Warning Order

ISSUE #41

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Warming Order

Steps Towards a Better Simulation

As long as I've been in the hobby the realism vs. simulation argument has been going on. While this article may seem like another extension of it, actually it has more to do with trying to figure out what exactly are we doing on the tabletop. By that I mean are we really representing combat at whatever level of rules that we are playing, or are have we been reduced to just pushing pretty toys around a tabletop that resembles a battlefield?

This came about as a result of playing the new Wing Leader game (reviewed later), a recent WW2 miniatures game, and reading a few new military history books. The combination of these things caused me to ponder why our games most of the time bear little resemblance to what happened historically. This isn't a quest for realism to the extreme, aka Advanced Squad Leader, but rather why various aspects of miniatures gaming and rules don't address these issues.

There is an interesting

mechanism in Wing Leader where after each air combat that involves flights/ squadrons you roll to see if the unit has become so separated or broken apart that the various stragglers, flights, etc., just decide to go home. Now contrast that with most air to air miniatures games that you've played in. Certainly it's at a more tactical level than Wing Leader, but the concepts are the same. No one ever runs for home, aircraft push for kills even at hopeless odds, and everyone is on the same page in regards to tactics and coordinating efforts. Is this the fault of the rules or the players?

Well, the answer is a bit of both. Most miniatures rules are designed to get a decisive result where possible, so anything that would end the game prematurely is definitely frowned upon. I'm sure that many times a flight of aircraft made a firing pass, got lost in the clouds, couldn't coordinate future attacks, etc., and just made for home. That's not going

to happen based upon the air combat games I've been involved in over the last 40 years! The players also bear some responsibility here as to most if they lose all of their flight it's no big deal, there's coordination of efforts even though most aren't in any form of contact, and there's no desire to live another day in gaming.

Then you turn towards terrain, which I have always felt was the weakest part of miniatures wargaming. Now I'm not talking about the actual models used on our tabletops as the quality and availability is truly astounding. Gamers today can assemble villages, forts, mats, and just about anything else in the terrain category that you can think of. The only obstacle to not having a massive amount of high quality terrain is your financial status!

No, I'm talking about actually *using* the terrain in your games. When a game is getting set up and before the first turn, what do most gamers think of? Let's put a unit of infantry in that woods as it gets a +1 and then a unit behind that farmhouse because it will get a +2. Do

Inside this issue:

Special points of interest:

- *Battle reports for Battlegroup Panzergrenadier, Ronin, BFE 2, and Age of Eagles.*

- *Two new scenarios in Engagements.*

- *Reviews of the new Wing leader and Genesis games from GMT.*

- *Book reviews, an article on using terrain chits, and the usual regular features.*

Steps Towards a Better Simulation (cont.)

(cont. from p2) you ever get a discussion on fields of fire, overwatch positions, rally points, channeling attacks, delaying positions, etc.? My guess is rarely, if ever. Yet, read about many of the great battles in history or even small scale actions and you quickly see that terrain is right there at the top of the list.

A friend and I recently played the South Mountain scenario from GMT's Twin Peaks. Getting the Union forces down the main road, deploying into line, and then attempting to get up the hills to push the Confederates back was a daunting challenge. The reason? Some of the nastiest terrain that you will ever see on a battlefield and not many options to get at the attacker. Now if we had played this using Fire & Fury, which is our club's standard set of ACW rules, I think the Union forces would have rolled their way to victory. The reasons are many, but mostly due to the fact that recreating the terrain would be difficult, if not impossible, and the rules just don't account for it. Defending in woods is a +1 (if I remember right), whether it's in the middle of a flat farm meadow or on top of a boulder strewn hill that just took an hour and a half to climb to!

Then you have the issue with streams, canals, and rivers. Historically, they presented all kinds of obstacles for both attacker and defender. A six foot wide, five foot deep stream in certain locations, (i.e., Normandy) could break up formations, force vehicles to search for the nearest bridge, etc. Not in most of our games. It's usually a "subtract 1/2 of your movement" type situation and move on. Also, firing into or out of said stream would also provide all kinds of challenges, none of which seem to be present in most rules.

Then we come to firing. That a wide variety of units and formations can all coordinate fire on one target has always been a mystery to me. While the From Valmy to Waterloo rules had multiple issues, two things it got right were that artillery batteries fire at an area and once a firefight starts it's hard to get out of it.
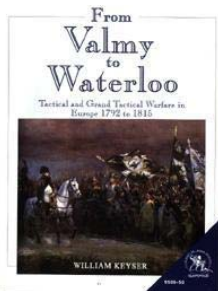
In skirmish gaming players try to set things up so that everyone under their command gets to fire each turn, which in reality would rarely happen. Yet it does with unswerving regularity in our games.

Logistics is another aspect of miniatures gaming that is often ignored. In most games each unit starts at full strength, has a full complement of ammo, and if a WW2 or later game has sufficient fuel to drive halfway across a continent! We've run a few games of BKC2 where certain forces had the chance to run out of fuel, which not only added some uncertainty to the game, but it forces players to think more tactically in that if they ran out of fuel, where would you want to be on the battlefield? The same needs to go for ammo, particularly for artillery, who just can't fire barrage after barrage all day.

Command and control is another area where things could definitely be improved. The danger here is that it can escalate quickly into an over the top system that takes longer to manage than a full turn of the game! Having said that, however, units should not be allowed to wander all over the board aimlessly, cross attach whenever needed, or respond quickly to unseen threats in every circumstance. Commands usually had specific orders covering the upcoming battle and usually stuck to them, good or bad. In most of the games I play in, however, orders change a few times each turn!

Proper use of reserves is definitely not something that you see in miniatures games. Very few, if any gamers keep a reserve to either exploit success or shore up a faltering defense. The reserves were usually released only when absolutely needed, but in most miniatures games the reserves are up on the front lines by the third or fourth turn!

We've talked about some of the problems about what we're simulating on the tabletop, but what are some of the solutions? Here's a few ideas that can be added to your rules or what to look for in a set of rules:

1. More emphasis placed on terrain. Carefully explain to all players what the various pieces of terrain are and their modifiers or what their role in the game is. A few systems I've seen in the past use hidden markers that are only revealed once a unit has entered the area. For example, what everyone thought was a gentle stream turns out to be unfordable once reached and another route needs to be found.

2. If more than one unit is firing on a target there needs to be some kind of coordination roll.

3. No more "to the last man" type scenarios. Establish clear limits where after so many losses combat formations fall back or break.

4. Add some variability to ammunition and/or fuel supplies that will add a level of uncertainty to one or both sides.

5. Commands should be organized properly and given clear orders for the upcoming battle. There should be some amount of chaos in the movement phase of the rules. Not all units acted quickly, followed orders, saw threats coming, etc.

6. Reserves should be identified and then moving them up should have some kind of process rather than being instantly approved.

These are merely suggestions to move our miniatures games to more along the lines of a historical simulation. Granted, any of the above could be expanded greatly to almost become a game by itself or increase the complexity of the game by a factor of ten. That's not the idea here. Hopefully, by just adding or changing a few things in your games you can depict far more interesting battles or get players to think about more than just rolling dice. This may not be everyone's cup of tea and you could be perfectly happy with your current sets of rules. However, I think it's good for gamers to look at what they're playing and ask if it really simulates the period on the tabletop.
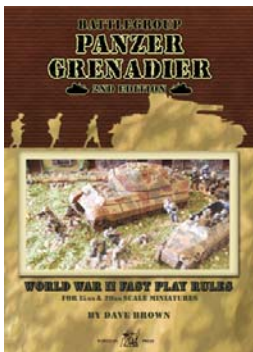
Defense in Depth   Battlegroup Panzergrenadier Playtest

If you've been reading this magazine for any length of time you can definitely figure out that 1) we play a lot of WW2 games, and 2) we can't seem to stick with the same set of rules, and 3) we're doing WW2 in yet another scale! Having said all of that, yes, we're trying a new set of rules again and back to 15mm. This doesn't mean that we've moved on from the other scales and rules usually seen here, but we've "branched out" yet again!

This would be our first playtest with Battlegroup Panzergrenadier, which is an operational level set of WW2 rules. By operational it means that each stand of infantry is a squad and units are organized into platoons and companies. These rules are definitely "command and control" heavy, which at least to me is a good thing while for others your mileage may vary. Each turn commanders are able to spend points to activate their various commands. Once activated the unit can then move and/or fire, depending upon the situation. As usual in games with a strong C&C component, you never seem to have enough commands or points to do everything that you want,

With only one player (the game um-

pire) having the rules, this would definitely be a bit of s slow playing game at first while we learned the new rules. Fortunately, the game system is fairly easy to pick up on and we were doing quite well after a few turns. The command system plays faster than it is explained in the rules, which is always a positive.

