# Warning Order

ISSUE # 36

BUSINESS NAME

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Battles For Empire II

Surprisingly, most gamers tend to focus on skirmish actions when doing colonial gaming, something that is definitely borne out by the success that The Sword & The Flame has had for 30+ years. When you go above the skirmish level that's where things get a bit fuzzy in terms of what rules to use. While there have been numerous sets over the last several decades, none has really caught on or emerged as the overall leader.

When I first played Battles For Empire (BFE) quite some time ago, my first thought was that this is the kind of operational level colonial rules I've been waiting for. Although I've played TSATF since the early 80s, all of the rules I've tried for company and battalion level games were distinct failures. Either the rules were trying to apply ACW or Napoleonic type mechanics to the colonial era, or they were so rigid and or clock like (think WRG here) that the fun of the period got sucked away after the first few turns.

Battles for Empire changed that for me. The scale was almost perfect,
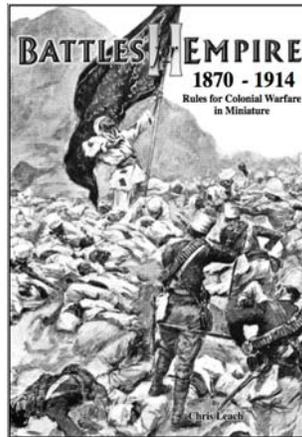
with four stands representing a company of Imperial troops or a clan of natives. The game looked good, felt right, and you definitely got the impression that there was a force of Imperial troops trying to stop a large native force. The movement system definitely gives you that "lava-like" flow of native units as they surge, stop, and then suddenly rise up and charge their enemies. We've played several games of BFE over the years and it is always eagerly looked forward to.

I recently received my copy of the revised edition, called Battles for Empire II. Naturally, the question needs to be asked that if the first version was so good, why revise it? The reasons

are many, but this is definitely a refined and enhanced version from the previous set of rules.

For those just hearing about the BFE system, it is a set of rules that allows gamers to fight large actions in the colonial era. All units except for artillery and machine guns consist of four stands. There are several basing systems given, ranging from the conventional having 2-3 figures a stand to using 15mm figs on 25mm stand sizes for effect to using just two very large stands packed with figures of whatever scale you choose to use. Most units take eight hits and once that occurs the entire unit it taken off the board, so there's no need to base individual figures for casualties sake.

The movement system is definitely similar to Fire & Fury, with each unit rolling on a chart, which determines how far they will move, if they rally, or in extreme cases if they just fall apart and rout. This does have the effect of making movement a bit random for the Imperial side, but it does a great job of simulating mass native movement (cont. on p. 3)

Inside this issue:

Special points of interest:

- *Several battle reports for Fire & Fury, Battles For Empire II, Age of Discovery, Warmaster Ancients, and Ronin.*

- *Reviews of Ronin and Battles For Empire II.*

- *Board game reviews for Breakout Normandy, Heights of Courage, Case Yellow, and The Supreme Commander.*

(cont. from p.2) as native units can be sitting idle for quite some time, then all of a sudden a fanatic attack is launched, with gives positive modifiers to other native units in the same area. This sometimes will lead to a surge of native units against the Imperial forces at the worst possible times!

Firing is done by rolling a number of D6s for how many stands in the unit (usually 4) and comparing them to a chart that lists range and quality of the unit. Each successful die roll causes one hit, with two hits in a single turn causing a shaken result, which can affect firing, melee, and movement. Artillery is also similar, rolling a number of D6s per section according to weapon type and affected by unit quality and range. Imperial units can rapid fire which will increase their firepower, but with the chance of running out of ammo! MGs can also jam and BFE does a good job of simulating the firepower along with the problems of these weapons in these types of battles.

One thing that works out very well in BFE is the quality of the firing unit. A British unit involved in a firefight with a Dervish or poor quality third rate unit will be at a huge advantage, as they usually were historically. While the third

rate unit may do some damage, they will quickly be overwhelmed, especially if the Imperial unit goes to rapid fire.

Melee uses a similar system to firing in that each unit gets a number of dice, then additional dice may be added for support units, which are units not directly involved at the point of contact, but are in base to base contact with the attacker or defender. You add a number of modifiers, then roll the dice and score hits on certain needed numbers. The loser goes shaken, which can have catastrophic consequences in the following turn.

This is where the game gets interesting and when the following turn comes around units in melee roll on the movement chart. Depending upon the result, a unit could rally and continue fighting, recoil, which is bad for the unit and others behind them, or simply melt away, giving an attacker to breakthrough and continue the attack against other units. It is this part, I believe, that gives the game its unique colonial flavor in that you never know what is going to happen from one minute to the next. It may seem like the natives are getting wiped out, then one bad melee result coupled with a poor movement roll and the line collapses while the remaining natives pour through the gap!

It's true that many games have this, but when you add the movement, firing, and melee systems all together the game seems to come alive. Rarely do all three of things work so well hand in hand. People may hate the movement system, but love the combat or gamers hate the combat system, but love the basing, game ideas, etc. Here it all seems to come

together to create a well thought out and workable colonial battle system. Sure, you can have games where the British sit there in a line and annihilate the opposition, but there's always that chance that one unit will miss on its firing, the native unit will roll a fanatic result, rise up and swamp the British unit, opening a gap that ends the game! The beautiful thing about this is that you never know when it is coming, so like most Victorian era commanders you need to constantly prepare for the worse, which sometimes leads to other mistakes!

There's also a few other odds and ends that probably should be mentioned. The only leaders that matter for command & control is the overall commander who has a 12 inch influence that gives a positive modifier on the movement charts. Other officers give a plus on the combat tables, but that's about it for their somewhat limited role. There is an optional Heroic Leaders rule that looks interesting, but we have yet to try it. The other interesting item is that only Imperial and Imperial trained units (think Indians, Egyptians, etc.) can change formation as the natives are only in a mass type formation except for a few rifle armed units that can skirmish. Again, this is easily handled and just deducts a certain amount from movement. Overall, the basic systems are fairly easy to navigate through and our group has never come across any real problems with these rules over the years. That's not to say that there aren't

We had decided to play Fire & Fury for our regular gaming night, but needed a scenario for at least four players, plus one that could be finished in under four hours as that's all the time we had. After looking through the various scenario books I came across the Battle of Franklin in 1864. The battle was a close affair and eventually led to the Confederate forces falling back to Nashville where they were invested and finally defeated by Thomas later that year.

On the day of the game I remembered to bring everything except the fortifications as I had read the game map wrong! Instead we had to use some excess stone walls and fences, so that's why some of the images don't look right! Set up was pretty fast, although it is difficult to get the terrain to look exactly like the Franklin area.

The Confederate forces came on quickly, moving down the roads and hitting the initial Union defenses outside of the town. At first the Union forces held as the Confederates sorted themselves out and continued the attack, finally overwhelming the defenders. The remainder of the Confederate forces continued to build up on the flanks, getting ready to attack the town all at the same time in an effort to swamp the defenses. Naturally, the movement rolls conspired to defeat that attempt so the first attacks went in and were thrown back.

The town was set up so that it was difficult to bring numbers to bear in any one place and there were few places for artillery to deploy to aid the attack. The Union forces were having difficulties as well as though they had extra units to spare, there were no places to fit them into the line. By the fifth turn the Confederates were finally all set to go and the flanking brigades began to make their presence felt. Up until this time the defenders had caused numerous casualties to the attacking forces, but couldn't quite deliver that knockout blow.

Pretty much the entire Confederate surged forward and hit the outskirts of the town. However, they were pushed back,

rallied and tried again. Several brigades got a toe hold in the town itself, but then traffic jams became an issue as well. The Confederates continued to press forward and after several turns had breached the town in three places, which gave them about five brigades in the town itself. The Union forces hung on doggedly and began moving more forces to clog the main roads into the town, meaning that the Confederate forces had to fight hard for every yard.

In the end the game was called as a Confederate minor victory. They had taken the outside suburbs of the town by nightfall, but had suffered numerous casualties and the Union forces would be able to fall back in good order or even counterattack the following day. It was a good battle with several wild swings of fortune that enabled the Confederates to get into the main defenses and was unusual in that most ACW battles weren't over a town. I think that we'll play this one again someday as it was an interesting scenario with several possible outcomes.

Battle of Franklin
November 30, 1864
Hood's Approach, 4–4:30 pm
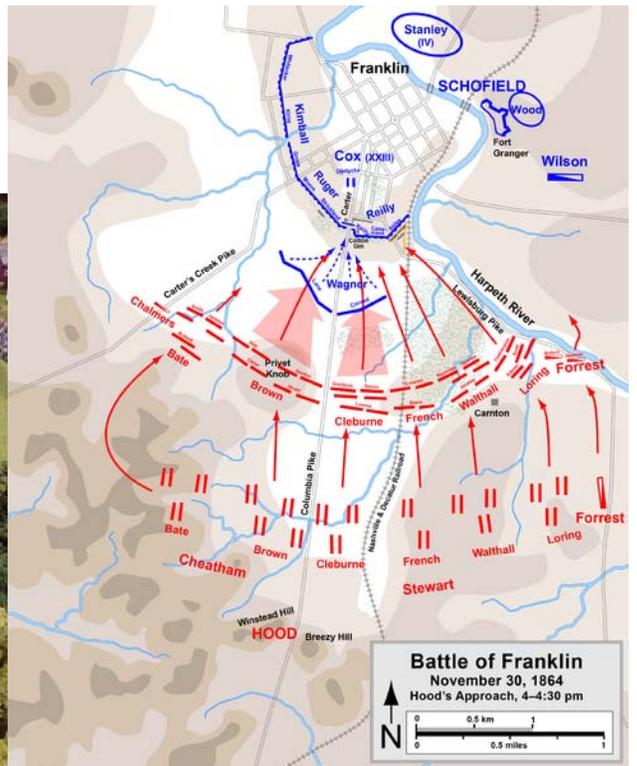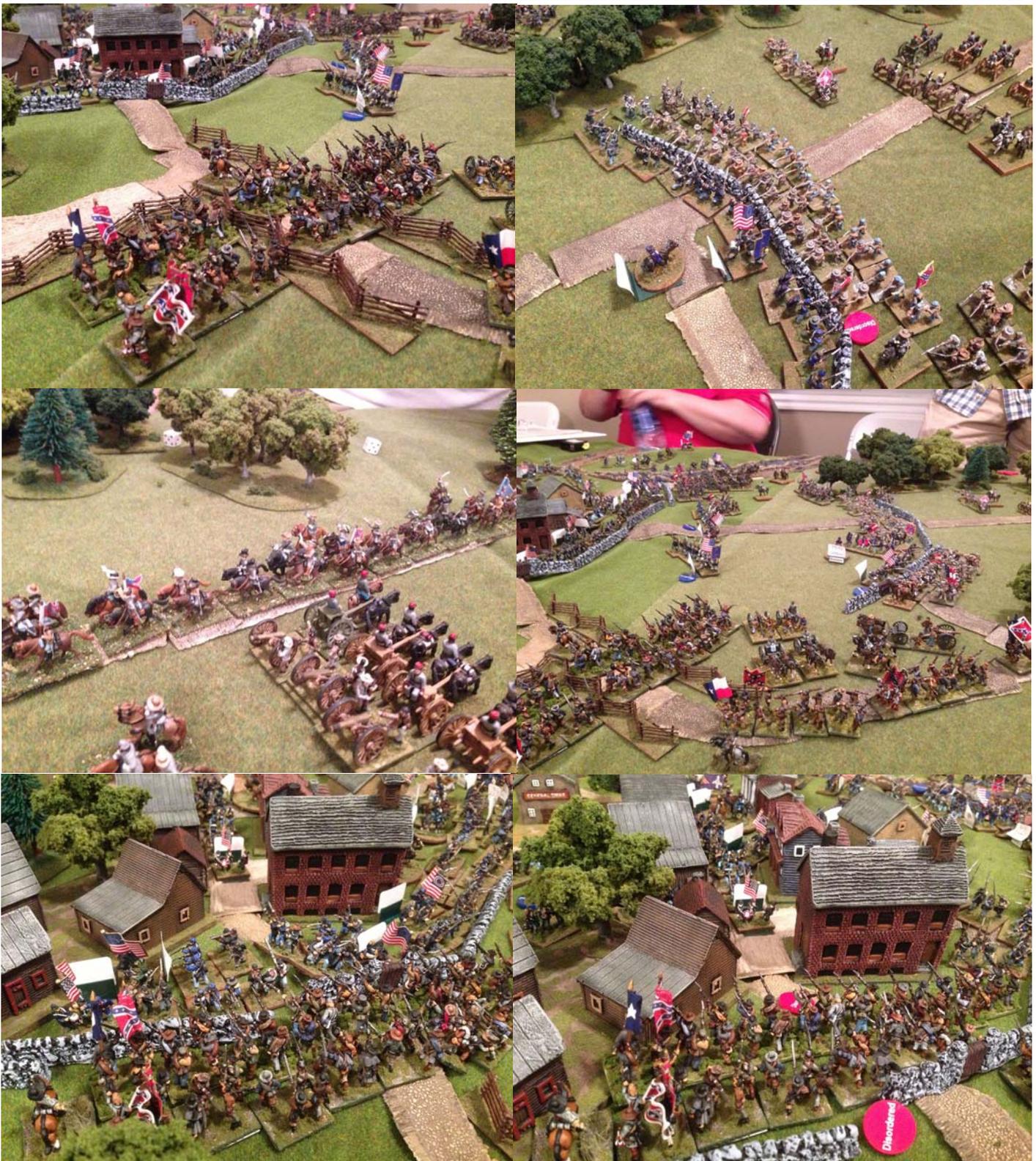
Several images from the battle with the Confederates overrunning the initial defenses outside of the town, then the main attack on the town itself. There were definitely several traffic jams and the defensive terrain was pretty tough for the attacker to negotiate. The Confederate forces had to launch a series of attacks against the defenses which finally prevailed and they entered the town.

Case Yellow by GMT

Game Review

The invasion of France and the Low Countries in 1940 has always been difficult to simulate in wargames. On one end the historical situation is balanced, but the mistakes by the Allied high command were disastrous. How do you prevent gamers from not making those same mistakes? The answer is usually a ton of special rules that literally destroy the game or the other route is to handicap the ratings of the Allied forces that the Germans always win no matter what they try to do. Case Yellow by Tod Racier, the designer of Paths of Glory among many other games, tries to take this campaign to a different level.

