Warning Order

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Command & Control: The Missing Element?

When you mention command and control to gamers you are bound to get one of two responses. The first is a gamer saying that they don't care about it and that they really don't care to play in any games that have it. The second is the gamer who wants this in his games and is always looking for the next best method to represent it on the tabletop. Gamers seem to fall into two categories on this subject; those who think that command rules are restricting them and they want to do whatever they want during a game, or those who feel it is a way to represent the problems of coordinating forces on a battlefield.

The first miniatures wargames had little in the way of command and control. Most rules were home grown and focused on movement and combat. As the hobby grew with more miniatures becoming available, new periods, etc., rules started to be published and available to a wider audience. This brings us to the first step in putting command and control into our wargames; the written order.

I'm not sure if WRG was the first to introduce this concept, but it was prevalent throughout the 70s and early 80s where almost every rules set tried to introduce command & control into gaming by using written orders. Some of these were quite simple systems, requiring each unit to have an objective while other sets of rules almost demanded that you write an essay on what each unit was supposed to do!

Naturally, this was time consuming and VERY subjective. I can remember arguments breaking out all the time about the way that some orders were structured. Still, at the time it was all we had and with most people in the hobby having plenty of time (6-10 hour games were the rule, not the exception!) not much thought was given to it for quite awhile.

The next evolution was the combination of chits and written orders that would be typi-fied by Empire. In this kind of command system each division or corps would get an orders chit, then their objective or other detailed orders would be written down. It didn't save much on time, but it cut down some of the subjective nature of written orders.

The next step was the big one that heavily influenced rules for quite some time. This was the orders chit that is seen in games like Johnny Reb and Command Decision. Each unit received an order that was on a cardboard counter and flipped over so no one could see it. They were revealed by both sides at the same time which served a number of purposes. First, it was quicker. Second, there were no doubts about where a unit was moving to or what it was trying to do. Third, it took command and control to a whole new level as now every unit had to have orders.

Many gamers, including the members of my club, jumped on this new way of doing things and it surged across the country. Games moved faster, there was less arguing about what someone's written
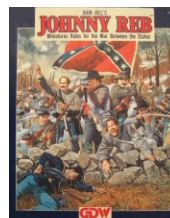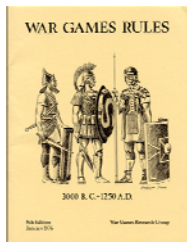
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Inside this issue:

Special points of interest:

- *Several battle reports for AOR, AOE, WMA Sharp Practice, and Phantoms.*

- *Review of Victrix French figures and several boardgames.*

- *Usual features and an editorial.*

Cover: 10mm Seleucids and Indians by Old Glory and Magistar Militum.

Command & Control... (cont.)

orders meant, and it appeared that gamers were enjoying the games just a little bit more. Regardless if you loved or hated this kind of command system, it did have one lasting effect on the hobby and that was to end the use of written orders for 99% of the rules used in miniature gaming.

The next step should be termed the Fire & Fury approach. In this system commanders roll on a table for each unit to see how far, if any, they move and/or rally from bad morale results. This speeded up the command system even more, incorporating it into the movement system so you are doing two things with essentially one roll of the die. Some commanders get certain modifiers and each type of commander (army, corps, division, etc.) has a command range. This system proved extremely popular in the 90s and more recently can be seen by the huge success of Age of Eagles. Still other sets of rules such as Battles For Empire use a similar system to F&F and I've seen numerous sets of rules that use this system in magazines such as the old MWAN.

I probably should also mention card driven systems such as The Sword and the Flame or Piquet. Although the cards are used primarily for activating units, they do function as a sort of command and control system. The other type of command system is the "pip" system where each player (s) get so many command points usually based on a roll of the dice. The "pips" can be used to activate units, creating a randomness to the system. This has been used in many systems, including DBA and Principles of War.

The newest command and control system comes to us in the way of a fantasy set of rules called Warmaster. In this system commanders are given a number usually between 7 and 10 that has to be rolled under with 2D6.
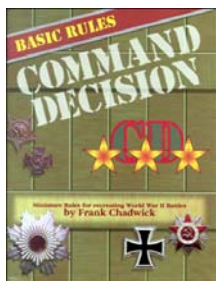
Units can then move or fire if successful and then attempts can be made to give additional orders. Simple, effective, and it creates quite a lot of forward planning and chaos when things go wrong, which they will do in this game. The system was expanded to historicals with Warmaster Ancients and Warmaster Medieval. The game system was also ported over to Blitzkrieg Commander and its modern and sci-fi cousins. Also, recently there was a modified version in the new Black Powder rules.

There's only system left that we haven't talked about and that is having no command and control at all! This is the approach taken by two of the hobby's most popular gaming systems, Flames of War and Warhammer Ancients. There are also many other sets of rules that either don't have this or it's so basic (eg.; everything needs to be kept within 6" of each other) as to not mention it.

At the start of this article I mentioned that gamers fall into two camps on this subject with not much in between. Those who are more concerned about the game itself in terms of throwing out large numbers of figs, having a free for all, and just plain fun despise command and control systems with every fiber in their being. They don't like being told that certain commanders weren't very good and can't activate as often or just because they failed a die roll their units have to sit still for a turn. You could show them stacks of books with examples where command and control problems led to an army's defeat or commanders not interpreting orders, but they will still not be swayed.

The second camp is that a game must have command and control, even if it is limited, to have any credibility as a set of historical miniatures rules. The gamers who follow this path range from simple C&C as in Warmaster to writing down a series of orders as in The Complete Brigadier. They usually have no use for games or gamers that play with no command and control.
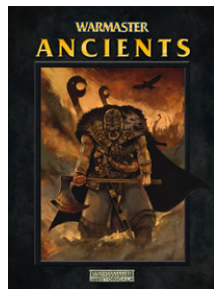
So where is this going? At the moment the trend tends to be towards less command & control in our games. The reasons for this are many, but some of the more popular ones are speed of play, fewer rules, and letting players do whatever they want to. Then there's the eternal cry about how what we do in no way simulates real war, so why worry about command & control? That naturally sets off another series of arguments about are we simulating history or just playing checkers or chess with miniatures from different eras.

The case, however, needs to be made to as many gamers as possible that history is full of command blunders and opportunities that have changed wars. Surely this needs to be represented on the tabletop in some manner, even if it is as simple as keeping units so many inches from their leaders. You can argue about commander ratings, but if you are playing historical battles then you may get assigned leaders who weren't very good and it's a challenge to do better. Troops don't always do as they are told, commanders don't read maps properly, interpret their orders wrong, or fail to act at all.

Yet, sometimes these things are missing from a lot of the games that we see played out on tables across the hobby. Games become chess like matches where everyone follows orders, there's no chance of mistakes, and everything comes down to a handful of dice coming up one way or the other. Everyone has taken the best forces available for their allotted points and there are no surprises during the game. Tactics consist of each player trying to use the special rules for their forces to their advantage, but not having to react to situations that could be beyond their control.

This is where command and control is the missing element in gaming. It can provide new challenges, some surprises during the game, and makes gamers think a little more while playing. Hopefully we'll see a resurgence of this important facet of warfare in future sets of rules.

Attack in the Center

Age of Reason Battle Report

By now everyone has probably figured out that Age of Reason is our "fall back" game when we can't determine what we should play that week or when there are last minute changes and we need to set something up quickly. AOR is also our most played game, with probably well over 100 games by now since we discovered the rules back in the early 90s.

Well, this was another of those times where we needed a quick game because of last minute changes, so we rolled on the terrain tables, chose 18 strength points, selected our forces and set up. We brought along Russians and Prussians, so the battle would once again feature the superior Prussian cavalry and

the large number of Russian batteries. As the Prussian player, I went with a more conservative approach , with cavalry on both flanks and two infantry brigades in the center. My thinking was to keep the flanks busy and overwhelm the center where two of the three objectives were located (the crossroads and the village). The Russians used a more thoughtful approach, massing their cavalry on the left and guarding the side with the marsh with just an infantry brigade. Their plan was to seize the walls around the farm and then entrench for a defensive game.

Naturally, I blundered right into their trap with my attack up the center! The game started off badly for the Prussians with a massive cavalry battle on the Prussian right (7YW games always have massive cavalry battles!). The Prussians held their own at first, but then reinforcing Russian units tilted the battle and the Prussians broke and fled. Before the Russians could rally and flank the Prussian lines, however, the Prussians counterattacked with a fresh cavalry unit and artillery, keeping the victorious Russian cavalry temporarily at bay.

The Prussian left did not see much action throughout the game. A Prussian cavalry unit tried to slip around the flank

and got quickly shelled by artillery, then fell back. The Prussian and Russian infantry brigades maneuvered towards each other, formed lines, then swapped some artillery fire, but neither sided was strong enough or willing to go on the offensive. Because of the deteriorating position on the Prussian right one of the two cavalry units began to move back towards the right.

While the right flank was in disarray and the left at a stalemate, this meant the main action would occur in the center. The Russians quickly moved two battalions up to the stone walls surrounding the farm fields with one battalion in reserve. They also posted two batteries of artillery on either side of the walls which created a very strong position.