The scenario was set in 1944 with the Americans on the defensive for this battle. There were two infantry companies holding a defensive position running across the board, with artillery available off board and possible reinforcements once the action started. The U.S. players, including yours truly, set up with two platoons up front and one in reserve. Not knowing what we were facing or how the rules worked, we made a few defensive errors that fortunately didn't have the long term effect that we thought it might. Also, it was another lesson in needing to take the time to ask questions about the terrain. The stream running along the American right became almost a fortress for the Germans while they advanced and was not accounted for in the defense!

The Germans attacked across the length of the American defense and while they ran into heavy fire on the American left, they had pretty good success on the right. The reason? The stream that was

talked about earlier. The German attack moved down the stream quickly (good command rolls helped) and an American counterattack against the forces in the stream was defeated easily. The Germans emerged from the stream and continued their attack on the American left. Without the cover of the stream the fight became much more fair and both sides took casualties. The Americans did get in a few airstrikes which helped to slow down the attack.

After a half dozen turns the situation was still 50/50 for the American side. The left was holding, the right was barely hanging on, and all of the reserves had been committed. The Germans for their part hadn't won the battle, but they hadn't lost it either. They lost one armor unit and a few infantry stands, but they were still in great shape. They (cont. on p5)

(cont. from p4) had made considerable progress on the American right and had knocked out at least one infantry platoon, plus they had forced their opponent to commit all of their reserves.

A few platoons of Shermans then arrived to bolster the defense while the Germans received additional troops as well. The Germans, undaunted by the approaching armor, continued the attack. The American infantry on the left continued to take a beating and by a little past mid game the Germans were in full control of the stream along its entire length. The only thing that prevented them from going further was the American armor and they had virtually no anti-tank weapons.

On the American left the German armor knocked out three of the newly arrived Shermans. The German infantry finally worked itself through and around the American defenses, which were based off of a series of hedge lined fields. Once that was breached the American position on that side of the battlefield was in trouble.

After more heavy fighting the Americans failed a 25% break point test, causing all surpassed units to fall back, which only compounded the problems of the defense. When the game was called after about seven hours of total game time, the group decided that it had ended in a tactical German victory. U.S. forces would have to fall back towards the town, but would be covered by armor and the artillery, plus some MGs. The Germans would pursue, but probably much more cautiously, since they were outnumbered in armor still at that point by a 3:1 margin.

It was a very good scenario that showed you can have a good game that doesn't rely on having armor covering the tabletop. Also, having detailed terrain also causes gamers to think more tactically and it presents unique challenges compared to terrain that is just thrown out to decorate the table without any thought to it. We liked the rules and the focus on command and control. The game won't win any awards for speed of play, but that could just be our group's playing style and not reflected by the rules. Overall, it was a good first outing for Battlegroup Panzergrenadier and we'll try it again.

This game was played with 15mm miniatures with mostly scratch built terrain. Gamers should try scenarios like this which feature a terrain heavy tabletop as it does provide a new perspective for both sides. Most WW2 actions were not fought out in the open and although doing a tabletop like this does take some effort, particularly in the set up and take down aspects of the game, it definitely enhances the gameplay for all involved.

Action from the second night where the American armor moves to counterattack or at least stabilize the situation. When the armor arrived the U.S. lines had been broken in several places and the situation was not looking good!

Ronin: Ikko-Ikki Bandit Attack   Battle Report

We've had a lot of fun with Ronin over the last year or so and this was another great scenario that Rob created. A samurai lord was away with most of his fighting force, so the village and his family was being lightly defended. A group of bandits decides to attack the village and all kinds of chaos breaks out!

The scenario was complicated by the fact that there was a group of Sohei guarding a temple who helped to evacuate the civilians to safety while the lord's retinue did the same, even though they were not on the same side. Add to this a number of ninja who pretty much fought anyone and everyone that came near them, which made this a hard fight to keep track of who was fighting who!

The bandits attacked from two sides and they had a few missile weapons, so this was a tough job for the defenders as they were pretty spread out. The Sohei moved quickly and not only fought the bandits, but escorted civilians caught out in the open. The lord's retinue tried to do the dame, but ran into heavy opposition. After escorting the lord's wife and child back to the house they prepared to defend the gate for as long as possible.

The bandits, meanwhile, were in a running fight with the Sohei, shooting at civilians, fighting the lord's retinue, and capturing certain civilians. Yes, it was quite the mess, but pretty fun, too! Add to this a few ninja, a number of archers on both sides who should have broken their bows and used them as spears, plus multiple melees across the table and you

a pretty wild skirmish.

However, the superior fighting skills of the samurai and Sohei prevailed in the end, but just barely. When we called it a night the bandits had made some progress in their victory conditions, but were just about spent. Including set up and take down, we spent about 2 1/2 hours on this skirmish.

Over the years I've seen that successful skirmishes usually are the result of someone taking the time to set things up and this was the case here. Each layer had their own summary and goals, which goes a long way into making it a unique experienced rather than something you've seen a dozen times before. Next time we need to try out the mounted rules and maybe even start a small campaign.

Air combat has long been a part of wargaming, from the early days of SPI's Foxbat & Phantom to the incredible realism of Birds of Prey and a variety of miniatures games as well, air combat is extremely popular with gamers. GMT has had a lot of recent success with games such as Downtown, Elusive Victory, and Bloody April, which show large, complex operational combat. Into this arena comes a new take on air combat by noted designer Lee Brimmicombe-Wood called Wing Leader.

For those of you looking for a hardware intensive game where you can pore over the aircraft data cards comparing armament, rates of climb, turning statistics, etc., you better turn back now. Each scenario is on the large operational scale of air combat, featuring airstrikes against carriers, raids, Channel attacks, and more. Players command multiple squadrons and flights, not a few aircraft in a dogfight.

The components are up to GMT's usual high standards. You get a rather bland sky blue paper map with rectangles to regulate movement, but that's where the boring bits end. The counters for the squadrons and markers, the aircraft data cards, and the rules plus a scenario book are all extremely well done. For the price there is little to complain about. Also, you will quickly see that the aircraft, cards, scenarios, and so on are geared to early war aircraft, hence the sub title Victories 1940-42. Obviously, there will be more volumes featuring late war aircraft or so we hope!

The rules are presented in an interesting format, basically taking up only one large column of text. The sidebars are used for examples of play and clarifications on the rules. I thought that this was a good idea as it helped reinforce various aspects

of the rules, which was critical to me in that this is a very *different* air combat game from what most of us gamers are use to. The rules are not that hard to understand and in my opinion it is critical to start with the first scenario and work through it solitaire with the rules close by. After a few turns things start to make sense and by the second game you won't need to refer back that often.

There are 23 scenarios in the box and the designer released four more that are available as a PDF, so 27 so far, which should keep gamers busy for quite some time. The scenarios cover almost every aspect of early WWII air combat, which includes the Battle of Britain, Sedan 1940, the Flying Tigers, Coral Sea, actions over Stalingrad, North Africa, and more. Add to this the fact the most of these won't play the same way each time and there is tremendous replay value here.

So, how does the game play? The set up is fairly easy, with players placing their squadrons and/or flights, laying out clouds, the position of the sun, any ground units, ships, airfields, etc. Finally, each squadron/flight has an identifier, mission, and any other marker such as Veterans, Green, carry bombs, etc., placed on the player's wing display. This display is crucial during the game as it will hold all of the informational markers attached to the various air units that are on the map. This presents very little map clutter and is easy to see for all involved. Each player also has a set of data cards for their aircraft that list speed (not movement points), firepower, climbing, etc.

Basically, one side is the attacker and one is the interceptor. Bombers usually move two squares a turn with fighters moving three where possible. Fighters are usually marked with missions such as escort, sweep, and intercept that can influence their movement on the map. The Tally Phase is probably one of the most critical aspects of the game. Each

fighter squadron tries to spot an enemy as you can only engage units that you have tallied. There are modifiers for GCI, no radios, positions, and more. Once tallied aircraft can move into combat, which is where the fun begins.

Combat takes into account the aircraft's speed or turn rating, depending upon the type of action (head on pass or turning dogfight for example), modified by skill, position, and more. Each side rolls two dice which gives a number that could tur into losses or stragglers. Then each flight and squadron roll for cohesion to see if the combat forced the aircraft to break up and become ineffective. It is here where the underlying theme of Wing Leader resides. Squadrons or flights in dogfights would have a tendency to break up, run out of ammo, or losses would force them out of the picture. This is not a game where squadrons spend a dozen turns in a twisting dogfight with horrific losses. Most fights are over quickly with the squadrons broken and heading for home. There are also sections for bombing, torpedo attacks, flak, and a whole lot more. It speaks well of the game system that even though you may add more to the scenario, the complexity hardly goes up at all.

Now here is where some gamers may have an issue. That is, you can set the game up, fly all over the map for a few hours, and each side runs for home in a draw with neither side shooting down more than one aircraft each. This happened quite frequently during the war, but gamers usually want more decisive results, so your mileage may vary.

