!

Games like Harpoon 4, Face of Battle, and others are definitely more realistic and take some work, which is the huge problem for today's gamers who want to be spoon fed their rules and history. I would rather learn something about the period I'm simulating than just roll dice and kill things.

I'm sure that there are many more myths about wargaming that are yet to be exposed and hopefully there will be a second article in the future.

Crusaders Over Vietnam

Phantoms Scenario Replay



It could have been that I had just seen the Dogfights episode on the History Channel that featured the F-8 Crusader or the fact that we had not played a Phantoms scenario in awhile, but we decided to go back to the skies of Southeast Asia once again. We had an odd number of players, so the scenario was set with two pairs of F-8 Crusaders given to the players with the most experience and two Mig-17s, two Mig-19s, and two Mig-21s given to the other three players.

The scenario was a standard MIG-CAP mission which the F-8s were so good at. Basically a flight of F-8s would patrol around the combat zone, looking for enemy Migs to tangle with while the main strike force went about its business. Both sides could select their starting altitude and speed, then the aircraft were placed on the table and the game began.

The F-8s and the Migs entered the merge at about the same altitude, then both sides started furiously turning to get behind the other. The Mig-21s slashed through the merge, almost getting a gun shot, but the angles weren't in their favor.



The slower Mig-17s tried to suck the F-8s into a slow, turning dogfight, but the F-8s decided no to get into that and split into two pairs.

After several turn impulses of maneuvers one of the F-8s fired an AIM_9B Sidewinder that exploded alongside a Mig-19, but did little damage. The second missile failed to ignite and fell off the rail, letting the Mig escape. The Mig-21s continued to violently slash through time and time again, but could not get into a good firing position as the F-8s power allowed them to zoom out of danger time and time again.

The other pair of F-8s now swept in and got behind a Mig-19 that turned too far in pursuit of another F-8. The first missile again fell off the rail, but in the next impulse the F-8 pulled closer and its missile knocked the Mig-19 out of the sky. The Mig-17s were still making things dangerous for the F-8s as even though they were slower they couldn't be ignored, which meant moving away from them and possibly into the arc of another Mig. However, one of the Mig-17s got knocked down by a missile and the remaining Mig-19 was damaged by gunfire from an F-8.

At this point the score was F-8s: 2 and the Migs: 0, so the odds were now even. However, this was not to last for two long. The remaining Mig-19 got off a gun shot, damaging a F-8 and the remaining Mig-17 got off a shot as well. Even though these two attacks didn't achieve much in the way of damage, they forced the F-8s to turn away. Unfortunately, they turned right into the path of the Mig-21s who were still slashing back and forth across the skies.

The first Mig-21s fired a missile that fell off the rails and into the ground, but the second missile hit one of the F-8s, causing major structural damage and it went down. Another F-8 dodged a missile, but suddenly it was four against three and the F-8s were back on the defensive. After a few more impulses the Migs were getting the upper hand and when

another F-8 fell to a missile from a Mig-21 the F-8s decided to fly back to their carrier. Even though both sides shot down two aircraft each, the NVAF were declared the winners of the game as they had held their own against the best that the USN had to offer.



The game did prove that quantity does have a quality all its own. The F-8s had to play defense for most of the game, then swoop in for a quick shot when the opportunity presented itself. Both sides learned to use their aircraft's strengths to their advantage and that you can't always count on early air to air missiles to actually work!



The big thing in these kinds of games where there are 10 or more jets flying around is that you have to learn patience as a player. Others are waiting for someone to get impatient or make the wrong move, then they get pounced on and downed pretty quickly. Overall it was a great scenario with lots of action. All of the players enjoyed it and hopefully soon we can return to this era and do a big ground attack with SAMs and AAA.

There were times over the last three decades that I've been gaming where I looked at other clubs that do one or two periods exclusively and thought that they were boring, too focused on one period, or that they were missing out on a lot of fun in the hobby. Now, after our gaming group has gone through another break-up/purging and some recent experiences, I'm not so sure that I don't envy them.

In the last year our gaming group of around 12 people, of which 6-8 show up on most nights, has done the following games: 10mm WMA, 15mm AOR, 15mm AOD, 15mm FOW, 15mm AOE (sorry for all the acronyms!), 25mm WAB, 25mm TSATF, 6mm BKC, 25mm WW2 skirmish, 25mm WW1, Wild West, 1/300th WW2 air combat, 1/2400th WW2 naval, 1/6000 WW1 naval, 25mm FIW, plus a bunch of board games and I'm probably missing some things.



On one hand you can say that we are blessed with gamers who buy figs, paint stuff, get new rules and that we have a lot of variety (probably too much!). On the other hand, however, while we do a lot of periods, we do few of them well. By that I mean we have armies of figs, but sometimes barely enough terrain, limited choice of troops, and not enough to do a campaign. The reasons for this are many, and while I've written about some of these things in past editorials, it probably helps to go over a few of them again.

Let's take the Napoleonic period for example. Our preferred set of rules and what our armies are based for is Age of Eagles. Most of the members would have no problem doing a campaign, but while we have close to a thousand figs for the era, we would still need to do some work. So why would a campaign never get off the ground? First, while most of the group likes Napoleonics, few want to play it for more than a month at a time as that would take time away from other periods that could be played. Second,

why spend money and time increasing our collection of Napoleonics when there's another hundred or so periods waiting to be gamed. Third, time and money spent on terrain could be going for... wait, you guessed it, more figs and rules for still yet more periods. Are you seeing a theme here?

Our group continually wants to start campaigns, but when the logistics begin to get hammered out, especially what is still needed, the interest level begins to wane. Now, it's not as if most of the group is intentionally trying to sabotage a campaign, rather it gets unintentionally torpedoed by new sets of rules or figs coming out.

And it's not just campaigns I'm talking about. Our club, and from what I've been reading online about other clubs, also has another problem, namely not finishing or continuing existing periods. How many times have you seen where a group of gamers want to do something really bad, get a bunch of figs, some rules, set up a game with great excitement, play one or two great games, then that period only comes out again once every two years? Unfortunately, I can think of almost a dozen of these kinds of games in our own group.

