



Warning Order

Issue #29

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Warning Order

What Are We Simulating?

It has long been argued that wargames in any form are not very realistic compared to an actual battle. This is true up to a point in that there is no way to simulate the stress, blood, dying soldiers, and ever changing situations with miniatures, rules, or cardboard counters. Lately, however, this has become an excuse by many to explain away why certain games don't have for example, command and con-



trol, unusual stats for vehicles or units, systems that seem more fantasy than real world, and more. After all, it's only a game, right? If it's a game, then who needs realism on the tabletop and why take the effort to simulate things that will just slow down gamers in the end?

This article will look at several important facets of

gaming, i.e., sub-systems of almost any set of rules, and try to determine if games are doing a good enough job of at least attempting to get it right on the tabletop. True, this kind of exercise can be subjective, but hopefully it will give everyone something to think about the next time they break out their favorite set of rules!

1. Unit Organization

How many games have you played or seen played where the starting units are under strength? Probably not many. Yet, if you go through many orders of battle, books, etc., you see that probably 95% of units were under strength. Time after time, however, we're treated to full strength Tiger battalions on the Eastern Front in 1945, French battalions at 100% strength in the fall battles of 1813, and Iraqi battalions overflowing with vehicles and personnel during the opening of Operation Desert Storm. Next time you try a game, forego the usual points set up and give players some under strength units and tell them to do their best. Their reactions should be pretty interesting.

2. Reconnaissance

Here's an area that most gamers tend to ignore. The game usually starts with everything on the board and all of the units are seen by everyone playing. Recon units are just extra pieces to be used in the main line of battle. In reality, recon forces have one of the most vital roles in an army. Determining the enemy's strength, choosing routes that the army can easily navigate and deploy from, spotting ambushes, and feeding the commanders information as the battle develops. How many times have you played in a game where reconnaissance was important? My guess would be not many if any at all.

3. Movement

One of the first things I do when I open up a set of rules is look at the movement rules. If they have a chart with standard movement rates it won't cause me to not consider them, but I kind of wince. Moving combat formations in usually unfamiliar terrain is not something that can be boiled down into everyone moves a set distance. Keeping units in line and organized was difficult at

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Special points of interest:

- Several battle reports including BKC2, General de Brigade, and Father Tilly.
- 3rd Annual WFHGS WMA tournament.
- Boardgame and rules reviews.
- Regular features and an editorial.
- GMT's Fighting Formations review.

What Are We Simulating (cont.)

best in the horse & musket era and then you have the problem of commanders interpreting orders differently, choosing the wrong formations to cross certain kinds of terrain, late starters, and a whole host of other issues that can prevent everyone moving at the same rate all the time.

Some game systems solve this by (cont. on p. 3) having randomized movement distances such as 6" +1D6, or in some like *Chef de Battalion*, you don't find out how difficult the terrain is until you get there. I applaud games that have anything like that which keeps gamers thinking during a game. What's that stream up ahead like? Is it difficult ground? Will I need to change to open order to cross it and then back to line afterwards? Will vehicles need to back-track to a bridge to cross? Games like *Battles For Empire*, *Fire & Fury*, and *Age of Eagles* do a good job of randomizing movement, which again makes gamers think and react almost every turn instead of knowing exactly where your units will be in three turns!

4. Artillery

Now here's a game mechanic that's wrong in so many games it might be easier to just list those who are on the right track. Basically, most rules show artillery as being only able to fire at a specific unit, as if that unit has suffered the wrath of the gaming gods and is being targeted as punishment! In reality, artillery batteries usually fired at areas and in this instance *From Valmy to Waterloo* portrayed this the best I've ever seen. If you're playing a game where each unit is a brigade (*Age of Eagles*, *Volley & Bayonet*, etc.) then artillery batteries targeting specific units is acceptable, but if you're playing at a level under that, then artillery should have different targeting and area effects.



When you move into the modern age the problem is exactly the opposite, namely there's hardly any artillery at all! Most game systems have rules for spotting, shifting fire, concentrated fire, etc., and they handle artillery on the whole pretty well. However, most gamers think it's too much of a hassle to deal with, so far too many WW2 and modern games have very little if any artillery! This is strange since artillery in WW2 accounted for well over half of the total casualties and some estimates I've seen go as high as 80%!

5. Direct Fire

Now here's at least one area in gaming systems that most rules get right. You can argue about the statistics, capabilities of certain weapons, armor, etc., but most games have some kind of direct fire (arrows, musketry, automatic weapons, etc.) system that works. Several systems have a "first fire" type mechanism built in that works well for the most part, but you rarely see a system for dealing with the break down of fire discipline in the ranks. Some rules have gamers put smoke out in front of their units and

they suffer penalties in future turns, which is a great idea. I think this is an area, particularly for horse & musket games, that can be drastically improved. Also, bonus points for any set of WW2 or modern rules where only about half of a unit fires as most of the unit is under cover, too afraid to act, or is too experienced to poke their heads into beehives.

6. Engineering

When you read military history you often come across battles that feature entrenchments, bunkers, trenches, minefields, prepared positions, and the list goes on. So why do we rarely see any kind of engineering or fortifications on the tabletop? Most rules just have engineers (often referred to as pioneers as



well) as a bunch of troops that are better than average, but not quite elite, that cost extra points! Fortifications and engineering are essential parts of combat operations through time, but are they too much work to paint and read the rules about using them?

7. Reserves

Again, throughout history battles have been won or lost through the use of reserves. Now ask yourself, when was the last time that you saw a game where there were reserves on the tabletop? If you have seen some, then you are clearly one of the lucky few. Most gamers I know want nothing to do with being assigned a command that is posted as a reserve. Everyone wants to be right up front in the action and usually in most group games everything is deployed in long lines so that the action starts as soon as possible. It would be nice to see more rules reward gamers for taking reserves or giving some kind of advantage for using them.

8. Morale

This is a tricky issue as different periods have wildly varying troop types, training, etc., that makes creating a one size fits all morale system virtually impossible. Also, gamers being gamers, no one wants to spend hours setting up a game, having a few bad die rolls, then watching their army run away! This leads to the commonly used 50% break point in most rules where things don't get really bad until half of an army has been destroyed. In reality, the "fight to the last man" or bloodbath type battles where more than

50% of an army was lost were not very common. Yet, this is acceptable in most wargames rules. In WW2 and modern era combat most attacks stall out after taking 15-20% casualties, then artillery and air support are brought in, reinforcements are sent up, then the next attack goes in. How many times do you see that in the games that you play? (cont. on p.22)

BKC2: East Front Counterattack

This scenario was actually played twice on the same night as the first attempt was a complete German disaster, so we set it up and tried again! We had a lot of fun with the BKC2 game on the day after Thanksgiving, so when the time came to choose a game for the next regular gaming night, this was high on everyone's list.

The premise is that a Russian force has seized a bridgehead across a river in the East Prussia region in early 1945. They have fortified a hill overlooking the pontoon bridges and an infantry battalion is entrenched up there with a T-34/76 battalion in support. More Russian forces are crossing and will soon be able to enter the battlefield.



The initial forces for the Russians consisted of an infantry battalion entrenched on a hill with a battalion of six T-34/85s deployed near the village next to the hill. Three more T-34 battalions, a SU-85 regiment, and a battalion of motorized infantry would be rolled for each turn to see if they showed up. The Russians had some say in where the reinforcements would arrive and they could delay them for a turn to have them arrive at a different location. There were also two batteries of 122mm artillery and a battery of BM-13 rocket launchers available for support.

The Germans had a mixed *kampfgruppe* consisting of a panzer-grenadier battalion in halftracks, a heavy tank company of two Tigers and one King Tiger, an assault gun company with Stug-IVs, and a mixed panzer battalion with a company of Panthers and a com-



pany of PZ-IVHs. The Germans had two batteries of 105mm artillery and a *nebelwerfer* battery available for support. The Germans would enter the road at the edge of the board and begin their attack.

We actually had the chance to play two games of this as the first one was a disaster for the Germans. All of the Russian reinforcements showed up early, they had great die rolls for their commanders, and they were able to bring down concentrated artillery fire in a number of places. All of this resulted in a massacre of the German forces with less than 50% of them remaining after only four turns! We reset the scenario and tried again.

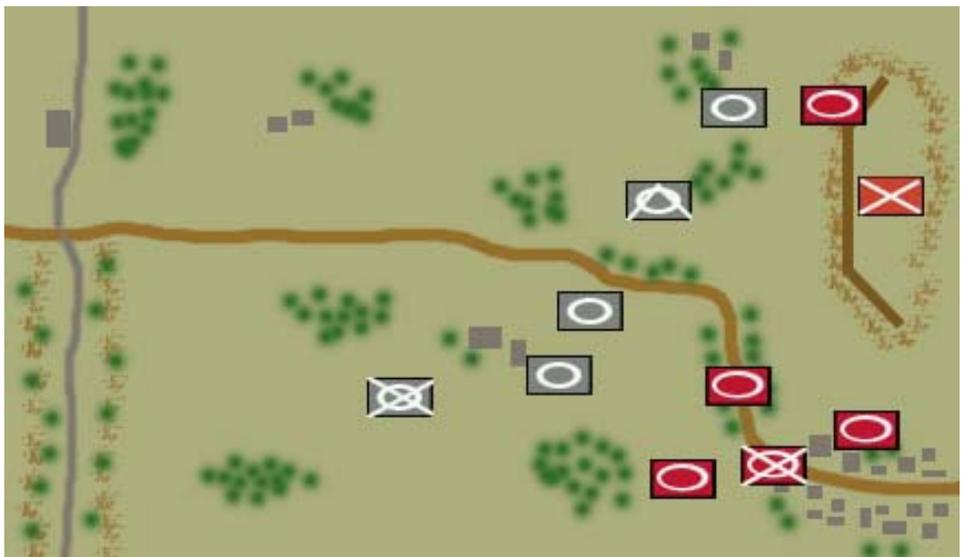
This time the Germans got off to a good start with their armor moving quickly out of the large open areas and towards the objectives. The Russians moved up the T-34/85 battalion and tried

to make room on the road for the incoming reinforcements. The first two turns saw average command rolls for the Germans and below average command rolls for the Russians.

The Germans positioned their Stugs to cover the road and protect the flank of the Tigers as they moved to attack the hill. The panzer-grenadiers got bogged down approaching the village, but the mixed armor battalion made good time towards the bend in the road, which would see most of the critical action in the game. The Russians moved one armor battalion towards the bend in the road, a second battalion moved up to engage the Stugs, and a third was delayed to be able to enter closer to the hill.

The action began with the Stugs and the T-34/76s on the village outskirts slugging it out. After a few turns only two T-34s were burning, but all four Stugs were knocked out. The Tigers and the lone King Tiger began to move to attack the hill, but came under flanking fire from the village. A *nebelwerfer* attack deviated right into where the motorized rifle battalion was on the road in the village and knocked out several units. At this point the game was pretty even.