The standard sized GMT box comes with quite a few components, which by now is a GMT trademark. First, there is a very well done back-printed 22x34 map which has different uses for the various scenarios. The main difference in the two maps are the tracks on the sides for the various functions. You get one and a half counter sheets with the combat units and various markers, three game reference cards (one has a map of the Netherlands back-printed on it for scenario #4), a set of rules, and finally a play book. The rule book and play book are both in color with a variety of examples that are included. Overall, there is nothing to complain about in terms of components

When you first glance through the rules and look at the counters your first thoughts are that this is a pretty standard hex and counter wargame. Read the rules briefly, refer to the playbook, set the counters up, and get going in under an hour or so. You would end up being sadly mistaken! The rules, while not very long, are going to take a few times reading through them to figure out how to play. Not only that, the play book has additional rules that get go along with the standard rules, which

for things like the first scenario, will cause you to flip back and forth through both of them.

In no particular order there are sections covering paratroop drops, the various fortifications across the map, Germans creating bridgeheads that affect combat, combat supply, refugees, armor attrition, and different effects of zones of control based upon the movement factor color or if the counter has white or yellow stripes on it! A few of these things by themselves are fairly easy to grasp and add a lot of flavor to the game. Items such as the armor attrition and creation of bridgeheads are very clever ideas and a breath of fresh air regarding this campaign. However, add them to the movement restrictions on the Allies, the chit pull system, Operation Dynamo, and the Fall Rot side of the campaign and you have a very involved game.

The sequence of play is not too daunting as it consists of a series of chit pulls for various action phases. The Allies generally get a few chits marked Move or Combat while the German chits can be either, which gives the Germans a huge edge in flexibility. During the action phases units move and conduct combat (depending upon the type of chit drawn) before going on to the next chit. At the end of the action phases armor attrition is checked, victory points are added up, refuges are placed, and so on.

It is my assertion that you really need to survive the first few turns to get through the game as those are the toughest. The initial paradrop, German move and attack with armored units, terror bombing, placing refugees, and the page long re-

strictions on Allied units in regards to who and where they can move will have you constantly referencing the rules. The second turn gets a little easier, but then you have to go into the Operation Dynamo rules followed by the German refit and Fall Rot sections. If you can make it the start of turn 5 the game does turn into your standard wargame and starts playing much faster. Those first few turns, however, will take some getting used to.

After a few plays I've noted that it is similar to many France 1940 games in that it is very difficult to simulate the rapid German advances, even with a lot of scripted or special rules. The system plays well, is very interesting, and with three scenarios and the drop on Holland

training scenario, there is some replay value here. At first I thought the Holland scenario was weird, but after playing the game now a few times my recommendation is to start with that as if you're playing the Germans you need to get that first turn or two right!

Overall, I think this is a keeper, although I'm not sure how many times it will hit the table in the future. Good components, interesting situation, some clever and flavorful rules, plus the game play isn't all that bad. The issue is the large number of special rules, especially for the first few turns. Expect to spend a lot of time with the charts and rule book in hand, learning how to enact the Dyle plan, ,who can move and who can't, Operation Dynamo, Fall Rot, Maginot area restrictions, and so on. It can be a pain in the back side at times, but the end result seems worth it.
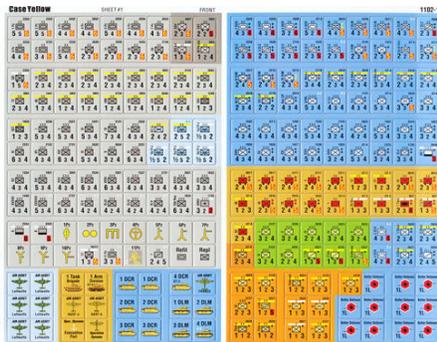
Breakout Normandy by L2   Game Review

Before Avalon Hill went under they did produce several iconic games with one being Breakout: Normandy. Not only was it an area based game similar to Storm Over Arnhem and Turning Point Stalingrad, but it proved to be a highly popular game and went for a pretty high price on Ebay for quite some time. L2 recently re-published Breakout: Normandy in a deluxe edition and since I was very curious after owning several of the other similar games, I decided to try it out.
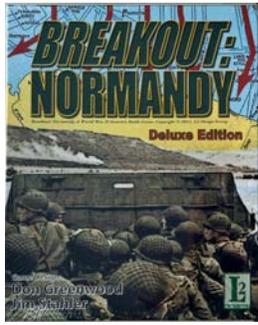
First, the components are similar to the original AH game, but slightly higher quality. The game comes in a larger than normal box and has a cardboard/mounted map that covers the area from east of Caen all the way to Cherbourg in the west. The rule book is done in color and the counters are the large variety, with color coding for divisions along with plenty of markers for various game functions. The map has been modified from the Avalon Hill version to include more info and I personally think it is an improvement. You also get some plastic "x" shaped pieces that are used for disruption status where the latest game in this "series", Monty's Gamble, uses regular counters. Overall, there's not much to complain about with the components.

The rules are fairly straightforward and if you've played other area/impulse type games, you should catch on pretty fast. If you've played Monty's Gamble you can basically set up the game, check the special rules, and get started! There are also extensive examples of play at the end of the rule book and several pages of designer notes. I think the most confusing parts of the rules deal with how the impulses are tracked and the Advantage marker. In future editions this does need to be clarified and raises some questions while playing your first few turns.

The game comes with the basic scenario, which covers the landings up to June 12th, and an extended campaign that goes on for another two weeks with additional units that arrive as reinforcement. The basic game is long enough as it is and very challenging, so my guess is that most gamers choose this scenario for play. Naturally, there is a special section in the rules that covers operations on D-Day and while it takes up some extra time, I found that it adds a lot of flavor to the game and goes faster than you would expect.

Each turn is broken into a series of impulses. During your impulse you can select an area, then use the units to bombard, move, attack units in that area or in another area, or blow/repair bridges. After both sides have finished an impulse, in most cases the marker gets advanced one space on a track. If the first Allied die roll of an Allied impulse is less than the number where the marker resided on the track, the turn ends. Clever mechanic and there are ways to get extra impulses, move the track up and down, etc., that adds another level of game play. Each combat unit has a Fresh and a Spent side. When a unit is Fresh it can move and/or attack, while when it is Spent it can only defend.

For attacks, a lead unit is identified with other units adding modifiers to the die roll, including artillery support. The defender chooses a lead unit, then additional units in the area plus the terrain are added for the overall defense factor. Both sides roll 2D6 and if the attacker wins, casualty points are assessed to the defending units, which are then used to flip fresh units to spent, spent units to Disrupt 1 or 2 status, retreat out of that area, or a combination of all of the above.

Once the turn ends there is a chance to refit units by using supply markers. Unfortunately for both sides, there are never enough supply points to go around! There will need to be some tough decisions on which units get flipped to their fresh sides, where the focus for the next day's fighting should be, and so on. Units can then fall back or move to an adjacent area, which is sort of a withdrawal under the cover of darkness rule or setting things up for a big attack on the next turn.

Game play usually sees the Allies land and start spreading out to make room for additional units and to break up the German defense before it starts to consolidate the tougher terrain positions. At some point the Allies have to advance beyond naval bombardment range and into the bocage, which causes a number of problems for them and certainly helps the defenders. Late in the game things get desperate for both sides and there is a final rush to capture or hang onto those last few victory point areas.

Overall, this is a very good game and certainly lives up to the reputation that is has had for a long time. The Allies and Germans have a number of options here and while strategy plays a huge part in this game, luck does as well. A few die rolls here and there can have huge momentum swings for one side or the other. This game is highly recommended and will probably hit the table a few times each year in the future.

Frontier Slugfest   WMA Battle Report
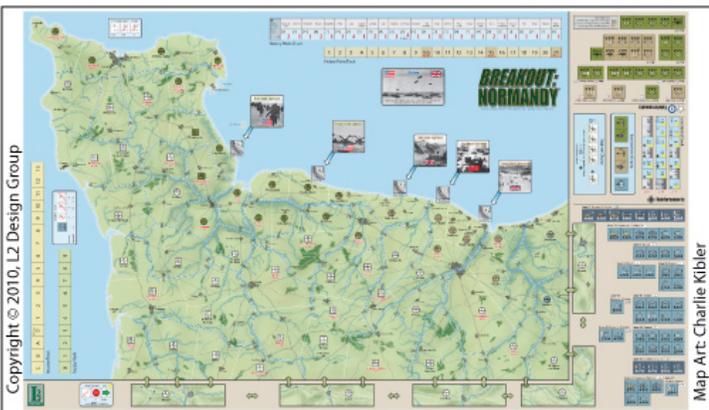
Finally, after about three years I got around to finishing my 2,000 point Indian army for Warmaster Ancients. To do this you need at least eight archer units and I only had five, so the Indians had been at a disadvantage the last few plays! Some of this was my own fault as I should have finished the necessary units sooner, but after painting five armies in 10 years and about thirty units of Indians I had definitely reached the burnout stage on this scale. I was finally able to force myself to finish the last three units, but it was no easy feat!

Although I have a Successors army that was an ideal historical opponent for the Indians, we chose to go with Romans in a fictional border encounter. We each chose 2,0000 points, which for the Indians would put a lot of units on the board! The Romans went with their basic set up, which was several legions backed by strong auxiliaries, some artillery, a few skirmishers, archers, and some heavy cavalry. They deployed in a solid line with the legions being closely supported and the cavalry on one flank. As usual when playing the Romans, the idea is to try to hold the flanks as long as possible as they are usually short on cavalry, then using the legions to grind their opponents down in the center until they achieve

victory. Not the most exciting strategy, but it works and has been successfully used against quite a few in our group over the years!

The Indian army was a mix of troops and one thing could definitely be said of it; they were extraordinarily average! There were a lot of units that included

twelve infantry and eight archer units for starters, plus some skirmishers, a unit of elephants (it would be a crime to not use elephants in an Indian army), a unit of chariots, and several units of medium cavalry. The reason that I say extraordinarily average is because each unit, with the exception of the elephants and chariots, has basic average stats, no armor to speak of, and their strength lies in numbers. The total number of units was right around 30 with a break point of 13, so that is quite a lot of stuff on the board for a WMA game.

The Indian side of which I was a part of decided to break the elephant unit apart and attach them singly to various infantry brigades. We've used this in the past with varying degrees of success. When elephants are used as one unit they can be devastating in a charge, but if they fail and are finished off that is a massive points loss that could cost the Indian players the game if it ends up being determined by points.

The Indians had a strong start, getting their cavalry out on the flanks and advancing towards the enemy. The infantry brigades, however, had a mixed performance and the center brigade had command problems all night long. The one thing that all of us like is (cont. on p.9)

(cont. from p.8) that the system does a good job of creating that ebb and flow that armies more than likely had if you had a bird's eye view of the great battles of the era.

The Romans had a very poor start and really didn't get moving until the third or fourth turn. By that time the main cavalry action had begun on the Indian left with their medium cavalry and chariots attacking and counterattacking the Roman cavalry. In the end the Indians prevailed, but their cavalry and chariot units were wrecked. In the center the skirmishing action began with both sides taking losses while the main striking forces of both sides struggled to get into action.

By about the fifth turn there were a series of infantry engagements that set a pattern for the rest of the evening as they were back and forth slugfests, with both sides taking ground but also taking heavy casualties. In fact, this was one of the bloodiest battles we have had yet with units getting hammered continuously, then the momentum switching sides almost every turn.

The extra Indian archer units definitely made a difference as no matter which Roman units advanced they were almost always met by a storm of arrows. However, the Roman legions' better armor and bonuses started wearing away at the more numerous Indian units. By the seventh turn the Romans were dangerously close to their breaking point with the Indians doing well in that category. However, they had many units that were down one or two stands, so command and control became an issue for them.

On the eighth and final turn the Romans made one final push in the center and had some success. The Indian counterattacks, however, pushed the Romans over their break point and the game ended as an Indian victory.

An Indian victory! Now there's some words not heard in our gaming group that often! Usually the Indians are the good natured guys who almost always come close, but end up second. Not this game as they dominated the battlefield from the start to finish, really going aggressively after the Romans and piling on where needed. Overall, it was a fun and very entertaining game for all who played.

# Third Reich: New vs. Old   Board Game Analysis

After Squad Leader, is there any more iconic game than Avalon Hill's Third Reich? When it made its debut back in the 70s it was regarded not only as one of the most complex games of its time, but also it established itself as one of the most popular. Just looking at the article index on BGG for the game entry shows enough listings for a dozen games, rather than just for this one! I can remember playing this game over and over "back in the day" along with numerous discussions about strategies, what ifs, and which side you were going to play next time.
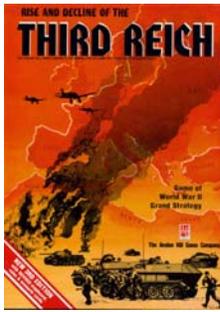
Naturally, games come and go, which is what happened to Third Reich. There are now so many other wargames out there that few have time to go back and visit the classics. There have also been quite a few games on this subject, including four new WW2 grand strategic games coming out this year alone! I recently played a full game of the new version of Third Reich, but I saw this staring at me from the shelf the other day and so I took it out for a play. Surprisingly, the game was still pretty good, although a bit dated by now. So, I was inspired to write this piece comparing the old game to its revised editions that are still popular today.

Third Reich went through several versions of rules, although the counters stayed pretty much the same. It wasn't until Advanced Third Reich came out were there any significant changes and those were in my opinion, titanic in nature. With the demise of Avalon Hill a new version came out from Avalanche Press called John Prados' Third Reich and it too has gone through three versions of the rules. When most gamers talk about Third Reich today, the inevitable question is do you play the AH or the Avalanche Press versions?

The Avalon Hill version definitely has those trademark 70s components. The map, which is

in four sections and mounted, consists of mainly a ton of white hexes that are just barely large enough to hold the counters. The AP version is also similar in that the hexes are very, very small, but the map is in full color and you can purchase the deluxe map (strongly recommended!) that takes care of the problem. You will also see that the AP version has numerous sea control boxes printed in the water areas as this version uses a different naval system.

Likewise for the counters where the AH version has functional, single sided counters for all of the major countries, but the minors and neutrals are hard to tell apart. The AP version has beautiful, two sided counters, plus the minors and neutral all have their own counters and are clearly distinguishable. The AH rules are written in the style of the era and at one time were thought to be at the upper end of complexity for wargames. That of course isn't true with so many complex games published already, but the rules will take a few readings to understand. The AP rules are similar in that they are long, there are a lot of special rules about countries, and it will take a few tries to get through them.