Rather than continuing to add new units, more terrain, etc., the one person who drove it in the first place gets left holding the bag while the others move on to new periods. That person then needs to decide whether or not they should keep the stuff, continue adding to it, or just dump it on Ebay. Surprisingly, this occurs far more than it should.

To explain it further, it would be like your gaming group decides to do the Leipzig campaign. All of you have tons of French, plenty of Russians and Austrians, but few Prussians and French allies. It's a pretty impressive collection and you've done a lot of games, but most of your stuff isn't geared to 1813. Now



given the information at the start of this article, what chance do you think there is of this kind of group painting up some units of Prussians, French allies, units to fill in the existing armies, and adding some Central European terrain? Probably on the order of around 25%. Now, take into account the number of new rules and figs that will be coming out during that period of time that will distract people and that percentage drops to around 5-10% of ever seeing it completed.

It could also be likened to building a 1,000 point army in whatever rules set and saying that you're done. No extra units, no possible upgrades, no options, and unwilling to expand it to 1500 or beyond. You're going to just use the same force over and over again. There's nothing inherently wrong with that, but its not going to help out in terms of planning a campaign for a group, doing historical battles that need more troops, or just moving up the points to fit in an extra player or two.

However, if your group only does one, two, or perhaps even three periods then the chances are pretty good that it will be completed. There are certain advantages to doing only a few periods and I think I am beginning to see the light.

So what about the future of the hobby in this regard? Will we ever get back to clubs doing large scale projects and actually staying on track? Are those days gone forever? Or, are we in a new age where everyone buys and paints just enough to do a two player game, but they do this for a dozen periods?

My guess is probably the latter. Gamers today seem to have very short attention spans, no long range plans, and are easily distracted by shiny new toys. The hobby is thriving in terms of products, but somehow there is this feeling that it is short on depth. I think that as a hobby we will continue doing a lot of periods, but not doing many of them well.

Twin Falls Air Show

Hill A.F.B., which is near where I live, usually has an air show every other summer with the featured act being the USAF Thunderbirds. The air show usually attracts 300,000+ and is quite an event. However, this year the event had to be cancelled due to scheduling issues, so that gave me an opportunity to go see the Navy's demonstration team, the Blue Angels.



good and there was plenty to look at.

The air show began with two squads of green Berets jumping from a C-130 which is always pretty spectacular to watch. This was followed up

by a few aerobatic demos by pilots in stunt planes that can do things that should defy the laws of physics! There were several fly bys by the B-25, P-51, and the two P-40s, followed by about six T-6s in various colors that did several fly bys in front of the crowd.

The air show was held in Twin Falls, Idaho, which is an unusual place for this kind of event. With a population of around 35,000 and just having a regional airport, you would think that the logistics issues alone would take this town out of consideration. Although the town has had air shows in the past, they said that it was nothing on this level!

There were numerous aircraft present, from civilian single engine aircraft to helicopters to the military aircraft and Blue Angels. It's always great to be able to walk up and take a close look at P-40s, B-25s, and more of the old WW2 classic aircraft. The good thing about the military aircraft like the E-2, AH-64, and others is that the Armed Forces make sure that there are pilots and ground crew available to answer questions and you can usually go up and see the cockpit of many of the aircraft.

Some of the more unusual aircraft that were present were some TBF Avengers, the P-51 flown by the legendary Robin Olds, two P-40s, and one of the few remaining B-25s that can still actually fly. Also, this air show had the most T-6s I've ever seen in one place! As far as static aircraft displays go it was pretty



The most unusual event of the day and one that was pretty interesting was a hypothetical scenario where a secret Russian weapons factory in the 50's had to be taken out. An F-1 Fury was to sneak in, bomb it and then get out. The F-1 made a pass, then a simulated bombing run, but was intercepted by a Mig-15 and a Mig-17. This led to a series of dogfights over the audience and it was exciting to see these early jets going at it, even if it was just fantasy.

The next great demo was by the Viper East USAF team who shows off their F-16s. Having lived on USAF bases for quite awhile in my life I've seen the F-16 demos before, but nonetheless it is still impressive. You could tell that many people in the audience had never experienced the speed, power, and sound of a modern military jet and they were pretty well overwhelmed!

Finally, the Blue Angels performed and if you've seen the USAF Thunderbirds, then the routines are pretty similar, except that the Blue Angels use F-18 Hornets. I did like the take off routine by the two solo planes as one keeps his landing gear down, but rolls inverted and takes off in an opposite direction.

The Blue Angels do a lot of crossover maneuvers and the solo guys like to fly in upside down across the runway, which is pretty impressive if you've never seen anything like it before. Overall, it was a well down performance and the Blue Angels are definitely one of the best air demo teams on the planet.



Since the show was not on federal property they could charge an entrance fee and here's where I thought the \$60 family pass I had to buy was excessive. Then, they confiscated all food and drink at the entrance, meaning that you had to pay the exorbitant fees for water and food inside! Then add in the fact that it was about 99 degrees outside (plus there's no shade for miles) and by the end of the show I was questioning whether or not it was worth it. Add in the fact that they used school buses to shuttle everyone back and forth from the parking area and I was really questioning if I

should ever come back if they do this again. On the positive side I did get to see the Blue Angels and some great old aircraft fly, but it was a long, hot, expensive day at a small airport.



French Raid!

F&IW Battle Report

We've enjoyed our last few games of This Very Ground, a set of rules for the French and Indian War, so this issue has not one, but two F&WI battle reports! Our group continues to add a few more units here and there, so we are now able to do some pretty large skirmish games if necessary.

In this scenario the French are on the rampage again, trying to raid every farm and village in the area while the British are trying to defend the frontier.