The Prussians would attack this position with one infantry brigade in the center and two battalions from the infantry
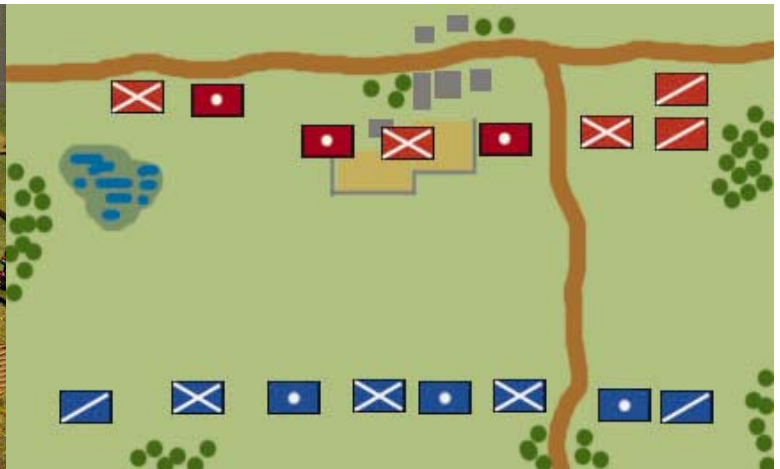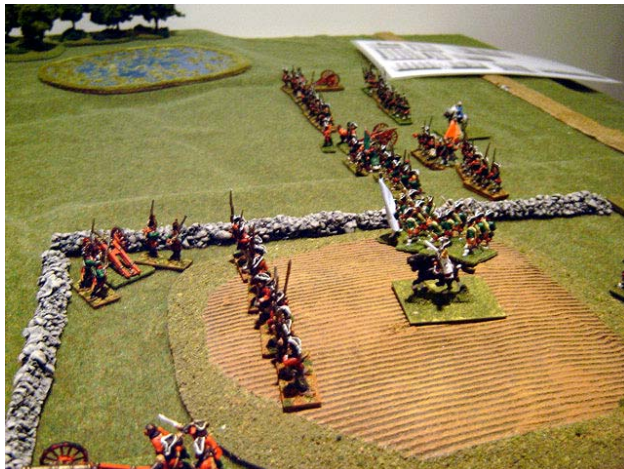
brigade on the far right, which was already bending back with a few units in square in case the Russians decided to charge that position. The central Prussian infantry brigade had two battalions of grenadiers and the heavy artillery, which formed into columns and quickly marched to the attack.

Just inside of artillery range one of the regular infantry battalions deployed into line and the rest of the brigade was screened by the Prussian light troops. The Russian artillery opened up and both sides began a firefight at the stone walls. The Prussians brought up two heavy batteries plus the siege battery to begin pounding the walls and trying to keep any additional Russian reinforcements from coming in.

By this time the Prussian lights had been shot to pieces and the leading Prus-

sian infantry battalion broke and ran. Now it was time for the main event. The two Prussian grenadier battalions formed into line and moved into close musket range. The Russian and Prussian infantry stood there for two turns and exchanged fire, creating a lot of casualties. Then the Prussian grenadiers launched a bayonet charge over the wall in the face of artillery and musket fire.

Amazingly, one of the Prussian grenadier battalions got over the wall and drove off the defenders. Quickly they tried to reform while the remaining battalions of the brigade tried to reinforce the attack. However, the Russian reserve battalion now moved up to stop the grenadier attack while the Russian artillery batteries in the area started to shell the flanks of the Prussian attack into the center. For one brief moment it looked as

if the Prussian attack would succeed and the Russian army would be split in half.

The Prussian grenadiers, however, worn down by musket and artillery fire, plus the melee, had enough and fell back. The remnants of the brigade were too weak to press the attack and the Russians moved back to the walls. With a stalemate on the flanks and the Prussian center severely beaten the Prussians would have to withdraw from the board and the game was deemed a Russian tactical victory.

It was a fun and exciting game which ended up pretty good considering so little time was spent in preparation! It also shows you the problem of playing with too many rules as I completely forgot to use the Prussian special rules, supports, etc., so I could have played better. Still, it was a great game!

Whenever we need to set up a quick game due to last minute changes, we increasingly turn to Warmaster Ancients. Not only do we find the game fun to play, but most of the battles go down to the last turn or die roll. Also, it looks great on the tabletop!

Well, this was another of those times, where we had some late cancellations and needed something created 24 hours before our regular gaming time. Luckily, I was almost finished with my 2,000 point Indian army so we decided to do a slugfest between the Seleucids and Indians. 4,000 points on the table, particularly with the cheap infantry the Indians have means a lot of stuff to deploy and move!

The Seleucid army consisted of the usual mandatory phalanxes with two units of Guard and one of those converted to Hypaspists, giving them a solid core that could defeat almost anything on the board. With the infantry came four units of archers, three skirmishers, some Thorakites, and some light infantry. There was also one unit of elephants backed by several units of heavily armored cavalry and few light cavalry units. Altogether it was a very impressive force with excellent infantry and cavalry, plus several light units to screen the main force.

The Indians were basically a horde of very average troops. There were twelve units of infantry, five archers (should have had eight which is mandatory-but they weren't finished yet!), four units of skirmishers, chariots, several units of cavalry, and two units of elephants. Although the entire force was very average

in terms of attacks and hits, the Indian force made up for this by sheer numbers.

Both sides decided to mass most of their infantry in the center with one unit of elephants each in support. The Indians put their cavalry on the left while the Seleucids put their heavy cavalry on their left as well. The Indian plan was to skirmish on the left, hold or force the center, then strike the killing blow on the right. The Seleucids were going to skirmish on the right, hold on the left, and put everything into an attack at the center.

After going over the elephant rules and watching the Seleucid players trying to familiarize themselves with the wide variety of units in their army, we were ready to start. It was decided to go until one side or the other broke, with the Seleucid break point at 11 and the Indians at 13.

The Indians had difficulty on the first turn, barely moving in the center and only about half of the cavalry on the Indian left moved at all. The plan to get out quickly and engage the Seleucid pikes before their heavy cavalry came into play went down the drain on the first turn! The Seleucids for their part didn't fare much better. However, their skirmish cavalry on the Seleucid right was able to move almost to the halfway point of on the board. Not much else occurred on the first turn, so on

to turn 2.

The Indian center now moved out en masse, followed by some good rolls on the Indian right. The Indian left still had problems, but the chariots and cavalry were now at least in position to threaten the Seleucid center or counterattack on that flank. The Seleucids used their light cavalry to drive back the Indian cavalry and the remaining Seleucid units moved up in the center. There was some archery exchanges, but no serious damage to either side.

The action got underway when the Indian chariots charged and chewed up a Seleucid light cavalry unit, which in turn was defeated by yet another Seleucid cav unit. However, this one strayed to close to the Indian lines and was torn apart by archery fire. The remaining Indian cav

units were still having problems moving up as the Seleucid skirmish cav kept driving them back, then running away!

Both sides were still having problems getting their larger and more heavier formations up to the front lines. The Seleucids in particular just could not coordinate their actions on the left where they had a decisive edge in cavalry.

By turn five both sides were about ready for the big battle in the center. Both flanks were still in doubt for both sides, but they would have very little impact on the main event that was shaping up in the center. So far, the masses of Indians were not able to make their numbers felt, but their average cavalry was proving to be...well, average! The next turn is when things really got going.
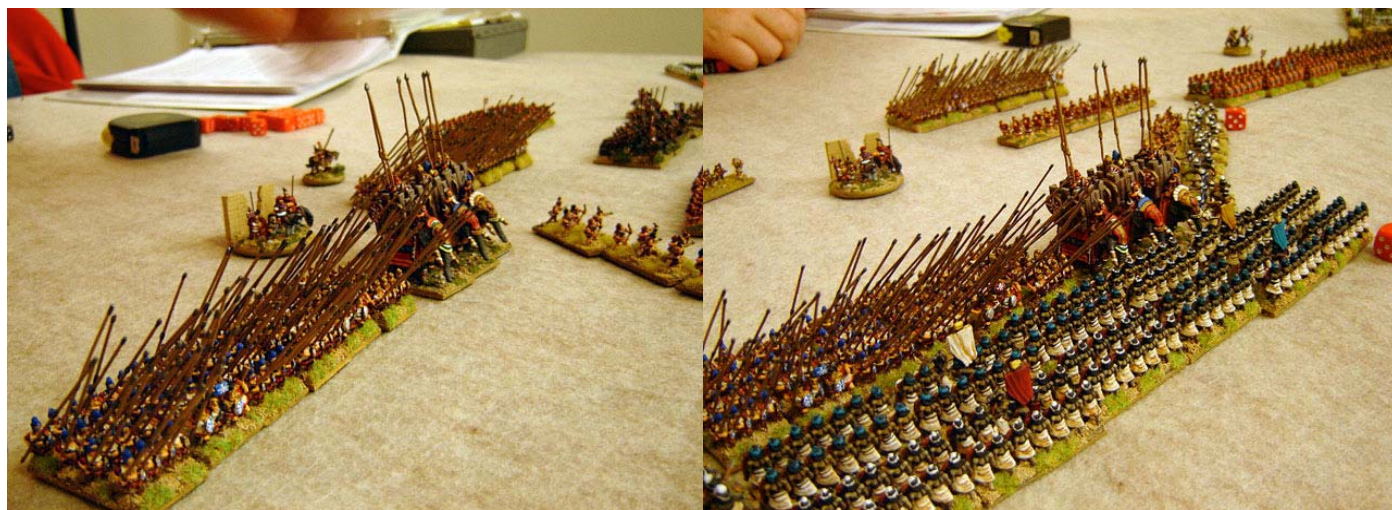
On the Seleucid left the Guard cavalry and cataphracts got into the fighting, causing serious damage, but took some back when the elephants on that flank charged them. Both sides had skirmishers, light infantry, and archers on that flank that added to the carnage. When all was said and done, the Seleucid heavy cavalry was wrecked, but the Indians had suffered severely as well.