Overall then for components, the AP version definitely has the edge, but then it had almost 30 years to improve upon it with modern printing techniques. The AP map is well done and I've enjoyed playing on it, plus the double-sided counters really make things easier during the game.

Game play is different as well, although some of the same concepts are shared by both games. For example, both still use BRPs (Basic Resource Points) and they share a similar economic systems in terms of growth, lend lease, purchasing, and so on. While the AH version uses an almost clock like

sequence of play, the AP version uses a chit pull system that makes the turns very interesting. Both sides still purchase offensives, but in the AP version you can purchase chits that allow your forces to do a variety of operations on multiple fronts. That's the first major difference in these two versions.

The second is the diplomacy aspect where in the AH game not much effort was put into that. You basically knew who was going to side with who and while you may able to prevent things for so long, some alliances were inevitable. Not so for the AP version. Each country, including minors and neutrals, have diplomacy tracks that can be influenced by

BRPs (bribery), die rolls, and events. This makes the game very different each time you play and in my last game Hungary and Romania didn't come in until the end of 1942, which really hurt the Germans in Southern Russia, although Turkey joined the Axis early and put pressure on Russia.

The third major difference is the random events. In the AH game each side draws one chit at the start of the game and that's about as random as it gets. In the AP game a chit is drawn at the start of EACH turn! Yes, this means that alliances can change, different countries can research and deploy jets earlier, upgrades for units, and more. I believe it is this aspect and the diplomacy that gives the AP version an edge in replay value as you never know what is going to happen in these two areas. The random events add a lot of fun to the game and keep things very interesting!
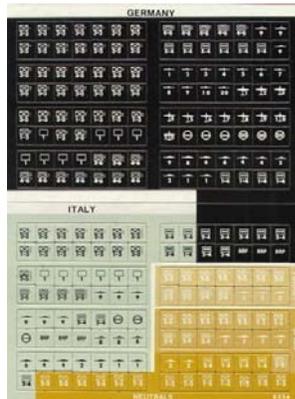
(cont. from p.10) The movement system and surprising the air system are very similar to both games and not much has changed in that area. The naval system still uses the same types of counters, but now sea control and raiding are big parts of the game. Combat is as different as apples and oranges. The AH game uses a standard type combat charge with odds while the AP version used their famous "bucket of dice" approach where you throw a D6 for each combat factor and score hits depending certain factors. This can create some wild swings of fortune and some players do not care for this system. However, the AH system is almost exactly the opposite where you pretty much know beforehand what the results are going to be for each combat.

Both games will see the inevitable entry of the U.S, which naturally has a huge impact on the game. In the AP game, however, the entrance can be a bit random, so for example in the last game I played the U.S. didn't arrive until fall of 1942, which put the Allies way behind schedule and caused a landing in Spain to get into Europe before summer of '44.

Both games can be on the long side and if you think that you'll be able to sit down with four or five players and finish this in a few hours you're in for a surprise. The AH version, in my opinion, plays much faster than the AP one, mainly because of the expanded diplomacy, sea control, and numerous random events that are in the AP version. Fortunately, both versions come with several optional starting periods for shorter games while the AP version also comes with a Barbarossa and Fall of France scenarios which
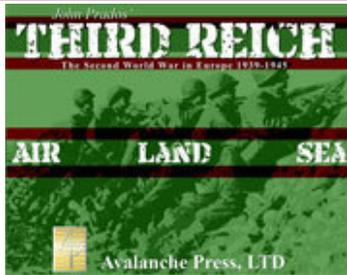
are great for learning the movement and combat systems. Also, combat that is resolved with one die roll in the AH version can be 20-40 dice in the AP game.

There are Pacific versions available for each version that will extend the game even further and the AH version has so many variant articles in back issues of The General that it would take years to try them all! Avalanche Press has also released two supplements, The Third Reich/Great Pacific War Player's Guide and Rumors of War. Both of these supplements add new events, more counters, a map extension, alternative starting situations, a 1946-48 Russian-U.S. conflict in Europe and much more.

These AP supplements in my opinion, is what gives the AP version a huge advantage in this discussion. There are so many options, i.e., Italian jets in '43, Japan discovering the nuclear bomb, adding Marines to all nations' forces, war breaking out in 1938, and so on, that it would be impossible to get bored with this version. There are far more opportunities to get a non-historical result with the AP version than with the older AH one.

As I stated earlier, the AH version is still a good game. In terms of graphics, game design, game systems, etc., it is showing its age, but that should not deter gamers from giving it a try and in fact there is still a sizeable crowd that will only play the AH game. The AP version,

however, is a vast improvement in my opinion on an already proven design. Although the combat system is much more random, that is one of the facets of the game that I enjoy. In the AH game many of the combats each turn were a foregone conclusion, but with the AP version there is a greater chance for countries like Poland, France, and Greece to hold out longer and throw a wrench into Axis planning. Add into that the seemingly endless random events and available variants, which makes each new game a standalone event.

So, where does Third Reich go from here? The AH version is still widely available on Ebay and there are several sites where you can download issues of the General to get the variant articles. AP seems to have ceased production on Third Reich, Great Pacific War, and the two supplements, but they did reprint the deluxe map, which is a vital necessity! All of these items are of course still widely available from several gaming sites.

Finally, I can't finish this article without a mention of the final evolution of Third Reich, which is called A World at War from GMT games and recently reprinted. This is not a game, but a way of life! From the staggering 100+ page rulebook to keeping track of so many things that you need a command staff, this is the ultimate version of Third Reich. Basically, ,you burn or sell all of your other games and devote your life to this game. In fact, under the page for this game at BGG there is a Geek list entry that is one of the funniest things I have ever read. It describes how a gamer came across this game and how it affected his life for a year or so!

Third Reich has been one of the mainstays of the hobby for approaching four decades and regardless of the version that you choose, there is still a lot of life left in this game series.

From time to time we as gamers come across something, whether it be a book, movie, article, etc., and think to ourselves, "Wouldn't that period be a great one to get into?" In reality, and yes, reality has little to do with gaming at times, we don't clearly think things through. This is why many of us end up with stacks of unpainted figures, rules sitting on shelves that have been never used, Osprey books that have only had a cursory glance, and so on for periods that we so badly wanted to get into, but never really did.

The reasons for this are many, ranging from underestimating the complexity of the rules to needing a second mortgage to afford all of the figures to have enough for two sides. The reasons could also vary from there is little to no info on the uniforms of the period to not being able to get other gamers interested in even trying the period out. Finally, there is that horror of horrors that has happened to all of us and that is what if the period just isn't any fun?

In this article I'm going to just go through some of the pros and cons of various periods I've seen through the years that seem to be tough to game. Not everyone may agree with my list, but feel free to send me your ideas for a follow up article in the future.

Vietnam Ground Actions

Yes, right off the bat here's the one period that can almost define what we're talking about. Without getting into the politics and other negative connotations, there's plenty of problems with this period right from the start. The most obvious one is the terrain, which is very, very hard to simulate with gaming materials. Add onto that helicopters, airstrikes, limited intelligence, ambushes, etc., and you have hit the jackpot for things that most skirmish games don't simulate well.

Pros: Vast amount of source material, large number of battles/actions, plenty of figures in a variety of scales, and surpris-

ingly, there are a number of rules sets for the period.
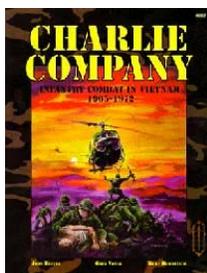
Cons: Terrain, terrain, and more terrain. I've seen very few well done Vietnam games and it is exceedingly difficult to model the jungle, trails, hills, and so on that typified the Vietnam conflict. Hidden movement in dense terrain isn't fun in gaming and having to tie the hands down on US players isn't fun either in an attempt to simulate limited intelligence as well as not being able to use your overwhelming firepower.

Modern Naval Warfare

While naval warfare, particularly WW2 is popular with miniatures gamers and board gamers as well, the modern era doesn't do too good, despite there being an outstanding set of rules available called Harpoon 4. Although there are other modern naval rules available, in comparison to Harpoon they can't be taken very seriously. Complex, tough to referee, full of data, and did I mention complex?
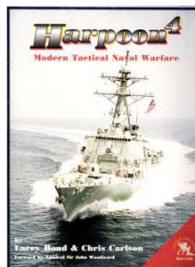
Pros: This will teach you everything you ever wanted to know about surface to surface missiles, sonar, search systems, and what modern naval combat truly is. Mind boggling amount of data and the ability to play with almost any ship, sub, or aircraft currently or coming into existence. Well supported, plenty of scenarios, and is suitable for group play.

Cons: Where to begin? First, for the referee it can be a lot of work. Second, many of today's gamers don't want to be bothered with learning as many nuances and details as this game has to offer. Third, there are a lot of rules and it will take several readings and plays to run a successful group game. I've found it to be a rewarding experience, but then again I'm a fan of complexity and few others share this passion!

Mexican-American War

This period will certainly bring up arguments about how hard it is to game

or not to game. I've played several Mexican-American War scenarios and several scenarios from the outstanding GMT game called Gringo! If you don't handicap the Mexicans as they were historically in terms of tactics and leadership, then you can have some interesting games that are a cross between the ACW and a Napoleonic battle. But there's the issue. The Mexican army had serious leadership issues, their tactics weren't the greatest and American casualties were fairly light considering the length of the campaigns and the number of battles fought.

Pros: Very interesting era with some unusual units. Definitely out of the ordinary and there is some good source material, plus there are plenty of rules systems out there.

Cons: Players on the Mexican side probably aren't going to make the same mistakes as the Mexican officers did and unless you handicap one side or the other there's no way you're going to get semi-historical results. In fact, there's some scenarios in the Gringo game that are foregone conclusions before you even start, which isn't too much fun except if you are a masochist and you can't play a close run game like Buena Vista each week.

Realistic Space Combat

Yes, this is not "cinematic" space combat like Star Wars, Babylon 5, Full Thrust, or other 2D space games. Granted, those kinds of games are fun and I've played in a ton of them over the years. No, I'm talking about full on 3D space combat with kinetic projectiles, lasers that always hit (you can't miss in space!), and things that you never have to worry about like heat dissipation, batteries, etc. Of course a degree in physics, math, or engineering would come in handy while learning or playing these kinds of games, but they are definitely a change of pace for those use to watching X-Wings and Tie Fighters (cont. on p13)

(cont. from p. 12) slug it out.

Pros: An eye opening experience that will generally change how you view sci-fi movies! If you have tactical skill in a 3d environment this will provide you with a whole new series of challenges and just surviving an engagement is something to be proud of.

Cons: Complexity and a high learning curve. Games like Attack Vector Tactical are going to take some effort to get into and training your group to just get movement to be understood could be challenging by itself. Also, these kinds of games have very little fun factor in them, so it's tough to find gamers who are interested in trying them out.

Ancient Naval Combat

Yet another period that I tried to get into and gave up after admittedly a few feeble attempts. Yes, everyone remembers the scenes in Ben Hur and it sounds so exciting, but basically there isn't much there and virtually no difference in technology, so it comes down to either who moves first or who chickens out first each and every game. I've looked through several sets of rules, trying to a) find something my group would be able to understand (not looking for an ancient version of Harpoon 4!) and b) would offer some replay value. So far, I haven't found anything yet.

Pros: Looks good and sounds great. What isn't appealing about ships ramming each other, boarding actions, etc., and a change of pace from most naval wargames. Lots of miniatures in various scales which can create a very attractive game.
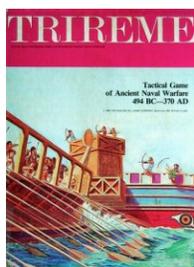
Cons: Usually ends up where one side or the other commits followed by the other side crashing into what's not already engaged. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Spanish Civil War

With the incredible selection of models and scales currently available you would think that one would see an increase in Spanish Civil War gaming. It was the opening shot in what would be-come WW2 and where the 88, German air support, the T-26, etc., were all first used. There was a bewildering array of units, plenty of battles, and there is good research available about the period. So why so little attention? My own personal viewpoint is that outside of skirmish gaming it doesn't offer what most gamers want, i.e., armor and more armor. Yes, this was mainly an infantry based war with lots of artillery and mechanization/air support thrown in randomly. Not the kind of things that gamers like to hear. Believe me, if there had been Tiger tanks in the SCW this period would be close to the top of the gaming pyramid!

Pros: Fascinating units and situation that can be played in almost any scale. Numerous rules sets, figures, terrain, etc., that are easily available.

Cons: Mainly an infantry war and how do you simulate the command and control issues that both sides had or the very poor performance of the Italians for example? Also, keeping a gaming group interested by just doing infantry battles again and again would be a challenge.

The Boxer Rebellion

What's not to like here? The end of the Victorian Colonial era, colorful units, the siege of the Peking Legation, and a wide variety of allied nations fighting a common opponent. You would think that this would be perfect for gaming and for some it is. Definitely the poorer cousin for colonial gamers in comparison to the Zulu War, Sudan, or the Northwest Frontier. My feeling is that while the siege at Peking is fascinating and Seymour's drive to relieve the city with the varied forces under his command, there wasn't too much else to get excited about.

Pros: Being able to field Austrian, German, Russian, Japanese, U.S., Italian, British, and other forces all on the same side definitely has appeal. It's colonial gaming so you could do this with The Sword and the Flame or games at a larger scale. Plenty of figures, some good resources, and some of the games I've seen of this period look good.
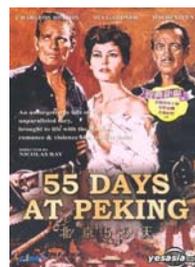
Cons: Not much in the way of Chinese terrain that is available. Simulating the command and control issues among the allied nations would be a challenge and other than a few battles, there's not too much to this war. You would really need to just do fictional battles or set them in this period of time.

Samurai

Certainly one of the most colorful and interesting gaming periods that is currently available. It looks and sounds great, plus there were hundreds of battles, great looking figures, and plenty of rules to choose from. So why don't we see more Samurai games out there in the gaming world? For starters, it is a difficult period to understand and trying to determine which army you're going to paint can be a challenge. Although there is plenty of reference material available it can be confusing at times to determine exactly who was on who's side. Finally, painting some of the samurai, particularly the cavalry, can be a time intensive undertaking.

Pros: Beautiful armies, plenty of rules and figures available, multiple eras to choose from, and something out of the ordinary that can be a good thing at times.

Cons: Most rules don't simulate the era very well, difficulty painting the figures, and the period will take some reading to understand.