French Force

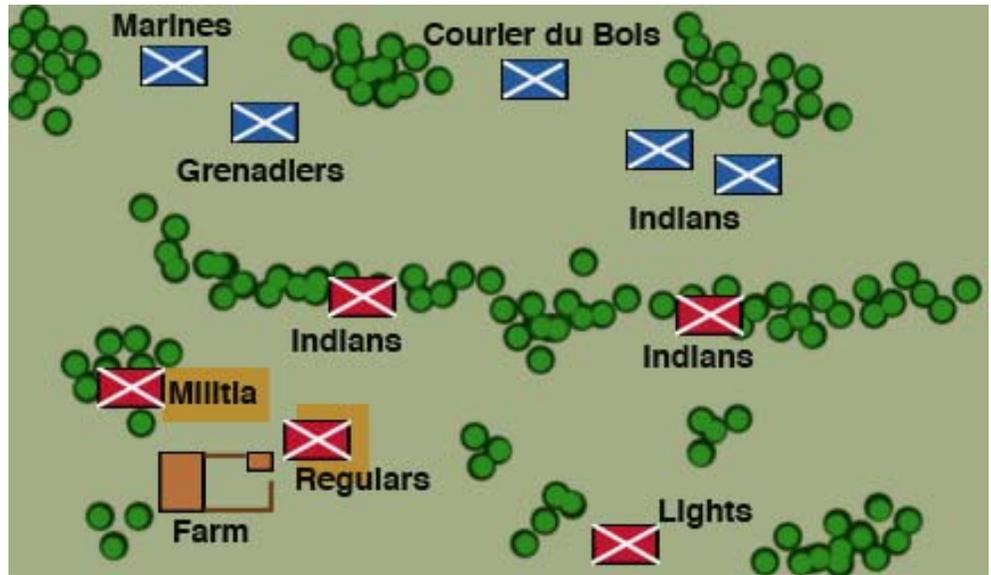
- 10 Marines
- 6 Grenadiers
- 20 Courier du Bois
- 40 Indians

British Force

- 10 Militia
- 20 Regulars
- 10 Light infantry
- 20 Indians

The objective for both sides was pretty simple. The French needed to seize and burn the farm while the British needed to defend it and the civilians inside.

The British were allowed to set up anywhere up to half the width of the



board, so they decided to put the Indians in the tree line with the militia guarding the left flank. The Regulars would back up the Indians in the center while the Lights would act as a reserve. The British plan was to ascertain the direction of the main French attack, then move the reserves to blunt it.

The French decided on a plan that was straightforward as well. The Indians and Courier du Bois would serve as the main attack force going up the French left and center, while the Marines and Grenadiers acted as a pinning force on the left. With both sides deployed the game began.

This Very Ground uses a unit activation sequence and both sides keep alter-

nating units until all units have moved, fired, or rallied. Units consist of 5-20 men and they are rated for shooting and close combat skills. The one thing that separates This Very Ground from other sets of rules for this period is the firing system. Each unit can fire, but depending upon the level of firing you receive a number of smoke markers, meaning that as you accumulate more markers, your fire begins to slack off, until the markers are removed. This presents players with a number of decisions during the game. Should you fire a crushing volley, but then be unable to fire for a few turns? Or, should you keep up a slow and steady fire? This is one of the more intriguing aspects of the rules and the reason why our group chose them for the period.





The game began with the French emerging from the woods at the far end of the board. Instantly, the British could see that the weight of the attack would come down the center and the right flank, so the Lights were hurried off in that direction. Some long range skirmishing opened up between the Indians and the French Marines while the Grenadiers moved around the flank.

The Courier du Bois attacked in the center, driving the Indians back to the fields where the Regulars were waiting. The French Marines and Grenadiers got engaged with the British militia on the flank, with both sides doing damage to the other. At this point the British plan was working, although the quick retreat by the Indians in the center had an effect on the Lights. They were going to move up to support the second Indian force in the tree line, but now they had to sit patiently to see what developed in the center.



The French Indians now descended upon the British Indians along the tree line. What followed was a bloody melee where the French Indians were forced back with serious casualties. The French Indians came on again, this time supported by a small unit of Courier du Bois from the center. Surprisingly, the British Indians stood their ground, causing more French casualties until the weight of numbers began to tell. The remains of the British Indian unit routed to the rear, but the French attack on that side had been stopped.

The British Indians in the center had rallied and tried to retake the tree line, but were repulsed by the French. The French Marines and Grenadiers, however, had been having pretty good success on the other flank. Several withering volleys had dispatched the British militia and suddenly the flank was open.

The British Regulars and Lights now came into action, with not a moment to spare. The Regulars cleared the fields of the French pursuing the now defeated British Indians and temporarily restored the situation. The Lights began some long range sniping to keep the French back.

It took the French a few turns to get reorganized as the success in the center and the French right had come as a pleasant surprise! With a 3:2 advantage in numbers the French made ready to resume the attack while they tried to rally the remnants of their Indian allies. The French plan was to overwhelm the center and seize the farm.

The French launched a coordinated attack in the

center, with the Marines and Grenadiers providing long range fire support while the Courier du Bois closed to close range. The British regulars and Lights fought back, but the weight of numbers began to tell again, then the Regulars started to fall back. The Lights were now caught out in the open and tried to reach some defensible terrain, but were taking heavy fire. The French die rolls, which had been very average all night now got into a hot streak. For every French figure killed at least two British fell, so the math was not going the British way!

Slowly, but surely, the British numbers began to dwindle. The regulars broke first, leaving the Lights to face the remaining French who were now moving around to cut off the British. The Lights slugged it out for a few more turns, but



the end was not in doubt. The Lights finally broke and the British withdrew off the board resulting in a French victory.

The game had not turned out as either side had predicted, which is usually the case with most wargames! Having the Indians defend the tree line was probably a mistake, but if the Regulars or Lights had faltered early, the Indians might not have been a good reserve force. The French conducted their attack well, driving down the center and keeping pressure all along the entire line. When they saw an opening in the center they quickly piled into the gap and brought heavy fire down on the reserves.

All in all, it was a pretty good four player game which took about 3 hours.

S&T #251: Cobra

Back in the glory days of SPI, one of my favorite games was Operation: Cobra. This covered the Allied breakout in Normandy and it was always a challenging game with the Allies having to slog through the bocage country and the Germans trying to block numerous holes in their line. When finally there was a hole ripped in their front, the big question is whether or not the Germans could remain intact as a fighting force.