On the Indian left the situation was a stalemate. The Indians had lost two cav units and the chariots, but the Seleucid light cavalry was not strong enough to force the issue. This left the center and after turns of maneuvering the decisive part of the battle began.

The pike phalanxes crashed into the Indian infantry brigades with a unit of elephants attached. The Indians recoiled, then counterattacked with more brigades!

Both sides watched the cream of their army disintegrate as the pikes did tremendous damage, but on a few critical pursuits failed to finish off Indian units which charged back and hit the pikes hard. The Indians were able to flank one of the phalanx units and rolled it up, creating a serous problem for the Seleucids. The Seleucid elephant unit charged in, obliterating the first Indian unit contacted, but running into a wall with the second one behind it.

The battle seesawed back and forth for several turns until the Seleucids finally broke. The Indians were on the verge of breaking as well and it went down to the last few die rolls of the tenth turn! The Indian army had taken a fearful beating, but emerged victorious.

The Indian army in WMA is definitely one of the more interesting armies we've played. You have numbers and I mean you have a lot of stuff! If I had any energy left after painting up the hordes I've already finished I could have painted and substituted several more infantry units for one of the elephant units and had an even larger horde! The advantages are a large number of archers, elephants, and did I mention numbers? The problems are the cavalry are very average, the infantry are unarmored and average, and it's tough to get everything moving.

When designing the Seleucid force you have so many options that it's difficult to create a balanced force. The pikes did their job, but I could have replaced the elephant unit with more cavalry and tried to win that way.

Overall, it was a very fun and exciting game that looked as great as it played!

Glossy Rules=Good Rules?   Editorial
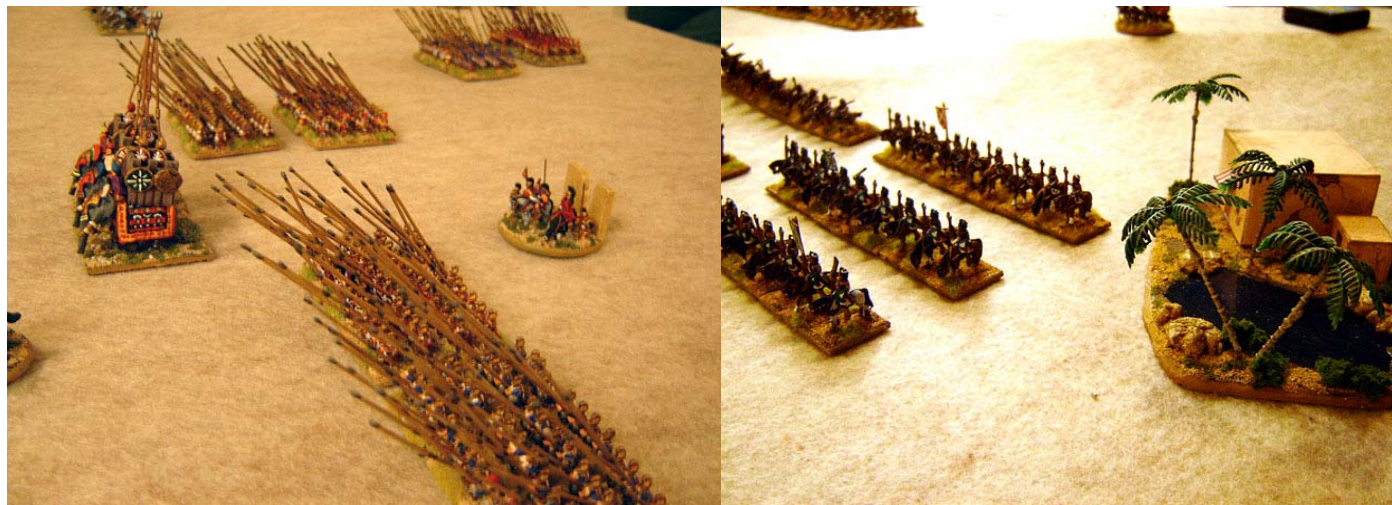
The past year has definitely seen a change in how rules are produced for the miniatures hobby. With the advent of new rules such as LaSalle, Black Powder, Napoleon, and more, the eternal argument over whether glossy, high production values or bare basics rules writing is best has taken center stage yet again.

This is nothing new and it has been going on for quite some time. When I began gaming back in the mid 70's there were a lot of rules sets around, but the production values compared to today's sets are almost primitive. Rules like the first edition of Harpoon, the Newbury rules, WRG, and more were nothing more than pages of text in magazine/booklet form with a cardboard cover that had little to no artwork on it. Inside were few, if any diagrams, pages and pages of endless text, and if you were lucky maybe a playsheet with the combat tables and movement charts on it.

Now this may come as a shock to today's gamer, but yes, we survived this and actually played games with these rules! There were some good ideas and some not so good ideas in the rules, but like it or not, many of those rules provided the basis for what the hobby is today. I think the changes came when first Heritage put out its Knights & Magic boxed set, then the first Johnny Reb rules, then the Complete Brigadier. Here were rules sets in boxed format, with multiple books inside with diagrams and even pictures. At that time it didn't seem that revolutionary, but it set the standard and soon other companies followed.

Then a company called Games Workshop got into the act. They were already getting things going with their White Dwarf magazine and Warhammer rules, but the original Warhammer 40K Rogue Trader book opened the floodgates. Here was a hardbound book with a ton of artwork, rules, ideas, and a lot more. Naturally, it took off like wild fire and soon followed the Adeptus Titanicus boxed set, supplements, and on and on. This was the new standard and although other rules sets kept coming out, the trend had been broken and only the ones with high production values sold well. You could have come up with a clever set of sci-fi skirmish rules that was better than WH40K, but if it was printed in a WRG style booklet then you would be lucky to sell 1/100th(and this is being generous!) what WH40K was.
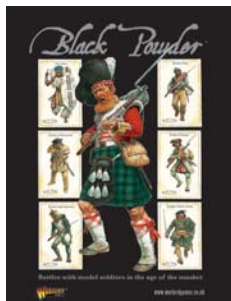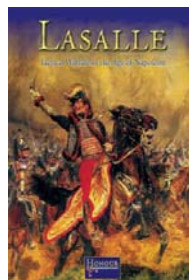
This is at the point where the arguments about rules quality really began in earnest. Sure, there had been arguments in gaming magazines for a decade or so about what was in the rules, but never about if the production values made the rules better. This divided the gaming community into basically three camps. The first who will not buy anything that has glossy, high production values, but instead prefer the older style rules. The second group who will buy almost anything shiny and new on sight, and finally the third group who will buy whatever set of rules they need for a period. Of these, the first group is definitely the smallest and the second is the largest as obviously someone is buying these sets of rules!

But the question remains, are we getting the rules we want or a nicely produced book that has some good ideas and lots of nice pictures? With some sets of rules approaching the $55-60 per copy level, this is an appropriate question. Are you paying for eye candy or content quality? Does the production quality and the quality of the rules go hand in hand? I think that in some cases there have been very good sets of rules that have come out lately and some that have not been so good. Let's take a look at a few.

The first example of a set that has not matched production values with quality of rules writing is Napoleon by Foundry. Launched with great fanfare, it is a well produced, slick presentation with lots of things for the gamer to look at. However, that's about where it ends in regards to how the rules were written. Numerous proofreading errors, rules that don't make much sense, and even people who support them have their problems with the rules. The verdict is almost unanimous that it is a beautiful set of rules, but not very good for a game.

The next few would be the Blitzkrieg Commander series of rules which includes a modern as well as a sci-fi based set using the same game system. Again, here is a set of rules that is well produced, has plenty of pictures, army lists for almost everything under the sun, and if you know how to play BKC, then the others are pretty easy to get into. Here the publication quality works, basically because the rules are playable. Now you may not like the rules, the scale, or how command & control is presented, but many do and the system has been successful.

So far we have one that didn't succeed, one that did and here's one that the jury is still out on. That would be Black Powder from Warlord. It is definitely one of, if not the most beautiful rulebooks that has ever been made. Hardbound and with numerous color pictures, it is gaming eye candy at its best. The rules, however, are written in a style that is friendly to some and condescending to others. The game play to some is fun and exciting, while others find it mindless and too generic.

So, what does the quality of the rules have to do with sales? Apparently not much. All three systems had brisk sales, which to my mind proves that gamers are at a stage where they'll buy pretty much anything. If Black Powder or Napoleon were printed in just B&W text with tan colored cardboard covers, would they have sold more than 150 copies? Probably not. Instead, we get a lot of new rules sets that are all around $40-50 each and are bombarded by those who bought the rules on forums about how great they are, even before anyone has played them! Gamers need to look carefully before buying, maybe even playing a game or two to see if they are any good. In my opinion it's the only way to keep these publishers and authors honest to make sure that proofreading and extensive playtesting have been done. If not, we have more of this to look forward to.