More Russians were arriving, however, and if the Germans didn't get moving quickly they would be unable to punch through the defenses. The Germans deployed to make one last attack to try and force the issue.



BKC2: East Front Counterattack (cont.)



On the German far left the Tigers and the King Tiger were both finally knocked out. Russian armor had arrived just in time to defeat that part of the attack and despite losses, the hill was still holding. All attention now turned to the bend I in the road near the village where a T-34/85 battalion had hunkered down and could not be moved. The panzergrenadiers could not venture out in the open and no one wanted to actually move around the bend and get shot at!

Finally, the Panthers moved closer and despite one Panther being knocked out the rest returned fire and the T-34/85 battalion was soon in trouble. Several panzergrenadier stands then dismounted and began moving towards the road in an effort to put pressure on the Russian ar-

mor. German artillery began to pound the area as well and the PZIV-Hs maneuvered to pour more fire into the Russian position. After a few turns the Russian T-34/85 battalion was pretty much knocked out for all intensive purposes and the Germans had created an opening.

The problem was that now the Germans only had the panzergrenadier battalion, one Panther, and five PZ-IVHs to continue the attack. After looking at the remaining defenses, the infantry battalion on the hill, remnants of the mech infantry battalion in the village, a few SU-85s, and about a dozen T-34s still left, it was decided that the Germans would have to call off the attack. The game ended as a Russian victory, but there had been several moments where the Germans almost

broke through and could have won. A few bad command rolls, a few blunders, and concentrated Russian fire had defeated the German attack.

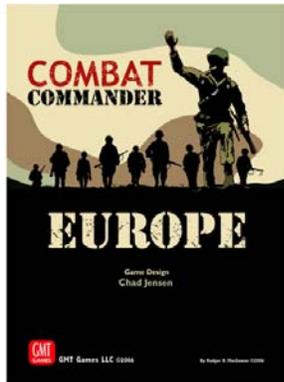
The Germans never could never really get rolling or string together a series of commands in one turn to gain the momentum. The game did bring up one concern about the BKC system and that was the ability of “groups” of units, such as a battalion of six T-34s to gang up and all fire at one German unit. This happened too often and seemed a bit unrealistic to many of us. We’re thinking of having some kind of “coordination roll” if you want to fire more than three units at one target, especially for armies like the Russians and Italians who had issues with battlefield coordination. Just a thought...



GMT's Combat Commander Game Series

For a long time the pre-eminent wargame for WW2 tactical combat was Avalon Hill's and later, MMP's Squad Leader and Advanced Squad Leader (ASL). When Squad leader first appeared it created quite the sensation and now, after almost three decades it has been supplanted by ASL. ASL isn't just a game, it's a way of life! For those who are fans, it is THE WW2 tactical game by which all others are measured and to its detractors it is just too much for those who can't devote every waking second to it.

For a long time there really weren't too many viable options if you were into this type of game. Yaquinto had Close Combat, there have been several Panzer Blitz type games from numerous compa-



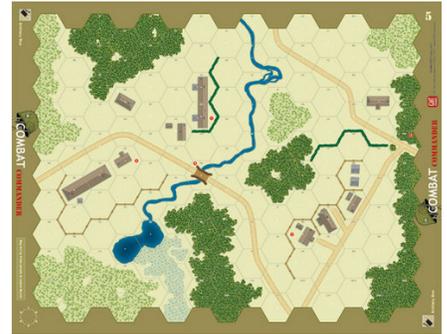
similarities to ASL? This article will try to explain the basic game concepts so that the reader can determine if they would like to go in this direction.

The Combat Commander boxed games come with a lot of components in them. For example, the Med box has the rulebook, a playbook with scenarios, three decks of 60+ cards each, two counter sheets, and around a dozen or so maps. Add this together with the other boxed games and the supplements and soon you have a stack of mats, hundreds of counters, multiple card decks, and over a hundred scenarios! The components are the usual high quality that everyone now expects of GMT products and there is little to complain about in this area.

The rules are broken down into numerous sections that cover the cards, counters, setting up a scenario, and then sections that go over what each order/action can do, terrain markers, and more. Fortunately, there is a well put together index that can quickly lead you to any rules that you need during a game. The rules may look daunting, but once play begins you get the hang of it pretty quickly and the game starts flowing to the point where you don't need to refer to the rules that often. You soon figure out that the basic rules are only a few pages with the rest covering exceptions and special items such as radios, artillery, etc.

The counters represent leaders, squads, and weapons teams. The number of soldiers depicted on the counter are just what it shows, i.e., if there are four soldiers on a counter then that counter represents four soldiers in the game. This is critical as you can only have up to seven men in a hex. Leaders have varying stats in regards to morale and com-

mand range, making them one of the driving forces in the game. Leaders can command multiple units and depending upon their stats, can issue orders to more than just one hex. A good leader with the right hand of cards can unleash a lot of firepower or get several units in position

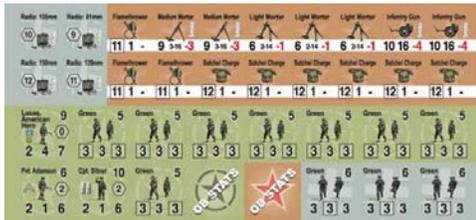


to launch an assault on an objective.

The smaller counters are light or man-portable weapons such as LMGs, HMGs, 75mm infantry guns, or small mortars. These can be assigned to squads and/or weapon crews to increase their firepower. You will quickly notice that there are no bazookas, panzerfausts, or anti-tank guns in the game and that's because there are no vehicles! Yes, this is the most controversial subject in regards to the Combat Commander series in that there is not a vehicle in sight. The scenarios are strictly infantry affairs, which to a degree cuts down the number of extra rules and complexity that vehicles would bring to the game.

The central part of the game revolves around the card deck, or Fate cards as they are called. Each card has a type of command or order that can be given such as Recover, Move, Fire, etc., plus each card has an action such as Ambush, Spray Fire, and more that can be used in certain situations. Finally, each card also has an event, a hex with a letter and number in it, and two dice that represent a die roll. Yes, there are no actual "dice" in the game as everything is done through the card draw.

The number of cards each player can keep in his hand depends upon the player's posture in the scenario. Attacking will usually let you keep up to six while if on a recon mission you would



nies, but nothing to rival ASL in terms of product quality, number of supplements, extra scenarios, and more.

Then came Combat Commander from GMT Games and now a lot has changed. I gave this game a very positive review when it first came out and at that time no one knew whether it would really take off or not. Well, it has, and in a big way. The basic game, Combat Commander: Europe, has spawned a boxed sequel, Combat Commander: Med, another boxed set called Combat Commander: Pacific, and several supplements covering Stalingrad, paratroop operations, Normandy, and soon to be coming out, New Guinea and Resistance, which covers partisan operations. Obviously, the series has enjoyed great success and continues to grow.

So, is this game for you, what is it all about, how does it work, and what are



GMT's Combat Commander Game Series (cont.)

only get five. The nationality and year will also determine how many cards you can discard each turn from only a few to possibly the entire hand.

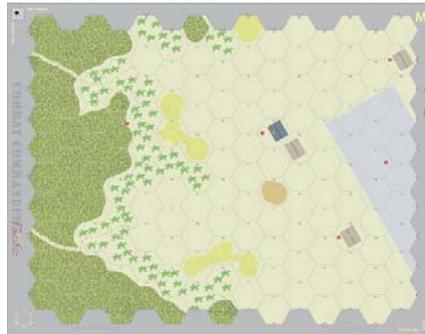
The cards are **EVERYTHING** in the game. All orders, actions, events, determining which hexes random things happen such as airstrikes or sniper attacks, and die rolls are all made through the cards. There are also several cards marked with a red **TIME** heading that advances the turn marker and allows the player's deck to be reshuffled. This is important as getting through the deck if you are a defender or ahead in the game in victory points is critical as every time you run out of cards the turn marker advances. You don't know when the game will end as each scenario has a sudden death marker on the turn track. Once you hit that the game can end at any time.



The one thing about Combat Commander is that it is not boring! A text book assault with a dozen units can go badly if several break due to a random airstrike or sniper attack. A bad run of cards can slow momentum or a defender placing a hidden minefield can disrupt them in this game and I've seen some wild swings where it looks like the game is over and then nothing goes right for the player who was ahead in victory points and they end up losing. If you're the type of gamer who likes adding up combat factors and moving units to get the perfect 3:1 attack, then you may have problems with this system. If you enjoy trying to get yourself out of mess, needing to make quick decisions, and trying to make do with the worst the system can hand you, then you will enjoy this game.

I think what adds value to the system is not just the large number of scenarios that are already available, but the games come with one of the best scenario generators I have ever seen. There are charts and tables that let the players pick the nationalities and the year, then you can generate a force, maps, posture, etc., which gives the players almost an infinite number of scenarios that they can play with. It should be noted here that each map has objective hexes printed on it, but there are markers that can be assigned or randomly chosen that lists the value of those hexes. Some of these will be known to both players, but often you only know what they are worth to you, which can see both sides rushing to gain objectives that only matter to their side. This is another method of keeping the game interesting and very random.

The supplements that have come out so far have some great scenarios in them, particularly the



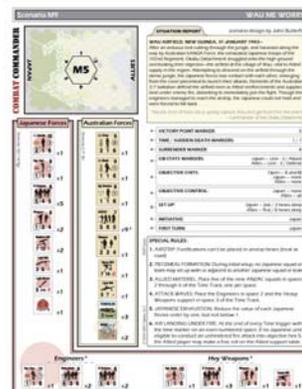
Stalingrad set and the Normandy pack. Stalingrad also introduced a campaign system where players can run through a series of scenarios and keep the same forces. You can modify these of course and there are reinforcements, but this is a good step in the right direction and it will

be interesting to see if these campaigns will get extended or have their own supplements in the future.

Naturally, comparisons to ASL will arise from some gamers, but these are really two different games. ASL has vehicles, but CC does not, which is probably the biggest difference. ASL has a strict and long sequence of play while in CC things proceed quickly from player to player using cards. ASL uses a large number of die rolls to generate combat, events, etc., but the cards in CC provide constant chaos that the players must learn to manage. One of the other major differences is that ASL will take some reading (OK, a lot of reading), playing some introductory scenarios (that's why they made starter kits), and even small scenarios can take several hours, especially if you use the full ASL rulebook. Combat Commander can be picked up quickly and finished in under two hours once the players become familiar with how things work. In the end it comes down to what each individual gamer prefers.