Overall, these are just some of the periods that I've experienced and why I think that they are difficult to game. Your mileage may vary and perhaps you've found a way to create some great games that are enjoyed by many gamers and if so I would like to hear about them. For myself, however, it's just another long list of things I would like to get into, but can't seem to finish!

Flanking Attacks   AOD Battle Report

One of the great mysteries of our gaming group is why we don't play Renaissance more often! It's usually a pretty wild game, looks good, everyone seems to have a good time, and yet we only trot it out once a year. Well, this was another of those times where we got an opportunity to play a four player game of AOD and these kinds of chances are not to be missed!

Lack of preparation time meant a straightforward meeting engagement with both sides starting fairly close together. The French and their Swiss allies were using the town as their base camp while the Imperialists had their entire camp deployed on the board on their baseline. The forces were as follows:

French

Four units of Swiss Pike, two units of French pike, two heavy artillery batteries, two light cavalry units, and four gendarmes/heavy cavalry. All together a small, but very powerful force.

Imperialist

Seven units of Spanish, German, and Italian pike backed by skirmishers, light cavalry, and several units of heavy cavalry. There were several batteries of light and medium artillery as well. A large force, but not as high of unit quality as the French force.

In AOD you use the movement charts to determine who goes first in a turn, but it also doubles for the set up as well. In this instance the French side had to deploy two of their three "battles" before the Imperialist side, which gave the Imperialists a chance to mass all of their cavalry on one flank. Basically, the battle was going to be a slow motion turning circle as each side tried to overwhelm one flank. Sure enough, the Imperialist heavy cavalry struck out for the French flank while the French went ahead with their basic plan.

There were some problems with this, however, as the Imperialists were going to get to the French flank before they could crash in the Imperialist flank. After about two turns the French heavy cavalry peeled back and began moving to intercept the Imperialist cavalry which were making good time and would be ready to launch their attack in a few turns.

Meanwhile, the Swiss pressed on towards the inevitable crash with the Imperialist pike, who were waiting for them in a constricted area of the board. The Imperialist artillery didn't do too much, but the French light cavalry defeated the Imperialist light cavalry and began looting the Imperialist camp! When a few of the Swiss pike units failed to reach their targets in a charge move, the Imperialists counterattacked with their German and Spanish pike units. This set off a very bloody, three turn battle that saw both sides decimated.

On the far flank of both sides the Imperialist heavy cavalry finally arrived and got itself ready for a massive attack into the center of the French forces. What followed was a series of charges, countercharges, and desperate attempts to stabilize the situation for the French. One of the first charges defeated a light cavalry force that penetrated all the way to the center of the board.

(cont. from p.14) This attack scattered had the unfortunate effect for the French of setting of a chain reaction of morale failures that saw two units pull back and the heavy guns abandoned for a turn.

The French reserves, which were two low quality pike units tried to stem the tide, but then turned and fled as well! It was only the arrival of the French heavy cavalry from the other side of the board that prevented complete defeat! By this time both sides had taken a beating and while the French were barely winning on one flank, they had already lost one flank the center was in doubt.

More units joined the fray in the center, including some arquebus and Imperialist artillery, which only added to the carnage. The problem was that many of these units just arriving were low quality, which meant any reverse had a good chance of affecting them as well.   Sure enough, as soon as one of the units ran they all did! The French were desperately trying to shore up the defenses, but couldn't get anyone to stop long enough to do so!

The French heavy cavalry made some suicidal, but necessary charges to give their side time to regroup, but the Imperialist had the hot dice going and slowly ground down the higher quality French cavalry units. When the heavy guns were abandoned for the third and final time the French lost the center position and with it the game.

Both sides had played well and the unfortunate roll for the set up order definitely did not help the French at all. The Imperialist saw their chance to strike hard on one flank and hold everywhere else, which they barely did. The Swiss pike are devastating in close combat and do well in protracted push of pike contests, but the Imperialists did just enough damage to hang on. We also saw for the first time both sides lose their camp, which is a major withdrawal check modifier.

Overall, a very fun and crazy game that saw pike battles, cavalry charges, camps overrun, and a lot more. Why we don't play this a lot more often still escapes me. The game is colorful and has rock, paper, scissors type forces which is a great challenge for both sides.

Ronin by Osprey Publishing

Rules Review

I'm always on the lookout for a good set of Samurai era skirmish rules, partly because I have an interest in the period and I have a few hundred figs as well for it! However, all of the systems I've used over the last decade or so have had some serious issues, so it's been quite some time since the last game we tried in this era. I had seen the announcements on various forums about a new set of skirmish rules for this era called Ronin from Osprey and with the price being right I decided to order a copy.

First, the rules could be mistaken for one of the many thousands of Osprey books on military subjects. It is the basic Osprey Men at Arms series size book and would be hard to pick out from a shelf at your local hobby or bookstore. Opening it for a cursory glance I was not terribly impressed. Not much in the way of rules, a few army lists, the standard art from other Osprey books about the period, etc. The one thing that did stick out to me, however, was that there was a lot of what is termed "white" or empty space in the book. In fact, the book could easily have been cut back a half dozen pages by consolidation and using up the extra space.

When I finally did get down to reading the rules in preparation for a group game on our regular gaming night, I found that they were fairly easy to digest. In fact, there's not really much in the way of rules at all! The first section goes over the basics, then a glossary of terms used in the Samurai era, and the sequence of play. So far, so good, and easy to assimilate. This is followed by sections on movement, combat, then the army lists.

Movement is very straightforward and gamers should have no issues with this as well, but it is interesting how you can shoot twice per turn with missile troops, including during the movement phase. Shooting is easy to do; roll some dice, add various factors, then compare it to the defender's total and anything over a zero differential causes a hit. Simple, effective, and players will be able to pick this quickly so that you probably won't need

a reference card after a few tries.

Hits are broken into four categories: Stunned, Light Wound, Grievous Wound, and Critical/Slain. Two light wounds equals a grievous wound and a grievous wound plus any other wound is critical/slain. Again, easy to remember and carry out during the game. Each type of wound will also affect a model's fighting skill, movement, and in some cases its combat pool.

The "combat pool", or CP rating for each model is an interesting concept. For each increment in your CP rating you can choose an attack or defense counter (we used black and white glass stones from craft stores). So, for example, if your model had a CP of 3, you can choose one attack and two defense, three attack, two attacks and one defense, or in some cases three defense. Each attack costs one attack counter then you can enhance the die rolls on both attack and defense with additional counters. Once both sides are out of attack counters the combat is ended for the turn.

Naturally there is a lot of potential strategy here in choosing which counters you should use for your combat pool in each melee. We found that there were so many variations that it would take a few games to really get the hang of it. Add in the various combat skills and attributes (these can be assigned to models) and you have a unique combat system.

After that there really isn't too much to the rules. There is an Action Phase at the end of the turn where you can shoot

again, recover from stunned results, loot bodies/heads, etc., and that's it. In fact, if you get one of the reference cards from some of the forums out there that is all you need after a few turns! The rest of the book is taken up with various army lists, some scenarios, and a feeble attempt at a campaign system, which in my opinion, could have been greatly expanded.

The army lists are easy to use and there is some strategy in choosing high powered characters, then selecting their attributes and combat skills. There are various Japanese forces including Sohei, Ikko-Ikki, bandits, etc., but there are also Koreans and Mongols/Chinese for those who wish to recreate some actions on the Korean peninsula.

I got my copy on Amazon for around $14 including shipping and I think that is just about right for this book. Anything over $20 and you are being overcharged as there really isn't too much there. You really need to just spend time learning the combat system and everything after that is pretty easy to figure out. Finally, this is one of those games where it really helps if everyone has the rules and brings their own force. There are so many variations in the army lists, attributes, and weapons skills that each player will want to choose the make up of their own force. I designed some generic forces for our first playtest and it did take some time to balance things out.

Overall, this is an interesting set of rules, mostly because of the unique combat system that works very well. Recommended for any Samurai era gamer.

First Try at Ronin

Battle Report

After doing a review of the new Ronin rules from Osprey the next best thing would be a write up of our first playtest of those same rules! With our group is tough to know who will be arriving at game time, which naturally makes getting a game ready a challenging task! I had created several generic army list and once I knew that we had five players for sure it was easy to get some points values that were close.

The first try was a Hollywood type scenario where ten Ronin were guarding a house with a sick employer in it. The attacking force had to get past the Ronin and enter the house, then complete an action phase in the house where it was assumed that they would have killed all of the occupants. The attacking force consisted of three groups, with most units being ashigaru with a leader and in some cases there was a samurai in the group as well. Not knowing how this would work, if it was balanced, etc., we got set up and jumped into the action.

After some discussion about the Priority phase (this determines who goes first) and how that would work with group play (we resolved it by doing everything one model at a time-even if it was a bit slower) the attackers moved up. Both five man Ronin groups had an archer and they started inflicting wounds from the start on their attackers. By the third turn the attacking forces were into hand to hand combat across the board and we started learning some valuable lessons!

For one, don't tackle a samurai/ronin with just one ashigaru as that is a death sentence. The best is at least three as the combat pool of six counters will at least give them a few attacks for the survivors. Second, if you get caught going against a better opponent, go on defense until help arrives. Third, taking a combat skill as one of the allowable attributes is very useful as it gives that model the ability to re-roll one of the dice use in attack or defense.

The first attacking force got wiped out pretty quickly, but the second did well and it was a close run thing where the Ronin prevailed in the end. The third attacking force ran into the first victorious Ronin group and was getting clobbered when we decided to call the game and set up a new game. In this game we had a large ashigaru attacking force (about 10 models) along with a smaller group of samurai (five models) going up against the same two groups of Ronin.

We were pressed for time, so we started everyone within one or two moves of each other. Both sides advanced to contact and we had several running battles that were pretty interesting. The high powered samurai unit was pretty nasty and was easily able to hold its own against the ronin group that was arrayed against it. We played a few turns to get a handle on the combat system, then had to pack up.

First, everyone had a good time and once you got the hang of the combat system it seemed to go faster. My guess that with two players you could do several games in a few hours as it is a pretty fast and brutal system. Large group games are going to slow down a bit because of the pri-

ority system, but it's nothing that can't be overcome with some house rules. However, even though there were a few problems here and there, they were quickly resolved by checking back through the rules. The rules aren't the best laid out set we've seen and some things are subject to interpretation, but we were able to work through most issues pretty quickly.

Next, I would have to say that where possible it would be best to have the players each choose their own units with their unique skills and attributes, which is what makes the game interesting. However, this may not always be possible, so sometimes there may need to be some generic army lists created .

Overall, it was good to get the samurai era figures out again as we had not used them in quite some time. Ronin is a quick little diversion that's great for those nights where you only have a few hours or aren't sure what to play. You could certainly set up some elaborate scenarios with this and there are endless variations to the units/attributes that can be selected for a players' force.

The Supreme Commander by GMT

Game Review

Talk about good timing! This issue has a comparison about the various versions of Third Reich and along comes The Supreme Commander by GMT Games. Although there are quite a few strategic WW2 games out there you can always use a few more and this year (2013) will see several released, including this one. Dan Holte, the designer of The Battle for Normandy (one of my favorite games), now tries his hand at doing WW2 in Europe.

We'll start with the components where the notably reliable GMT slipped up on this one. First, you get two 22 x 34 maps of Europe that extend from England and Spain all the way to Iraq and the endless wastes of Russia. The diplomatic tracks, combat tables, victory point track, and other items are on the maps, which saves a lot of time looking them up. Also included as a nice touch are both maps printed in a smaller scale on the back of one of the larger maps for those who wish to play the game that don't have a lot of room. There are several sheets of counters, various play aids, and a full color rulebook, so on the surface everything is what you usually expect from GMT.

Now here's where the problems come in. First, the diplomatic tracks on the maps and the reference card are wrong as they show A3s in all Allied boxes where it should be A1, A2, and A3. Second, there is no Polish partition line or boundary for Vichy France printed on the map. Third, the combat modifiers on the Terrain/Combat charts show negative modifiers where as they should be positive modifiers. Also, several of the counters will need to be reworked as well. It almost appears as if in the final stages of development the right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing and vice-versa. This is highly unusual for GMT and to their credit they are reprinting almost all of the components and sending them to owners of the game, which is incredible service.
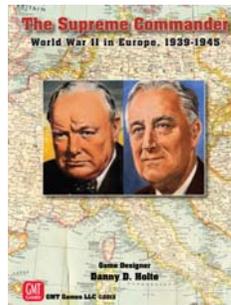
I think at this time it would be helpful to explain what Supreme Commander is and what it isn't in terms of other ETO type games. First, it appears to be a much quicker version of Third Reich or other similar games. Not many units, simplified systems, and pretty much follows the timeline of WW2.

It is not uber-detailed, there aren't thousands of units, you don't worry about basing ships and aircraft, and there won't be too much deviation from historical alliances.

Units are corps and armies, with three corps making up an army and a stacking limit of six corps. Players spend a lot of time purchasing corps, replacing them with armies, then breaking them down again after combat or for movement where necessary. Fleets and aircraft are handled quite differently from other games that you may have played on this topic. For example, the British start with three fleets and the German one. When there is combat you could lose the ENTIRE fleet, which is dramatic. The same for air units where you place them in what is called a front box and then they can be used in any combat along that entire front. Certainly a novel concept, saves time from tracking where to base units, counting ranges, etc., but the combat can be decisive and can literally cripple a side with a few bad rolls.

The reason I stress that is because of the costs of the items. Countries get MSPs, which are the building blocks of the economy to produce units. Again, unlike in many ETO games where you get a chunk of resources to spend through the whole year, here you get them each turn (turns are six weeks-unusual time scale) For example, Italy gets around 45 per turn, but when fighter units cost close to 100 and fleets are around 150 losing one is catastrophic.

Combat is interesting in that only one hex can attack an enemy hex. You add up combat strength, tech levels (another part of economic production-about 150 points per level), flank support (another unique concept), and air support, then subtract the defender's strength, tech level, terrain bonus, and air support to get the number then roll a dice for step losses, which can also have half taken up by retreats. HQs can also be used to add their strength to an attack or defense within their range. Not too hard, plays fast, and easy to use during the turn.

Diplomacy is weird in that you can only influence countries that you are adjacent to. So, if you want to get Finland to join the Axis you need to take Norway to be able to influence them. I'm not sure I agree with this concept and the chances of you having strange alliances that pop up from time to time in other ETO games are quite slim here.