Victrix French 1807-1812   Product Review
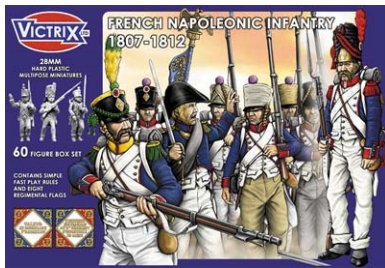
Our gaming group has been playing Sharp Practice for awhile now and we at first used 28mm lead figs. However, with the advent of the various plastic boxed sets we now have multiple units of the Perrys and Victrix. I've owned armies made of plastic throughout my wargaming hobby life, including an Airfix ACW army and plenty of WW2 forces from Matchbox, Airfix, and Atlantic, so I'm familiar with the problems/advantages of plastic armies.

I decided to try a box of Victrix French for 1807-1812 to add to our forces for the 1812-1814 era that we've been playing scenarios for. You can get a box of Victrix for anywhere between $32-40, depending upon the supplier.

You get a pretty good sized box with a lot of stuff in it which makes it a pretty good value. The box has enough parts to make 60 28mm figures, plus instructions,

a set of wargame rules, and several flags. There is also a painting guide on the box and along with the cover it should give even those not well versed in the period a good idea about how to paint the figures. All in all, it's pretty hard to complain about the price! The wargame rules are too basic and I doubt that anyone would play them except if you had no concept about Napoleonic gaming.

You get a wide variety of heads, arms, legs, plus backpacks and torsos/legs. While you can make 60 figures, you are limited in what kind of figures you can make. For example, you get around a dozen or so elite troops, but you could not make an entire box of grenadiers or voltigeurs as you simply don't have enough of the right parts. You also need to pay attention to the finer points in the instructions about which parts (arms and legs) will produce certain figures. Although you don't have to follow this and can kit bash, it may save you some time in fitting if you're doing large numbers.

On the positive side these are hard

plastic figures and go together with few problems. Once primed they take paint well and when finished they look just as good as many metal figures. The figures have a slender look and feel to them, which is what you usually get with plastics and models. There are no rifle straps that would scale out to a yard wide or rifles the size of telephone poles! The faces come out well with standard ink/shading techniques and when finished they look good in unit sized formations.

You get plenty of line figures, several officers, elite troops, drummers, and even heads with bearskins, so there's plenty of options for using the figures to make almost any kind of force for any rules system. I also liked the separate backpacks as it made painting the straps on the figures and packs much easier.

Now, time for the final judgment and I'm torn on this one. Victrix figures are a good value for the money and you get plenty of stuff in the box, so no complaints there. The figures paint up well, look good on the tabletop, and hold their own against comparable metal figures in terms of size, proportions, quality, etc., but are definitely lighter. My big issue was with the assembly time. Hunting for the right arms, heads, etc., then gluing everything took time, at least double or triple the time to prep metal figs. When doing my Russian battalion of the same size (using OG figs) I was painting figs way before even having half of these assembled! Overall, good figures and options, but the assembly is not going to be for everyone.

We've been playing Age of Eagles since it began as a playtest set of rules a long time ago. However, we have never tried anything for the Peninsula, but now that we have some British forces it was time to try out this interesting part of the Napoleonic Wars.

The scenario was loosely based upon some of the delaying actions outside of Corunna during the Peninsula campaigns. I say loosely because we set the game up in a hurry and were short several villages, streams, and needed more rough terrain! We did the best with what we had at the time, but it did show us that if we're going to be playing a lot more actions in Spain then we needed to invest in more rough terrain! The forces were from an actual order of battle, but we needed to make some changes to the terrain.

The French force consisted of the equivalent of three infantry divisions, a few batteries of artillery, and three cavalry brigades. The British force had several brigades of infantry in the front line, with a few in reserve or moving up to the front. There was only one battery of artillery and no cavalry. The British needed to hold until nightfall, then fall back down the road to Corunna and board the waiting ships to achieve a victory.

Although the British brigades were smaller than their French counterparts and lacking cavalry along with artillery, their defense was helped by the rough terrain. Anything off the roads for artillery and cavalry was treated as rough (basically 1/3 of their movement), so they wouldn't be able to go anywhere quickly.

The French led off the attack by trying to get the cavalry to go off road, which didn't end well. Both brigades were disordered and barely moved. The infantry, however, moved quickly to the attack, trying to get through the terrain as best they could and since it was Reserve movement they were able to get going a little easier. The British, meanwhile, spent most of the first few turns trying to get the reserves up and trying to determine where the main French attack would hit.

The French struggled across the first river and started to move towards the British line. One of the British brigades counterattacked, driving the French back to the other side of the small river, but they in turn were forced back by numbers. Across the line a number of fire-fights broke out with the French taking the worst of it at this point. The British were still moving up forces and by the end of the fourth turn all reserves had been committed to holding a line across the width of the board. The lone British artillery battery had been manhandled into position on the corner of a hill and started to shell the approaching French.

The French attack up the road on the French right ran into stiff opposition and a number of charges were repulsed. Still, the British were giving ground and trying to make it until nightfall where they could fall back to the ships. In the center the French launched several more attacks that produced a stalemate. The French had numbers though, and were gradually wearing down the smaller British brigades. On the French left the infantry were in position to begin a series of attack to try to flank the British position on the main hill. The artillery was finally deployed and even though the cavalry were still far behind the French were ready to make the final push.

The British had moved everyone up into good defensive positions, but were short in artillery and manpower. The rough terrain was helping, but the disparity in numbers was beginning to show. There were several brigades that were almost spent and with no artillery to break up the French attacks, the British position was looking as if it was in big trouble.

The French launched a second series of attacks on the British left, but were again repulsed. The British, however, had to fall back again to shorten the line and not get caught too far ahead of the remaining brigades. In the center two British brigades were spent and fell back to a more defensible position near the center of the hill. The French finally cracked the defensive position where the British had formed a "v" on the hillside and the British retreated again. By now the entire hill was being defended by brigades that were either at or near half strength.

On the British right the French had tried to flank the hill defenses, but ran into a British brigade that had moved there just in time. It held for a few turns, but then had to fall back where it joined up with the artillery battery. The reserve British brigade, which had severe diffi-culty moving up got to the front just in time to prevent the French from coming up the back side of the hill. It fired a volley then charged, driving back the French brigade on that flank. At this point the British were halfway towards their goal of lasting until darkness. They were beaten up, but had inflicted a number of casualties on the French as well.

Just then, however, things took a turn for the worse. The French got back to back turns and rolled very well on their attacks, leaving several British brigades disordered. The French launched a series of bayonet attacks that shattered the Brit-ish line. The artillery battery was overrun and there were no reserves to stop the breakthrough. In the center the two bri-gades there turned and routed, leaving the hill in the possession of the French. Only on the British left was there still deter-mined resistance where the infantry bri-gade on that side was still fresh and fal-ling back in good order.

The British forces were beaten and would have to stream back to Corunna to save what they could. With several hours until darkness it was determined that the French would take the town and the Brit-ish would have suffered a serious defeat.

Overall, it was a good game for our first experience of the fighting in Spain. We definitely need to improve our selec-tion of terrain for the area, so that will begin almost immediately. I also think that the rough and impassable areas need to be marked better as it was a little un-clear what was what. Still, it was tense and different type of game than what we usually play using Age of Eagles. There are already plans to do more battles in the Peninsula and players are already making plans to enlarge their forces.

Memoirs of a Miniature & Board Wargamer Pt. 14

Terrain: Then & Now

"Back in the Day" gaming terrain left a lot to be desired. I think most of us in the 70's and early 80's used one of these four things; a sheet of plywood painted green, a ping pong table, a sheet of green felt, or the old bright green railroad grass paper. On top of these surfaces we would use masking tape for roads, hills were usually books underneath the mat/felt sheet, and forests were made of lichen. Yes, doesn't sound too exciting and compared to today's games featured in many magazines it was very primitive.

An example of the beautiful terrain pieces done by ESLO.

Although there were several building manufacturers there wasn't a great selection. Many of the best layouts used HO or N scale train buildings, even though they weren't really in scale. Other firms had offerings, but they ranged from very good to what could only be called a lump of plaster! There were no color catalogs, no internet, etc., so you had to pay your money and take your chances. After several disastrous orders I started to scratch build most of my stuff.

This is not to say that we didn't have fun gaming. Hundreds of battles were fought over this kind of terrain and because no one really knew better, it was just accepted. Magazines were far and few between, with most of the pictures in black and white, so if you were looking for inspiration to improve your terrain you needed to look at railroad modeling magazines.

In my opinion this all changed in the mid-80s because of two things. The first was the new magazine Miniature Wargames. Here were color pictures of beautifully laid out games and articles on building terrain, which began to show gamers that you did not have to accept green felt mats with lichen as forests and masking tape for roads. The second item was the terrain sets sold by a company called Geo-Hex. Now anyone with around $100 could make realistic battlefields with sloped hills and rivers. Yes, setting it up wasn't easy and most of us

went to something else after awhile of trying to find the right piece to fit into the layout! After that Integral Terrain came out with their terrain squares and what had been a wall between having so-so terrain and something that looked at least like an attempt to do a model railroading layout was shattered forever.

What these products did, however, was raise the bar in a big way. All of a sudden, the last thing you wanted to be caught having was a green painted table with lichen as forest! From this point forward it was a race to see who could do the best terrain, how to make it as realistic as possible, and most important of all, it was now common to spend money on terrain, not just figures.