Personally, I like the CC system and I hope it grows. Yes, it's too bad that vehicles can't be added into the games, but there's so many scenarios, campaigns,

Combat is pretty easy as you pick a number of units (depending upon the leader's command value and the Fire card) and add their firepower plus any weapons to a die roll on a card. The defender takes into account any defensive modifiers, then draws a card for the die roll that is added to the morale number and if the attacker's value is higher the defender is broken and if it is lower there is no result. However, using a card for a Fire order, possibly another card for an action to increase the firepower, then a card for a die roll, then if it triggers an event or a sniper will force another card draw and you just used 5 cards for one attack! The deck can be cut down pretty fast in this game, which forces the action and there's very little if any down time for the players.



plus the random scenario generator that there is enough to keep me busy for years to come! I think GMT should make its own starter kits with a few counters, a map or two, two pages of rules, and small card decks to get more people interested in the system. As many gamers can attest, once you start playing Combat Commander you're hooked for a long, long time.

3rd Annual WFHGS Warmaster Ancients Tournament



For the last three year our club has run a Warmaster Ancients tournament over the Christmas break. Many of us are either off of work or school, so we have the capacity to use a full day to run the tournament. This year we held it on December 31st which started with breakfast, followed by the tournament. The goal was to be done by 5pm so that everyone could go to their New Year's Eve obligations! This year featured armies of Normans, Hittites, Seleucids, and Indians.

The tournament consists of three rounds where we try to finish each game in 90 minutes or less. Points are calculated, new territories added, some armies get changed slightly, then it's on to the next game. Each player was allowed 1,000 points, three territories (these generate extra troops), one unit skill, and one commander skill. This gives everyone 12-16 units and some choices to make in terms of setting up their army.

The Normans went with hard hitting



cavalry and plenty of cross-bow units. The Seleucids of course featured a mass of pikes, but decided to try a new tactic of parceling out the elephants individually instead of using them in one big unit. The Hittites had more units than previous years, which gave them the obvious advantage in numbers. Finally, my Indians went with a combination of plenty of infantry, several average cavalry units, and a unit of elephants.

During our WMA games throughout the year we usually go for historical opponents, so the tournament is a great way to match up against armies you wouldn't ordinarily see in our regular Friday night games. It also brings up interesting tactical considerations such as how to stop charging Norman nights with Hittite light chariots!

Each side starts 30cm in from the edge of the board and we alternate the placing of units during set up. This usually gets everyone ready to play in under 5 minutes and when you're trying to get three games in under 5 hours speed is of the essence! The games continue until one side reaches its break point. Then, casualties are added up for both sides as at the end of the tournament there is a special Master of Mayhem award given to the player who caused the most casualties during their three games. After that new territories are rolled for and both players can readjust their forces to reflect the loss of certain units or being able to add new ones according to which territory was rolled. Players can only adjust their forces based on territories received or taken, so there is no wholesale re-

working of armies between games.

With this kind of strict time limit it does make creating a tactical plan of battle pretty challenging! Each player needs to set up on the fly so to speak and come up with some kind of plan quickly before the first units roll to move. All of us find this quite refreshing and more often than not the original plan goes out the window by the second or third turn!

The Seleucids proved to be particularly nasty this day and easily won their first two matches. The Normans won their first two as well, which set up a showdown that wasn't planned in the



schedule, but it worked out well! The Hittites won their first game in their two year history of participating and my poor Indians lost all three games! The Seleucids and Normans had a titanic battle which ended the tournament. When the dust settled here were the results:

1st	Seleucids	Dave
2nd	Normans	Gary
3rd	Hittites	Mark
4th	Indians	Matt

Dave also won the Master of Mayhem award by inflicting the most casualties during the tournament.

We'll set up a fourth tournament at the end of this year and if everyone keeps painting we may be able to do a medieval tournament as we've been building forces for the Crusades.

3rd Annual WFHGS Warmaster Ancients Tournament (cont.)



Several shots from the 3rd Annual WFHGS Warmaster Ancients Tournament. The 10mm armies that were used were Seleucids, Hittites, Normans, and Indians. Each player was able to play three games and each game was only ended when one side reached their break point. There was also a prize given out to the player that caused the most casualties in terms of points for the tournament.

Barbarossa: Crimea

I became a convert to GMT's East Front Series a few years ago when I decided to take the plunge and purchased Kiev to Rostov, the fifth volume in the series. With the first four commanding huge prices on Ebay, I was eagerly awaiting Crimea (which I could afford!), and it did not disappoint.

For those unfamiliar with the EFS series it covers Operation Barbarossa in volumes, such as Army Group North, Typhoon, Crimea, etc., with the Army Group Center/Typhoon remake coming up next and then on to new volumes which will end up covering all of Russian for the critical 1941-42 period. Units are generally divisions and brigades for the Russians, while for the Axis forces there are regiments and battalions, plus for the naval forces individual ships for cruisers and larger. Yes, there are a lot of units in these games! Not only do you get the regular infantry and armor counters, but flak units, armored trains, NKVD battalions, militia, supply trucks, and far, far more.

The Crimea box comes packed with lots of goodies. There is only one 22 x 34 map that shows the entire Crimea and four counter sheets. The rule book and the play book which has the Crimea specific rules, the modified naval rules, scenarios, and examples of play are both in full color, which is a nice touch.

The incredible thing, however, is like other games in the series, there are multiple cards with pieces of the map and set up charts so that you can play several of the smaller scenarios without setting up the full map. No amount of space is wasted on these smaller maps, the set up cards, charts, tables, etc., and it is a breathtaking work of game development.

This is definitely one of the least known East Front campaigns, but here it is covered in detail. Not only do you get



the full campaign game which can be linked to Kiev to Rostov and Army Group South, but you get plenty of smaller scenarios. These cover the initial German attacks across the Tarter Ditch, the Russian amphibious operations, the German and Romanian drives to Kerch, Russian counterattacks, and the siege of Sevastapol. There's even a separate scenario (with map and set up card) for the siege of Odessa which isn't even on the map you get with the game!

The EFS system, however, is not something that you want for your first wargame or to introduce others into the hobby. The sequence of play for one turn alone will make many gamers cringe as there can be a lot of steps. Replacements, artillery support, reaction, engineering operations, supply, etc., are all covered in plenty of detail, plus the air and naval operations are almost a separate game within the game. There are different color codes for movement factors, interdiction rules, ZAP units which provide Russian reinforcements, and more that you usually do not see in other wargames, which is what sets EFS apart.

Just by looking at the turn sequence you can see how detailed the system is and how it addresses doctrine issues for each side. For example, the Germans can move their motorized and non-motorized forces together in the same phase to set up attacks, while the Russians have to move their motorized forces first, then have combat, then move the rest of their forces. Things like supply that are glossed over in most rules come to the forefront here. Without trucks and wagons moving supply to the front neither side will be able to launch effective attacks.

Combat is similar to much of the EFS system in that it is detailed and not over in one or two easy steps. Units declare an attack, then the defender has a chance to use reaction movement to move motor-

Board Game Review

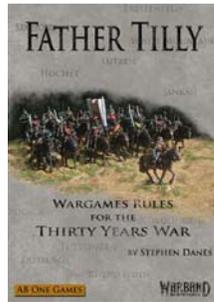
ized forces to the location of the attack. Then artillery for both sides is checked to see if it can support the units involved, then air units can arrive which can lead to air to air combat, then anti-aircraft fire. Units can also receive no retreat or additional retreat orders which also adds into the mix, then a 10 sided die is rolled. Results range from step losses to retreats with additional losses for armor or if the attacker is going up against fortifications if an asterisk accompanies the result. The results don't seem too dramatic and there are few combats each turn, but too many step losses can be devastating. The Eastern Front is huge, getting replacements forward is difficult, and sustaining any kind of attack or defense is difficult for both sides.



The EFS system will teach you a lot about the Eastern Front in WW2. There are all kinds of small units such as armored trains, rocket artillery, NKVD troops which compound Russian retreats, coastal flotillas, and you must be thinking about supplies and road nets each turn. Trying to coordinate actions for both sides is extremely challenging and it will take a few scenarios for players to fully grasp the system and the little nuances that it entails.

In summary, there's really nothing bad to say about this game. For the money you get quality components, well illustrated and laid out rulebooks, and plenty of game play with a campaign game and multiple scenarios. For the East Front aficionado this is nirvana! Detailed maps of the operational areas, units that you only read about in books, doctrine enforced through the rules, sequence of play, how replacements are handled, etc., which gives gamers an interesting look into operations on this front. This game is not for everyone and you do need to dedicate some time, but it is a rewarding game system. I'm looking forward to the AGC/Typhoon reprint this year and for more games in the series which will someday include Stalingrad.

One of our club members got interested in the Thirty years War in 25mm scale and it naturally infected several others, so now we've built up forces for a several player game. Having the figures and terrain were great, but deciding on the rules to use is always the biggest challenge for us! We looked at the 30YW variant for WECW in several issues of Wargames Illustrated, FOGR, and a few other alternatives, but nothing seemed to really jump out at us. Then someone ordered Father Tilly by Stephen Danes along with a few of the supplements.

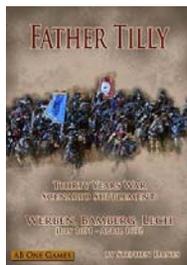


interesting concept, particularly the deployment process, and some of these features on the card can come in real handy during times of crisis in a game!

Each turn both sides bid for initiative be determining how many command actions their side will use that turn. The lowest number goes first, which can be critical at times, but you may need to bid so low that you can't do everything with your forces that you would have liked. Movement, rallying, changing formation, etc., costs command actions, so if you bid 2 for example, you will probably go first, but you may not be able to do much! War tokens can help with this by adding additional initiatives to a sides' turn.

Father Tilly covers the Thirty Years War in a basic set of rules along with multiple supplements that cover the Eastern conflicts, the Swedish War, scenarios, and a campaign system was recently released. There is no need to buy the supplements as the rules will be sufficient to set up a game, but the supplements do contain specific rules for the different periods of the war, army details, and a lot more.

The rules themselves feature a nice, full color cover with black and white text inside along with a few images. If you are expecting something similar to the production quality of Black Powder or Flames of War with hordes of pretty pictures on glossy paper you won't get it here. What you do get, however, is a workable set of rules for an interesting period. Are there some issues? Yes, and they will be addressed here. The rules are good value for the money and have several interesting concepts.



The first of these are the use of what are called War Tokens. These are small rectangles (although playing card sized versions were recently released) that list events and different effects that leaders can use during a turn. These range from deployment to adding a dice in melee to additional dice for certain morale checks. Depending upon a leader's quality you can hold varying numbers of them per leader. This is an

Movement is fairly standard with designated rates plus 1D6 for most cases. The only big change from most rules is that charges are a two step process where you first move up within 4 inches of an enemy and then on the following turn move into contact. No big deal, but it does take some getting use to.

Shooting and hand to hand combat are where the big changes will be for most gamers and they contain what I feel are the most innovative parts of the rules. For shooting each type of weapon has a factor, so say for example you are using some type of arquebus/musket which has a factor of 3 and maximum range of 24 inches. If you are firing on a target with 12 figures that is 15 inches away you would need to roll 12 D6 with any score of 5 or higher a hit. 5x3 is 15, which is the distance to the target. Yes, it takes a few turns to get the hang of it, but it works out. You then roll for damage to see how many hits translate into kills. Each four kills results in the loss of a figure. Artillery has maximums of how many casualties it can cause per turn.