In fact, that is one of the problems with this game in that there is no randomness to it. The U.S. is going to enter at a certain time, the chance of unusual alliances occurring is limited, there's no random events, and so on. It's like you're playing an ETO game for the sake of playing an ETO game. The game doesn't have to turn out exactly how WW2 did, but you're kind of pushed that way. I would label it Third Reich for ADD gamers. Set the game up, barring a few minor changes to history you can crank out an ETO type game in a few hours or at least to a reasonable conclusion.

Now it may seem as if I think this is a bad game and that would be jumping to conclusions. It's much more *different* than other ETO games I've experienced and the game will definitely reward long range planning (especially in unit purchases) and patience, two things that many gamers don't have. Overall, I wanted to fall in love with this game and still might after a few more plays. There is nothing inherently wrong with the game other than it is a much different feel compared to other strategic games. I'm hoping that the new rulebook and charts will correct some of these issues.

The Gamers and now MMP's Standard Combat Series (SCS) games have always had a place in my heart. They are bare bones, standard hex and counter wargames with a minimum of fuss. They are quick playing, have brief series rules and short exclusive rules, but plenty of action. The SCS system is flexible, ranging from the Spanish Civil War to It Never Snows in September, a monster wargame on Operation Market Garden. Sometimes the basic unit is the division and in others it could be a battalion or regiment, but the rules are basically the same.

Yom Kippur has always been one of my favorite Arab-Israeli War games and although I've played several about the battles of the Golan Heights, I've yet to find one that I like other than the old SPI Golan, which isn't too bad, but needs an update (don't get me started on the DG reprint!). Naturally, when MMP came out with a SCS version on the battle I was excited, especially since it was rumored that you might be able to link it up with Yom Kippur to fight the entire '73 War.

The components for SCS games are by now pretty standard. There is a 22 x 34 map with the unique SCS type terrain artwork, one counter sheet, the series rules, and a set of exclusive rules. The map covers the area from Lebanon in the north all the way to Jordan in the south. Not surprisingly, most of the area is taken up by Syria and northern Israel, with a long anti-tank ditch running along the center of the map that is the focal point for the first few turns. The counters use standard NATO symbols, which is a change from the tank silhouettes used in Yom Kippur. The series rules are very easy to learn and you can be ready for a game in under 30 minutes, even including time to read the exclusive game rules, which usually amount to no more than a few pages.
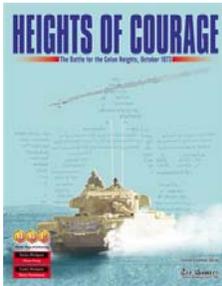
There are several scenarios that cover the initial Syrian assault, an accelerated timeline for the Syrians by getting more formations into battle faster, and the full campaign. Set up for the Syrians is quite easy as the divisions are color coded and with each unit a regiment (Israelis are company/battalion) it goes pretty fast. Not so with the Israelis. There is not much of a command structure, so you need to hunt and peck through the counters, which is annoying. Why they couldn't put turn numbers or color code the reinforcements and initial forces is beyond me. Not as bad as Stalingrad Pocket II, but right up there on the "needs to be improved" list.

The Syrians definitely have the initiative and the advantage here during the opening turns. They can choose a "fast tempo", which alters the turn sequence and allows them to overwhelm and drive towards their goals. Of course the huge problem is getting across the anti-tank ditch and past the strongpoints along the border. The Israelis get two Exploitation Phases to simulate their command and control/tactical skills advantage which helps them to rush units to trouble spots before Syrian combat.

For the Israelis it is like holding back the tide the first two turns. If the Syrians roll well they will breach the border and could end the game early. If not, massive Israeli reinforcements arrive and the Syrians have to hang on for dear life. It does take nerves of steel for the Israelis as you watch high powered stacks of units cut their way through your forces and there's nothing to plug the holes with. For the Syrians it's about knowing where to strike, keeping your objectives in mind, then knowing when to quit and go on the defensive. The Israeli counteroffensive will do some serious damage and the question is whether or not the Syrians have accumulated enough victory points to hold out until the end of the game or a UN cease-fire, whichever comes first.

Overall, I like the SCS games, but it takes awhile to get use to the combat results table, which is bloody, so you need to always stack units as single counters are dead meat. The games play fast, are usually pretty tense, and there's not many rules to argue about or that need to be continually looked up. While this is a good game I'm not sure I would classify it as a great game.

First, it is an unusual situation in that either the Syrians break through on the early turns and win the game with the Israelis having no way to stop them from seizing all the entry points and/or victory point hexes or the Israelis hold then maul the remaining Syrians. There doesn't appear to be any middle ground and most games I've played about the '73 Golan Heights battle are the same way.

Finally, MMP and the designer had the opportunity here to make a game that would mate with Yom Kippur and possibly produce a very playable game on the entire '73 War, which is badly needed. All they needed to do were keep the same type of counters, match up the turn record chart, and add some rules about the use of air units and transferring troops across fronts. Did they do any of that? No. The time scale isn't the same, the counters are different, and the air/artillery system in both games aren't the same either. Aaargh! Definitely a lost opportunity.

Still, this is a pretty good, fast playing game that is a challenge for both sides. Pick it up and give it a try if you get a chance.
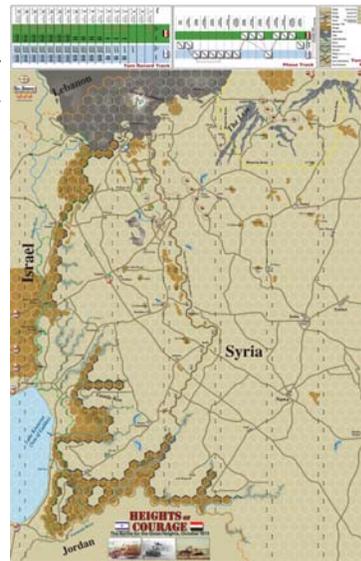
Memoirs of a Miniatures & Board Wargamer Pt. 23

Strange Gaming Ideas That Worked...Well, Sort of...

Have you ever read an article in a gaming magazine and said, "Hey, my gaming group would really like to try that!", or "Wait until everyone sees the great idea I just found!"? Well, truth be known, all of us at one time or the other have those eureka kind of moments and this segment is about some of those.
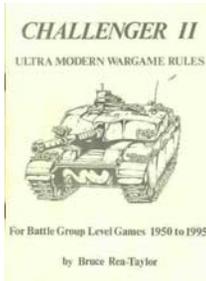
The first was back in those heady days of modern micro-armor with our endless Warsaw Pact vs. Nato scenarios and campaigns that filled up most of our gaming days for the late 70s and 80s. I had seen an article where you could restrict line of sight by suspending a blanket or sheet over the table so that players couldn't get a "helicopter' view of the terrain. Back in those days no sacrifice was too great in the quest for more and more realism so we tried it.

We played a scenario on a 6 x 12 board and we cleverly were able to use some 2 x 4s on the edges with some thinner boards going across them down the length of the sides of the table. Then, using clothespins we could raise or lower the sheet over the table. Wow, it was really a different view. As a tank company commander you couldn't see much and every corner contained your worst fears that there was a hidden ATGM position, armor ambush, etc. Definitely one of the most realistic micro-armor games that I've ever been associated with.

So why did we only do this once? While it was a great idea and improved realism to no end, it REALLY slowed the game down. Raising and lowering the sheet, moving it so players could make their moves, moving it again for the referee to make judgments, contorting ourselves to move units on the board, and so on. A great idea, but way too much work and we never tried it again.

Another great idea from a magazine article was when we decided to do a large game with both commanders in separate rooms and we did another where they were playing a board game in a separate room, but still commanding. They would issue orders, players would send updates back to them, and so on. Great idea in concept and I thought the execution went pretty well. Orders were misinterpreted, players sent back wrong locations and coordinates, the sanity of the commanders was continually questioned, and so forth. I thought it did a pretty good job of simulating command & control in the horse & musket era.

However, most of the gaming group hated it. The commanders felt left out of the group and the fun of gaming night, players got angry over their orders and wouldn't follow them, and in general the games turned into a near disaster. Tried twice and that was the end of that.

I'm sure that many grognards out there, especially naval gamers, have tried the next idea out at least once in their gaming lives. This was the "Let's find a rules set that lets us do naval battles in scale on a gym floor" idea. Yes, we had a player with some WW1 fleets and who not only took the time to buy the rules, read the rules, then set up all the charts needed, so basically the rest of the group just had to show up! The game did look impressive with the ships from both sides starting at least 50 feet away from each other.

Then reality set in. The rules used a range estimation system (I think they were similar to Fletcher-Pratt, but it's been over 30 years!), so the first guesses by the players were way, way off. Then they got closer and closer, but each move of a target threw them off again! I think we played for about six hours and scored very few hits, which may or may not have been that realistic. By the fourth hours players started to wander, talk about other things, etc., as your chance of hitting anything was not very good. A game that I am still happy to say that I played in, but for some reason it was never repeated.

Another item that seemed like a great idea at the time was to break a Guinness record for the longest played game. Yes, it was in the early 80s and the game of choice was Dungeons & Dragons. There were more than enough volunteers, in fact too many, and there wasn't any thought to weeding out any of the problem players that plagued many of the groups in the area.

Sponsored by the local gaming store the gaming room area was completely taken up by anywhere from 10-35 gamers at any one given time for I think what was something like three days. Now we all have visions of what the stereotypical D&D players were from the early 80s and this would be the correct assumption here. Now multiply the number of 64 ounce Big Gulps, Double Stuff Oreo packages, poor hygiene, etc., by three and you basically have what the event turned into. It was a non-stop 72 hour D&D players dream come true and they somehow pulled it off, holding the record for at least a little while and sending their picture in to Guinness.

I was over there a few times during the event and some of my regular gaming group participated, but it was one of those things that by the end of the second day you thought someone was going to lose it and go berserk. Although a few reached the edge, thankfully nothing happened. I think it was a lesson to the organizers, however, that in the future be a little more careful during the selection process!

Even though it may sound like I'm complaining about these things now, that really isn't the case. I wouldn't have missed these things for the world and they still bring back great memories, although as I get older bits and pieces of these events start fading away! There was some great creativity back then as we generally had to make do with what gaming items we had at the time, which compared to today's offerings for the gamer, were quite limited.

Blast From The Past Pt. 22

Remember These?

OK, does anyone remember these gaming items from the past? You score extra points if you actually owned any of these things and double points if you used them in games! Seriously, these were actually some important products "back in the day", but that time has passed for one reason or the other. Still, they are worth mentioning just for the nostalgia factor.

Martian Metals

Before they lost everything in a major fire, this was one of the up and coming companies in sci-fi wargaming. At the time they were just getting going and had an extensive range of true 15mm figures for Traveller, plus they were heaven sent for sci-fi gamers of other systems as well. Crude by today's standards, at the time they were believed to be cutting edge.

Minifigs Greyhawk 25mm Figures

Although not quite Lord of the Rings sanctioned figures, they were the closest thing. For years and years no D&D gaming group went forward without using their miniatures for orcs, kobolds, knights, and many other things. They were a great deal money wise, readily available, and back then there weren't too many other choices. I can remember playing several Men of the West against Evil games using WRG or Chainmail rules with armies of these figures. Great for back then, but they haven't stood the test of time.
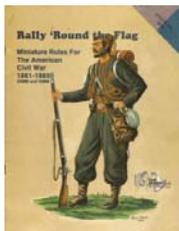
Rally 'Round The Flag

This was the first set of ACW rules that I ever owned, with Empire's Stars "N Bars arriving at my house a few days later. At the time they seemed like a good set of rules and I've recently learned that there are still groups playing this set of rules, which is great after all this time. The rules weren't that bad, but once Johnny Reb showed up they were quickly forgotten and placed in the "pile of rules" from which they never returned.

Atlantic Miniatures

Back in the mid to late 70s there was a company who seemingly came out of nowhere called Atlantic. All of a sudden there were boxes of 1/72nd scale Egyptians, Greeks, WW2 infantry, and even vehicles. They were great value for the money and quite a few gamers got hooked on them for their WRG armies, WW2 skirmish rules, fantasy armies, or just to pick up a few boxes to try them out. However, the same thing that doomed other plastic miniatures at the time happened here as well. Better and better 15 and 25mm figures kept coming out and there were no specialty figures to increase your armies within that scale. After a few years they were gone, but they had quite the impact over their first few years.

Monsters, Monsters

During the role-playing heyday that was the late 70s and early 80s there was an unusual set of RPG rules called Monsters, Monsters. Basically, it was the gamers being the monsters with the dungeon master playing the good guys! Certainly a novel concept and I remember the few games I played being quite fun.
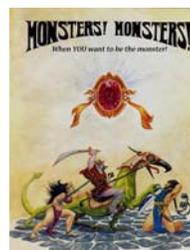
Star Fleet Battle Manual

Long before Starfleet Battles took the sci-fi gaming world by storm, there was a set of rules for Star Trek based ships from the prolific Lou Zocchi called the Star Fleet Battle Manual. Bearing no resemblance to the later and more popular Starfleet Battles, this was a popular game enjoyed by many sci-fi gamers. Some groups even used the Ertl plastic Star Trek models and would slug it out on gym floors or even outdoors! It was certainly a rules set that deserved better than being quietly forgotten once the Starfleet Battles express got rolling along. It was also famous for one other thing in that when the first miniatures for Starfleet Battles came out, the demand was such that the company could not keep up. Gamers quickly discovered that the Zocchi Federation and Klingon ships were the exact same size, so until production caught up every shop in America was ordering hordes of the Zocchi ships!
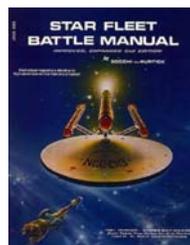
Tank Charts

Surprisingly, "back in the day" there were plenty of WW2 and micro-armor rules for various scales. The big problem was finding something you were happy with! It was not uncommon to play micro-armor four straight Saturdays with four different sets of rules, then one would find favor and get a run going of several months. This was quickly followed by having a rules blow-up or argument that caused you to look for something else that took care of that problem. One of those sets of rules was Tank Charts, which was aptly described as it was essentially a chart driven game with everything under the sun being on charts. Now the rules weren't as bad as it sounds and there were some good ideas in there, but having to stay organized during a game was quite the task. Even in that age of rules complexity it got tiring after awhile and we went back to something else.
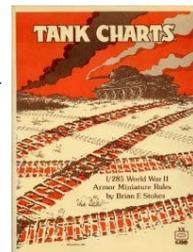
Yes, many of these items haven't aged well, but at the time they came out they were novel in concept or filled a need in the gaming hobby. Mot of these items had to be ordered sight unseen as there were no Internet sites, previews, reviews were hard to find, and the chance that a hobby store had them in stock wasn't very good. When I see these items it does bring back fond memories of a bygone age in gaming where you really wanted these kinds of items to succeed and they were great for generating ideas.