Overall, I found Wing Leader to be a refreshing change of pace and a new look at air combat gaming. Interesting scenarios, good game play with lots of decisions, and you can play through most scenarios in a few hours. Highly recommended for any gamer interested in operational level WWII air combat.

Let's face it, there's not to many games about the Biblical period in the wargaming hobby. While the era has been a staple on the miniatures side for ancients wargaming, I can't recall having seen or played iin that many games on the subject over the years. Following up to the very successful Pax Romana, noted designer Richard Berg and GMT Games brings us Genesis: The Bronze Age.

When you first open the box you're greeted by a host of components in the now standard GMT quality, which is to say that everything looks very good. The map covers Egypt to present day Turkey and down to Iraq (Babylonia) with various transit spaces and fortified cities. There are several counter sheets with quite a few markers, but each player gets a set of soldiers, chariots, slaves, and peasants in a distinctive color. There are also numerous units for the various minor countries and barbarians that show up at various points throughout the game. As a nice touch there are two player cards for each player that list all of the combat tables, actions, etc., so no need to print and laminate extra copies. There is also a deck of cards used for events. Finally, there are rules and scenario/playbooks. Overall, another nice job by GMT on the components.

The rules aren't particularly hard to get into and understand, plus if you've played games similar to this such as Pax Romana or Sword of Rome, you should be up and running in no time at all. Players need to focus extensively on the activation system and combat, which is definitely one of the most unusual things I've seen in gaming. The playbook has a large number of scenarios and many of them can be played with two to five players (Egypt, Assyria, Mitanni, Hittites, and Babylonians). Most of the individual scenarios focus on a certain area and are around three turns in length while the full campaign is ten turns long. You may think that three turns is pretty short, but with multiple players and up to four acti-

vations per player, that will easily take up a gaming night.

Each turn players must "pay to play" when their activation is chosen. The game features the use of silver points, which are used to purchase troops, maintain chariots, build monuments, and so on. Players then draw an event card, then can conduct one major action, two minor actions, and one recruiting action. While there are cards used in the game, this is not a card-driven game such as Paths of Glory or Empire of the Sun.

With each turn being around 50 years, the current king or pharaoh is only on the board for one turn, then is replaced. This means that on some turns you can have someone who is useless or the next coming of Alexander the Great! For your major action when you have someone good you need to take advantage and conduct as many campaigns as possible. Each leader gets to roll 1D6 for movement points plus their campaign rating. The leader and his forces then can move, fight, siege up to their movement allowance, so there's no stopping after the first enemy is encountered. This creates an interesting dynamic in how far does a player push their major activation during their turn. You also get to activate four times in each turn through a chit draw system, which makes the game highly unpredictable.

The combat system is highly unusual, relying on a multitude of combat shifts that influence the die rolls, but not how you would think. For example, the Babylonians have 21 strength points and a leader with a campaign rating of 3 going against an Assyrian force of 10 . Assuming no other modifiers, the Babylonians get 5 shifts (2 for 2:1 odds and 3 for the king's tactics rating) and then each side rolls 1D6. Let's say that the Babylonians roll bad with a 2 and the Assyrians roll a 4. The Babylonian player can then shift the die

rolls, such as moving the Babylonian roll from a 2 to a 5 and dropping the Assyrian roll from a 4 to a 2 or any combination of five shifts. The final result is multiplied by 10 to get a percentage which translates into unit losses. It's faster than it sounds, but there is a lot of strategy involved in moving the die rolls up and down.

You also need slaves, peasants, and money to expand your kingdom. You need to keep chariots in the field, recruit troops when things go badly early in the turn, pay for rebuilding of cities, and a lot more. There is also an interesting mechanism for chariot technology and manpower limits. I haven't even mentioned the minor powers or barbarian invasions that come into being through card play, but they can ruin the best laid plans in a single turn. It sounds like there is a lot going on and it's complex, but after the first turn things start moving rather quickly and soon you're not even consulting the sequence of play.

Are there any issues with this game? Very few, if any. My only concern is that if you're playing the campaign game with the maximum of five players there's no way you're finishing in a single night. Also, expect the first turn or two to go slowly as players learn the system, especially trying to get used to how combat works. Having said all of that, however, this is a rather unique game and worth your time. The ability to play a variety of scenarios with from as few as 2 to a max of 5 players is a huge plus. I found the game engaging with well written rules that offers some insights into a little gamed period. Highly recommended.
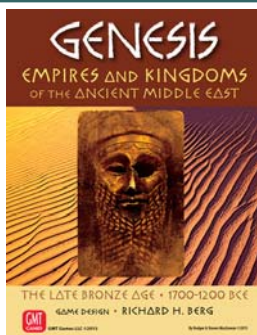
My On Again/Off Again Love Affair With ACW Gaming

For some inexplicable reason, The American Civil War has always been a favorite period of mine, ranking right behind the Victorian Colonial Era. Not only do I have an entire bookshelf filled about the subject, but I own all of the GMT GBACW games and have been playing ACW miniatures games for almost 40 years! Still, it's not like I paint units for my ACW armies day and night, or even a few units a year plus it only sees the tabletop every blue moon. Why? I really have no idea.

Although I got into gaming back in 1976 it wasn't until 1978 that I discovered the ACW period for miniatures. I came across one of those Charles Grant Tabletop Teasers about a force emerging from a swamp to surprise a garrison force and it was set in the ACW period (does anyone still remember that series?). I instantly had to find some ACW forces and being low on funds (high school student mowing lawns for income) I went the Heroics and Ros 6mm route plus the Rally 'Round the Flag rules.

It was a good start, but the first few battles that we tried left a lot to be desired. Not being sure if was the miniatures scale or the rules, I decided to change both! So I sold off the 6mm armies and went with Airfix 20mm along with the Newbury Fast Play ACW rules. The 20mm scale was a marked improvement and I was able to put together a few small scenarios, but the Newbury rules were a struggle to get through, especially figuring out the casualties during each firing phase. We tried Stars "N Bars, but it proved to be a bit much for our group at the time.

It was at this time that I was fortunate to run into three things that really got my ACW gaming into high gear. The first was a group of like minded gamers about my age who were looking for ACW gaming. The second was the glo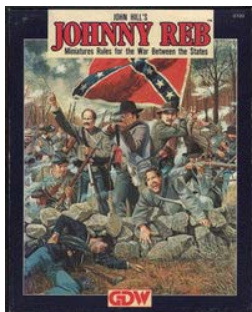rious catalog sent out by Stone Mountain Miniatures with its selection of 15mm figures and scenery. The third and final piece of the puzzle was the release of the Johnny Reb rules.

All of s sudden ACW gaming went nuclear! In the span of a year we had several divisions for each side finished and were doing large games such as Antietam in three different phases. ACW battles raged across tabletops in our area for several years, plus our library of ACW books grew at an enormous rate. When GDW put out JR2, we figured that things in terms of ACW gaming could not get much better than this.

However, jobs and lives changed, with many of us moving on. I was fortunate to meet up with a group that was interested in the ACW, but was teetering on the edge about whether or not to commit to it fully. That changed when Old Glory came out with their 100 figure bags of 15mm ACW miniatures. We fought several campaigns, major battles (some lasting more than three nights!) and amassed a pretty sizeable collection. In fact, we often had 12-15 players at some of the games!

So, what happened? Well, for one Johnny Reb 3 came out and like fools we all migrated to it before extensive playtesting. Figures were rebased, some small games were tried, and then we went back to the large 10+ player games. The result? Well, not quite a disaster, but very, very close. While JR3 is not a bad set of rules, there were numerous problems that we were unprepared for. The first thing was that they were far more complex than version 2, so many of the club didn't get it and were abused by those who knew the rules. Second, the new charge procedure slowed the game down considerably, and finally, after playing the same set for so long many gamers simply didn't like the change and gave up quickly. Tack all of that onto the new Old Glory 25s that were coming out and suddenly the divisions of scale reared its ugly head.

After a break up of the club, those of us who were interested in mainly 15mm went on, but as the late 90s wore on, another development changed the fate of our ACW gaming. This would be the professional career, not enough time, too many entertainment options, and way too many periods to play. Suddenly, JR 2 or 3 just wasn't able to fit a 4-6 player game in under the four hour threshold.

Years passed before we were bitten by the ACW bug again and we decided to try Fire & Fury. The first few games were acceptable, but the fire and passion that was present with Johnny Reb definitely wasn't there. ACW became just another game put into the rotation and it was quite some time before we tried it again.

However, once again, situations changed and we went through another building phase where we added more terrain, new units, and as you can see from past battle reports in this magazine, that we still game in the ACW period, even if it is only occasionally. There's been talk of doing a campaign, but with such greatly varied interests in the group anymore, that is probably a longshot at this point.