Combat is also unique with both sides adding up the number of figures that are fighting, then determining their modifiers to hit. Both sides then roll off with usually large numbers of dice and compare the results by matching hit numbers. If side A rolls three 2s, four 3s, two fours, two fives, and two sixes, then side B rolls

three ones, two twos, five threes, one four, three fives, and no sixes, with both sides needed a 4+ to hit, here's how it would end up. Side a rolled two fours, but B only one, so that's a hit to B. B rolled three fives and A two, so that's a hit to A. A rolled two sixes and B none, so that 's two more hits to B. In the end A causes three hits and B one. Both sides then roll to see if the hits are converted into kills. If you're thinking that melee could go for awhile you would be correct!

Morale is based upon unit quality and then modified for things like losses, seeing a rout, etc. In the above combat example a side that suffers kills has to roll morale, which can result in a push back and additional kills. When units rout it can be very hard to get them back into action and it's easy to start a cascade of units that start to fall back.

We've played several smaller games to get a feel for the rules and that would be my suggestion to players that are just getting into Father Tilly. Start with a few pike/shot units, maybe a unit of skirmishers, an artillery piece, and a unit of cavalry, then work through a few turns. This is much different than playing WECW or FOGR, so it will take players awhile to figure out how to make everything work.



Are there problems? Yes. The reference sheet contains only some of the info that you need to run a game. I created a new one and published it on the Father Tilly Yahoo group to help with this situation. There are modifiers and rules in

strange places which will cause you to flip back and forth during your first few games. The art work on the war tokens is too colorful, meaning that trying to read the text is a challenge. Finally, the basing is unusual (very large bases), but as long as each player's forces are based the same you should be OK.

The above are small, but sometimes annoying problems. However, there are some unique ideas to this set of rules that I like and hopefully more people will get a copy and try them out.

Father Tilly Playtest

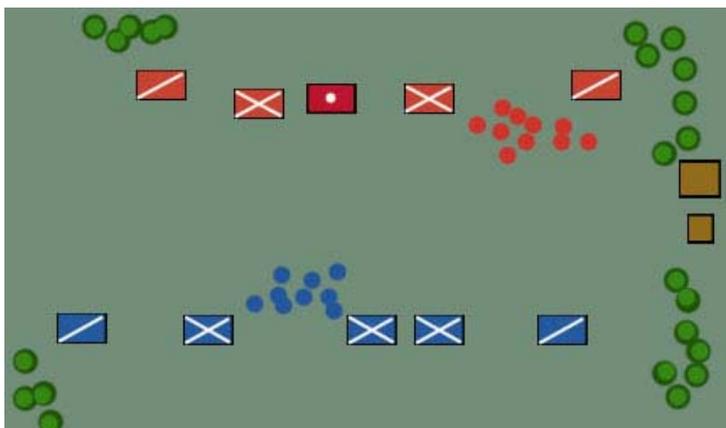
Battle Report

After playing a few very small games of Father Tilly to get used to the rules and concepts, two of us determined that we were ready to give it a go as a group game, although with just four players. We decided to keep it small so that everyone could concentrate on their commands, learn the rules, and understand that some of the systems, such as shooting and melee, are not the typical stuff seen in most rules!



Side A had two units of cavalry and two units of pike/shot infantry, with one of each being veteran, which we learned during the game, is a big advantage. This was done to even out things as Side B would have a third infantry unit and in retrospect it more than made up for being outnumbered! Side A also had a small artillery piece and a unit of skirmishers. Side B had two units of cavalry, three of infantry, and one small unit of skirmishers.

After explaining the rules and the war tokens, we proceeded to the deployment phase. Each side played a number of war tokens, then we set up our forces. Both sides went with cavalry on the flanks, infantry in the center and skirmishers to screen the flanks of the cavalry towards the center. There weren't too many surprises here as many of us had played



WECW before, so at least the players were somewhat aware of the capabilities of the armies of this period.

The one thing that we did learn, however, and that other players who are thinking of using this system should note, is that even for a game with few units as ours was, a 6x4 table is WAY too small! The large possible moves of the cavalry meant

that units were in contact by turn two. In Father Tilly when a unit charges it moves to within four inches of the enemy unit, then on the following turn it can press the attack using the charge procedure.

As noted in the review, combat is unusual in that you figure out the combat factor of the units involved (usually a 5 or 6 is needed for a hit), then roll a number of D6s for each figure that is eligible to fight. These numbers are then compared to each other, in effect cancelling out opposing hits. The dice that represent hits that are left are then rolled to translate into kills with four kills resulting in the loss of a figure. In practice it is much quicker than trying to explain it here.

In the first melee of the night the veteran cavalry of Side A crushed the opposing cavalry, routing them and pursuing them off the board. In Father Tilly melee can go on for several rounds, but when things start going bad for one side they really go bad! The victorious cavalry pursued the defeated cavalry until it went off the board, but then they were able to hold up and rally. So, after

basically a turn and a half there was now a hostile cavalry unit to the rear of Side B's forces!

Both sides advanced towards each other, with the skirmishers pressing out farther in front. By the end of turn 3 each side was exchanging fire, but not causing too much damage. It took a few turns for everyone to get the firing system, but after that it got to be almost second nature. The artillery unit then got off a few shots, damaging one of the pike and shot



infantry units. On the far flank the other two cavalry units prepared to get into the action.

Side B now tried to get two of its three infantry units into the fight. One maneuvered to the right and tried to contact the enemy skirmishers, but both times the skirmishers fled, but not before getting off a few parting shots! Both sides then got into a firefight that went several turns with the pike & shot unit coming off the worst for it.

Side B's center infantry unit then became involved in a multi-turn firefight with the veteran infantry unit of side A. Here's where the veteran status began to pay off. The difference in combat factors was only one, but when you multiply that by a large number of figures it begins to add up after awhile! (cont. on p.13)

With an enemy cavalry unit approaching from the rear, the Side B unit decided to charge the veteran infantry unit. What followed was a fairly bloody melee with the Side B unit forced back several times before finally breaking.



Overall impressions were generally positive. Everyone was able to figure out the war tokens, movement, shooting, and melee pretty well after a few turns. You do need to get the reference card posted in the Yahoo Group

On the far flank the cavalry clash resulted in both sides breaking off, followed by several exchanges of pistol fire and then counterattacks. This again resulted in both sides breaking off followed by more pistol fire. The third Side B infantry unit over there couldn't get around the cavalry melee so they had to spend several turns in time consuming wheels (there is no oblique movement) which cost their side dearly as they were badly needed up at the front where their numbers could have been decisive.



files section as the one that comes with the game is good for players who have had a few games under their belt, but not for those just learning to play.

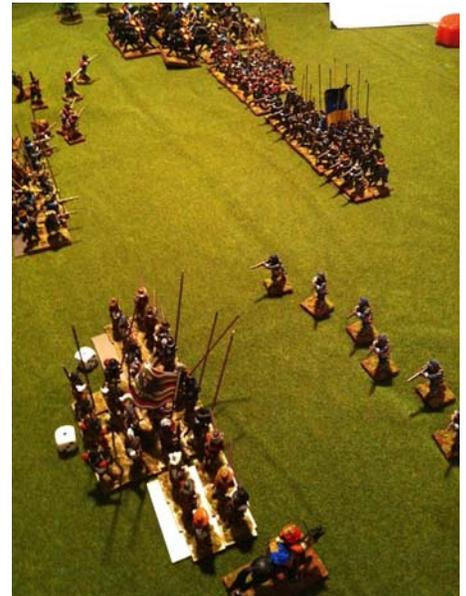
Father Tilly was designed to be a game where both sides have spent some time preparing for the game. There are sections for terrain placement, stats for the generals, and what would be described as unit characteristics, so it's not a game where you show up, throw some units on the board, then start playing, which is what we did. However, we felt for a first game that we would stick to the basics and not use many of these additional features. The command system can also get much more involved, with units being given orders and their objectives/positions tracked on a map. Again, we determined to just focus on movement, shooting, melee, and using the war tokens.

After a few more turns it was looking as if Side B was in huge trouble as several units were threatened to the front and flank, so the game was called at that point. Overall, we had spent about four hours with the set up, explaining the rules, and then playing about seven turns, which isn't bad for a first attempt.



Using the full set-up and command system would definitely take more time and I believe would be great for two player games. I'm still not entirely sold that it is a game for more than two players as the initiative bidding system is hard to get it to work properly in a four or more player game. For example, if your side desperately needs to go first and you bid low, i.e. a 2, then if you have 12-15 units on your side your only going to be able to issue two commands. This means that there will be a lot of sitting around by several players.

The other major concern is the rulebook needs to be reworked and an index added. We keep coming up with questions and fortunately the author is very responsive on the Father Tilly Yahoo group. Finding things in the rules can be a challenge and we kept having things pop up that we didn't know about our do properly! More examples of play, maybe a flow chart for the setup, pre-made rosters of commanders and units for quick games, etc., could be added.



It needs to be said, however, that in the end everyone had a fun evening. The battle felt like a 30YW/ECW fight with the push of pike, unpredictable artillery, and wild swings of fortune for both sides. If you can stick with it and get through your first few games, Father Tilly can be a good set of rules for this period. We're going to give it another go with more units, more table space, and using the full command system next time.



Yet another scenario set in the Spring of 1813 and this time using the General de Brigade rules. I think we like the 1813 period as you get to use almost every kind of unit from Saxony, Poland, etc., plus Russia, Prussia, and Austria are allied, so you can take almost any figures you have and end up using the for something!

In this instance several Prussian brigades are holding two villages roughly in a line across the center of the board, but with limited cavalry. The Prussians have taken up strong positions in and around both villages, supported by artillery, with some additional units in support behind the villages. The huge problem for the Allies is that the left flank is for the most part wide open, there's little cavalry, and the troops in the center of the board are



pretty exposed with minimal support. Additional Russian forces would be entering, but not for the first few hours.

When the French came onto the board, the Allied players, including me, looked around like no one was going to stop this attack! Battalion upon battalion of infantry, liberally supplied with artillery, and the multiple brigades of cavalry were still stacked up waiting to come on!

However, the French had two major obstacles to overcome at the start of the game. First, there was simply the matter of congestion. The large number of battalions coming onto the board to attack at one or two points took some time to sort out. Second, there was a meandering stream near the French entry areas that proved to be a substantial obstacle and it took the French forces several turns to



cross it and then get organized for an attack.

When the attack came it was on several fronts with a great deal of support in depth. The first attack towards the village in the center was met with murderous fire from the Prussian defenders which drove the initial attack back. The French side brought up more battalions and commenced a fire-fight on three sides of the village with artillery coming up as fast as it could. The French attack towards the village on the Prussian right met some initial success, driving back the Prussian skirmishers and scoring some hits on the Prussian artillery battery in support of the skirmishers. When the first French column attacks went in and drove the Prussian defenders back, it looked like it might be an early night!