Issue #251 from Strategy & Tactics is a double sized issue with the new version of Cobra (sometimes referred to as Cobra III). Besides a good article on the battle, there are two maps and two counter sheets, one of which is for the Winged Horse game. With two maps and almost 300 counters, this makes Cobra sort of a “mini-monster” game. The game offers the shorter Cobra Breakout scenario, an extended campaign game that starts with the D-Day landings, and an Alt-Cobra scenario which has different starting positions than the first breakout scenario.

At first glance the map looks pretty impressive, but then you study it for awhile and begin to notice some problems. First, the hex numbers are in a tiny, light gray font that makes them difficult to read. Then, the hex row numbers on the top map don't match the bottom map! Finally, I guess the players are supposed to sit east to west as if you would do the normal north-south one of them will have to reach over most of the oncoming reinforcements. The counters are good, not great, but they work well with the game. However, most of them have the hex numbers for the breakout scenario printed on them, but then some hex numbers correspond to their starting positions in the extended game and some don't! The British, U.S., and SS counters set up fast on the reinforcement track, but the grey German counters took forever. Why? Because it's hard to read white unit designations on light gray backgrounds!

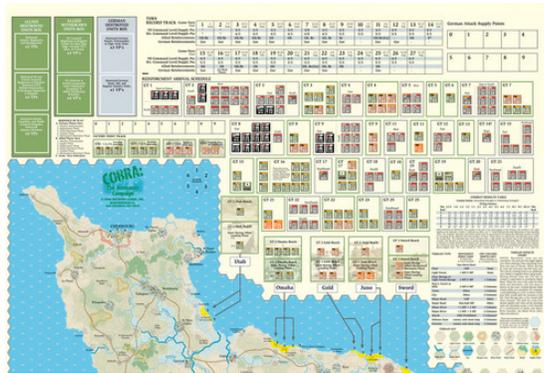
The rules aren't too bad and the designer at least has been updating the errata on a regular basis, which is a big plus. I would have liked to have seen part of the map list the VP schedule and timetable instead of repeating some of the charts in two places on the map. Having to continually refer to the rules about when and how to qualify for VPs got annoying after awhile. Also, why do some game rules spend so much time talking about overruns when in games like this there is very little to gain from it?

In the first turn of the extended game the Allied deployment is pretty well set for you, but what you do afterwards can change the way the game will go. Should you go for Caen right off the bat? Drive inland quickly to seize certain points? There are a lot of options and this will contribute to the replay value of the game. The game then becomes a race between the Allies to bring in more units and get a good beachhead before the heavier German formations start showing up. Weather can play a critical factor in this game as it determines how far the Germans move and the amount of supplies (used for Allied attacks) and air support that the Allies get. Plenty of clear weather will see the Allies romp through France while numerous storms can help the Germans get a lot of forces in position to make a determined defense.

By mid game the Allies have plenty of forces in position for a number of attacks to punch a hole in the German lines while the Germans have tried to build a defense with some reserves, but they are spread pretty thin. Then the Allies begin to hammer at the German defenses while they slowly give ground. The terrain in this game is unmerciful and most of the game is spent fighting hex by hex, slowly pushing the Germans back and looking for that one hole where everything will race through. Once that happens its every German unit for

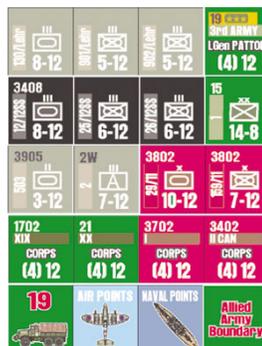
themselves! Again, there is good replay value here as the direction of attack could be anywhere on the map and numerous strategies could be tried out.

Unfortunately (probably to strong a term here), this where I think the “fun and exciting” aspect of the game breaks down. First, the defender only takes a step loss if the result is 3 or more, while



the attacker always takes at least one step loss if there's any result against them. Well, getting a 3 result on the combat results table isn't easy, so what happens is that Allied forces bludgeon themselves pushing back German units, trading steps for hexes. The Allies get as many replacements as they want, but have to be back several hexes from the front lines. This creates a formula of attacking, pushing the Germans back a hex or two, moving damaged units out of the line, sitting for a turn or two while they come back full strength, and then doing the same thing again. Lather, rinse, repeat. Is it historical? From my readings of the battle, yes or pretty close. Is it terribly fun? Not really. Also, I was disappointed in the carpet bombing rules as they do little damage and you can't attack the hex that was bombed that turn!

Overall, this game is good, especially in terms of replay value and an interesting situation, but the fun factor is in doubt. I think with a few tweaks and new German grey counters (not likely) the game could turn out to be a winner. It is a big improvement over the older versions and I liked the D-Day expansion.



Abbas Steamer from the movie *Khartoum* in 15mm

For Victorian colonial enthusiasts, one of the best moments in film is the scene from *Khartoum* where the Abbas runs past a Mahdist ambush. The Egyptians are firing their Nordenfelt machine gun, two artillery

pieces, and even the civilians on board contribute with rifle fire! It is actually a very good attempt at visualizing what must have happened with various armed steamers and gunboats along the Nile during the siege of Khartoum.

Not much is known about the naval side of the siege, other than a few references to Wilson using the gunboats that he had to aggressively keep open the Nile passage to Khartoum. Also, although there were close to 30 gunboats and steamers on the various Nile expeditions, there is little information about them. However, I always need more gunboats for my Sudan games, so I thought it would be a good idea to add the Abbas to my fleet.

First, there are no plans for this ship as far as I know, so I had to use screen captures from the film to try to figure out what the vessel looked like. Fortunately, I was able to discern that it was very similar to many Nile passenger steamers of that era and the 20th century, so a few images off of the internet gave me a good starting point.

The Abbas was a sidewheeler with two decks, a pilothouse on top of the



second deck, rounded stern, and a large box-like section on the second deck just behind the bow. The Abbas in the movie had boards nailed to various places as extra “armor”, so this made the silhouette look a little different and it was hard to see what

was behind the extra “armor”. The long roof appeared to be of either wood or tin metal with a rust colored appearance.