At the moment it would seem that we'll probably be using Fire & Fury for quite some time. I think that there is little stomach for converting to 28mm, even though the selection of figures now is truly astounding. I also think that there is an unwillingness to try new rules as well. It could be old age, an unwillingness to try anything new, or it simply could be burn out on what used to be a very popular period. Whatever the reason, it was a good run and continues, albeit a little more slowly now. I still read a lot about the ACW, buy new books, and collect new board games. It does teach you that when you come across something really, really good in the gaming world that you should enjoy it as long as possible, since you never know how long it's going to last.
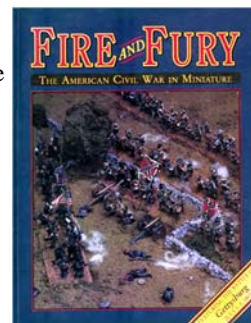
Blast From The Past Pt. 27: GDW Series 120 WW2 Games

GDW was gone way before their time, caught up in what could only be called the great purge of gaming companies that occurred when SPI, Avalon Hill, then GDW all went under for various reasons. I always had a fondness for GDW games as at the time they were the alternative, or outsider to big brothers SPI and Avalon Hill. GDW made some unusual games, but quite a few such as Imperium and Third World War have stood the test of time.

One of the more unique ideas that they had were the Series 120 games. These small boxed games (some came only in zip-lock bags) had a fold out map, around 100 counters, and could theoretically be played in under 120 minutes. While we are quite spoiled today by companies like GMT, Clash of Arms, etc., with their astounding graphics and components, at the time these GDW games were state of the art. Also, at a time when wargame releases were far and few between (OK, maybe except for SPI!) these kinds of games were eagerly looked forward to.

While the entire series was made up games that ranged from the ancient era to deep space, this review will focus on the three WW2 games that covered 1940, 1941, and 1942 respectively. It's a shame that there weren't further games in this series and I've never heard definitively what the plans were before GDW vanished.

First, all of these games are classic hex and counter, with ZOC's, a basic combat table, and various chrome added in for the specific games. The rules are in digest format and should not prove to be much of a challenge for anyone with even basic wargaming experience. In fact, these are great introductory wargames and could certainly be used to get interested people into the gaming hobby. Movement and combat are quite simple, with the combat results being the standard DR, EX, and DE variety. The set up on all of these is pretty quick, so you can pull these off the shelf at any time and be playing in under 30 minutes after reviewing the rules and set up.

1940 covers the fall of France and the Low Countries. The game has an interesting set up where the German player must choose one of three plans to conquer France and then the French player needs to deduce where the Germans are going so that they can be stopped. Simple, but very effective and it keeps the French player guessing while at the same time constraining the Germans. The game is actually pretty good and the results compare favorable to many other larger, better produced Fall of France type games.

Although the French have a lot of rules for the operations of their forces, they are competitive in this game and it's no walkover for the Germans. I'm not sure about the two hour playing time as my few tries were definitely over that limit, but under three hours.

1941 is another very interesting little game. This covers the opening of Operation Barbarossa and ends at the start of 1942. It's primarily famous for having some German panzer units with pretty high combat factors! The situation does appear hopeless for the Russians, but in this game time and distance mean everything and by the middle of the game you can tell that it's going to come down to the last few turns.

The Russians get more and more units, the weather starts to change, then the Germans throw everything at one final thrust to end the game. All in all, a very good little game that is again just a little more than two hours to play.

1942 is a hard game to rate. This covers the initial Japanese thrust into the Philippines, Malay, and Java. Basically, Allied units evaporate in front of the Japanese advance and you end up fortifying the objectives while hoping that the Japanese player has a series of bad die rolls. The naval and air aspect is so abstracted that it truly diminishes what their role was in the actual campaign. Not a bad little game, but not a great one either.

In the end 1940 is the game to own if you're thinking of trying any of these and 1941 is a close second. 1942 is only for those who are interested in the subject or feel the need to complete the series. The two hour playing time is actually closer to three, the components could use an upgrade, and the rules, while functional, could use a few tweaks here and there. However, these games are still viable despite their age.

It is a shame that GDW left us when they did. These games along with others in the series, including the excellent Snapshot and Dark Nebula, showed a great deal of promise and it is a shame that more were not produced. Looking back, you were more than willing to try these games out and give them a chance as there were so few games available. In today's market they probably wouldn't merit a second glance, but once upon a time they were highly thought of.
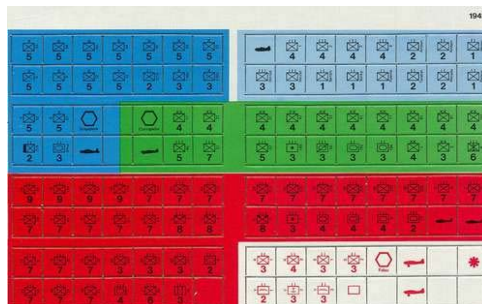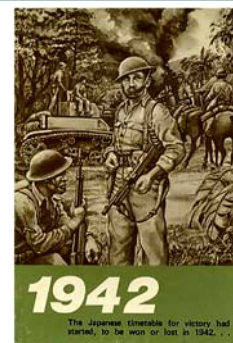
One thing can definitely be said about our gaming group and that is we like to bite off more than we can chew! We had a desire to play Age of Eagles (AOE) after all kinds of other games in the last few months and chose to do the "fantasy" or "alternative" version of the famous Battle of Liebertwolkwitz. This was the large cavalry clash that preceded the Battle of Leipzig during the 1813 campaigns.

The alternative version from the AOE scenario book postulates that the large number of infantry formations that were in the area actually got their act together and joined with the cavalry for a major action. If you've played any board games on the battle or read anything about the actions on the first day you can clearly see several divisions of infantry in various locations near the cavalry fight. Most of them for various reasons were never organized for the attack or a meeting engagement, but for this scenario they would be.

First of all, this is a big game! In fact, we didn't even realize how big it was until we started putting labels on all the stands, set things up, and then looked at the scenario to see that even more French and the Austrians weren't even on the board yet! We also had to in the interest of time cut the roads down to just the major arteries or the board would have been covered in roads, which aren't that critical in a battle like this using the AOE rules.

The French were already waiting in the center of the board when the Russians and Prussians began to enter. Here's where the Allies (including yours truly) made the first in a series of mistakes. We thought the road movement would allow for quicker deployment and came on in long columns where we should have just entered across the entire length of the board in whatever formation we could. Then the French did something clever and advanced their cavalry up to the middle of the battlefield, putting the leading Russian and Prussian elements into the tactical zone.

In AOE the tactical and reserve zones is an interesting mechanic to force players to think like generals of that era, using reserves far behind the lines to move up in large formations to affect the battle. If you are within 18" of an enemy unit you are in the tactical zone. Now why is this important? The reserve zone units move *first* and they use different modifiers for the die rolls. With the leading elements moving second and the units in reserve packed in tightly behind them, there were massive traffic jams along the length of the Allied deployment.

By the time the leading cavalry and horse artillery got itself disentangled, the French cavalry were posing a serous threat. What followed was a series of back and forth cavalry charges, very similar to the actual battle. The Russian infantry and artillery, which could have been decisive at this early stage, were locked in traffic jams. Both sides charged, rallied, and countercharged for several turns. In the end the superior numbers and quality of the Allied cavalry prevailed, but at a cost of substantial stand losses and time.

On the Allied left a nasty fight broke out between the Prussians and French/Poles on that side of the board. Between the forests, streams, and villages both sides attacked and counterattacked. A well timed French cavalry charge at one point blew a hole in the Prussian lines, but the breakthrough was checked and the isolated French units were finished off. At the end of several turns the Prussians controlled that part of the field and looked to advance to the main line of French resistance.
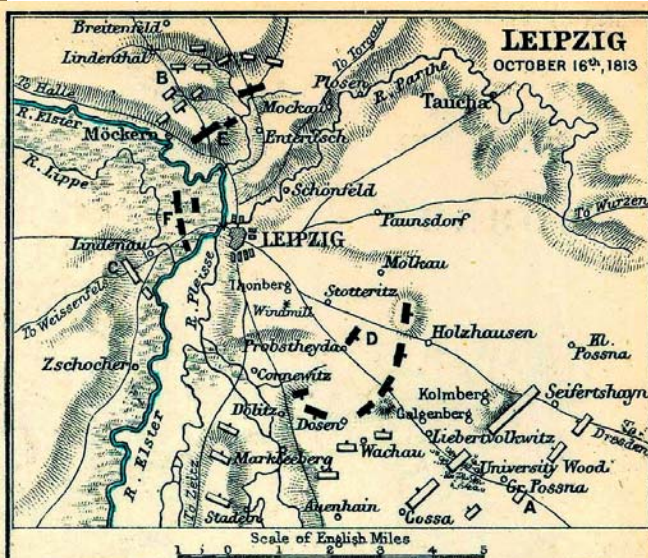
(cont. from p12) The main problem on the Allied left was that the French artillery was now formed up and in a great position. French brigades were in support and a killing zone had been established on that part of the field. The first Prussian units to advance were met by devastating fire and forced back.