As with any new development in the hobby, many gamers had to be drug kicking and screaming into this new era. Thousands of gamers (and surprisingly there are still quite a few around today) refused to buy terrain and concentrated all of their efforts on figs and rules. However, the cycle had been broken and there was no way the hobby was going backwards. From this point forward everything was about doing more with terrain, trying to create famous battles or buildings, and basically trying to do whatever it took to improve your gaming experience through better terrain.

It was a slow progression and certainly from the mid 80's to the late 90s there were still two separate camps in dealing with terrain. The first was to stick with the old ways and I still remember playing in games or watching games at the local store where there was hardly even a tree on the board! Gamers just lined up figs and started playing!

Another company with some very impressive terrain is Grand Manner.

The second camp was creating forests with Woodland Scenics materials, buying Architectural Heritage buildings, Scenic Effects roads, and doing whatever possible to improve the visual appeal of their games.

Today you rarely see truly awful looking game boards. Usually there are a few buildings, some trees, a few roads or a river, and maybe even an entrenchment or two. The games are more often than not set up on some kind of terrain mat or board modules. True, every so often you'll see some convention pictures where you say to yourself, "Wow, that looks bad!". Certainly there can be no excuse for not being able to find terrain through a variety of sources to make your game look even halfway decent.

In fact, terrain has progressed to the point where companies are really catering for those who have deep pockets. Firms like ESLO and Grand Manner produce some spectacular terrain pieces, but they're not cheap either. Other firms offer pre-painted buildings and still others, such as Miniature World Maker offer a huge variety of pre-painted hills, roads, rivers, and more. If you have the money you can just order what you need, open the box, and then set up terrain for a good looking game! The possibilities are truly endless in today's hobby.

If you don't have a lot of money then there are still quite a few options for you. You can use Woodland Scenics materials and mount the trees on balsa or plywood for forests. You can use foam core for buildings (there's quite a few articles and templates for this), and several companies have quite inexpensive buildings for sale such as JR Miniatures and Crescent Root Studio. Also, when it comes to terrain it's best to build up your collection slowly, adding a few pieces here and there. That's how I've accumulated terrain for four different scales and about twenty different periods!

Blast From The Past Pt. 13: Early Sci-Fi Gaming

Before the advent of games like Full Thrust, Warhammer 40K, Starfleet Battles, and more, there were many other games in the science fiction genre. Yes, hard to believe, but this part of the hobby did exist prior to Games Workshop coming along!

Many gamers, including myself, are easily attracted to sci-fi miniatures gaming. For one, the idea of starships, X-Wings, ground battles with tanks armed with lasers, and so on can easily suck in almost anyone. The miniatures usually look cool, everything is pretty easy to paint, and there's always a large section of any club or group that are willing to participate.

Most of the sci-fi gaming during the 70s and early 80s revolved around the role-playing game Traveller, which was the sci-fi answer to D&D. Many of us played Traveller, but also wanted to do miniatures games. Well, at this time your choices were pretty limited and it would be this way for quite some time, leading up to the mid-90s.

The first option which was mentioned in the last issue was Starguard for ground combat. There were several races, the rules were great for group play, and almost everyone used the miniatures for something, even if you didn't like the rules. At this time you didn't have the scale creep that you do today, so the 25mm figs were true 25s and look really small next to today's much large figures.

Ral Partha had a great series of 15 and 25mm figs along with several other manufacturers, although the selection was limited. One industrious gamer in our group wrote a set of sci-fi rules and we did all kinds of raids, rear guard actions on alien worlds, and then he produced a 25mm ship with corridors, rooms, etc.,

for boarding actions. I still remember those years for some really great sci-fi games. I think he borrowed heavily from D&D and Gamma World, but the rules were easy to use and produced some great games.

Of course, who can forget Superior Miniatures and their large selection of starships and ground vehicles. There were several races included in the rules and they made every kind of miniature for these races, ranging from destroyers to giant battleships. I played the game a few times and while I thought it was a little too simple, I can still remember gamers dropping a lot of money on these minis and coming to play massive games on Saturdays at the local stores. At the time the larger ships cost around $10-15, which back in the 70s was a lot of money for a miniature!

Then there was the Star Fleet Battle Manual by Lou Zocchi. Yes, Starfleet Battles was not the first Star Trek miniatures game! There were only a few ships available, but we had a blast playing this game for years. In fact, one group in the area used to use the ERTL/AMT plastic ship kits and fight their battles at a local park! It was definitely a lot of fun and it would eventually lead us into years of playing Starfleet Battles.

Of course, this was also the boardgame era and there were many sci-fi offerings. You had the Dwarfstar series of games from Heritage, several of which are now free to download. Metagaming was in full swing with the outstanding Ogre and GEV games. They also produced two sci-fi classics in Stellar Conquest and Godsfire. Both of these games took a major commitment in time, but although they were complex and took a lot of paperwork, they were fun to play with a group. SPI created a magazine series called Ares which had a game in every

issue, plus they also did full sized games such as Battlefleet Mars and Star Soldier, still two of the most complex sci-fi games you'll ever play.

GDW did Imperium, Snapshot, and a bunch of boxed games for their Traveller series which were also stand alone games for those not into the series. Although sci-fi gaming was not yet mainstream, there were some quality offerings, although by today's standards the graphics, covers, sculpting, etc., are dated. Still, if you wanted to do some sci-fi gaming you did have choices.

There were two big differences from sci-fi gaming back then to what we have today. The first is that you really had to use your imagination back then. There were no huge rulebooks, supplements, web sites, etc., with new figs constantly coming out. You sometimes had a small range of figs, had to create some terrain, a back story, then design scenarios. This is a far cry from today where everything is done for most gamers and battles are by points. The second is that gamers took these games pretty seriously. By that I mean that they spent time on painting, discussing rules, how to improve the game, and designing scenarios. Contrast that to today where a lot of sci-fi gaming is done with a wink and a nod, then gamers go out and buy the next big killer item to get even with the army they just lost to.

Now, before everyone gets angry at me, I'm not saying that the old sci-fi gaming was any better, just that it was different than today's. I still remember the paperwork that went with a lot of sci-fi gaming back then and I'm not sure even I can go along with that today!

Of course, sci-fi gaming was forever changed when the Warhammer Rogue trader rules were released. What started out as a hard-core sci-fi ground combat system for mainly adult gamers ended up as an endless set of ever expanding rules and figures. Still, if you get a chance, seek out some of these older games as many of them had some great ideas.

Modern air combat gaming is one of those topics with gamers where you either love it or hate it and so it is with our group. On this particular night we had everyone who likes it, or who will play it at least! We decided to do a Phantoms Intruders scenario with a United States Navy attack on a bridge in North Vietnam.

For those not familiar with the game, Phantoms is a set of modern air combat miniatures rules based off of the Mustangs board game by Avalon Hill. Each turn consists of ten impulses and each jet moves during various impulses according to its current speed. Aircraft have a choice of eight different maneuvers that are placed in front of the aircraft, then when the miniature reaches the marker, they perform that maneuver and take a speed loss, if any. We invert our markers to make it more challenging and to keep both sides guessing. Spotting, radar locks, missile combat, etc., are usually done with each player rolling 1D10 and

comparing the results. Not as complex as Air Superiority or The Speed of Heat, but it lets a group play a modern jet combat game with multiple jets in a reasonable amount of time.

The USN side had two F-4Bs on MIGCAP positioned near the center of the board. The main strike package consisted of two A-4s and two A-7s escorted by two F-8s that entered from a corner of the board. The NVAF side consisted of two Mig-21s which were in a head on position to the F-4s, with two Mig-19s on the F-4s 3 o'clock position, and two Mig-17s entering near the end of the board, but close by the USN strike package. There were also two Fire Can radars near the bridge with four AAA batteries of varying caliber.

The USN plan was to break up the A-4s and A-7s, with the A-4s moving north of the bridge, then cut across and dive bomb it while the A-7s went after some of the AAA positions. The F-8s would try to keep any NAVF threat busy while the strikers went after the bridge. The NVAF were simply going to make things as difficult as possible for the USN players!

The F-4s zoomed past the Mig-21s, clearly identifying them, which was one of the rules of engagement, and then reversed to get back into firing position. The Mig-21s split and reversed back, trying to stay close to the F-4s to prevent their launching of radar guided Sparrows.
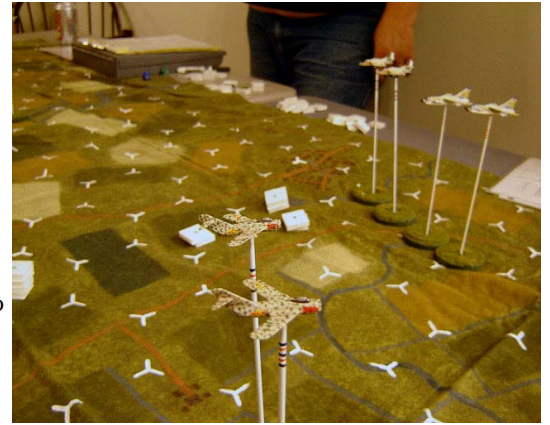
The Mig-19s continued straight, hoping that the F-4s would cut across their path, but they didn't. The Mig-17s moved to position themselves in front of the strike force3, but the strike force split into two groups to confuse the defenders.

With their reversal the F-4s had a clear view of the approaching Mig-17s and let loose a volley of Sparrows which missed. The Mig-17s now changed directions to get out of the radar envelope, but not before a second Sparrow downed one of the Mig-17s. One of the Mig-21s got off a cannon shot on the F-4s, but missed and another tried an Atoll attack, but the missile failed to ignite and fell off the rail!