I started with the hull and cut out a three inch wide (my standard width for 15mm gunboats) by fifteen inch length of foam core. I then rounded off the stern and used thin sheet plastic glued over the sides to give the hull a finished look. I then built the second deck superstructure again using foam core, but with pieces of typing paper folded over the corners which hides the seams and takes paint better than filler.

It’s at this point where the deck pieces have to be added. I’ve found that the best way to ensure a uniform looking deck is to use the Evergreen scribed plastic sheeting with the boards about 1/8th of an inch wide. All you need to do is to scribe one inch segments and you have a good looking 15mm deck!

The paddlewheel housings were going to be the most difficult part of this model, but fortunately there were at least two good screen shots from the movie that showed them from different angles. I was initially perplexed about how to build them as they are of an unusual shape and size. I was going through one of the local craft stores and saw a heart shaped cardboard box for 99 cents and thought that might do the trick. I cut the box in half, then spray painted the sections white. I then glued pieces of sheet plastic painted black over the outside and painted the grill-like lines on the black plastic with white paint using a small brush. The result came out remarkably like the version in the film!

The “armor” was made from

sections of soft balsa wood that were scribed with a sharp #2 pencil, then spray painted black followed by several shades of brown that were drybrushed on. The final look came out pretty good, but cutting and scribing the wood planks was time consuming. I used balsa rather than the sheet plastic as I was able to do many different cuts, sizes, and damaged sections easier than with sheet plastic, giving a more realistic result.



The stairs, roof, and smokestack were added next, with the most difficult part being the pins and thread installed along the sides of the stairs and the upper platforms, which took a lot of time and some profanity! Finally, the guns and crew were added (I purchased them from Essex/Wargames) to complete the model.

I think the most important thing I’ve learned about building seven gunboats now is patience. Plan everything out, cut the sections out carefully, and probably most important of all, paint as you go. Also, look for out of the way pieces of wood, craft pieces, etc., that can be used to solve some of your construction problems such as rounded sterns, housings, and more. If you find yourself pressing, put it aside for awhile and do something else. Now it’s time to start on the native dhows and a Mahdist command vessel!



Memoirs of a Miniature & Board Wargamer Pt. 9

More Memorable Games...

“Back in the day...” we did a lot of modern micro-armor games. You have to understand the times we lived in where the possibilities of a Soviet/Warsaw Pact invasion against NATO forces was very real and it was fertile ground for gamers! Our group had a large collection of vehicles, terrain, and rules, with games being played at least once a month and a few campaigns over the years.



One of the gaming groups in our area asked if we wanted to come down and play a modern micro-armor game. They said that they would provide the terrain, figs, and the rules would be the Enola Games system. We had played those rules and were looking for a change of pace, so we agreed and four of us piled into a car and drove the 30+ miles to Salt Lake City to the only gaming store in town at that time.

Little did we know, but the other group had set it up as some kind of “team challenge” with all of them on one side and the four of us on the other. The scenario involved a Russian/Syrian assault on Israel near the Sea of Galilee with PLO troops in Russian vehicles for allies. We were given a combined Israeli/French/U.S. Marine force of a company of tanks, some Milan teams, some light vehicles, a battery of artillery, and two Harriers for air support. Then we looked at the other side of the table...

There were seven players on their side and they definitely had enough stuff to go around. There was an armor regiment consisting of three battalions of T-72s, a motorized regiment of two battalions with BMPs, a battalion of recon units, several batteries of artillery, and enough air defense vehicles for an army group! Now, even with the scenario being far fetched and divorced from reality, we were not prepared for this set up

which was obviously designed to make their group look like better players by having us outnumbered about 10:1. We had driven up anyway, so we decided to go through with the game and hopefully it would just bog down and we would get out of there with a Did Not Finish result!

We deployed our forces the best we could as the referee described a few extra details which primarily consisted of more limiting factors on our side. The other side set up and began pouring down the roads in huge masses, which was a pretty disturbing sight from our side. We began sniping at them with the Milan teams and the light vehicles (some had TOWs) and began knocking a few vehicles off here and there.

Then the infighting began on their side. They were intent on getting “in on the kill” and began getting their vehicles too packed together. When they lost a few more vehicles on one of the flanks, they thought that the major part of our defenses were over there, which they were soon to find out they were not.

To avoid casualties all of their forces began piling down the one main approach that ran through a valley like depression. It’s hard to describe in writing, but imagine about 100 armored vehicles packed in an area about 18 inches wide by 24 inches long! We called in our two Harriers, planned an artillery barrage, and readied our tank company (Merkavas) for a counterattack. This is where one of the most amazing things in gaming happened that I’ve ever seen.

First, the chance of the Harriers getting through the air defenses were virtually nil. There were four ZSU-23/4s, two

SA-9s, three SA-6s, and a horde of SA-7s in the vehicle parking lot below. After dozens of die rolls, one Harrier was slightly damaged and they got through! They dropped their full load of cluster bombs on the milling mass and exited the other end of the valley, leaving an inferno behind them.

This was followed by an artillery barrage that added to the carnage and set off a dozen morale checks which all failed. The remnants of several commands turned and fled back down the valley and to safety. Then our tank company moved to the top of the ridge and began to engage the retreating elements, knocking out more vehicles and turning their attack into a full fledged rout.

The uncommitted forces that were moving up ran into the retreating units, causing another traffic jam as commands began to get jumbled, all the while being harassed by artillery fire and our lone tank company. This set off more morale checks and soon their entire side was routing off the board!

By this time the other side had turned on each other and a blaming orgy began. Players blamed the rules, blamed the referee, blamed the scenario design, and it started getting pretty heated. We saw our chance to walk out alive with a victory and took it. We politely thanked them for hosting us and got out quickly. Later, at an all night eating establishment, we must have laughed until we cried about the scenario, what happened, and how it all ended. Not surprisingly, that was the last time we were invited down there, but it still gives me fond memories.

I think it would have been better if they had sent us the scenario ahead of time, had our group chip in on the set up and figs, then split up the players to have some from both groups on each side. However, how it was set up suggested an ambush and fortunately (at least from our standpoint), we prevailed!