Battles For Empire II (cont.)

(cont. from p.3) any issues with the rules, but getting started is pretty easy to do.

The rules also cover trains, gunboats, and towns, which are all a huge part of colonial gaming on the tabletop. Every gamer would love to do a Khartoum type siege, gunboat rescue, etc., so thankfully these sections are included. The rules author also takes the time to thoroughly go over the terrain types that can be used with the rules. There is no spending a few sentences on each terrain type, but sometimes a paragraph or more to help gamers out in understanding what the effects of each terrain type are.

The rules include specific Conduct Charts (these are the movement charts) for the Sudan, NWF, Zulu War, and instructions on how to use them for other periods. There are several scenario ideas presented and additional scenarios will be posted to the BFE Yahoo Group at some future point. You can even use these rules for the Spanish-American War and up to early World War One. There are some very good options about using the reinforcement/arrival charts for games so that players don't know what is coming or from where, which again, gives the game a good colonial warfare feel to it.

Finally, there is a large optional rules section covering things like randomized ambushes, hidden deployment, marksmen, and more. You can definitely add extra layers of complexity or use these in specific scenarios such as a native attack at night or adding character traits to the commanders.

There are a lot of pros for the game.

First, the rules are a labor of love and the designer has literally spent years trying to make this the definitive edition. Everything you wanted to see in a colonial game is present, from gunboats to specific rules about how Zulus attack, is covered at some point. The unit quality system, firing, artillery, and melee are well done. The systems are easy to grasp, work well, and most important of all, seem to work right during a game. You don't find yourself questioning the combat mechanics often or raising an eyebrow at ludicrous results.

The biggest appeal of the game in my opinion is that it allows gamers to move beyond the skirmish level that is so prevalent in colonial wargaming. This game system allows you to fight operational level combat with companies and battalions or even try historical actions such as Ginnis, El Teb, or Maiwand. Most important of all, the natives move like native armies did from my readings of the period. Surging forth, traffic jams, uncoordinated attacks, then a sudden well timed fanatic charge that ruptures the Imperial line can al be seen during games of BFE. The unpredictability of the native forces is certainly on display here and the system works well, plus it is a lot of fun for the players. This last point needs to be reinforced in that pretty much every gamer I've introduced the system to has liked it, even those who are not really into colonial era gaming.

Are there any cons about the rules? Well, yes, there are a few. First, for those not use to long rules then you're going to have some difficulty here. There is a lot of text and sections to go through, but again in my opinion it's nothing earth shattering and once you actually play the system things go fairly smoothly. My suggestion is to take two native units and try to maneuver into position, then charge a single Imperial unit. This will get

you used to the movement, firing, and melee systems. Once you have those down everything else seemingly falls into place.

Finding things in the rules can be an issue as the tops of the pages aren't labeled with the section headings, so for the first game or two you will find yourself hunting through the various rules sections to get answers. The rules are organized according to the sequence of play, which is nice in some ways, however it also places items which should be in one sections sometimes split into several areas of the rules. The lack of scenarios in the rules was a serious omission as many gamers quickly jump to that section to see how units are organized, how historically accurate is the scenario, and so on.

My only other real quibble is that the Imperial and allied cavalry is not powerful enough and too generic for my tastes. These units at times proved to be a battle winner throughout the colonial era, but all the cavalry here, both Imperial and native, are kind of treated the same. This can be fixed with scenario specific rules or adding a house rule or two.

Overall, I feel that it was worth the several year wait to get this edition of the rules. I've always considered BFE an outstanding set of rules that could be used by other gaming eras and this edition adds even more ideas as well as fixing a few problems. If you are interested in gaming large colonial era battles then you need look no further for a set of rules as BFE II has everything you will ever need!

# Game or Wargame? Editorial

If you want to start an argument in the gaming hobby, walk up to some gamers playing Battle Cry, X-Wing, Axis & Allies, or any number of other games and tell them that those aren't real wargames. My guess is that the sparks will fly and a long ensuing argument will occur over what is and isn't a wargame, everything we play are just games anyway, there's no real way to simulate the death and destruction of real war, and so on. The funny thing is that these kinds of argument used to happen all the time in the 70s and 80s between role-players and wargamers, in the 90s and into the first decade of the 21st century between sci-fi/fantasy miniatures gamers and wargamers, and now this.

The beginnings of the argument are easy to see. Basically wargamers have existed since the dawn of gaming time, but for this argument we'll say the 60s with the advent of Avalon Hill games. Every time one other facet of the hobby grows by leaps and bounds it will eventually collide with the wargaming crowd. Some wargamers embrace it, some try to steer the others off of their evil path towards enlightenment, and then others just look upon the opposing group with disdain. I've been seeing this occur for close to 40 years with no end in sight!
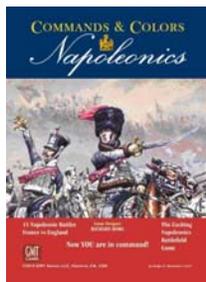
The current issue is actually due to the incredible publishing techniques now being used with games and societal needs in terms of time for entertainment. In the last decade you have seen some excellent games coming along that, shudder, distract people from wargames and are competing with them in terms of sales and popularity. Take Battle Cry for example. Well done art on the box, quality components, and several scenarios are included. You roll dice, fight battles, and it gets done in a reasonable amount of time.

In fact, Commands and Colors is made by GMT, which is considered to be one of the preeminent wargame companies! In fact, each new addition to their ancients and Napoleonic series rapidly hits the pre-order number and the series has a large following. Beautiful components, color rules, easy to play, setup and play time is quick, and so on. What's not to like?

Well, plenty if you're a card carrying grognard from the wargaming community! Putting aside all of the usual arguments about simulating war, realism, complexity, and so on, what's really wrong with these games? The answer is that there's nothing wrong other than perception. This is the your mileage may vary, different strokes for different folks argument all over again. One side isn't right or wrong, but it's the perceptions that are getting deeply involved. Gamers who like these new games point to the quality components, the great game play, quick playing times, not much need to know history, and low complexity. Wargamers will agree on the quality components being needed in their games and good game play (although that's not too high on the list), but it's the last few items that cause them pain.

Wargamers will cry that you can't simulate Austerlitz with a dozen or so units a side, drawing some cards, and rolling a few dice, then finishing in under an hour! No, you need four 22 x34 maps, 1800+ cardboard counters, and a 100 page rulebook to simulate that! Anything less than that doesn't qualify as a wargame! Just read some of the threads on Boardgamegeek regarding A Few Acres of Snow and you'll get the drift pretty quickly.

I've played A Few Acres of Snow several times and find that it is an interesting game. Notice that I didn't use the term wargame as that is my own opinion. Yes, there are sieges, cards for military units, etc., but I have no other games in my collection that are like this one as most of my games are what I would term wargames. If someone wants to refer to A Few Acres of Snow as a wargame then that is their right and frankly, it's not worth getting worked up over or spending time arguing the finer points of wargame design. I kind of class A Few Acres of Snow as a deck building game with a French & Indian War theme. I would then term GMT's Wilderness War as a simulation/wargame of that same war, but yet there are many who would disagree with me.

Likewise with the X-Wing miniatures game. Do I think that it is a good representation of space combat? Ummm, no. Is it a wargame? I guess that would again depend upon where you're coming from. In my estimation it is a space combat game based upon the movie series, but probably not a wargame. However, others may think it is a wargame and play to their hearts content thinking that it is the whole time. Fine by me. It's obviously been a massive success and I don't think the company cares how gamers classify it!

So, why do gamers get into arguments about these kinds of things anyway? If I think that Compass Games' Proud Monster Deluxe is the best wargame/simulation on the WW2 East Front ever made, why can't gamers who don't agree argue about the details of the campaign, units that may be missing or overrated, or problems with the map, reinforcement schedule, or any one of a hundred other things? Instead, some gamers seem determined to prove that Axis & Allies is better, Risk, or anything else but what you think is good. The reasons will run from playability, component quality, etc., all the way to that none of us ever fought on the Eastern Front in WW2, so how would we know what's real anyway!

In the end gaming is gaming. Whether you play the Shiloh scenario in Battle Cry and finish in one hour or if you play GMT's Dead of Winter in 100 hours, they're both Civil War games. If someone thinks one or the other is more realistic, that's fine. But don't go out of your way to disparage what someone else likes or what kind of games they play. The hobby is a big tent and all should be welcome to play whatever they want.
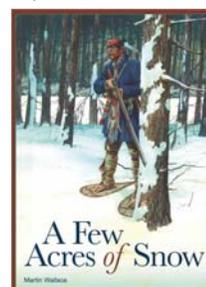
Save The Train!   BFE II Battle Report

Although we were one of the playtest groups for Battles For Empire II, this would be our first game with the finished product. We had been waiting for quite awhile for the new version to come out and had not played in about 18 months, so it took us awhile to get back into the rules! Once you get going your really only need the Unit Conduct charts and combat tables, so I had made a reference card with the Sudan charts on one side and the usual tables on the other.

First, a word about the basing. In the pictures you will see that I use 24 figure units for both infantry and cavalry in 15mm. Actually, I use the base size for a two figure 25mm stand, then pack it with 15mm figs, usually six to a base. You DO NOT have to do this, so hopefully no one will be alarmed! In fact, I think most gamers use the standard three to a stand type basing. I just think the 24 figure units look good and the Sudan is one of those periods where I go all out!

The scenario had an Anglo-Egyptian train ferrying British troops to the front and it had broken down near a village. Runners were sent out to bring back help, but the Mahdi's spies also informed the local area forces who converged on the train. When the game began the three

British units on the train had detrained and taken up position, backed by the machine gun and artillery piece mounted on the train. Although the train had some firepower, the arcs of fire were very limited.

The relief column had one unit of Egyptian cavalry, one of camels, two Sudanese regular infantry units, two Bashi-Bazouk infantry units, and a British 9 lb. artillery battery of two sections. Most important of all, however, were the two supply camel stands that had the badly needed spare parts for the train. These entered along a road just outside the village on Turn 1 in column.

The Dervishes started with four units

on the board and then rolled on the reinforcement table in the rules. We figured that this would keep both sides guessing and randomize things a bit, but in the end we thought that it's better to have a large starting force and bring on reinforcements than to hope that the reinforcements accumulate into a large force, which didn't happen.

One of the Dervish players thought they would test the British firepower and cross the tracks to get on the undefended side of the train, which was a big mistake. The Nordenfelt gun on the front of the train and the Naval Brigade company unleashed devastating firepower that eliminated that unit in two turns. The remaining Dervish units tried to move on the Royal Marines and Highlanders, which proved tough as well, so they peeled off towards the village. Meanwhile, more Dervish units began to arrive at the rate of one or two a turn, where they were quickly sent in to the attack.

The two Egyptian mounted units didn't roll too good the first few turns and were still making their way through the village with the infantry (cont. on p.25)

(cont. from p. 24) coming up behind them. The Egyptian camels then rolled well, changed formation, then moved toward the train with the British artillery battery close behind them. The camels launched a charge into a Dervish unit which then saw a three turn melee that pretty much eliminated both units. The Egyptian cavalry unit found itself in an awkward position and had to charge the enemy in column. Although they held the first round the arrival of more Dervish units tipped the balance in their favor and they too were eliminated.

The British artillery now found itself deployed back to back fighting enemies approaching from both sides. The first section was quickly overrun even before it could get off a shot, but the second section were definitely trying to get their Victoria Crosses! This lone section time and time again stopped Dervish attacks through their accurate firepower. Finally and without support for several turns, then were taken in the flank and wiped out. The two Sudanese infantry units were desperately trying to get clear of the village to deploy where they could use their firepower to their advantage. Once again, however, poor movement rolls left them in untenable positions.

The first Sudanese infantry unit was caught deployed in line in the town and beat back several Dervish attacks. The second one outside of the town was hit from two directions and barely managed to beat off the first series of attacks. By this time the Dervishes had figured out to leave the British around the train alone and pick on the Egyptians and Sudanese! More Dervish units arrived and were quickly thrown into the battle. One caught a Bashi-Bazouk unit coming out of the village in column and quickly routed it. The Sudanese units fought for as long as possible before they too were overwhelmed. There was one more attempt against the British which caused some casualties to the Highlanders, but for the loss of two Dervish infantry units. The Dervishes once again turned toward the center and overran the supply camels, which ended the game.

It was certainly an unusual and wild battle. The British firepower is certainly something to be reckoned with and the village played more of a role than I thought it would when I set the scenario up. My thinking is that it would be a base for the Dervishes to rally and launch attacks against the train, but the Egyptians had a hard time moving through the village and the game actually became two games in one. There were the attacks against the British defending the train and then there were the attacks against the relieving Egyptian forces. The interesting part about many of our games using these rules is that no one thinks about forming square, which is a good tactic in this era, but I think we all play too many ACW and 7YW games where the preferred formation is the line! Despite a few problems locating rules and umpiring some unusual situations, the rules played well. Everyone figured out the movement, firing, and melee tables quickly, which are most of what is used during the game anyway. Overall, it was a fun game and more battles with BFEII are on the way.

Engagement 1: Retreat to Winter Quarters

Note: This is a new series I'm starting up which will provide ready made scenarios that can be used for group games or on nights where no one has had a chance to prepare a game. Feel free to modify these to suit whatever forces and terrain that you may have as well as the rules that you plan to use.

Situation: Red forces have been defeated in battle just as the campaigning season for the year is coming to a close. The first snow has fallen and all that is left is to get to winter quarters then regroup until next spring. There is a rear guard in place and a relief force across the river to guard the columns of defeated forces who are desperate to get to safety. Meanwhile, Blue forces have caught up to the rear guard in pursuit and are trying to overtake the fleeing columns.

Period: Designed mainly for the horse & musket period, but could be used for earlier periods such as medieval or ancients.

Table size: Can be used with a 6x4 or 4x8 table.

Terrain notes: The river can only be crossed at the two bridges. The area beyond the river is Red's winter quarters. Forested areas (light gray on dark gray areas) should be considered light forest at this time of year.

Red Forces:

Relief Force-Two units of infantry, one cavalry unit, and one artillery battery (in fortifications) on the north side of the river. These units can cross the river to aid other Red forces.

Rear Guard: Six infantry, two cavalry and one artillery battery deployed as indicated on map.