The Russians finally got their act together and the first infantry divisions advanced along with the artillery. The Russian and Prussian reserves were now organized and left behind in the reserve zone where they could more easily get to the front lines where necessary. The Russian cavalry now came under fire from the French artillery supporting the various infantry brigades in the French front lines. The French cavalry made a

few counterattacks that were not very effective except that they continually delayed the Russians from hitting with one compact blow.

The French reorganized to meet the attack while at the same time fortifying their left knowing that the Austrians were going to be coming on board at some point. In the center and French right the Young Guard made an appearance and they were shuffled off to provide a counterattack force in case of any Prussian success. The Prussians, for their part, had basically had enough and were reluctant to advance into the killing zone on that side of the board.

We reached Turn 9 where the Austrians were supposed to arrive and decided that A) we still had a long way to go and

we only had an hour of play time left (this was the second night we played this battle), and B) the Allies were in trouble and more than likely not breaking the French lines.   The French were now firmly entrenched from one board edge to the other, with two lines of brigades and strong artillery positions. We played one more turn with the Russians trying to break through and the game was called as a French victory.

Yet again we had produced a fun, exciting, colorful, game that we simply could not finish! We definitely needed more players, pre-game night set up, etc., to make this kind of game a success. Now that won't stop us from doing it again as we're slow learners, but AOE is definitely a great game system.
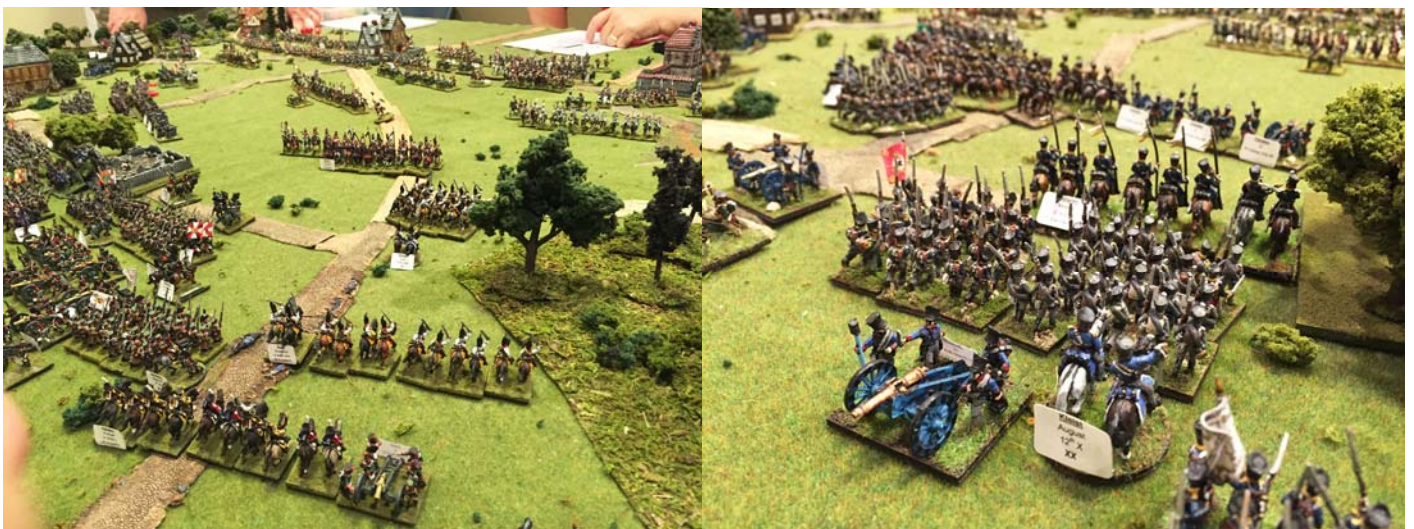
You can clearly see from these images that the Allies had some "traffic jam" issues, which were entirely the fault of the players! The battlefield is hard to represent because of the numerous roads in this area, so we focused on only the main ones since in AOE it's not that critical and we didn't want to spend an entire night laying down roads when they weren't going to get much use! These images also show that we've yet to rebase all of the Russian artillery to the actual AOE rules (we based them when we were one of the playtest groups), so that's on the agenda for the end of this year. Another thing we really need to work on is using color coded labels for the various units and the most recent AOE scenarios that have been posted have that, which is a HUGE improvement. Trying to determine who is commanding who in a game this size is a massive challenge and we intermingled commands a few times.

# What Happened To Research?   Editorial
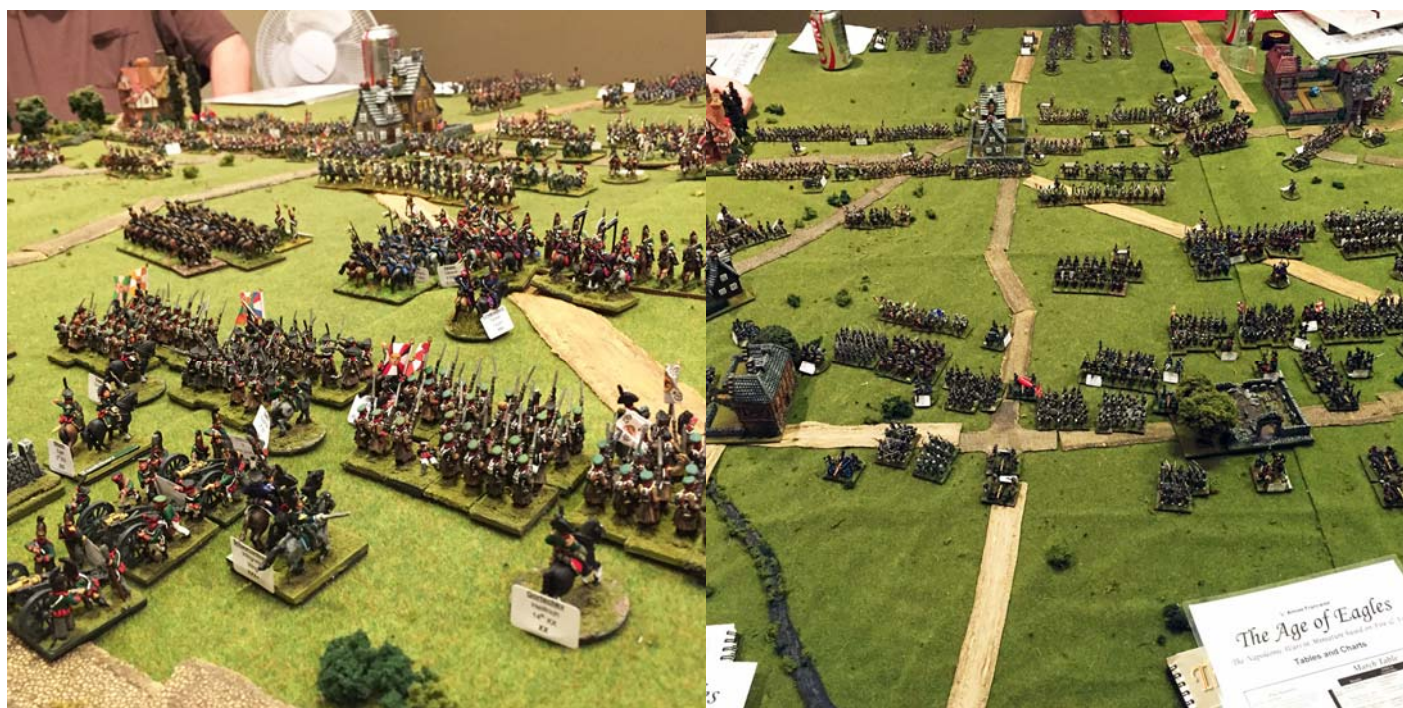
I remember a Saturday back in the late 70s (which was our usual game day back then) where one of the guys came in all bleary eyed for our WRG Ancients game. When asked why he was so tired, he stated that he had been up until 3am reading about Alexander's pike formations and tactics for the battle that morning. Now how many times are you going to hear that today? Most gamers I know would just arrive with their army, set out their forces, and start playing, usually without knowing even the basics about their army or its history.
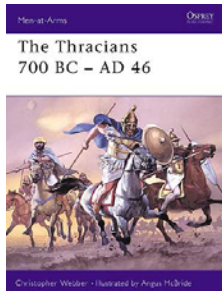
For a long time in our hobby, research was an essential part of what we did. It went hand in hand with ordering figures, painting them, and then trying to use the actual formations and tactics for that army. In fact, research is what usually led to your choice in armies in the first place, usually because you could find uniform info, they were in army lists in most rules, and you liked how their forces were used historically.