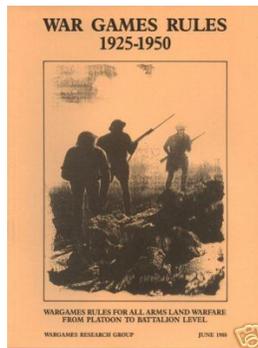
Blast From The Past Pt. 8: The WRG Era

If you've been playing any kind of wargames for awhile, then you've probably heard of WRG. WRG stood for Wargames Research Group and for a long period in the 70s and 80s they were the dominant force in miniatures gaming. Besides putting out rules for multiple periods they also produced army lists, scenario books, and guides to different periods.

What they were known primarily for, however, were their sets of ancients rules. If you were an ancient miniatures gamer then you either loved or hated WRG Ancients as there was no in between. You either accepted the written word chapter or verse or you went elsewhere and there weren't very many other places to go at that time. Sure, other rules tried to cater to the masses who didn't want to be involved with WRG, but none of them came close to the popularity of the WRG rules.

Now popularity didn't mean that people actually loved their rules! With sentence structure that would challenge an Oxford English professor, the average gamer and club spent years interpreting just what was meant by some of the rules. I can remember heated discussions in some of the clubs I belonged to about how to use certain modifiers, apply casualties, or read the army lists. On the positive side the rules established a basing size that is still used by many rules today and it did lead to some serious research being done about the period. Early wargaming magazines were full of WRG Ancients articles on tactics, rating the army lists, rules interpretations, discussions with the author, and research into the period and how it translated into the rules.

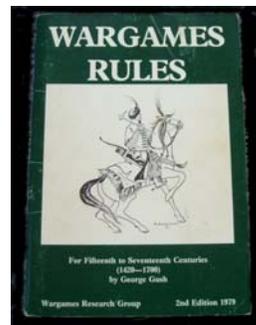
There were and still are many ancients tournaments that used these rules. You could travel to any city and find a few gamers who had



armies based for the rules and it probably came as close as the hobby will ever get to a "universally accepted" set of rules for any one period.

Each edition was eagerly awaited for and when it arrived the entire club would go through the rules, combat tables, and army lists to see how it affected their army. The rules generated an excitement that is not seen in today's hobby, particularly in this day and age where there is literally too much information for the gamer to absorb.

Besides Ancients WRG did put out several other sets of rules. One of the most popular was the Renaissance set which is still used by a few clubs today. Similar to the Ancients rules, there weren't as many argumentative rules in it and it was quite popular for a long period of time.



Another set was the 1685-1845 set of rules that covered the Seven Years War and Napoleonic eras. Way before Empire, Napoleon's Battles, and Age of Empires it was the pre-eminent set of rules for those periods. If you had played the ancients or renaissance rules then you could quickly migrate over to this set. All of WRG's rules in those days featured a clock like play sequence, written orders, and combat tables with lots of modifiers.

One of the sets of rules that I enjoyed for a long time were the skirmish rules that they put out. At the time I was just getting into wargaming with Airfix and Atlantic WW2 figures, so this set of rules was surprisingly easy to get into. The rules were only a few pages, played fast, and everyone seemed to have a good time. I remember seeing a free set of them online a year or so ago, but I have since lost the web address!

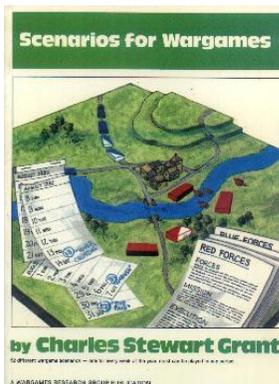
The other mainstays in

those days were their sets of micro-armor rules. Labeled as 1925-1950 and 1950-1985 (later changed to 1950-2000) they were used by our group for many years. Both sets, while keeping the tradition of grammar that defied our attempts to translate, were well suited for large micro-armor battles (there were no small battles in those days!). Each time another set of rules were tried with hundreds of charts and tables we would keep going back to the WRG sets. This lasted until the Cold War died of and modern micro-armor fell out of favor with most gamers. The rules played well, covered most aspects of modern warfare, and as stated above, they were to provide the basis for many of our years of micro-armor gaming, including three campaigns.

WRG also produced several books under the "Armies & Enemies" series, which are still highly sought after. The books were a bare bones presentation with some black and white line drawings and a lot of small text. However, they are still some of the best wargame reference material that you can find as they exhausted many original sources and compiled a ton of information in those books.

They also produced several books on the wargaming hobby itself. Two of the books I still own and cherish are the Setting Up a Wargames Campaign and Scenarios For Wargames. Yes, there are no pretty pictures and incredible graphics, but both books are filled with original ideas from an age where gamers had to think for themselves and create from scratch many aspects of the hobby that they enjoyed.

Although their DBA rules live on, few if any gamers remember anything about WRG's role in the hobby. Back in a time when there were few companies producing rules, few hobby magazines, and few figure manufacturers they were giants in the hobby. Although their rules are still much maligned even today, their contribution to the hobby had a major impact. From ancients to modern warfare their rules got gamers involved in many periods and their legacy still lives on in many of the rules we use today.



Spike The Gun!

F&IW Battle Report

Two French and Indian War battle reports in the same issue! Our group has found that this is the ideal period for those nights when we learn at the last minute that there will be only 3 or 4 of us and the game needs to be changed. Using the rules This Very Ground very little prep time is needed, so a scenario can be set up within minutes and play can begin!

The scenario this time involves a British gun positioned to fire upon a fort that is just off board. The French have decided to sortie out from the fort and try to either seize the gun or spike it, which will put the siege on more even terms. The British have been alerted to a French sortie by outlying pickets and have assembled a defense.

British Forces

- 10 Highlanders
- 20 Regulars
- 10 Light infantry
- 10 Rangers
- 1 6lb. Gun w/4crew

French Forces

- 20 Regulars
- 10 Marines
- 20 Courier du Bois
- 20 Indians

The British decided to defend the length of the stream running down the middle of the game table. The Highlanders were positioned on the British right, next to the gun where they could provide immediate support and prevent the French from flanking the entire line. The Regulars and Lights were in the center, ready to move to either flank if the French decided to concentrate in one area. Finally, the Rangers were covering the extreme left where they could fall back and defend

the flank from the safety of a farm in the area..