The French columns then swung to the

right of the Prussian held village, attempting to flank the village and engage the Prussian supports waiting behind the village. These columns got caught up in a charge-countercharge type of situation that see-sawed for several turns, then the French were forced back. The French attack in the center of the board, where the Prussians were the weakest, was defeated. The French pulled back, re-grouped, brought up artillery and cavalry, then surged forward again.

The critical moment came when three French battalions charged a large Prussian battalion deployed in line to cover a gap in the defense. The Prussian infantry held and forced the attackers back. It did, however, clear a bit of space for one of



the French cavalry brigades to deploy and then charge into two Prussian battalions that hastily formed square. The French cav rolled extremely well and the Prussians rolled very poorly, meaning that one square routed and was (cont. on p.15)





(cont. from p. 14) run down, causing the rest of the brigade to falter and fall back. All of a sudden there was a massive gap in the Allied defenses right in the center of the table!

The French, now seeing the end in sight, sought to exploit their advantage and finish the Prussians off. However, the one solitary Prussian battalion in the center refused to budge, defeating a second attack and causing the French brigade to not only falter, but to completely fall apart which triggered a chain reaction up to division level! Now the tables were reversed, with the French completely out of the picture on the Prussian right.

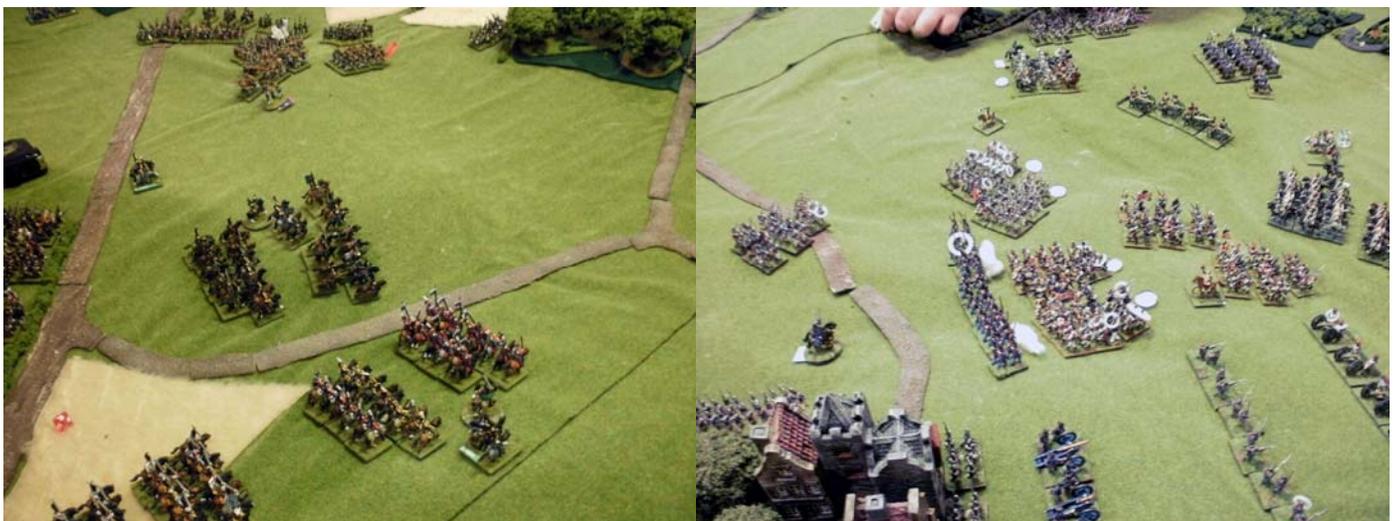
The French cavalry did charge and wipe out a Prussian artillery battery and for a brief moment the rear side of the

center village was open. Then, Russian cavalry moving up as reinforcements closed the gap and began a melee with the other French cavalry brigades, tying them up as well. By this time one of the Prussian infantry brigades had rallied and resumed its position in the center.

On the Prussian left the Poles, Saxons, and French were locked in a life and death struggle with Russian reinforcements that had moved up to anchor the flank and help the village defenders. The French again tried to bombard then assault the village, but were thrown back yet again. By this time the French were fast running out of options. When the Russians moved up their cavalry and consolidated the crossroads position it was clear that the French would be un-

able to take two of the three objectives with the forces that they had. At this point it was declared an Allied victory.

Overall, it was a long and tense struggle with several wild swings of fortune that took around 10 hours to play over three nights. The French players rolled something like ten snake eyes in that time! Not only that, but they were at the most inopportune times! The Prussians had just hung on at several points during the game and at one time were contemplating a withdrawal from one of the villages to shorten the defensive line. The French had plenty of chances, but the initial deployment and having to cross the stream took too long and left the cavalry unable to get into the fight until it was well underway.



I've written in this magazine before about how I loved the SPI folio and quad games from the 70s. In fact, I still have Battle For Germany, Chikamauga, Arnhem, and Golan from that era. They were and still are great little games that can be set up quickly, are fun to play, and you can keep a game to under 3 hours.



So, imagine my excitement when I found out that Decision Games, the successor to SPI, announced that they were going to remake a lot of the old games in their new folio series! Yes, with reworked maps, double sided counters, and they were going to come with new systems for the rules. What could possibly go wrong?

Well, judging by Aachen, a lot. First, let's go over the good news. The initial releases for the folio series contained many games that came out in the 70s, such as Arnhem, Golan, ACW battles, Leipzig, several of the North Africa WW2 games, and more. They also released a few new titles such as a future war between India and Pakistan, plus a war with the Koreans. Decision Games is to be commended on the size and scope of this project, plus bringing back many of these games that have been either hard to find or sell for a high price on Ebay.

The folio series is basically a game inside of an 11 x 17 folder. The folder has artwork or images on the front and details about the game on the back. For Aachen there was a 22 x 34 map, a sheet of double sided counters, the series rules (the Fire & Movement series) and a set of exclusive rules. The map is a big improvement on the old SPI maps from the 70s and the counters have improved as well. Both sets of rules are easy to digest and an experienced gamer can be set up and playing probably inside of 15-20 minutes. A new wargamer might take a bit longer, but there's nothing there that is going to completely befuddle someone playing their first wargame.

Aachen portrays the attempt by the U.S. 30th Infantry Division and 3rd Armored to penetrate the West Wall fortifications near Aachen, Germany.

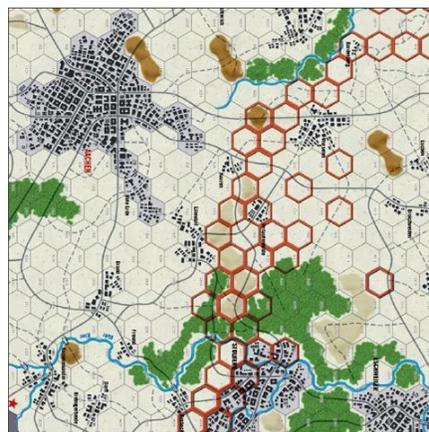
The U.S. forces need to penetrate the fortifications quickly to bring on the U.S. 2nd Armored and to race forward to take as many victory locations as possible before German reinforcements turn the game into a WW1 style meatgrinder. The U.S. player needs to seize Aachen and a series of road exit hexes for a victory while the Germans just

need to prevent these things from happening.

The game system uses a standard IGOUGO turn sequence, zones of control, and the old SPI quad/folio combat results tables which aren't very bloody. The problem here is the fortifications and that you can't advance after exchanges, which is about the only way to get the Germans out of the fortifications!



The 30th Infantry begins its attack and needs to capture three contiguous hexes of the West Wall to unleash the 2nd Armored. If you can't do this in a reasonable amount of time there's no need to finish the game as without the 2nd Armored the U.S. player has no chance. The 3rd Armored begins the game at the bottom of the map (get the errata as the set up in the game is completely wrong for the 3rd Armored!) and rushes in to cut off Aachen and threaten the victory hexes on the far side of the map.



What follows next is the U.S. player banging their head against a wall and praying for exchanges to clear out sections of the fortifications. There are a few exciting parts to the game such as the first turn, the breakout of the 2nd Armored (IF it gets unleashed) and German counterattacks. The rest of the game (probably more than 50%) is the U.S. player praying for certain numbers on the die roll to kill off German units to make holes.

This leads me to one of the more controversial aspects of the new WW2 and modern folio system rules; the artillery. In the old games there were units for artillery and they needed to be positioned to support, offensively and defensively, various units on the board. Not so here.

Each side gets a number of "support" markers, ranging from 3 to 10 in strength which represent mortars, artillery, aircraft, etc., that can be added to combat. The problem?

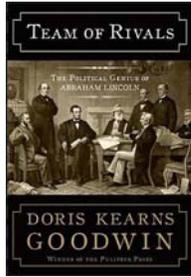
They can be used ANYWHERE on the board! In fact, the German player can save some each turn to attack lone U.S. units (each one eliminated cuts the number of turns the game lasts by one) and hope for an exchange!

I can see this being done for corps or theater level assets, but not at this level. I don't know whether the designers thought they were being clever or trying to appeal to today's gamers with short attention spans, but it doesn't work.

Overall, I'm in the middle about this game. Good looking map, interesting situation, and a lot of potential. Offsetting that, however, is the mediocre support fire system and how did the game go to press with the wrong set up for half the U.S. units? I think if they had kept the original artillery units this game would have been a keeper and I would be looking forward to buying every game in the system. However, after having tried this a few times I am now lukewarm about the remaining games and probably won't buy another. Maybe Decision will reprint the artillery units and change the system back to what it used to be? That would definitely save a game like this.

Team of Rivals

The American Civil War has always been one of my favorite periods of history, but usually from the military history side of the war. Pulitzer prize winning author Doris Kearns Goodwin has written a new book, *Team of Rivals*, which shows the political side of the American Civil War as seen from Lincoln's cabinet.



in the 1840s and 50s. Even if you've read biographies of Lincoln or thought you were familiar with him from reading Civil War books you will be surprised at the level of detail given here. His early life, jobs, speeches, and political philosophy are given new life that all lead up to the fateful day of the nomination.

The first part of the book focuses on the four men who would compete for the Republican nomination of 1860. These four men, Chase, Seward, Bates, and Lincoln, all took different paths towards the nomination and these are explored in fascinating detail. Goodwin covers their early lives, their political careers, and goes over several of their most famous speeches.

Naturally, the emphasis is on Lincoln, but you learn a great deal about the era and what the political landscape was like

Fortunately, things are just getting started with his nomination! From there he convinces his rivals to take jobs in his Cabinet and this is where the country begins to move towards Civil War. The book then moves into a second phase where the war is being fought and Lincoln must trust his former rivals to help him keep the North moving forward. This wasn't always successful and the political intrigue for a country fighting for its life is beautifully brought into focus.