Those days are now long gone. The extent of most research now is the cool pictures of painted figs and the fluff that goes into today's well produced rulebooks. While I think that Osprey has done a remarkable job in producing almost every kind of uniform book known to mankind (even though at times the history is a bit suspect and the uniforms are often conjecture), how many gamers even take the time to buy one? I'm also seeing a generational gap forming on this subject, where older gamers will peruse the book racks in game stores, while most of today's younger gamers walk right on past. After all, if it's not in the painting guide in the rules they own, how important could it be?
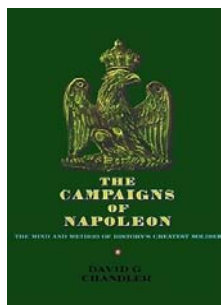
Either I was blessed by being in a wargaming group that valued research when I first started or it might be that gamers from that era wanted to do things right. That's not to say that gamers today are doing anything wrong, because after all, it is a hobby and you get whatever enjoyment out of it by doing things your way. Rather, I (and I think many other historical gamers) took the time to read about various armies, learn about their uniforms and units, then tried to replicate that on the tabletop. You knew that there was only one unit of Wheat's Tigers at First Bull Run, but today would you be surprised if someone had 20 or so units of them on the tabletop? Probably not.

There are several periods that I've created armies for over the years that pretty much forced you to do a large amount of research. The first would be Renaissance, where outside of Oman's book and a handful of Ospreys, there really is not much to go on. If you think the Renaissance is tough to do research on, it doesn't even compare to the French Wars of Religion where there are hardly even any uniform or flag plates to go by! Yet what drove me to build those armies? I definitely had an interest in the periods, the figures are unique (as is the setting), the games are a lot of fun with strange twists of fates due to the army make up, and it seemed to be a challenge.

For many of us in the hobby, it is that challenge of researching the army that sometimes drives you to carry through with what to your gaming buddies seems like an insurmountable task. It's also interesting to read about periods that most people know so little about. Finally, there is the feeling that you're doing something that most gamers would never even try, which in this day and age certainly sets games dealing with the Renaissance apart from others!

I also think that research can heavily influence rules choices, which may or may not be a good thing with today's rules. Back in the day, if you were into the ACW for example, when you looked at the rules and saw that they had ported over a Napoleonic or Crimean system, then replaced everything with ACW terms, you instantly knew that the rules weren't going to work. Today that is secondary to what most gamers look at in rules, which seems to be are they pretty, is it easy to paint for, hopefully you don't need a lot of figs, and will the game get done in under three hours. With those criteria research about whether or not the rules portray the period accurately is way, way down the list of priorities.

I can remember lengthy discussions over the various aspects of WRG rules regarding historical tactics, army formations, minimum numbers of certain troop types, and so on that could rage for hours. At the time I thought many were overdone and often boring, but I would prefer that to today where there is little to no argument and where most rules are just generally accepted. Research is now done for you by the rules and most gamers feel that there's no need to go further. A two page synopsis on the dozen or so Crusades is more than enough to know that a certain set of rules is the right one for everybody! After all, how could a rule book filled with so many beautiful pictures be wrong?

Are we ever going to get back to where gamers were in the 70s and 80s in terms of research for the hobby? Not a chance in hell. Too many distractions, gaming time that needs to be done in 2-3 hour blocks, and the cult of the new has pretty much doomed that kind of thinking.

So what can be done? Offer to loan newer gamers books on a particular period that they may be interested in. If they want to do an unusual period such as the Germans in Victorian era Southwest Africa, French intervention in Mexico, WW1 in East Africa, etc., then by all means help them out. Painting a few units, building a piece of terrain, or offering to help with the rules might get someone into an interesting period. Then, in the future they might be encouraged to try something out of the ordinary again. There's plenty of WW2 and Ancients games, so helping others with research can bring some new periods to light.

Engagement 11: Roving Cauldron

Situation: Blue's front has been torn in several places, with Red's armored spearheads driving deep into Blue held areas. A number of Blue formations have been cut off, but are still at near full strength and desperately need to reach Blue's new defensive lines.

Period: Designed primarily for the modern or Post WW2 periods.

Table Size: 6 x 4, but a larger table could be used with more terrain added.

Terrain Notes: The woods should be considered to be light woods. The river can only be crossed at the bridges that are still intact. Bridge A is held by Blue at the start of the game and 1D6 is rolled for Bridges B and C, with a 5 or 6 meaning that the bridge (s) are still intact. The villages are a mixture of wood and stone buildings.

Scale: This scenario is designed for operational level games such as BKC 2 or Battlegroup Panzergrenadier where one vehicle or stand equals a platoon.

Red Forces: Red begins the game with two forces that have been assigned to garrison villages at R1 and R2. These units may be set up within 12 inches of the village center, but may move no further than that distance from the village center.

R1: One battalion of infantry and one armor company.

R2: Two companies of infantry, one anti-tank company, and one tank destroyer company.

Off-board: One artillery battalion (three batteries of medium artillery)

The remaining Red forces appear randomly throughout the scenario. At the start of each turn, roll 2D6 for the unit that arrives, then 1D6 for the location. If the location is occupied by blue forces, the units may enter anywhere within 12 inches of the original location that was rolled.

Die Roll	Units
2	2 armor companies
3	1 tank destroyer company
4	1 recon company
5	1 mech infantry company and one heavy weapons company
6	1 armor company
7	1 mech infantry company
8	1 armor company
9	1 mortar battalion (3 sections)
10	1 airstrike (2 aircraft)
11	1 armor and 1 mech infantry company
12	1 artillery battalion (off-board 3 batteries of medium artillery)

Red Orders: Prevent Blue's forces from escaping off of road exits R2 and R3.

Blue Forces:

4 companies of armor

1 company of heavy armor (if none available use 1 company of regular armor)

4 companies of mech infantry

8 companies of infantry

1 heavy weapons company

1 tank destroyer company

1 anti-aircraft company

1 recon company

Off-board support: On the roll of a 6 on 1D6 there are two batteries of medium artillery available for that turn.

Blue Orders: Organize the formations in the area then proceed to attack Red's forces to create a path to the road exits at R2 and R3.

Set Up: Blue rolls 2D6 for each company or company equivalent in the starting forces list and places that unit at the locations marked in blue on the map. Units can begin the game in any formation designated by Blue.

Initiative: Blue is first each turn

Game Length: No set game length. Game ends when it becomes apparent that Blue will no longer be able to get forces to safety at R2 or R3.

Special Rules: None

Victory Conditions: Blue receives one victory point for each company or company equivalent that moves safely off of road exits R2 and/or R3.

Less than 10 points: Red Victory

10-11 points: Draw

12+ points: Blue Victory

.**Variants**: If playing the scenario with Post WW forces, substitute various units for helicopter support and ATGMs for anti-tank units. Also , the longer weapons ranges may mean that the game needs to be played on at least a 4 x 8 board.

Engagement 12: Frontal Attack

Situation: Red is determined to break out of the WW1 trench type situation that now exists on the front lines. Red will launch a frontal assault to overwhelm Blue and pus towards the open ground, hopefully encircling Blue's forces in other sectors.

Period: Designed primarily for the modern or Post WW2 periods.

Table Size: 6 x 4, but a larger table could be used with more terrain added.

Terrain Notes: The woods should be considered to be light woods. The villages are a mixture of wood and stone buildings.

Scale: This scenario can be played with any game system as long as you have the necessary forces to represent all of the units.

Red Forces: Red begins the game with forces either off board and entering on any turn or in the deployment area marked by the red lines on the map.

6 units of infantry

3 armor units

3 mech infantry units

1 mortar unit

1 recon unit

Off-board: Three units of medium artillery in direct support. Three units of heavy artillery are available for the first three turns.

Red Orders: Break through the front lines and seize Objective #1. From there send forces to exit the map at Objectives 2, 3, and 4.

Blue Forces:

These initial forces begin on the board at the locations marked on the map.

5 units of infantry

1 unit of armor

1 unit of mech infantry

Off-board support: On the roll of a 5 or 6 on 1D6 there are two medium artillery units available for that turn.

Reinforcements: Blue receives the following reinforcements according to this schedule:

Turn 2: One armor unit

Turn 4: One mech infantry unit

Turn 7: One infantry unit

Turn 9: One armor unit

Roll 1D6 for where the reinforcements arrive:

1,2   Objective 2

3,4   Objective 3

5,6   Objective 4

Blue Orders: Hold the front for as long as possible and counterattack where necessary. Prevent Red from seizing the crossroads at Objective #1 and exiting forces off the edge of the map.

Set Up: Blue places the entrenchments and starting force in the locations marked on the map. Red then positions their forces in the deployment area or keeps some or all off board to enter on any turn.

Initiative: Red is first each turn

Game Length: 12 turns.

Special Rules: Entrenchments-Blue receives sufficient entrenchments to cover each unit of infantry deployed in the front line. These should consist of slit trenches with the occasional heavier fortification for MGs and/or AT weapons.

Blue also receives 12 inches worth of mines to cover any gaps.