The French decided to feint on the French right, push forces into the center with the Regulars, then using the Indians speed attempt to overwhelm the gun before help could arrive. With both sides deployed the battle began.

The French drove down the center with the Regulars and Courier du Bois while the British Lights moved near the stream to defend from better cover.

Unlike in previous games there was no initial long range skirmishing as both sides looked to close the range as quickly as possible. Once the Indians broke into the clear, the artillery opened up on them, causing a few casualties and they withdrew back into cover.

The Courier du Bois got into the fight first where they were trying to force a crossing over the stream. The British Regulars and Lights began a firefight with them that saw the French side lose



some more casualties, then fall back yet again. At this point things were looking pretty good for the British as no French thrust had been successful.

The Indians tried again to launch their attack, but once again the artillery had them ranged in and they fell back having failed their morale check yet again. The French Regulars and Marines had now moved up and were going to put pressure on the opposite flank. They began skirmishing with the Rangers and part of the Regulars that were still in the center.

While things had been going the British way, there was still some uneasiness on the British side that while two attacks had been stopped, the French were not defeated by any means. There was no possibility of redeploying forces either, as at any moment the French could try to rush the position again.

Which is exactly what happened. The French and British Regulars got into a nasty firefight, with both sides' initial volleys doing some serious damage. The French Marines had gotten the better of the Rangers and they pursued them back to the edge of the farm. The Regulars of both sides continued to exchange fire, whittling down their opponents, but still neither side broke. The British Lights changed their posi-





tion to cover the left in case the Regulars broke.

This is when the Courier du Bois, who been taking a beating, decide it was time to return to the action! They moved back to the stream and engaged the Lights. The British Light infantry, in an astounding display of bad die rolling, simply could not hit anything! The Courier du Bois fired into them several times until they broke, leaving the center wide open.

Then the French Indians reassembled for an attack and pushed forward. This time the artillery missed and they were able to make it to the edge of the stream in front of the artillery position. The Highlanders moved to cover the gun, but their first shots had little to no impact. However, the return fire from the Indians

an effect on the Highlanders.

The British were now in serious trouble. The left flank was a mess and the Regulars were down to less than 50% and still locked in combat with the French Regulars. The Lights had fallen back and the Courier du Bois were no crossing the stream and firing on the gun crews. The Indians were slowly forcing the Highlanders back and getting ready to cross the stream in force.

When the collapse came, it came suddenly. The Regulars fell back to the farm, leaving the center totally undefended and the Courier du Bois moved to keep fire on the British Regulars and to begin sniping at the gun crew where they killed one of them. The Indians were now crossing the stream and the High-

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landers were in no shape to do anything about it. There were a few more turns of firing, but by now the end was not in doubt. There was only one gun crew member still standing and the British had lost over 50% of their initial force. With that the game was called a French victory as they were assumed to have spied the gun and returned safely to the fort.

On paper, what looked like a good defensive position for the British didn't translate well onto the tabletop! This is often the case in skirmish games where if the defense is even outnumbered by even a little, it can be a huge advantage to the attacker. In this game the Regulars were in a good position, but bad die rolls and losing the Rangers quickly led to them fighting on three sides!

Overall, it was another fun scenario that was good for four players and completed in just over three hours.



German Kampfgruppe Counterattack

BKC Battle Report

The premise for this scenario, set in Northwest Europe during the fall of 1944, is that a British task force has punched a hole in the German lines and seized a vital hill. Two mech infantry companies backed by some 6 pound AT guns are positioned along the hill which overlooks a German held village. A company of Shermans in support are deployed in some woods along a road that leads to another village.

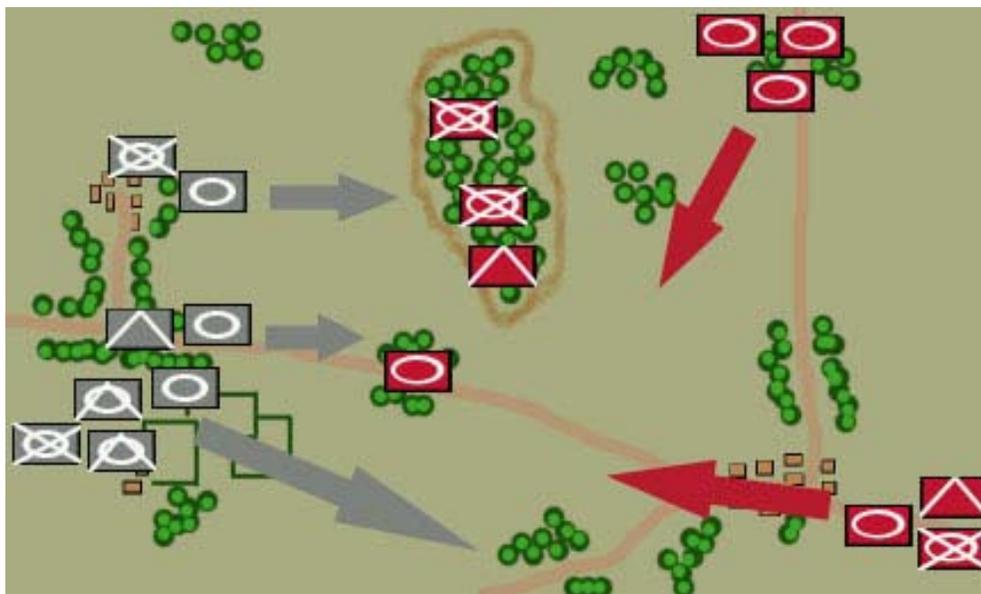
British reinforcements in the form of three com-

panies of Shermans, a company of Cromwells, a mech infantry company, plus some Churchills and more heavy weapons are racing to hold the village and defend the hill before the Germans can take it back.

The Germans have not just been sitting idly by, but have been assembling a counterattack. Two companies of panzer-grenadiers backed by a Panther company, a 88mm AT battery, a company of Stug IVs, plus some Hetzers

and Tigers are going to try to break the British defenses before they can receive reinforcements. Both sides also had three batteries of off board artillery and the Germans had two recon units attached to themselves as well. While the Germans had the advantage in heavy armor, they were handicapped by having only three commanders while the British had at least double that number.