I've always been fascinated by reading

Book Review

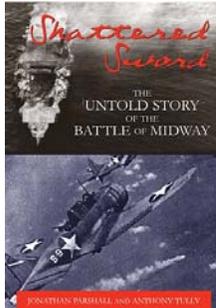
books where a country is facing doom and yet certain people can't help themselves but to try to further their own political ambitions! Again, the author takes time to clearly explain the goals, influence, and plans each man had throughout the Civil War. Sometimes it seems that they were all working against each other, but in the end they were able to create a coalition that saved the Union.

I thought the portrayal of Lincoln throughout the book was of extraordinary interest to me. By focusing on his early life and then his entrance into politics, I thought the book did a good job of building up to him eventually becoming President. One of the more shocking things that the book brings out is the views of the men regarding the issues of slavery and of African-Americans. In today's world they would have been hung in the media, but in their day and age they were champions of the anti-slavery movement!

Long, but highly recommended.

Shattered Sword

After reading this book I will never be able to watch the movie *Midway* the same way ever again. Authors Jonathan Parshall and Anthony Tully have written an astounding book covering the Japanese side of the events leading up to and during the Battle of Midway. Using Japanese ship logs, interviews with the participants, and comparing what has been written previously, they craft a fascinating look at the battle we all thought we knew everything about.



eration. The book then spends a good deal of time going over the planning and wargaming of the operation. Finally, the fleets are assembled and the operation begins.

Now this is where most books about Midway begin to focus on operations from the U.S. side and the Japanese are portrayed as either unlucky, incompetent, or just as plain old bad guys. It was refreshing to see that very few pages are spent looking at the U.S. side of operations.

The book covers the PBY night torpedo attack which is rarely mentioned anywhere, the combined SBD and B-26 attack from Midway, and the multiple B-17 attacks, which are interesting in their own right. The main battle begins with a detailed look at Japanese air operations and the search plans they used that day.

When the U.S. attacks finally come a

Book Review

good deal of time is spent explaining that the Japanese CAP was not out of position, which attacks were successful, and the Japanese reaction to them. There is an incredible chapter just on the Japanese damage control efforts on the three carriers. Finally, the Japanese strikes on the U.S. carriers is covered as well as the options that the Japanese had at that point. A series of appendixes includes an interesting look at whether or not the Japanese landing forces could have taken the island from the Marines.

Overall, this book will definitely change how you view the Battle of Midway. The writing style is a bit dry at times and there is a long set up to the actual battle. However, I guarantee that you will learn so many things that you never knew about this battle that it is well worth your time. I wouldn't call this revisionist history, but a detailed look about what happened that fateful day.

Memoirs of a Miniature & Board Wargamer Pt. 16

Hidden Movement:

Fun or More Work?

If you've been in the hobby for probably longer than five years at some point you will be asked to participate in a game that features hidden movement. This could be a skirmish game, sci-fi, hunting submarines, night fighting, or any of another hundred gaming topics. When you finish the game you will be left with one of two outcomes. First, the game was fun and despite the work in keeping things hidden it was worth it. Or, it was a total abject failure.

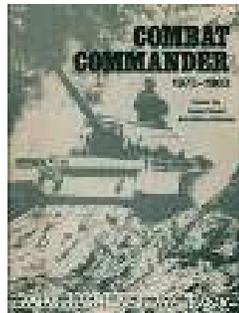
With hidden movement, there really is no in-between result. Either everything works and players have a great time, or the game bogs down as it's just too much work for not enough game. I've participated in some good and some not so good hidden movement games over the last 35 years, so I thought I would share some thoughts on the subject.

First, I don't think any scenario designer or gamemaster goes in with the idea, "Hey, everyone would love to do a game this week with hidden movement!" Rather, it's usually a mechanism by which the gamer thinks it's the only way a scenario can be played or they are trying to keep a surprise hidden for as long as possible. It's my humble opinion that the games that work really well with hidden movement are linked to how much work went into them.

A great example of how hidden movement can really affect a game and give you a real life perspective on things occurred during a game of Enola's Combat Commander back in the mid 80's. The guy setting up the game had obviously spent a ton of time setting up the forces, terrain, reinforcements, etc., plus he knew the rules (particularly the sections on visibility-yes, gamers usually skip this section) very well.

The scenario placed me in charge of a Warsaw Pact armored battalion with a mech infantry company in support trying

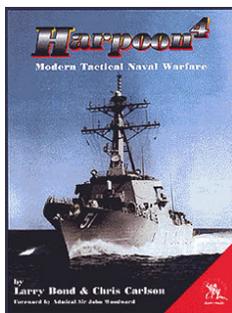
to force its way through a sector defended by strong NATO forces. My commanders and I looked over the terrain which was



basically a long road running past two villages, a stream with a bridge, several farms, and patches of woods. We launched our attack and started taking casualties, then shifted the attack and ran into more opposition. We called down artillery and tried again without success. Where were those NATO guys at?

In the end we were forced to call off the attack as we had lost a company of armor and destroyed one U.S. M113 in return! It was at this time that the referee showed us the NATO forces. They consisted of three APCs, two jeeps, three infantry squads, one TOW team and two Dragon teams! How embarrassing! However, it stuck with me to this day about how good games with hidden movement could be if you work at it.

Another good game was a Harpoon scenario where three Russian submarines and some air assets were trying to prevent a NATO submarine attack against an amphibious landing in Norway. I was the LA class sub trying to penetrate the screen and after about five hours of hard work I did sink two of the Russian subs and got through. It was tense, nerve wracking, and took about five hours. Not the most fun game in the world, but a good gaming experience.

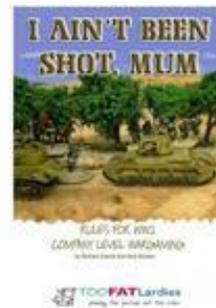


Another good hidden movement experience is a Harpoon campaign I ran for our club based upon the Russians seizing the Kurile Islands from Japan. This involved over 100 aircraft on each side, numerous ships, submarines, transports, choppers, and more spread across a large section of the Pacific Ocean. The game went for several months and there were numerous clashes between opposing forces. Both sides spent long hours agonizing over maps, trying to figure out where the enemy was and what they were trying to do. Everyone afterwards expressed what a great

time they had, but it left me frazzled trying to run all of the hidden movement!

Then there are those games that all of us have experienced where things start hidden, but it becomes such a chore that everyone votes to "un-hide" the figs to get to the main part of the game. Naturally, this ruins the game and leaves everyone with a bad taste in their mouth for future games. The other thing that can ruin it quickly is when some players aren't paying attention in tracking their forces, forces get revealed too soon, or when some players simply cheat!

Over the last few years there have been a few attempts to incorporate some hidden movement. I Ain't Been Shot, Mum and Sharp Practice use "blinds", which are oval shaped cut outs which represent where some figs might be and there's the Ambush rule in Flames of War. Still others use cards to add rein-



forcements that show up already deployed on the board or they have very complex visibility rules, even though everyone can clearly see where the figures are at on the board.

To me, many of today's "hidden" mechanisms suffer from the fact that most are merely gaming gimmicks. You may still enjoy them, but they're not true hidden movement games. They've been added in for period flavor, speed of play (getting to the action faster), point balancing, or whatever else to suit today's gamers who need to get their game in under two hours.

Hopefully everyone can someday enjoy a well run hidden movement game. Some may argue that it's too much work, takes too much time, and that it doesn't do anything to make the game more fun. I'm merely stating that it can be fun to go up against an enemy when you have no idea what their forces are, you need to use recon assets, patience, and come up with a plan to achieve your mission. I know that this is asking a lot of today's gamers, but it is a true gaming experience to play in some of the games I've described above.

Blast From The Past Pt. 15

OK, admit it. Back in the 70s and possibly the early 80s you got sucked into role-playing games, or RPGs as they are now known, at least once in your gaming life. It still seems hard to believe that from that one plain box that had the three basic Dungeons & Dragons books that it would spawn a segment of the hobby that has made millions of dollars and still exists today.

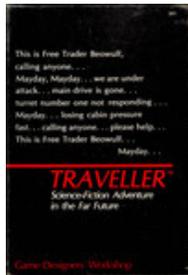


with D&D, so we expanded out slowly and surely, but we kept coming back to D&D.

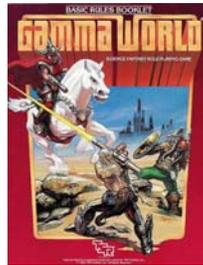
The first RPG other than D&D that we tired was Traveller. Even though there was the boxed sets, supplements, etc., it was a game that we never really got into. It seemed that the most fun was rolling up the characters, building a universe, creating ship, and more, but the actual game play was...well, dull. We tried several times and got through a few sessions, but I don't think anything ever lasted longer than a month.

I played my first D&D game back in 1977 and thought it was fun, but I was more interested in SPI and Avalon Hill games at the time. It wasn't until 1979 when I got into an ongoing campaign with a really great dungeonmaster that I really started to appreciate the game. As time went on I started to run my own campaigns, including some that were so elaborate they ended up with massive battles with armies of miniatures!

I then drifted into Squad Leader and lost some of the desire to get into RPGs as the gamers in my area had no real desire to get into that side of the hobby. Things changed again when I found a local hobby store where there were some gamers like me who did basically everything under the sun, including RPGs. This started a five year period of doing some kind of RPG gaming almost every other weekend. What started out as basically doing D&D most of the time soon expanded out into almost every popular type of role-playing game from that era.



One of the most fun RPGs I ever played was Gamma World, but here you needed a really good and clever GM. Fortunately, I ran into one and he had a very elaborate campaign that was a blast to be involved in. Basically, we started out with a spear and knife in a remote village and set out to explore. We ran into a western town, radiated zones with armies of bizarre creatures, old ICBM complexes, and more. When this GM left, so did Gamma World, and it's a shame that I was never able to finish that campaign.



We tried other games such as Top Secret, Star Frontiers, Runequest, Champions, and James Bond. We did everything from gangsters in the 1920s to being teams of secret agents trying to save the world and we had a great time. There were some great games that involved superheros, running booze shipments, and fighting supernatural beings in an H.P. Lovecraft setting.

Naturally, D&D was the most popular, especially when the hardbound books and third party supplements started to come out. It became D&D 24/7 for about two years straight with multiple campaigns running at several players houses. These were great times as you would play on a Friday or Saturday night until the wee hours of the morning, loading up on M&Ms, Coke, and pizza. Looking back, I think it was the social aspect of the game that was far more important than the game itself.

Of course, there were too many other systems to try out rather than just stick

Our evenings would usually start as meeting for dinner at 6pm on a Friday or Saturday night with the preferred venue of choice being Pizza Hut! From there it was a trip to the local grocery store to stock up on the necessities of gaming, these mainly being candy and soda! After that we would start getting set up



to play while watching a concert on MTV, then game from about 9pm until 3am. Many of us would then go home, sleep three or four hours, then get up for our jobs at the local mall, factory, or wherever we worked when we were in our teens and early twenties, only to repeat the same thing the next night. Mix in going to the arcades, watching horror and action films, and you basically had my life from the late 70s through about 1985!