Victory Conditions: Red receives five victory points for seizing Objective #1 and five points for each unit (or unit equivalent) that exits the board at Objectives 2, 3, or 4.

Less than 10 points: Blue Victory

10-15 points: Draw

More than 15 points: Red Victory

Players will need to decide what constitutes the equivalent of a unit as various parts of units may be able to escape the board at different intervals. Players will need to keep track of which units or parts of units have exited the board.

.**Variants**: A great many variations could be added to this scenario. The first is to expand the board and the forces, which while it would give the attacker a better opportunity to pick a point in the defense lines and overwhelm it, the defender would have more reserves to deal with a breakthrough. Another variant would be to enhance the fortifications and give the attacker some engineer units, which would focus the game more on the initial break in operation. Airstrikes, a preliminary bombardment, and infiltration could also be added. Finally, the victory conditions could be modified to reflect losses by both sides.

It's been awhile since our last outing with Battles For Empire II, but since I had just about finished my 1500th figure in my 15mm Sudan collection we figured that it was time to start using them! I had actually envisioned a much larger game, but when we got cut down to three players due to some last minute cancellations the scenario was drastically cut back.

The situation is that an Anglo-Egyptian force is moving to the relief of a town in the Eastern Sudan that is still holding out, despite being surrounded by the Mahdi's forces. This force has fought a series of running battles and the day of decision has arrived. With the number of wounded, supplies running low (especially water), and no end in sight to the enemy's strength, the wells in this area need to be found or the expedition will need to turn back. A local guide has told the British commanders that the wells are over a ridge and to the right of their position. When the game was set up, the British players could only see up to the ridge and not beyond.

The fate of the game would be based upon a D100 roll, with the British earning percentage points for accomplishing certain objectives. For example, they would receive 100 points for reaching the wells and destroying enemy units, but would lose points for each hit suffered by their units and the loss of the baggage camels and/or wounded. The total would be added up and then a D100 roll would determine the fate of the British expedition.

The Anglo-British force consisted of

two infantry companies (one Indian and one Egyptian) in a thorn brush enclosure guarding the wounded and most of the baggage in the corner of the board. The remaining force consisted of two companies of Highlanders, a unit of the naval Brigade, a Royal Marines detachment, and four companies of the Sussex regiment. This was augmented by a unit of the 19th Hussars and two sections of screw guns that were formed up in square.

The initial British plan was to advance slowly in square to the ridge, but to

get the cavalry up there quickly to take a look at the surrounding terrain and any enemy forces awaiting them. The square moved slowly up, watched by several Dervish cavalry units just out of range. The Hussars moved in front of the square to reach the ridge quickly and this is where they ran into the first ambush.

Two Fuzzy units burst out of cover forcing the Hussars to retire, but not before they suffered a few hits from a Fuzzy rifle armed unit on the ridge. At the same time the four Dervish cavalry units charged into the other flank. However, the screw guns, which were to show their worth time and time again in this game, blasted one of the cavalry units while rapid fire made short

work of the others. The Hussars gallantly charged into one of the Dervish mounted units, but rolled poorly and were defeated while one of the Dervish units ventured to close to the Indians, who poured deadly fire into their flank. The Fuzzy units died in a hail of fire and the rifle armed unit on the ridge made the mistake of getting into a long range firefight with the better trained British infantry and were destroyed.

At this point the square was nearing the ridge, but not making headway as fast as the British commanders had hoped. With more enemy coming at some point the decision was made to break apart the square, with one half of the units guarding the flank while in support range of the wounded camp while the remaining units pressed on. Their guide had found a pass where if the British units went through in column they would not be disordered, while if you crossed the ridge at any other point you would be. Several British units formed into column and began moving up the ridge.

When the first unit reached the crest, the remaining terrain was placed along with the enemy units that they could see. To their chagrin, their guide was wrong and the wells were behind a Mahdist held town! To make matters worse there were two rifle armed Fuzzy units in rifle pits in the front of the town and multiple Fuzzy infantry units to the right of the town, ready to advance on the British as they came over the ridge. More Dervish cavalry and infantry appeared on the flank of the British units left behind on the other side of the ridge.

(cont. from p 18) The screw gun section that had been hauled up to the crest of the ridge now came into action, hitting the advancing Fuzzy units while another British infantry unit joined them in providing fire support. The naval Brigade got down the pass and into line just as the first Fuzzy unit hit them. The Royal Marines arrived in the nick of time to support them as the first Fuzzy unit charged into melee. The close range fire and steadfastness of the Naval Brigade won the day, despite taking numerous casualties. The remaining British units now formed up and prepared to advance.

On the other side of the ridge the British poured volley after volley into the advancing Mahdist forces. The natives kept trying to coordinate their attacks, but bad die rolls, the uncanny accuracy of the screw guns, and getting the initiative several turns in the row helped the British. Time and time again the Dervish and Fuzzy units threw themselves at the strung out British units, but without success.

Near the town and despite taking casualties from the rifle armed Fuzzy units the British attack pressed forward. The Fuzzies advanced bravely, but they were cut down by the British rapid fire. When the game was called the British were going to achieve all of their objectives and had destroyed so many enemy units (over 20!) that they were easily going to be over 120% for the success of the expedition.

This was our first time playing with a large British force and they are a very nasty opponent. The combination of rapid firing, better to hit rolls, etc., means that the natives need a "good" day to come out on top. The screw guns were the heroes of the action, continuously placing their rounds amongst the packed units, causing maximum casualties. The Dervishes and Fuzzies for their part died bravely, but simply could not string together a series of good die rolls all night. They continuously failed to rally, performed poorly in melee, only won the initiative once in ten turns, and the list goes on!

All in all, it was a very fun and fast moving game. BFE 2 is a great set of rules that may look hard, but is very easy to use for colonial battles.

WW2 Skirmish Gaming-A Rebuttal

by Rob Coleman

My article in last month's issue on WW2 skirmish gaming generated a lot of comments, more so than almost anything else I've written about in the past few years! I would say about 90% of those fell into the category of, "Yes, we've noticed something is wrong, but we're unsure what should be done about it". The article at least got people thinking about their WW2 skirmish gaming, which is what I was aiming for. Here is another opinion on the topic.

Matt

Like Matt said, we're all avid fans of both history and wargaming. If we weren't fans of history, we wouldn't be here writing a gaming magazine about historical games. Matt wrote a rather good article about some short comings he felt WW2 skirmish gaming suffered from. Today I'd like to write a rebuttal to that article if only to give another perspective on gaming.

First off, let me say that the problems outlined in Matt's article are not unique to WW2 skirmish gaming. For myself, I'm an avid fan of ancient and medieval history, and most of the problems Matt outlines are true of any wargaming period. As gamers, we have to be willing to suspend disbelief to some extent, and yes I do realize that will be to a different level for different people. Let me at least try to put up some different ways to think about some of these classic gaming problems.

The first problem Matt deals with is complexity. I have nowhere near the experience the rest of the club has with historical games, but I have played loads of different games in my life. One of my all-time favorite games is Axis and Allies. I love the board, the multiple levels of play (economy, defense, offense, production, land control, transport, and technology) that tries to capture the fact there is a lot going on when thinking about a major conflict. That said, unless everyone is very familiar with the rules, the setup, gameplay, and the general strategies that work and don't work, you are in for a very long game that will get boring for players.

Think about the last time you played that really complex tabletop or board game which covered everything from which way the wind was blowing to how you reacted if you got shot with rifle vs shot with mortars, with multiple tables for everything. How much of your time did you spend referencing tables, looking up a rule for a particular odd scenario, or argue over the correct interpretation of a given section of the manual? Was that what made the game fun, or was it enjoying the great scenery and lovely minis that had been painted up while trying to make your plans work and your enemies fail? As I said, I can enjoy complex to a point (Ticket to Ride or Clue, other board game favorites, are nothing on A&A, which my family and most of my friends won't play with me while they will play those two) and there are times I actually want to play a bit more complex, but all of the time? Carry that out over multiple game systems, and you can spend a bulk portion of your time trying to remember what was different between systems.

I'm not saying beer and pretzels is the only way to go, but you can often get much more tightly written rules with them, games can still take a couple hours if you want (depending on how you play them), you can alternate actions, and not spend all night looking in the book and not playing. I like Bolt Action, as an example. I also like Blitzkrieg Commander, they enable two different ways to play, and both have their flaws that you have to accept when you play them.

Matt's second argument, which is hidden movement, has both direct and indirect counters to it. I myself do like the idea of a hidden movement system, but any system I've yet seen has flaws. The first of these is that having extra chits still enables your foe(s) to have some idea where you are and what's going on.

Granted it reduces this, but to keep them hidden tends to mean you have to move or act in ways that wouldn't be necessary on a real battlefield. Fog, smoke, dust, rain, snow, battle fatigue, being pinned down by enemy fire, and more can make you lose your ability to track and follow enemy movements, even when they should be 'in the open'. Plus, what about defiles, ditches, low hills, brush and bushes, and other odd terrain items we just can't or don't model on the table top?