The F-4s continued to maneuver to bring more targets into their Sparrow envelope, but after another series of misses and some sharp maneuvering by the Migs, the F-4s weren't getting too many chances. However, the Mig-19s, which had been quietly skirting the edge of the battle, now did a series of tight
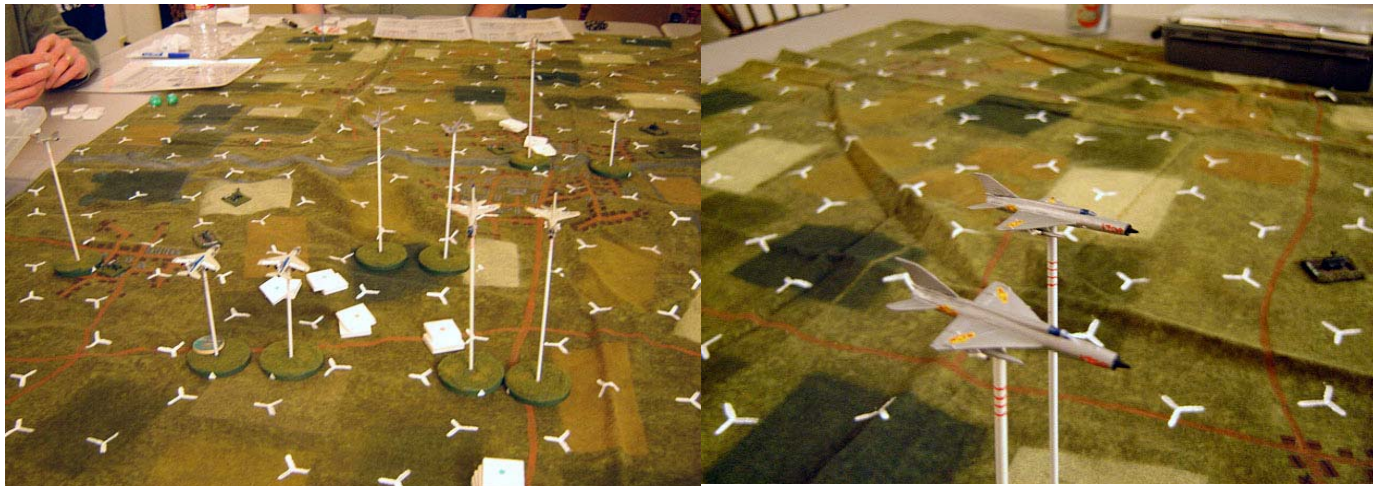
turns and one came up behind an F-4 and shot it down.

The strike force now came into action. The A-7s had split off and accelerated into the attack, trying to knock out some of the AAA in one of the approach areas. The A-4s maneuvered to make a run in on the bridge while the F-8s streaked into the melee overhead. The F-8s broke up the Mig groups as now they had to worry about the F-4s and the F-8s. One of the Mig-21s in trying to escape the F-8s put itself squarely in front of an F-4 which promptly shot it down.

The A-7s began taking AAA fire from the two emplacements show in the picture on the lower right. The Fire Can had locked one of them up and it began taking a few hits. The A-7s responded with CBUs, which knocked out one of the AAA batteries and the Fire Can, leaving the S-60 AAA battery on manual targeting, meaning that its chance of hitting a fast moving jet wasn't going to be good.

The A-4s now began their run into the target in the face of radar directed AAA and the first A-4 went down in a ball of fire from several direct hits. The second A-4, however, dive bombed the bridge and put a string of Mk. 82s right on target, heavily damaging the bridge. The remaining A-4 now at tree level zoomed out of the target area and the AAA envelope.

In the melee overhead both sides maneuvered to get shots, but few were available. Both sides were turning violently, but the shots that were taken were low odds and they all missed. The A-7s turned tightly and began their run on the bridge, taking out one of the AAA batteries with their remaining cluster bombs. After surviving the AAA fire they dropped their remaining ordnance on the damaged bridge, knocking it down and for all intensive purposes ending the game.

Both sides could claim victory. The USN players had knocked down two Migs, destroyed the bridge, plus took out one Fire Can and two AAA batteries. The NVAF players had knocked down one F-4 and one A-4, which for them was a good day! It was joked that the NVAF players would actually be allowed to sleep inside that night! They still wouldn't get pillows, just smooth stones to sleep on as there is a big difference between being rewarded and being pampered!
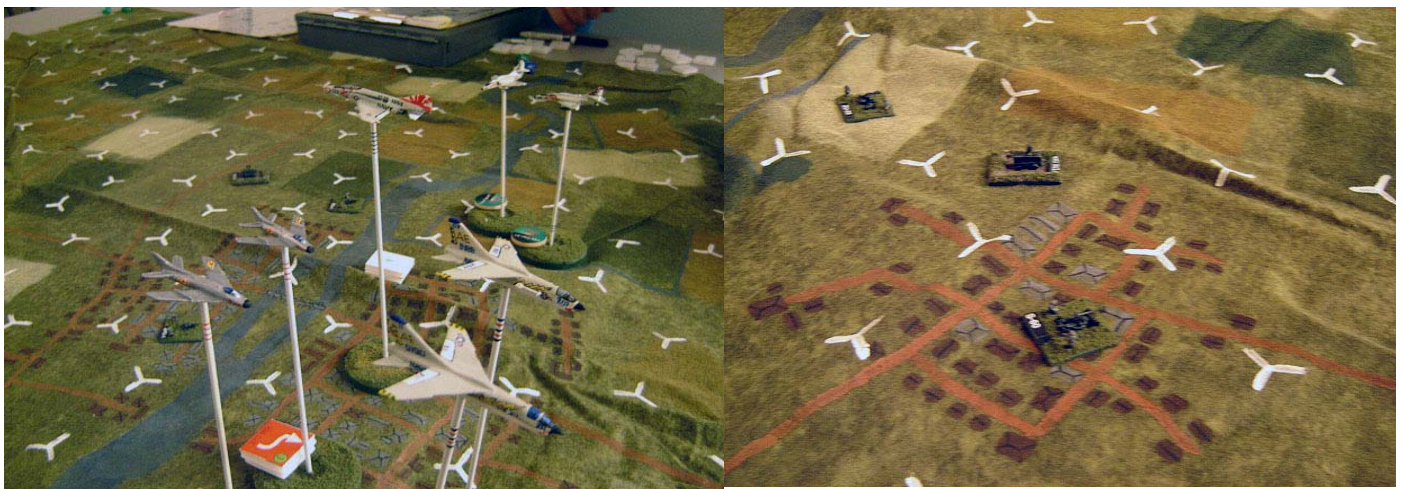
Even though not all of us have a copy of Blitzkrieg Commander 2 yet, we decided to give it a try. After going over the changes, especially to the army lists, we set up a quick scenario and got going on the game. We discovered more changes as we played and referred back to the rulebook several times, but overall there wasn't anything so radical that we had problems.

The scenario was that a recent German counterattack in the Normandy area has left the defenses in other German held sectors weaker. A Polish armored battalion has punched a hole in the German lines and has seized a vital hill overlooking a road junction. The remaining Polish forces are moving up to reinforce the hill while more British forces are moving into the area to exploit the success. Meanwhile, the Germans have assembled a kampfgruppe and are going to launch a counterattack to retake the hill.

The Allied players began with two companies of Shermans, including two Fireflys and one commander on the hill next to the road junction. The remaining company would enter the board near the village on Turn 1 while a British battlegroup with one battalion of Cromwells and one mechanized infantry battalion would enter from the Allied rear on Turn 3.

The Germans would have a panzergrenadier battalion in halftracks, a PZIVH company, a company of Panthers, one Tiger unit, one 88mm AT unit, a company of Stug IIIs, and various other AT units scattered throughout the command. Both sides had artillery support available.

The German plan was to pin down the Shermans on the hill with the heavy German armor, then seize the village with the panzergrenadiers and their Stug support. They could then block the British reinforcements until the hill defenders were neutralized. Once the German armor was on the hill, the British would have a very tough time of it trying to get it back as they would need to cross plenty of open ground on the other side of the hill.

The German offensive didn't open up too well, with most commands only getting to move once. This was offset by the Polish armor only getting one volley which didn't do any damage. On the second turn the panzergrenadiers and their support units were able to make progress towards the town while the main German armored forces were still moving towards the hill. The Panthers began a duel with the Fireflys

on the hill and the rest of the Shermans which lasted for quite some time. There was a blunder, however, which had serious consequences for the German side and that was the PZIVH commander had his command capability reduced to a 6, which was catastrophic.

The Poles responded by knocking out a Stug and one of the PZIVs. The next turn saw the Stugs supporting the panzergrenadiers reach the vital crossroads first while the 88mm battery deployed to cover the road. The panzergrenadiers also began to maneuver to seize the town.

The remaining Polish elements entered the board and immediately began to engage the Germans who were pushing

forward near the village. The reinforcing British also entered the board and through some spectacular die rolling got some Cromwells near the crossroads on their first turn of entry! The stage was now set for the main slugfest between the Cromwells and the Germans at the crossroads.

Back at the hill the Germans were grinding forward ever so slowly. For every Sherman they knocked out they lost a PZIVH, Stug, or Panther in return. The Poles were beginning to look as if they would break shortly, especially if the Germans could finish off the Cromwells quickly, then flank the hill.