Towards the end we ended up playing a lot of MERC along with AD&D. There were quite a few memorable MERC campaigns and battles including several large battles fought with miniatures. By this time, however, everyone had miniature armies for WW1, modern naval, modern micro-armor, sci-fi, colonials, and more, which led to the RPG time being cut back drastically. The biggest thing that derailed the playing of RPGs was Starfleet Battles, which our group played for about three or four years straight.

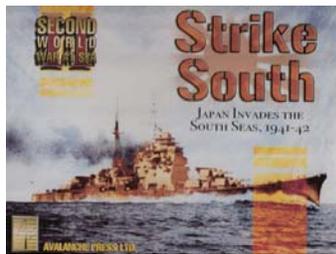
We kept coming back to RPGs and started to play some of the newer ones that came out in the early to mid 90s that included games like Twilight 2000 and Star Trek. However, it seemed like the magic had gone and in the end most of us gave up RPGs and went into boardgames and/or miniatures to stay. The newer games seemed to do everything for you and everyone was basically going through the motions of playing the game. Gone were the days of creating maps, designing characters and antagonists, and using your imagination to set up an evening of fun for your friends.

As has been stated here before I think we all reached a point where it was time to move on. School was finished, professional jobs, starting a family, and other obligations took up time previously used for gaming. Last summer, however, I was at our local gaming store when the new hardbacks for AD&D arrived. Believe it or not, there were lines of teenagers and twenty-somethings buying three and four books each! Maybe RPGs aren't dead after all!

The Second World War at Sea series, or SWAS, as it is usually referred to, is one of Avalanche Press' most popular series. Say what you will about the games that Avalanche Press puts out, with little play-testing, graphics errors, unplayable systems, etc., this series has had a string of successes. Along time ago I reviewed Eastern Fleet and just recently got a pretty good deal on its cousin, Strike South.

Strike South covers the period at the start of America's involvement in WW2, essentially when Japan ran wild through the South Seas and Indian Ocean. It is a perfect companion to Eastern Fleet in that both have numerous scenarios where it is very difficult for the Allies to win! Strike South covers the period from the beginning of the war to events leading up to Coral Sea and Midway, which are covered in separate games. This game gives players the chance to recreate the Japanese onslaught or as the Allies try to score some kind of victory in desperate circumstances.

The retail price of the game was \$59.95 and for that amount of money you do get a lot in terms of components and scenarios. First, there are two beautiful maps of the South Seas area that cover the Philippines, Singapore, Java, and Northern Australia. They are done in the standard SWAS format, which is offset tiny squares that serve as reference points for task force orders. There is also a tactical map used for surface combat. There are two counter sheets, one for ships and the other for smaller ships, transports, and aircraft. The counter sheets are well done and feature the Japanese ships done in yellow with the aircraft in a variety of shades depending upon if they were naval or land based air. The Allies are in various shades of blue with the Dutch ships and aircraft in orange.



There is also a series rule booklet and a booklet with scenarios and campaigns for the specific game. The rules are pretty easy once you understand how to write task force orders. This is the core of the game and players need to spend

some time learning what task forces can have certain orders, how they move, and what changes are permissible. After that, searching, combat, submarines, etc., is pretty easy to digest. The addition of aircraft, however, will up the complexity level just a bit. However, once you start using aircraft and conduct your first air to air or air to sea combat it gets pretty easy to do after that.



The game specific rule book features several rules that usually occur only in that game that are added on to the standard series rules. Again, most of these are minor and are easy to implement. There are

several battle scenarios which are just surface combat with the counters being placed on the tactical map. These games are a good introduction to the series and can be completed in under two hours. Yes, they do use the Avalanche "bucket of dice" system, but the surface combat actions are fun to play out.

You also get several operational scenarios (or I like to think of them as mini-campaigns) that deal with many ships and aircraft spread over a wide area. Several of these take both maps and use almost



every counter, so getting them completed in an evening could be a challenge.

So what makes this series so popular and/or interesting? To me it is the operational part of the game. The tactical battles with the massive amounts of dice rolling are fun to a point, but can get tiresome unless linked to one of the larger operational scenarios. It is when playing the operational scenarios where the game system really shines.



Each turn movement is plotted for task forces, aircraft are assigned to searches and strikes, and it becomes a real cat and mouse situation.

You know that there are enemy forces out there and have a general idea of where they are. The problem is what their composition is and their mission. Each player needs to use all of their available assets to discover where the enemy is, how many of them are there, and where are they going. When forces meet the action is transferred to the tactical map where combat is resolved. Yes, there is some paperwork involved, but it's minimal and nothing like playing some of the WW2 naval miniatures rules I've used over the years!

If there's one problem with Strike South is that it is similar to Eastern Fleet where the Allies have little to no chance in some of the scenarios. It's not the designer's fault or poor scenario design, but rather the actual historical situations. Let's face it, the Allies were not ready for the Japanese onslaught in December of 1941 and this game definitely shows that. Having said that, however, the scenarios and operational games that are given here are interesting to say the least. Can you hold the Philippines longer than what actually happened? Can you get badly needed convoys across the South Seas in the face of ever growing Japanese fleet strength?

Not only that, but where else can you get to use Dutch naval and air units? Also, the multi-national task forces with almost impossible missions are another unique part of this game. Overall, this is a well done game that provides an interesting look at the first few months of WW2 in the pacific.

I've been gaming since the mid-70s and if there's one period that really brings out the arguing, tournament mindset, pick up your ball and go home type of gamer, it's ancients. Yes, you see similar things with Napoleonics and WW2 to some extent, but nothing like ancients. I started out playing WRG 5th, then Newbury, Shock of Impact, Warhammer Ancients, and finally settled on Warmaster Ancients. By no means am I an ancient period expert, but I keep up to date on game related items in the period and I find the current state of affairs quite interesting.

Although there will never be "One Rules Set to Rule Them All", it did look like for awhile that WAB was going to come close. It had a huge following, numerous supplements with more planned, most magazine articles on the period were in terms of WAB, and many, if not most gamers based their armies for the rules. But then chinks began to appear in the armor, most notably by the lack of supplements for items like Samurai, Successors, etc., followed up by a years long wait for a second edition of the rules. A change in ownership, more delays on the second edition, then the unusual practice of selling the rules by direct order only have been damaging body blows to the franchise. Although there are still large numbers of WAB players, many still do not have the second edition, have lost interest, or just moved on to other rules.

Naturally, this left an opening for Fields of Glory to come riding in and save the day. Umm...not so fast. FOG had several huge advantages, namely having Osprey behind them in the publishing area and a well established core of gamers who were looking at FOG as an improvement of DBM. Throughout its development it was hoped that this rules set, with all of the gaming experience of the designers, input from ancient gamers around the world, then coupled with Osprey's graphics and publishing expertise would produce the ultimate set of ancients rules. Not only that, but a virtual library of army books poured forth into the hobby during its first year.



The problem with the game, at least from my point of view, is that it is DBM on steroids, or what many gamers thought DBM should have been. Reading through the examples of play it struck me that WAB gamers are not going to jump to this, although I'm sure some have. It is an entirely different style of game, definitely more formal in its approach, and obviously it would be better suited to 15mm than 28mm, which is what most WAB players have.

So, the field is now wide open for someone to produce a "dominant" set of ancients rules. By that I mean a set of rules that will clearly sell more than others, have good support, they will feature additional army lists, maybe a campaign system, and you can at least move or visit another city and have a good chance of playing with other players who have the rules and armies based for that system.

But is that possible any longer? Has the ancients gaming community been so fractured that this is merely a pipe dream? Warmaster Ancients definitely caught on and while nowhere near the level of WAB (although the Yahoo group is approaching 2500 members-pretty good for a miniatures game), I can't see all WMA players dumping their rules and armies to go to a new system. Likewise for those who turned to Impetus. This has been a successful entry into the field, although it seems to be primarily in Europe and England. Will they give up their rules for another set?

Also, what about those who still play WRG 6th and DBM/DBA? I read a convention report where they were still having tournaments with those rules and had attracted enough for large tournaments, although by reports nowhere as large as they have been. If those gamers haven't changed to WAB, FOG, or other sets by now I think the odds are slim that they will move to something new this year.

So there will be three new, high production value sets of ancient rules coming out this year. The first will be Hail Caesar, or jokingly referred to as "Powderless Black Powder"! This is an attempt to use a modified Warmaster

system and produce a book/rules similar to the success of Black Powder last year. The next will be Clash of Empires from Great Escape Games. From what I've seen this may be closer to WAB than any of the other sets. Finally, Rob Broom, who for many years oversaw WAB and Warhammer Historical, will be putting out War & Conquest as well.

It's shaping up to be almost a replay last year of Napoleonic rules where you had Black Powder, La Salle, and Republic to Empire all come out at pretty much the same time. There was an initial flurry of excitement, threads on forums about what to buy, reviews, comparisons, etc., then finally mud slinging matches about which set of rules was the best. Black Powder in my mind (even though I'm not a big fan of it) clearly won the fight, but what did it win? All three had good sales, but the main question is, what real impact did they have on that gaming period?

From what I've seen, many gamers simply went back to what they were playing before. Also, it gets hard to get others in your club interested in becoming invested in yet another set of rules, almost as if there is a new gaming illness called "Rules Fatigue". I know in our club many of these rules were bought, but we've yet to see few, if any of them played. If you have four guys who like Empire for example and play it all the time, what chance do you think you have of them helping you to set up a game of La Salle? Then next time someone wants to set up Republic to Empire then maybe Black Powder after that. I know in our club and with others that's a non-starter.

That's not saying that all of these rules are bad, but taking the time and money to get a new set of rules, learn it, then put on a game seems to be in short supply these days. Will this happen with these new releases for ancients this year? Maybe. Or one of them can stand so far above the others that it has a magnetic effect and creates a horde of new fans. Only time will tell. I'm sure that all three of these new rules will do well in terms of sales, but at the end of the day if everyone tries them and goes back to what they were playing, did we really need them?

What Are We Simulating? (cont.)

(cont. from p.3)

9. Pursuit & Army Disintegration

In wargames rules pursuit has to be one of the strangest parts of any game system. Some rules handle that when a pursuing unit touches a retreating or routing unit they're simply wiped out. Others have rules that allow for the pursuer to go wildly off the board in pursuit as well as the retreating unit. In practice, however, pursuit in combat was never a given and both sides could end up far worse than they started when the pursuit began. Pursuit, if it ever got going, could eat up the pursuers strength and some units that were being pursued put up effective rear guard actions, which are rarely seen on the tabletop. This is an area where rules writing could use some innovation. What about a table or chart that shows how long the pursuit lasts and what the effects are to both sides?