Both sides deployed their initial commands, with the Germans looking to pin the British on the hill, then thrust towards the village with the Panthers and SP AT units. The British looked to rush any units they could use to bolster the forward deployed Shermans and keep possession of the hill and village for as long as possible.



The Battle Begins

The German attack ran into problems from the start. The Shermans holding the woods knocked out one of the Tigers and the initial British artillery barrage hit the 88 battery along the road. With some good die rolls the British continued to knock out German units along the road and as they tried to deploy.

This was to reverse itself in the following turns as two of the German com-

mands rolled snake eyes which gives a double action to both commands. The Panthers overwhelmed the Shermans, forcing the survivors back to the village and moving up quickly to the outskirts of the village. The British reinforcements,



meanwhile, had a series of bad command rolls and were strung out along the roads leading to the village. At this point it looked as if the Germans were going to isolate the hill and seize the village, ending the game quickly.

German Kampfgruppe Counterattack (cont.) BKC Battle Report

Just when it looked as if an easy German victory was about to happen, the British battalion of Shermans arrived to save the day. They deployed quickly along a small ridge running behind the hill towards the village and awaited the German attack. Sure enough, the Panthers, Stugs, and Hetzers moved up to engage the Shermans, which were the one remaining obstacle to victory.

Then things began to go wrong for the Germans. First, they failed two command rolls right in front of the Shermans. The Shermans responded by making command roll after command roll, pouring a deadly fire into the attacking German armor. The British artillery came into play as well and with some lucky rolls suppressed two of the three German

commanders! For the next turn on that flank the Germans had no command rolls and the Shermans took advantage, knocking out the remaining Panthers.

The Stugs and Hetzers kept up the attack, but some bad die rolls again did little damage to the Shermans, now in a good position to block any thrust towards the village. To make matters worse, the remaining British infantry made it successfully to the village and began digging in. The Cromwells and Churchills began to move up and were approaching the

forward edge of the battle. Things were not looking very promising for the Germans and it wasn't about to get any better in the next turn.



Finale & Summary

The Germans tried once more to force the issue by moving the remaining Tigers forward and coordinating an attack with the artillery and remaining SP AT units. Once again the command rolls failed at the worst possible time, leaving them in the open to face an entire battalion of Shermans which began knocking out more German armor.

The final straw came when the Crom-

wells and Churchills flanked the panzer-grenadier company and Stugs, knocking out several units and ending the game.

It was a great scenario with several wild swings which resulted in the Ger-



mans almost winning the game in the first few turns. The British were able to hold on and with some good command rolls were able to defend the hill and win the scenario with room to spare.



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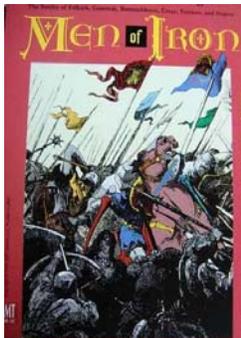
Now that the rules have been out for awhile, I thought I would comment on the Fields of Glory release/hype/reality. When asked at the time I thought from what I had read and seen that FOG was essentially DBM by people who either hated WRG or wanted DBM to be improved and I thought that most of the gaming community wasn't going to like it (or at best be indifferent) plus it would not have a Flames of War type impact on the hobby. Naturally, this view came to be seen as heresy, especially with the large number of threads on TMP, the release of plastic boxed sets, companies making FOG starter armies, and the fact that Osprey has high standards.

So, what happened? Well, the rules and supplement came out and it went about as I expected. The fanboys cheered, but after a few days the first negative comments came out. Then the shock that FOG would not replace WAB, WMA, or DBM and it would not unite the ancients gaming community began to set in. The reality is that FOG will find its niche in the ancients community, but it will never attain the level of say, Flames of War for WW2, or Johnny Reb or Fire and Fury for ACW. Gamers who like DBM, WRG 6th or 7th, or anything similar might get into it, but that's about it. No new masses of gamers waiting to migrate to FOG from WHFB or Warmachine, no massive rebasing or painting up armies to play the game by non-ancients gamers, and FOG will continue to be just another set of rules for ancients. So now I'm left wondering what the next great thing will be so that the entire process can start over again!

Men of Iron by GMT Games

Game Review

There is no doubt that Richard Berg is a prolific designer and while he takes a lot of criticism, there are advantages to playing a lot of games, such as being able to understand his systems quickly. Men of Iron: Vol. 1-The Re-Birth of Infantry is no exception and it shares several systems seen in many of his games.



You certainly get your money's worth in terms of components. There are two 34 x 22 maps with six battlefields, 700+ counters, a battle book, reference cards, and a rule book. Surprisingly, the rule book is only a few pages and can easily be read with the game set up and ready to play in no time at all. The interesting part about the rules is that there really is no turn sequence, just commands activating over and over again with a

chance to continue activating commands by your side. Upon initial reading it does seem to put a lot of luck into the game, but my first few tries led me to believe that there is no more luck involved here than in many other games.

The movement, firing, shock (melee), and charging systems are all fairly simple to grasp, so most gamers will have few, if any problems playing the rules. Shock, or melee, is resolved by comparing weapons type, then the modifiers on a counter, followed by a die roll on a table. Simple, it works well, and it creates a sensation of the back and forth nature of medieval combat. Archery is even easier, with some modifiers applied to a single die roll. Units become disrupted or "retire" back to their army's standard to be rallied and occasionally there is an outright

elimination of a combat unit.

The part that I like about the game so much is that you get several battles such as Crecy and Poitiers with a wide assortment of units that includes French, Scottish, British, Flemish, and more. Most of the battles are 2-3 hours long and are played on smaller maps, so the action starts right from the first turn. The biggest issue I have encountered is that the game is probably best for solitaire play as some of the historical scenarios are fairly unbalanced. There are optional deployments for most of the scenarios which balances things out somewhat.

Overall, this game is worth the money, particularly if you are interested in this era. The rules are easy to grasp, the components are well done, the game play is fast, and you can finish a game in a few hours.