The reinforcing Polish units were having some success, knocking out the 88mm AT battery and sweeping around the German panzergrenadiers. The Cromwells deployed to engage the Stugs and retake the crossroads. The first exchanges of fire were not in the Allies favor and it looked as if the Germans would hang on.

The British mech infantry were beginning to arrive in force and dismounted to carry their attack into the woods near the now vital crossroads. The Stugs and panzergrenadiers were stubbornly giving ground, knocking out several Cromwells and getting good die rolls on their saving throws.

Meanwhile, the Germans were still pressing their attack at the hill while the Poles desperately tried to hold their ground. The Polish armor battalion had lost close to 50% of their strength, but the Germans could not get more than one command a turn per unit and every time they looked like they would break through they failed a roll to push through a gap.

At the crossroads a wild melee ensued with both sides using AT guns, infantry close assaults, and armor. The contest went on for several turns and when the smoke cleared the British emerged victo-rious, holding the crossroads and checking the German attack, despite horrific casualties on both sides.

With the Germans halted at the crossroads, they would be unable to flank the hill as the German attack in that area also ran out of gas. The Allies were declared the winner of the game even though they had taken major casualties, but they held the hill in the end.

Another great game using the BKC 2 rules. Both sides had plenty of opportunities and the new blunder charts are deadly as two results hampered the German attack on the hill. The Germans probably should have just bypassed the hill in hindsight and pressed on to flank the defenders. Overall, we liked the new BKC 2 rules and will next use them on the Eastern Front.

A Most Dangerous Time by MMP   Game Review

My last several games that I've bought from MMP have turned out to be pretty good. This includes Monty's Gamble, Shifting Sands, Storm Over Stalingrad, and Warriors of God. I had been interested in A Most Dangerous Time (AMDT) since I saw it on the Pre-Order page and since I have sizeable Samurai forces, it was a natural choice for me.

The components are hit and miss. The map is 22 x 34, printed on glossy paper, and is beautiful. There are numerous spaces, castles, and temples marked on the map along with holding boxes, turn tracks, etc., so the design was well laid out. The counters are also very nice and if you ignore the several that are missing a blood stain (explained later) there's not much to complain about. Most counters are soldiers (units of troops) along with leaders (named samurai and daimyos) that are color coded for the various clans. On the backs of most counters are the "betrayed" versions which usually have a blood stain to represent that they've switched sides.

Now we come to the two components that I have problems with. First, the cards are well done and look good. However, you get a small stack of cards that have the biographies of the samurai that were in this campaign. Is that really necessary? Couldn't there just have been section in the rules? Also, you don't get player's reference cards with the rules, combat modifiers, etc., but instead you get two sets of eight cards that have all of that stuff on them. They are very hard to see, the font is too small, and you have to shuffle through them to find what you are looking for. Bad idea. Then there's the rulebook where something must have got lost in the translation (it was designed in Japan and brought over here by MMP).

It's not that the rules are hard or long, it's just trying to wrap your head around what's happening on the board. A few sections, particularly on the betrayal of soldiers/leaders and the re-

grouping for the Ikko-Ikki will leave you staring at the rules for quite some time. Then you find out in the errata that the modifiers for the betrayal and combat in the rules are wrong, leaving yourself wondering how people could have been playing the game until this was fixed!

Now once you actually get to the game it is pretty good. The sub title of Japan in Chaos is correct and AMDT puts the "C" in Chaos! Each turn consists of a number of impulses where a chit is drawn out of a cup. That faction then rolls for how many movement points it gets for the turn. Leaders and soldiers can move around the board, engage in combat, or besiege enemy forces. In between leaders with a diplomacy rating can try to get soldier counters to betray to their faction and cards can be played to get leaders and their forces to betray. During the end of the turn there is a regrouping phase where destroyed units and wounded leaders may come back.

At the start there is the Oda clan who is trying to unite all of Japan under one ruler and they are opposed by several other clans. The first few turns there are only a few chits in the cup, but by turn 15 there can be quite a few chits in there and this is where the action gets fast and furious. One of the things that causes so much chaos is that there is an End of Turn chit that can come out any time. Yes, this is where you either love it or hate it as it can definitely influence the flow of the game. It may not be uncommon that it comes out first in two or more consecutive turns or after only one faction has moved. It could be seen as periods of peace during the overall campaign, logistics failures, etc., but it does add a level of unpredictability not seen at this level in many games.

The other contentious area is combat and there is a lot of it in AMDT. The problem is that before combat both sides roll for initiative and if you roll high

enough you may get a round of combat where the other side doesn't get to roll against you! You may go into the battle with a large superiority in numbers, then get wiped out without doing much damage to your opponent!

As you can see, chaos is the main theme of the game and it succeeds wonderfully. You have no idea how many chits will be pulled each turn, your leaders and forces may change sides, you may enter battle and not come back with any forces, and this is happening all over the board! For some this may prove to be too much and it will lose its appeal. Randomness and luck are prevalent here and this runs contrary to what some gamers consider to be a good design. Also, although it has cards, it is not a card-driven game. By that I mean that cards are

given out for controlling Kyo or if you are the anti-Oda player, by taking spaces on the board. There is a short game that goes only 10 turns or you can play the full campaign that can go 30+ turns.

So, what's the final verdict? If you can get past the rulebook, no reference cards, fix the errata (very little errata, but the modifiers error is huge!), and get through the first few turns, I think you can have fun with this. It is liken to Kingmaker on steroids, with forces running around either putting out fires or fighting everything in their path. Units switch sides, battles change momentum, there are a huge number of strategies available to each side, and you never know what is going to happen from turn to turn. AMDT is meant to show you the chaos of Japan in this period of history and it succeeds.

Also Available

Along with Warning Order the WFHGS site has several sets of rule and campaigns that are free to download. By going to http://www.wfhgs.com/downlaods.html you can access all of this free content. Besides the popular Phantoms/Intruders jet combat rules there is a Tobruk campaign for Flames of War, the Valley of Fire colonial campaign for The Northwest Frontier, a Zulu War campaign, introductory air combat rules, and more. Below are two of the free downloads that are available from our site.

Phantoms Deluxe

Phantoms is a miniatures based set of rules for jet combat during the Vietnam era. The systems is based off of the popular Mustangs board game from Avalon Hill. Each plane has a record sheet that keeps track of fuel, engine power setting, altitude, and weapons. Playes place maneuver markers on the tabletop and when a miniature jet moves to the marker, the jet completes the maneuver chosen. This makes the game fast moving, easy to learn, and suitable for large groups or convention play.

The Phantoms Deluxe package includes the Intruders ground attack supplement that contains rules for AAA, SAMs, Wild Weasel operations, and has a mission generator with points costs. The Deluxe package also includes data cards for most jets from the 60s to the 80s. You also get the 2008 update with additional rules, aircraft data cards, scenarios, and rules for attacking modern ships.

Valley of Fire

Valley of Fire is a fictional miniatures campaign for the Northwest Frontier and although designed to be used for The Sword and the Flame it can be used with almost any set of colonial era miniatures rules. VOF features a large map, counters, and rules that cover movement, combat, sieges, and there is a simple supply system that captures the difficulty in keeping large forces supplied in this theater. Starting forces are randomized which gives the campaign high replay value.
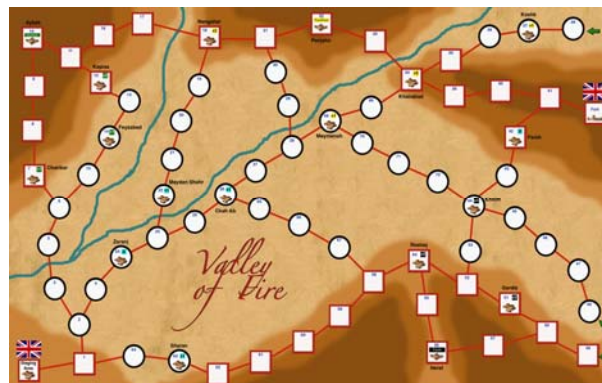
It's been awhile since we last played Sharp Practice, especially since we put so much effort into our first games of playing the system. Our collection of figs for this game expanded quickly to where we have more than enough for quite a few players. Not only that, we've expanded theaters as we now have British!

This scenario was taken from one of the Charles Grant scenario books and basically the French are trying to seize the entrance to a mountain pass in the Peninsula. The British had two infantry companies of regulars, one company of Rifles, and one squadron of dragoons. The British had their choice of set up positions and chose to deploy the two line companies in a tree line along the first ridge with the Rifles deployed in skirmish order in a group of trees on the opposite side. The dragoon squadron would remain in reserve along the road at the top of the pass entrance, ready to come down and help against the main French thrust.

The French had a choice of forces and chose three line infantry companies, a light company, and a squadron of light cavalry. The French would have the advantage of numbers, but the British had their troops in good positions. The French plan was to press the attack all along the front and try to keep the British forces occupied. Hopefully a gap would open up in the defenses, then a company could slip through, seize the pass entrance and win the game.

After getting the right cards shuffled into the deck, reviewing the special rules/cards for the British, and just trying to remember how to play again, we were ready for the first turn! The French moved out quickly, with two companies going to the left of the village and one company down the road. The remaining French forces moved up on the right flank. The French were cautious as there were British blinds (markers where British forces could possibly be) near the village. Once those were found to be decoys, the French continued with the attack.