Also, rules that make brigades, divisions, etc., check for retreat/rout/disintegration have some wild extremes as well. In some systems you merely pick up the entire division and suddenly there is a massive hole in your lines. Where did the remaining brigades or battalion go? Isn't there still fighting going on there somewhere? As gamers we sometimes want quick resolutions while in reality the division may be trying to rally units, form a new line, bring up supports, etc., but on the tabletop most higher echelon units don't get a second chance.

10. Command & Control

Yes, I realize that this topic has been beat to death over the last 35 years that I've been in gaming, so I'm not going to men-



tion too much about it here. I will say that command systems such as those in Warmaster Ancients, BKC2, and the new board game Fighting Formations from GMT are a breath of fresh air in wargames rules. Anything that can simulate command and control while remaining relatively simple to grasp for most gamers is always a good thing.

11. Scenario Driven Games

Most of the games I see are relatively straight forward affairs with long lines equally deployed against their enemy, even in WW2 games! Does everyone realize that there are scenario books, orders of battle in books, online resources, etc., so that gamers can do something different? Surely, someone can come up with enough drive to do something other than "Pick 1,000 points and set up in a long line on that side of the board". How many times have you seen or participated in a siege, a river crossing under fire, rear guard actions, delaying actions, flank attacks, or assaults against heavily fortified positions? Probably not many.

12. Cavalry Charges

Here's another system in rules that have a million different interpretations. My biggest complaint is how can a charge come up short? Surely the cavalry commander would know where and when to launch a charge, plus they don't just stop in the middle of a battle and say, "Hey, that enemy is too far away!" Yet this happens time and time again in many horse & musket games where units get left hanging hopelessly just short of their intended

target. Also, most cavalry attacks were usually a series of squadron charges, but yet we rarely if ever see this on the tabletop. I remember in The Complete Brigadier that a series of squadrons would almost always defeat cavalry deployed in regiments, which was very well done.

In Summary

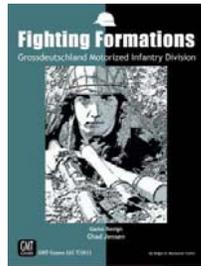
It is true that a few things I've picked up from various rules sets and mentioned here, while novel ideas, aren't always from a good set of rules! Many gamers have found that while reading a set of rules they will come across a great idea, only to find out that the rest of the rules are unplayable, don't fit the period well, or wouldn't be right for their gaming group. Also, many of us go on playing rules even though deep down we know that some aspect of the rules doesn't feel right, work as it should, or is just totally unrealistic. However, the rest of the rules make up for this, so we press on and "conveniently" ignore that section that we don't like.

But are we simulating history or merely playing a game with history in it? If you're simply playing a game with historical miniatures from the given era, then you are free to have ignored this entire article! Throw 50 Jagdtigers on the table, don't check for morale until you lose 80% of your force, ignore artillery (it just takes too long to deal with anyway), and have a good time. As a gamer it's your right to buy the figs you want and use the rules that you're going to have fun with.

If, on the other hand, you want to at least try to simulate a point in history, then hopefully this article has given you some food for thought and you'll start taking a closer look at the rules you have. This isn't a "complexity is better than simplistic" argument, rather it is an attempt to get gamers to take a look at some of the systems that are in their rules. No one set of rules is the answer to everyone's dilemma, but some rules seem to do a better job overall for certain eras. Notice I didn't even touch on things like air support, naval warfare, terrain on the tabletop, etc., as I'll probably write about those in the future!



Coming fresh off the success of the Combat Commander series, designer Chad Jensen has emerged with a new series called Fighting Formations. The first game focuses on the Grossdeutschland Motorized Infantry Division during the 1942 and early 1943 battles on the Eastern Front. As this review will show, it is a step up from Combat Commander in both scope and scale.

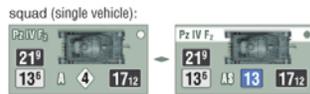


When I first opened the rulebook and the playbook I thought I was in for another session of GMT's East Front series, but this was not the case. The rules are easy to understand plus there is a well laid out index to find quick answers.

Once you start playing and get through the first few turns it gets very easy after that.

First, you get a lot of high quality components that have been a staple of GMT Games for quite some time now. There are four 22 x 34 double-sided mapsheets, several sheets of counters, a bag of different kinds of dice, wooden cubes and a token, reference cards, a deck of asset cards, a rulebook, and a full color playbook with numerous scenarios and detailed examples of play. Yes, there's a lot of stuff here!

The counters represent platoons of vehicles and infantry, but there are also similar counters for squads. This is so that platoons can break down and for taking casualties. Vehicles and guns are on long counters while infantry and MG teams are on the standard square counters. Other counters include smoke, sighting, hits, hidden units, and a variety of counters to keep track of various game functions. The asset cards are just that; cards that allow one side or the other to use things such as artillery barrages, air strikes, or to discard for certain functions. Fighting Formations is not a card driven wargame, but the cards are there to give players even more options during a turn than they already have!



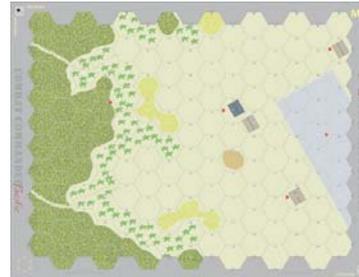
The rulebook is well laid out and if you are an experienced gamer you could probably get started playing the game by just reading the examples of play in the playbook! The actual rules themselves are probably only around 8 pages with the rest of the space taken up by terrain, what the markers mean, how to read the counters, etc.

Fighting Formations is definitely a command and control game. Each side has round command counters with a Mission side and a Tactical side. Each turn an orders matrix is seeded with the wooden cubes. There are different kinds of options and depending upon which cube you choose, there are certain initiative points that must be paid on a track. For example, if you choose to receive three asset cards for your turn, the initiative token is moved 10 spaces towards your opponent.

This may give the other player a chance to run several commands such as move and fire that only cost 2-3 initiative points each to push the token back towards the other player. Where the command chits come in is that if you're under mission command the actions don't cost anything extra, but under tactical command adds extra initiative points and out of command adds even more. This may sound complicated, but in practice it's

pretty easy and it gives player a wide range of options each and every turn. Once the 10 order cubes are used up the turn ends.

Direct fire is done by opposing die rolls using a variety of dice. If you're going for a long shot you may only roll 2D6s while if you're adjacent you may roll up to 2D20s depending upon the situation. This is

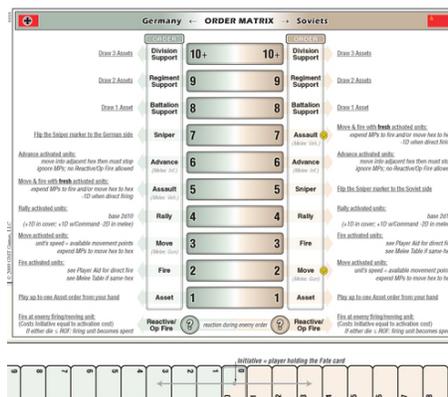


compared to a defense roll (2D10 + armor for vehicles or morale for infantry) and if it exceeds the total of the defense a hit marker is drawn. Simple, effective, and it works well during the game.

There is also melee, events, the asset cards, snipers, and a lot more. There are so many options each turn for both players that it would be impossible to describe them all here. Each player must decide on how much initiative they are willing to pay to do movement, firing, rallying, and more. At the end of the turn you may have to give up the initiative by paying quadruple for a move order just because you're desperate to seek cover or keep an attack going, but you will give your opponent the initiative for quite some time at the start of the next turn.

The scenarios range from probing attacks to full fledge assaults with masses of T-34s. The 10 historical actions and one introductory scenario will provide plenty of gaming time and there is a high replay factor with this game.

There is already talk of additional scenarios for this game and for follow on games that may involve the U.S. 2nd Armored and one of the Canadian divisions in Normandy. This first volume is a welcome addition to a crowded field of tactical WW2 games and is highly recommended.





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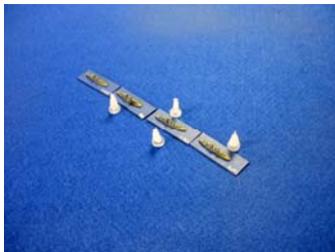
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I'm really questioning the need to keep posting on gaming forums unless it is something that either a) I'm really interested in that game/topic, or b) a gamer really needs a certain piece of information. I've come to the conclusion that posting on many of these forums is a colossal waste of time. Most of your comments are ignored if they have any hint of reality in them, you get piled on upon if you express anything contrary to the prevailing opinion, and I can't take the bad grammar that passes for intelligence these days. If I see for example, a gamer needs info on a certain unit's uniforms for the NWF in 1898 I will post and try to help them, but posting about what rules are best for a certain period is a waste of typing. Too many people respond with bizarre ideas, they hijack the thread to another topic, recommend obscure rules sets no longer in print, and more so that the entire thread becomes useless. It's also not only on gaming forums, but on sports and news sites that I frequent as well where I see childish behavior and little to no intelligent discussion. What will happen when many people such as myself abandon these sites? They'll no doubt go on, but will they get worse or better? My guess would be worse, then they will lose more people, but maybe that doesn't matter anymore. Perhaps its me who is behind the times and maybe I need to start getting angry, post idiotic statements, go on and on about nothing, and then maybe I'll fit right in with a large segment of the gaming community!

Victory at Sea WW1

On one of our gaming nights where we ended up without a place to play and having to make a last second decision on what to game, we ended up trying the WW1 version of Victory at Sea by Mongoose Publishing. The WW1 and WW2 rules are based off of their popular Babylon 5 space combat system.

We only had a few hours as were playing at the local game store, but it helped that all of us who were playing had played many, many naval games over the years, we didn't need to be briefed on every single aspect of the rules! There was a brief overview of the sequence of play, how the ship data sheets are used, movement, and how the combat sys-



tem works. To keep things simple we limited each player to just four battlecruisers each, which in the long run proved to be the right decision as with limited time available we were able to focus on the basics (no destroyers, torpedoes, etc.) and get started quickly.

The turn sequence is pretty straightforward and movement is much simpler than in most naval games. Naturally, being gamers everyone wanted to shoot at things, so after a few turns of brief maneuvering the shells started to fly. Each battlecruiser is rated for how many turrets/guns they have, range, special modifiers, and armor. Combat involves rolling large numbers of dice, checking for critical hits, then applying the effects of the damage on

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the individual ship sheet. Again, nothing here that is so complex that it would drive gamers away.

We played several turns and by that time several battlecruisers were on fire, others were damaged (some heavily) and the game was really just getting going. The system is a "grind your enemy down" type game, probably similar to Starfleet Battles where you are trying to get your opponent (s) to mark off as many boxes on their ships as possible each turn.

Overall, it was a lot of fun. Probably not the most historically accurate set of WW1 naval rules out there, but everyone was able to quickly grasp the concepts and had a good time, which is what counts in the end!