Retreating Columns (in green): Eight infantry units and two artillery batteries. These units should be rated at least one morale class lower than usual, have sustained casualties (probably should be around half strength, and be treated as if ready to rout at any moment. Movement for each unit is done by rolling 1D6 with a 1 or 2 is six inches, 3 or 4, is five inches, and a 5 or 6 is six inches. All units MUST stay on the road until the cross the bridges.

Red Orders: Cover the retreating columns until they can cross over the bridges, then withdraw the rear guard forces. Try to save as many units as possible.

Blue Forces:

At Start: Three infantry units and one artillery battery deployed within six inches of the table edge at location B on the map. These units can start in any formation.

Pursuit Forces; Starting on Turn 1, roll 1D4 to determine the next pursuit force that arrives each turn until there are no more forces left to arrive (each force can only enter once):

1-Two cavalry units and one artillery battery.

2-Two cavalry units and one artillery battery.

3-Four infantry units and one artillery battery.

4-Four infantry units, one cavalry unit, and one artillery battery.

(Ex.; #2 is rolled on Turn 1, leaving 1, 3, and 4 to be rolled for on Turn 2. A suggestion would be to roll 1D6 and on a 1 or 2 Force 1 arrives, a 3 or 4 Force 3, and so on…)

Roll 1D6 for location of arrival:

1-A, 2-B, 3-C, 4-D, 5-E, and 6-F. Units arrive in column within six inches to either side of the entry location.

Blue Orders: Cut off the retreating column and do as much damage as possible. Attempt to block the bridges and defeat the rear guard and any relief forces that intervene.

Initiative: Red goes first on Turn 1.

Game Length: The game can have a set number of turns, end when all of or as many as possible Red forces reach safety, or until Blue calls off the pursuit. IF Blue
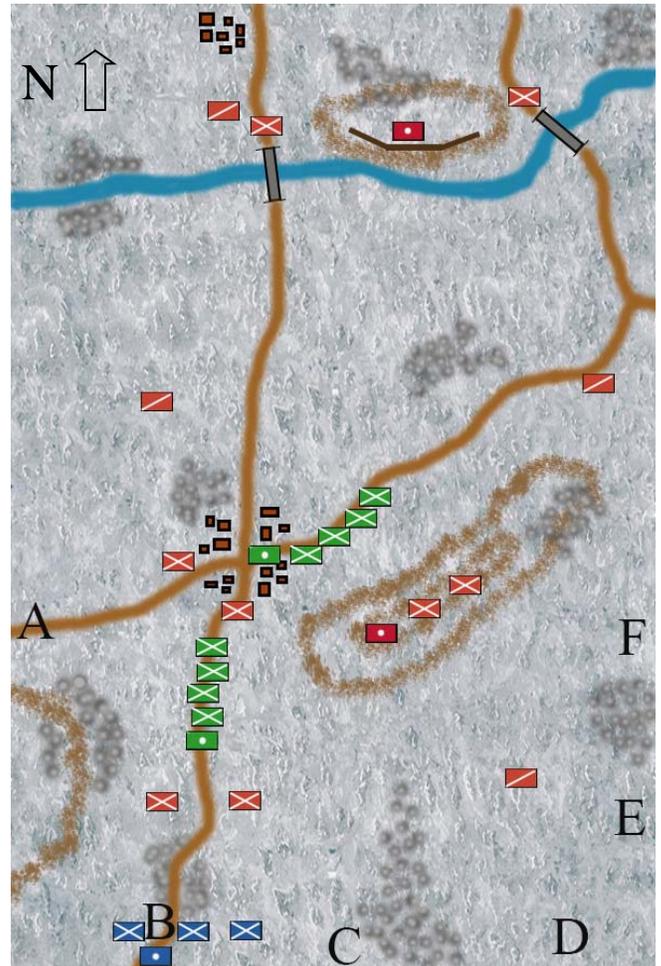
seizes either of the bridges they automatically win the game.

Victory Conditions: Red scores one point for each cavalry unit, infantry unit, or artillery battery that crosses the bridges to safety. The points are then added up at the end of the game to determine the level of victory.

Points	Result
15+	Red Victory
12-14	Red Marginal Victory
10-11	Draw
7-9	Blue Marginal Victory
6 or less	Blue Victory

Feel free to experiment with the pursuit force arrival and the victory conditions to balance the scenario.

Engagement 2: Expanding the Bridgehead

Situation: Red has captured a damaged bridge, but is only able to move infantry units across it until repaired. Overnight, Red has managed to build a pontoon bridge downriver and has moved several armor units across in preparation for expanding the bridgehead at first light. Gray has moved all available forces in the area into blocking positions and they are awaiting reinforcements to counterattack where they plan to eliminate the bridgehead.

Period: Designed for late WW2 with the British, Russians, or U.S. forces trying to cross one of the many water obstacles that they encountered in driving back German forces across Europe. With some modifications this scenario can be used with other periods.

Table size: Can be used with a 6x4 or 4x8 table.

Terrain notes: The existing bridge is heavily damaged and can only be crossed by infantry type units. The river cannot be crossed except over the existing bridge or the pontoon bridge.

Red Forces:

Starting at location A: One battalion of infantry (3 companies) with MGs and light mortars only.

Starting at location B: Two companies of armor and one company of mech infantry.

Off-board: One battery of medium artillery on call. One battery of heavy artillery is available each turn when a 6 is rolled on 1D6. One airstrike/flight/sortie of ground support aircraft is available each turn when a 6 is rolled on 1D6.

A pontoon bridge may be placed at Red location 1, 2, or 3.

Reinforcements: Each turn one of the following groups may be chosen to enter on the Red side of the board and either move to cross the damaged bridge (infantry only) or at the pontoon bridge. Once a group is chosen it cannot be selected again during the game.

Group 1: One infantry battalion (3 companies).

Group 2: One tank destroyer platoon, one armored recon company, and one company of armor.
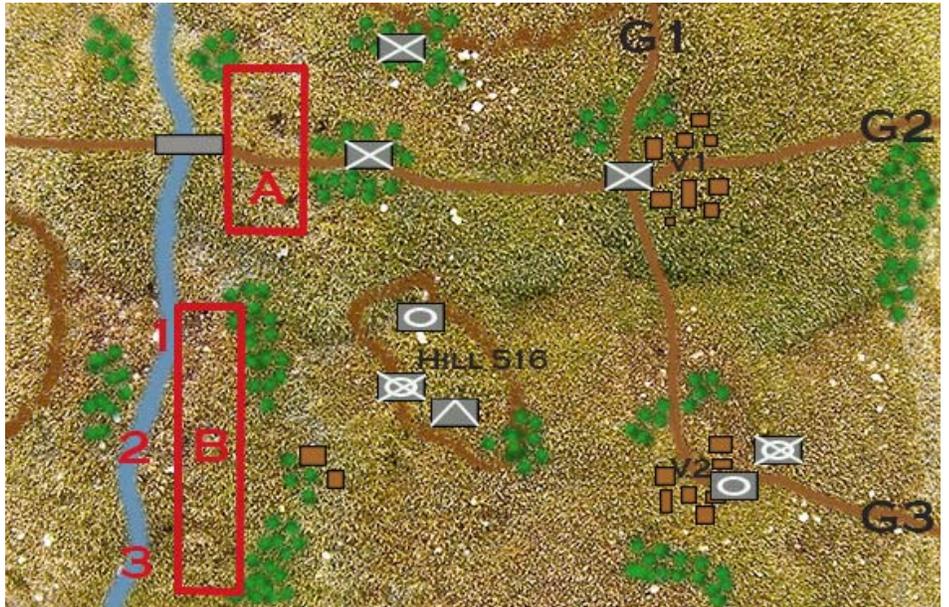
Group 3: Two companies of mech infantry.

Group 4: Two companies of armor.

Group 5: One company of heavy mortars.

Group 6: One armor company and one mech infantry company.

Red Orders: Expand the bridgehead by taking Hill 516, then villages V1 and V2. If possible, exit forces on roads at G2 and G3.

Gray Forces:

On Hill 516: One armor platoon, one mech infantry company, and one anti-tank battery.

At village V2: One armor platoon and one mech infantry company.

The remaining infantry symbols are deployed infantry companies w/inherent heavy weapons. Gray forces can be considered dug in/entrenched at start.

Off board: One battery of medium artillery on call.

Reinforcements: Each turn one of the following groups may be chosen to enter as reinforcements. Roll 1D6 for location entered with a 1-2 for G1, 3-4 for G2, and 5-6 for G3. Each group may only be chosen once.

Group 1: One armor platoon, one mech infantry platoon, and one armored recon platoon.

Group 2: Two armor platoons.

Group 3: One SP AT battery, one heavy weapons platoon, and one heavy mortar platoon.

Group 4: One towed AT battery, one infantry company, and one engineer platoon.

Group 5: One heavy armor platoon, one assault gun battery, one mech infantry platoon.

Group 6: One armor platoon and one mech infantry company.

Gray Orders: Prevent Red from gaining 15 points according to the victory conditions below.

Initiative: Red goes first on Turn 1.

Game length: 15 turns

Victory Conditions: Red needs 15 points to win the scenario. Hill 516, village V1, and village V2 are each worth 5 points. Each company or equivalent exited off the roads at G1 or G2 is worth 1 point each, so there are several paths to victory.

Age of Reason: Austrian Defense in Depth   Battle Report

I've always been impressed with the fact that Age of Reason can be used for two player all the way up to a dozen players aside for the Seven Years War. For this scenario we would usually have around six players, but we were able to manage the game in the same amount of time with only two players and one member who acted as umpire. Steve, who designed the scenario and acted as umpire, had created a fairly involved and well thought out scenario that proved to be an interesting diversion from our usual line up and slug it out type AOR night.

The goal for the Prussians was actually very simple; seize the village in the center of the board. However, getting to it was going to be quite the problem. There was a hill between two streams that was classed as a forested/marsh area that prevented the Prussians from seeing the full range of the Austrian deployment. The Prussians would need to assign their forces to the attack, then as they approached the objective and were clear of the obstruction they would then see where the Austrian main line of resistance was.

The Prussians had three brigades of cavalry with a total of seven regiments and two batteries of medium artillery. The Prussian infantry formed up into three brigades with a total of thirteen infantry battalions including one brigade of grenadiers. For this scenario the Prussian infantry was classed one morale grade higher than usual, meaning that they were going to be particularly effective in firefights and have staying power,

both of which would come in handy during the battle.

The Austrians had two batteries of light guns covering the stream on one flank with two batteries of heavy guns on a hill overlooking the stream on that same flank. There were several cavalry regiments and infantry battalions defending both flanks in depth, almost inviting the Prussians to attack across it. The scenario specific rules were set up so that the streams were treated as a linear obstacle, but any charges across them were done in a disorganized state.

From the start it appeared that the Prussians were going to have two avenues of attack and both of them left a lot to be desired! The first was on the Prussian left which had the Austrian heavy guns covering the approach to the stream and then the light guns covering the crossing itself. There were infantry battalions also on the Prussian left, but not much could be seen in the middle. On the Prussian right there was a large space of open ground where the cavalry would cross, but then be hit by two separate forces. If they could win the initial fight or at least hold their own, the infantry could cross and form up for attack.

The attack began on the Prussian right where the hussar brigade crossed the stream, then met the Austrian cavalry who intercepted them. In a chaotic melee, the Prussians won one melee, but lost the other, with the third Austrian cavalry unit in reserve counterattacking and routing the Prussian hussar unit who survived. The infantry pulled up at the stream, not knowing if they should go into square or continue to cross. A Prussian dragoon regiment crossed and charged an Austrian cuirassier unit, but was defeated and routed. By turn three that side of the Prussian attack had come to a standstill.

On the left flank it was a matter of there simply being not enough room to deploy for an attack. The first Prussian infantry brigade went up in line and tried to engage the Austrians on (cont. on p29)

(cont. from p28) the banks of the stream. At that point they could see the remaining Austrian deployment and it was definitely going to be a challenge to take the village. The grenadier brigade moved up in column to support the first infantry brigade and try to exploit any opening.

The first Prussian infantry brigade was met by a hail of fire from several angles. Fortunately for this scenario the Prussian infantry had been graded one level higher and the Austrians one level lower. If it was not for that the Prussians would never have even crossed one unit! After several turns a few Prussian battalions were across the stream, but several had taken heavy losses. By the seventh turn the Prussians were holding their own and making slow, but steady progress.

The Austrians then launched a series of counterattacks that included a cavalry charge, but all were beaten back by the Prussians. By turn nine the Prussians were advancing on all fronts and looking for avenues to let their four fresh cavalry units get into the fray, but there was limited space to deliver a final blow. The Austrian defense was being depleted, but not fast enough for the Prussians to win the game by turn twelve.

On turn ten the Prussians finally drove back the Austrian light batteries and the grenadier brigade began crossing the stream to continue the attack towards the village. The survivors of the first Prussian infantry brigade were now engaging the Austrian second line of defense and things were looking good, except for the

problem of time as the battle was coming to an end. The last two turns saw a slight Prussian surge, but it was not enough. Even though they had inflicted more casualties on the Austrians and forced two withdrawal checks, the Austrians held the village and won the game.

A very challenging scenario that was both good and bad. The good part is that it was much different than most of our thrown together scenarios and the morale grade adjustments for both sides made the scenario very balanced. The bad part was that with the limited space the card draw sequence became critical, especially when for several turns the Prussians had severe traffic jams and could not deploy to attack. Overall, it was a well run two player game that went the distance.

WMA: Successors vs. Indians   Battle Report

If you've been reading this magazine for any length of time, then by now you've realized that we really like Warmaster Ancients! I'm not sure if it's because it looks like an ancients battle, plays fast, the games are always close, and everyone has a fun evening, or a combination of all of the above. We do play WMA about once every three months and sometimes more often than that. With our annual one day WMA tournament coming up this would be a good time to get in a little practice, plus now that I have all of the archers done for a 2,000 point Indian force, I take any


opportunity available to use them on the tabletop!

For this game the Indians went with what is becoming the standard combination for the 2,000 point battles. The infantry are broken into four brigades with three infantry units covered by one archer

unit, four separate archer units, two units of skirmishers, four medium cavalry units, plus two elephant units and a variety of commanders. The army is about as generic as an army can get with few units having any armor at all. However, it has a high break point (13) and has the available troops to keep feeding units into the fray.