The French spotted the British in the trees on the French left, but moved quickly to close the range rather than begin firing. The British on their cards opened up with a volley that caused a few French casualties. The French returned fire and this began a long running firefight which continued to the
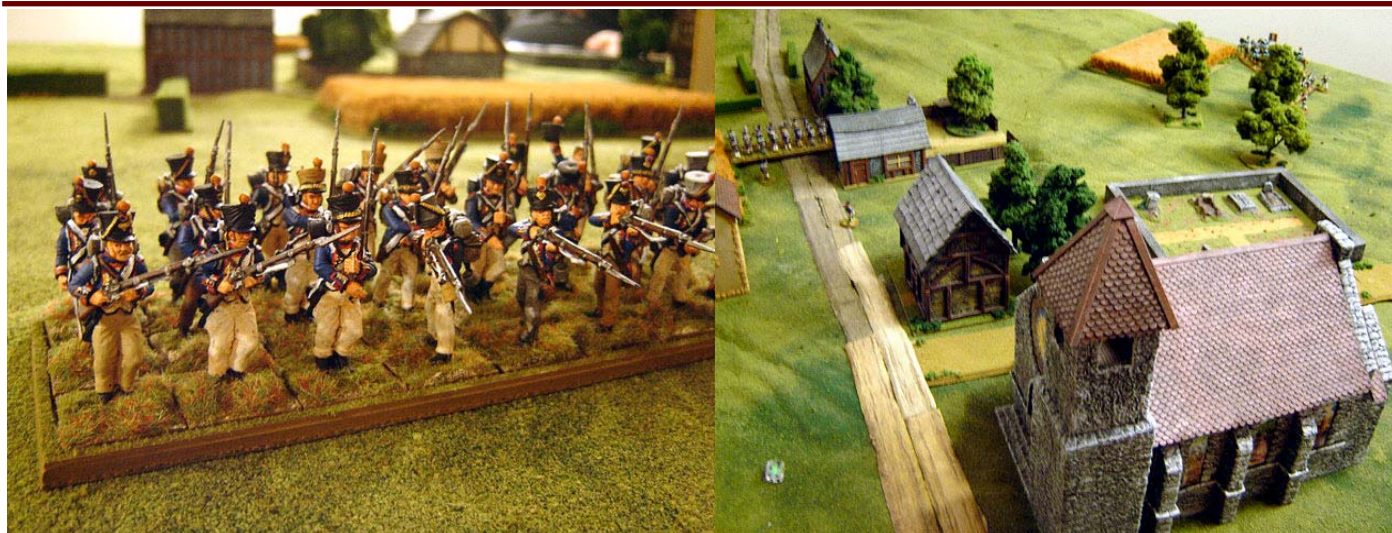
end of the game. The French company in the center moved to the edge of the village to await developments.

On the right the French light company began moving up, but was plagued by few cards and bad die rolls. This left the French light cavalry out in front and in true fashion, they decided to carry the fight to the enemy! The Rifles opened up on them while they were forming up for a charge, but they also had bad die rolls and only inflicted a few shock points. The French cavalry then charged the Rifles who were deployed in some trees and were met with a volley that caused a few casualties. The cavalry crashed into the Rifles, but the shock points and the terrain did not favor the French cavalry and in two rounds of melee they were repulsed and forced back to regroup!

The British cavalry had seen their opportunity to charge and tried to catch the French cavalry as it was forming up for the attack. However, bad movement rolls and no cards left them in the open when the French lights showed up.
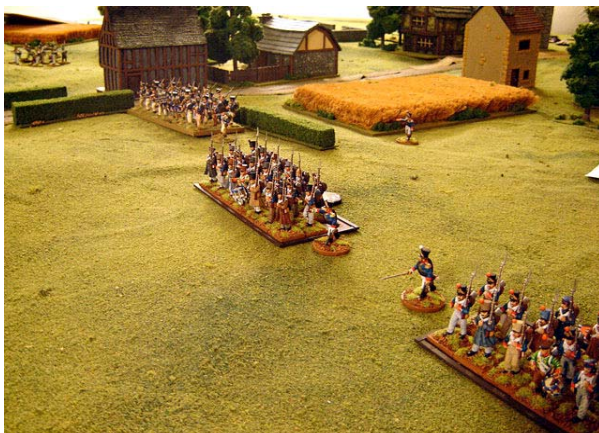
This left the British cavalry exposed and the French light company opened up with a devastating volley. The British cavalry turned away to regroup, but the French company in the center, who was at that time acting as a reserve, smartly pivoted and fired a volley into their flank, adding to the casualties and forcing the British cavalry to retire to the presence of the overall commander to rally.

Back on the other flank the French infantry were slowly being ground down in a battle of attrition. The firefight was swaying back and forth, but the French units were taking the worst of it and after several turns, one company was forced to retire.

At this point things didn't look good for the French. The British had a solid position in the tree line and were beating off the French attack there. The French cavalry had been run off and the Rifles were still holding their ground. Not only that, the French infantry company in the center had run out of ammo (random event) when they fired against the British cavalry.

This set the stage for the decisive act of the game. The Rifles so far had held their own against the French cavalry attack, the firefight with the French lights, and some skirmish fire from the French company in the center. That company was now out of ammo and the only thing left for them to do was to withdraw to get ammo (which would have ended the game) or to fix bayonets and attack.

They attacked. The charge hit the British Rifles in the tree line and rolled them up, taking the position and opening the way to the pass, thus ending the game as a French victory!

A very hard fought battle which nearly saw the British winning. We used one big man card for each company which was good and bad. The game plays much faster that way, but limits the splitting of units, activating sections, and taking off shock points. We talked this over and were still undecided after discussing it. If you give each unit two big men as the game suggests it can start to bog down after awhile and players start to lose interest. We continue to use the two Tiffin cards per deck and the turn only ends after the second one is drawn.

Overall, it was a fun scenario that showed that you can have a lot of fun by keeping things to the bare minimum for several players.

What is up with all of the bizarre threads on TMP like, "How do I game the A-Team?" or "Tell me the figs I need for a Pirates of the Caribbean vs. Jurassic Park game?". What's next, a request for melee rules for use in a Little House on the Prairie game? Have we reached the point in the hobby where there is so much stuff that gamers have run out of ideas and are now going to the extremes in an effort to find something to game? Or, has the hobby grown so big and so fast that these kinds of fringe games are to be expected?

"Back in the Day" we were generally concerned about finding figure xyz to finish an army or how to create accurate terrain for some historical battle. Today it seems as if the overriding concern is how to paint the fewest figs as possible, then come up with some weird scenario or game to use them in. You never heard of half of this stuff back in the 70s or 80s, which either means it is either a creation of to-day's gaming hobby, or there are just more online (forums, groups, etc.) outlets so that you notice it more. It does show that the hobby tent is getting pretty big to fit almost any kind of game under the sun, but it also shows the hobby is more frac-tured than ever. You use to be able to travel almost anywhere in the country and get in a game of ancients with WRG rules. Now you would be lucky to find one per-son who owns the same rules as you do, the same scale of figs, and who doesn't want to fight your Assyrians with time traveling lizard spearmen from the planet Mondo!

Remember Gordon!   Game Review

Ok, so what am I doing reviewing a game that was definitely not produced in the last few decades? For one thing, I am a huge colonial gamer and board games about colonial battles are few and far between. Second, my favorite colonial period is the Sudan, so I naturally buy almost anything gaming related for it!

Remember Gordon: The Battle for Omdurman is actually three games in one by Phoenix Enterprises. You get a map of the Omdurman area and a smaller map for the fall of Khartoum game. The counters are definitely of the old school variety, but they are functional. The rules are short, pretty concise, and there aren't too many questions that came up during play. Going over the game components and reading the rules reminded me of the GDW games back in the 70s and 80s as
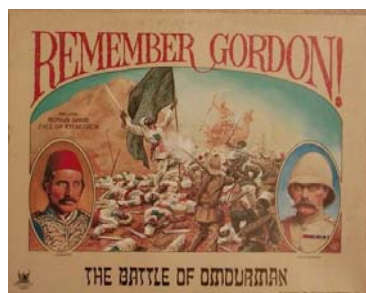
the style of almost every-thing is certainly the same.

The movement and combat systems are pretty basic, with a firing cross referencing chart for the type of troop and weapon. This produces a result that either disrupts or kills off a number of units. Simple, but very lethal and Dervish units can quickly vanish. However, if the Der-vishes get into melee they can be very deadly. I especially liked the inclusion of leader counters and the gunboats which played a prominent role in the campaign. There are also rules for forts, breaching walls, and constructing zeribas.

The bonus game is about the fall of Khartoum and is easily the worst of

the lot. It is played on a small B&W map that represents the city of Khartoum. There are a handful of defenders that are quickly overwhelmed which isn't too much fun. Neither is the Omdurman scenario where the Dervish hordes try to close the range on the Anglo-Egyptian army and basically get slaughtered. A good solitaire exercise, but nothing more.

The best option is the campaign game which starts out with Kitchener's forces entering piecemeal onto the map. Here is where the Dervish side can use several strategies to engage the Anglo-Egyptian army and there is actu-ally a chance for victory.

Overall, I'm glad I found this game on the Consimworld Mar-ketplace. It is on an unusual topic, but the campaign game is worth it. It definitely isn't every-one's cup of tea, but for a design that's almost 30 years old it's not too bad.