The Successors have a large variety of options and for this one, Mark chose the "heavy" variant, which is 2,000 points of heavily armored forces. There were six units of pikes, two of imitation Romans, two units of Thorakites, two light infantry, two skirmishers, four units of archers, one unit of elephants, and then four units of heavy cavalry which included two units of Guard/Companions and one of cataphracts. A small break point (10) meant this army could not afford a grinding battle of attrition, but it did have considerable striking power.

The Indians decided on a general, all purpose deployment since there really weren't any "elite" units other than the elephants. The problems would be that with this many units the leaders with a seven rating were going to have a hard time moving units towards the front. The plan was simple, get everything forward as fast as possible, pile into any combat, and grind

down the Successor force. The Successors on the other hand went for the pikes in the center, a massive cavalry attack on their right flank, and then units to hold their left.

The game started out a sit usually does for our group, with several command failures! By the third turn both sides had a fair number of units moving to engage and the Indians (at least the flank I was on) were growing concerned about the brigade of Successor cavalry bearing down on them. Sure enough, the first few Indian cavalry units were obliterated, but did some damage and then the archers who next felt the cavalry's wrath did a bit more damage. All of a sudden two of the Successor's elite units were down to one stand each. This set the pattern for the rest of the night, with the Successor forces doing incredible damage on the first round of combat, but the Indians kept feeding units into the line and knocking off a few stands (cont. on p. 31)
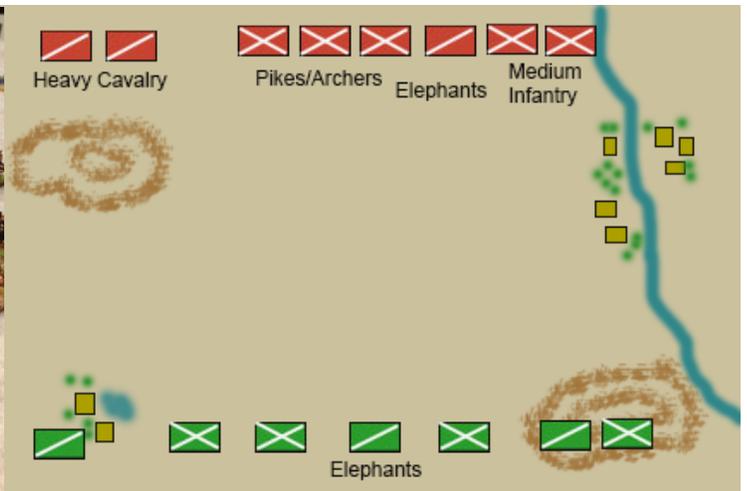
(cont. from p.30) here and there. By the fifth turn both sides had lost several units.

The elephants on both sides then got involved and more units died, so by this time there was a general melee taking place in the center of the board. The flanks had fought themselves out, either by exhausting their units to the point of being down to one stand, or in the case of both sides having one flank where the units just refused to move!

Now the main units of both sides began to close the range in the center, with the Indians putting forward several blocks of infantry to face off against the onrushing pikes. One unit of Indian elephants trampled a Persian archer unit in Successor service and then crashed into the line of pikes beyond, doing incredible damage. The other Indian elephant unit also mangled an archer force and then engaged the remaining Thorakites near the center. By this time both sides were closing in on their break points with a large number of casualties.

The remaining Successor pike units now charged the Indian infantry brigades, ripping large holes into the lines. The Indians counterattacked and in some spots drove the pikes back. The archers of both sides also contributed to the carnage by picking off stray units outside of the center and disrupting reserves. By the tenth turn both sides were on the verge of breaking and with one final, deadly combat both sides reached their break point at the same time and the game ended in a draw.

A well fought, fast playing, and very fun battle that saw a bit of everything. Both sides had units that refused to get involved, but could have swayed the battle. The Indians had a four unit brigade that NEVER moved! The Successors also had their imitation Roman legions that could have been devastating, but they never could get into the action. It was definitely the classic quantity versus quality type battle and in this case it ended up as a draw.

Next time I think I will draw up an "extreme" Successor list with camels, artillery, scythed chariots, and every kind of weird unit I can find! The Successors are an interesting army and you can make quite a few lists with a variety of units to confound opponents or yourself!
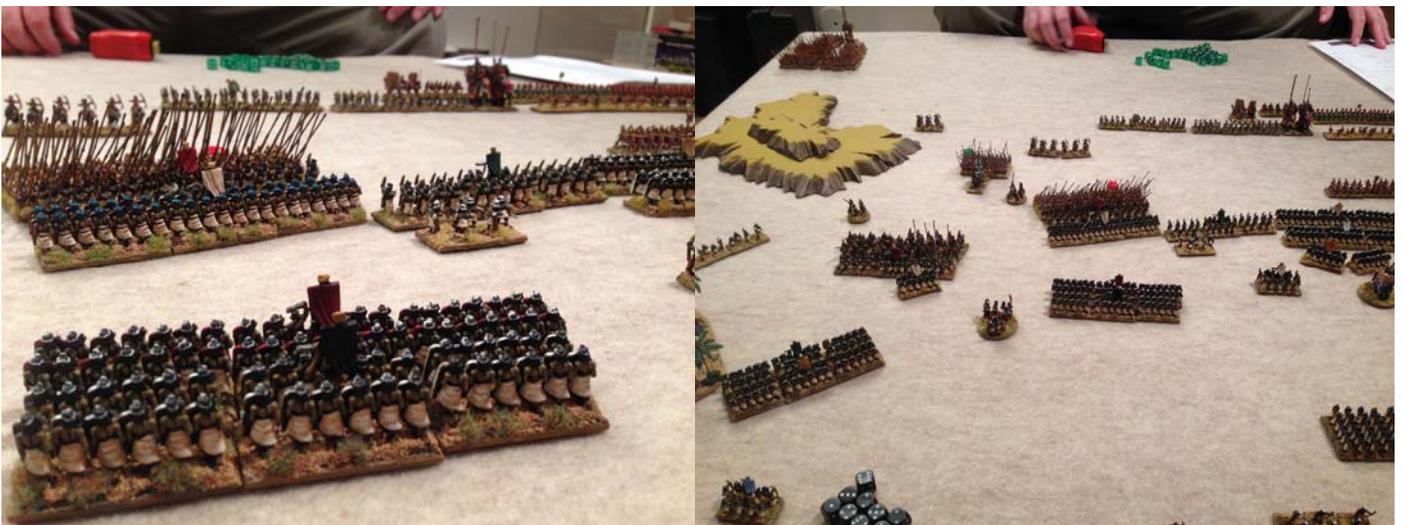
Fire & Fury: Champions Hill Battle Report

Yet again one of those Fridays where we needed a game for only a few players, it could only be set up for one night, and we would be getting a late start with the set up/planning. So, we turned to what we know and that would be Fire & Fury ACW! We found ourselves at around 7pm on Friday night still trying to figure out what scenario to play when we decided upon Champions Hill from the 1863 Vicksburg campaign.

In hindsight it was probably a bit too ambitious to get the whole thing set up and played to a reasonable conclusion in under five hours, but we gave it a go anyway. The first problem that we encountered was that we simply did not have a large enough table as the map was an 8 x 6, but we only had a 7 x 6 which was probably close to 5 1/2 on the width. Also, we didn't have enough trees or river sections, so fortunately we came up with a creative solution. This namely involved cutting off one end of the map and the back river section of the Confederate position. Once that was solved everything else came together pretty quickly.

The scenario began with the initial Union attack at 9am and the Confederates had to hold out until dusk, which unfortunately for them, was around 8:30pm, or about 23 turns. The Confederates had about three divisions in a fairly good

position, backed by three batteries of artillery and each division had at least a brigade in reserve. Right from the start both sides could see that the Confederate left was going to come under some heavy pressure as it was spread pretty thin. Little did anyone realize that in this refight the crisis for the South would occur in the center.

Sure enough, the Union forces began arriving en masse. One division moved forward and deployed to attack and/or pin down the Confederate right. This started a multi-hour attack and counterattack near a small farm as the defenders tried to protect that flank. The main force headed straight for the center while yet another Union force moved to engage the Confederate left. Confederate artillery began to pound the approaching Union forces, but because of the terrain and how the Union was attacking, the Confederate forces did a rapid redeployment which didn't quite have the desired effect.

The Union infantry surged up the hill in the center and hit the defending Confederate brigades, driving them back. The Confederates counterattacked, but failed spectacularly, being driven back down the opposite side of the hill! Two

artillery batteries were overrun and all of a sudden the game almost came to an end in the first few turns!

This prompted one of the adjacent Confederate brigades and two more batteries of artillery to pivot and form a new line to stop the Union advance. Another Confederate brigade wheeled and began an almost suicidal attack down the hill to buy time for new defense lines to be formed. The Union attack on the Confederate left now began to develop as well. The Confederates were definitely outnumbered here and were forced back slowly. One Confederate brigade, however, held the line for several hours, inflicting considerable damage upon the Union infantry and (cont. on p33)
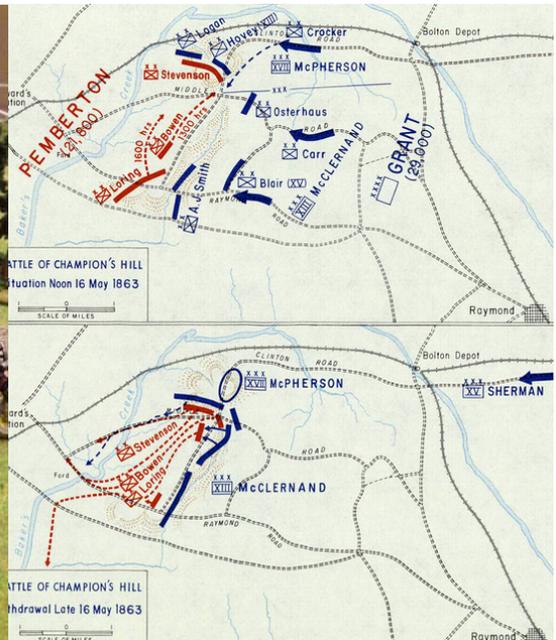
(cont. from p32) forcing back several assaults. However, numbers began to tell and it along with the other brigades began to fall back to better defensive lines.

The Union cavalry now came into action and rode down the retreating elements of several Confederate brigades. Their attack on the two batteries holding the crossroads at the top of the hill, however, was pushed back or the game would have ended right there and then. Both sides then took some time to reorganize for another round of combat, but still more Union forces arrived on the roads.

Over on the Confederate right the see-saw affair continued, with the farm and a small series of woods changing hands several times. The Union simply did not have the strength to force a decisive issue on that side of the field so the attention once more turned back to the center. One of the Confederate brigades that wheeled and charged down the hill met with some success, driving several Union brigades back and buying precious time for the defenses to be reorganized. However, it was surrounded and destroyed by a combination of Union forces.

At this time it was approaching 11:30pm and we needed to make a decision about going on. We had played about 9 turns (it was about 1:30pm in game time) and still had quite some time to go. We were unable to keep the game up so we had to make a decision about how the game would likely end. Although the Union side had taken more casualties in the series of attacks, they had brigades to spare and it had not affected their operations at all. The Union had made a mess of the Confederate center, captured two artillery batteries and damaged one more, plus they were rolling up the Confederate left slowly, but surely. We decided that the Confederates would need to withdraw back over the bridges and leave the field to the victorious Union forces.

The game did not quite play out how we thought. The Confederate position in the center looked invincible, but it fell early to determined Union attacks. The most interesting fight of the night was on the Confederate right and the left never really got going for either side. We'll need to try this again some time with a large board and all of the turns.

With all the talk about 3D scanners and printers, especially how they will revolutionize gaming, I thought I would take this opportunity to shed the light of realism on the subject. Not many of you probably know that I run some very large computer labs for a major university and we do have a 3D scanner and printer. Not only that, a member of our group has three 3D printers (including one over $50,000) at his own business that I've had access to. After having played with them for awhile and seen what they can do, I think we're a long way off from seeing this industry seriously impact gaming. 3D scanning is still in its infancy and takes a lot of time and effort to create what is called a watertight model that can be printed. If you thought that you could take a 28mm fig, scan it in a few minutes, then start printing them off at will, you're sadly mistaken.

Likewise for 3D printing. I've seen some amazing models created in 28mm that can then be scaled down and printed in 20, 15, and 6mm, which is impressive. However, the time spent modeling the object (not easy to do), the cost per item, and the overall cost of the printer makes gaming items a not very profitable use of this new technology. Will it improve in the future? Yes. The cost of the printers is coming down, 3D files are being sold online, and you can pack a lot of small items in the "build box" to print all at the same time. I think the revolution is still a ways off and it will be interesting to see where the hobby goes with it.

Race to the Reichstag   Book Review

I tend to read a lot of books about the late actions on the Eastern Front in WW2. There's something about the desperation of the fighting, the heavier armor, and a fascinating look at the reversal of fortune of the two armies involved. In this book, Tony Le Tissier focuses on the battle for the city of Berlin at the end of the war and not much else as with many other works on this subject.

This is a no frills, detailed look about the fighting in the city and is displayed by the detail about the role of the individual units throughout the fighting. While I've read many books about this battle where the reading progresses almost like fiction such as The Last Battle or The Fall of Berlin, Race For The Reichstag is a day by day accounting of the titanic slugfest that occurred in the city.

While many other books include the goings on in the Fuehrer Bunker, the rape of the German women in the city, and the relief efforts by Steiner and Wenck, this book briefly mentions those things. Instead, there is an intense effort to go over things like the Russian army boundary lines, the crossings of each water obstacle, the German defense sectors, and so on. The author does a good job of guiding the reader on the Russian progress through the city and how the Germans were reacting to it.

As a stand alone treatment I'm a bit torn by the material presented. In my opinion it assumes that the reader knows what happened to the Russians and Germans up to this point, who many of the players are, and how the battle for the city fit into the end of the war in Europe. If you have never read a book about the battle for Berlin, then you could be confused as you're asked to make a lot of assumptions.

However, my suggestion is to use this book as a guide while reading other works on the battle. For example, in the books I previously cited, there are mentions about the breakout attempts and command problems with the German defense, but not much time is spent on them. In this book there are several pages about the breakout attempts, numerous comments about the commanders and their issues, plus several other noted items about the battle that I had never heard about previously.

Overall, the book is recommended, but only if you already know something about the battle itself. The detail about the Russian units and their attacks is well presented, you get a sense of urgency from the Russian command, and the desperation of the German defenders. It's not the most exciting book that you will ever read, but it is a notable work on the subject, plus it has very good maps, some images I had not seen before, and very extensive notes.