Part of that problem is what do you do when a unit moves out of vision or spotting? Do you immediately hide them again? Should you leave them visible? How do you simulate the fact that units could lose their foes or at least parts of them during a running battle? How do you resolve a sniper in a tree? Should you have to measure from their position and thus give them away even though they could often get multiple rounds off without anyone ever learning where they were at (give or take the breaks)? How do you handle the fact that a single man could break off and sneak up on the sniper without them ever knowing about it? I recently read the eyewitness account of a Polish Journalist who dropped into Arnhem with the Red Devils. He talks about the snipers, and how they could pick off one, none, or many troopers before they were spotted. Invariably when they are spotted, one guy sneaks out, the sniper never realizing it, and the sniper gets shot from someone nonchalantly walking under their tree or hidey hole and popping them.

The other aspect of hidden units, is that I still haven't seen a reasonable recce rule in a game. Those Greek peltasts who dressed as herders or painted themselves black for a night recon to ascertain positions and detail the enemy don't seem to suffer from the logistical issues of then communicating that back and or aren't taken because point costs are always out of sync with the effect those units bring to the table. If a hidden movement system could come up with a way to then encourage recon and have it not be a waste of 'points' then you might have something.

WW2 Skirmish Gaming-A Rebuttal (cont.)   by Rob Coleman

Then we also have the problem that even though you might get some rules which do alright with hidden units, you haven't denied vision of the terrain. We've played I Ain't Been Shot Mum, and when you know what the terrain is beforehand you can predict certain things. That tree line over there, going to be a MG there no doubt. Oh, there is a tower, watch out for something parking in it. Poor knowledge of terrain is an issue that crops up in any bit of history you read about. Had the Persians known about the mountain passes sooner do you really think we would have ever heard of the Battle of Thermopylae? Probably not, as there wouldn't have been a battle but a total massacre and Greece would not have had a few days to make ready to face a somewhat demoralized Persian host.

One thing that gets overlooked, and hence my not so direct comment, is weapon ranges. I myself am particularly guilty of gripping about weapon ranges in games. Units almost always move to fast vs the range they can shoot out to. Even an ancient archer could get in 4 to 6 volleys before his foe closed the distance. When have you ever seen that on the table top with the common 24" range and a 6" move that can often get longer due to multiple move orders, charges which increase speed, and so forth. I heard someone give a really good argument the other day on weapon ranges, and why a rifle is only 24" in Bolt Action. I won't repeat it all here, but the basic thrust of it was the rifle can obviously shoot farther than that. A shorter range, in addition to trying to balance things in a particular way, is a way to represent reduced visibility, battle fatigue, intervening miscellaneous cover, and so forth. Not being able to shoot beyond that represents the infantryman having to aim at foes who are probably moving while he is as well, haze, dehydration, and other things that would prevent it from being a rifle range 1000 miles away on a calm day in the Utah countryside, far away from any stresses.

I've probably rambled enough there, but in short, let me say the issues Matt describes are not unique to WW2 skirmish games. They are problems with all hist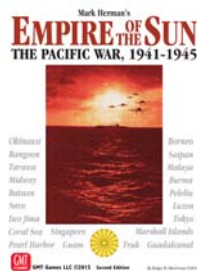orical games. Honestly, unless every time we borrowed or refought a battle and had someone other than who was actually shot/wounded killed/stunned/whatever have that happen to them, we've broken with realism and are tempting massive what if scenarios. So at some point we have to say we're willing to suspend disbelief, that we aren't going to achieve parity, and relax and enjoy being with friends and getting to geek out over who was a better fighter, the Viking or the Samurai. Oh, and if someone wants to try and borrow Muskets and Tomahawks spotting rules and I Ain't Been Shot Mum's hidden deployment and roll them on top of Bolt Action, I'll be happy to play it. I'll just also enjoy playing Saga with its well written and easy to pick up rules set while still appreciating the complexity and strategy the battle board adds without needing to stop every few minutes to check the rules.
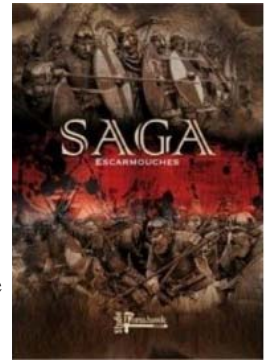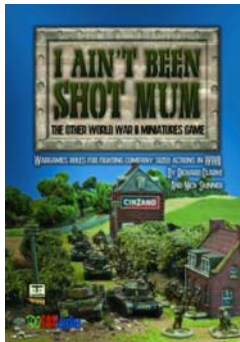
Empire of the Sun 2nd Ed.   Game Review

Several years ago I reviewed a ground breaking board game called Empire of the Sun, from GMT Games and long time designer Mark Herman. It was novel at the time in that most, if not all card driven wargames were area type systems. EOTS uses your classic hex and counter backdrop then adds the cards on top of it.

Since it came out EOTS has been one of the highest rated wargames in quite some time. The designer and fans run regular games against each other where the results are posted for all to follow along, which is great for learning the system. With the CSW posts in the tens of thousands, there are a wide number of strategies, rules changes, and questions that necessitated a second edition.

For this new edition the first thing you notice is the mounted map board, which is a nice touch. Next are the counters, which are thicker and have had a few color changes on them to help with the inter-service rivalry events which often occur in the game. The cards have also had several changes that reflect over a decade of game play. All in all, it is a very impressive package of components.

The rules have also been slightly modified and even though I have played the game at least a half dozen times since its release, I had a hard time picking out the various changes. After a cursory glance and review I was able to get back into the game with little effort. The example of play and the ability to choose shorter scenarios are huge advantages in learning the system.

Now that's not to say that the game system is any easier! Nothing has changed in that regard, so it will take a thorough reading of the rules and a few turns to understand what is going on here. The combination of a hex and counter game with cards that drive the events and operations is not something that you're going to get the first time or maybe even few times.

Having said that, however, this is still an outstanding game on WW2 in the pacific and has terrific replay value. GMT and Mark Herman have done a great job with this revised edition.

The Guns at Last Light

It is hard to think that An Army At Dawn, the first book in the Liberation Trilogy by Rick Atkinson, came out thirteen years ago. While it was a groundbreaking book and took an interesting look at the U.S. Army in WW2, I think most readers thought the remaining volumes would have been out sooner! Nevertheless, the final volume is out to complete the trilogy and it was definitely worth the wait.

While the first book followed the U.S. Army as it prepared and carried out the North African campaigns, then the second book followed the brutal slugfest on Sicily and then up to Rome, this book has an entirely different tone. By now the reader has become familiar with the U.S. Army, its strength and weaknesses, the leaders, relations with the other allies, and more. This allows the author to focus on the task at hand, namely liberating Western Europe and ending the war.

Naturally, it's not as simple as all that. Not much time is spent on the preparations for the invasion of Normandy, but rather the book opens with the invasion and clarifies the problems along with the opportunities of launching a campaign of liberation from that location. The author does a good job of giving the reader what the situation was, anything in the past that related to it, and then what happens. This is the formula that is used over and over again throughout the books and it is successful.

While many books give you the feeling from both sides or try to keep the reader informed on every level possible, the author here keeps his focus on the U.S. Army. Whether it is describing Hitler's plans for the Battle of the Bulge, Montgomery's plans, operations in other Allied areas, etc. the author always brings you back quickly to what is happening with the U.S. Army. Some readers may not like this kind of style, wanting to know more from every viewpoint, but I appreciated the author's consistency throughout the series.
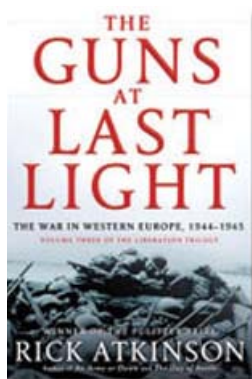
If anything could be said about this book, it is more of a Shakespearean tragedy than it is a history book. The problems with equipment, planning, intelligence, leadership, dissension with the Allies, and more are all on display here. The campaigns in Southern France, bad weather, and so on makes you look at the campaign as one of steady annihilation, very similar to the U.S. Civil War in late 1864 to its finish. The Allies were going to win, but it was going to cost a lot in lives, material, and time. The reader gets a sense of the overwhelming problems that Eisenhower encountered on a daily basis and the ultimate victory was at the point of sheer exhaustion.

I thought the book brought out several points that are rarely discussed in WW2 history on whether or not victory in Europe was a foregone conclusion. The manpower shortages towards the end of 1944, supply issues, questionable leadership and strategy, etc., are all detailed throughout the book. The narrative also goes over the subject of politics, which seemed to have been ingrained in almost every aspect of European operations. Eisenhower played the role of a CEO more than a commanding general and spent a great deal of his time just getting the various individuals under him to cooperate.

Naturally, this book touches on Operation Market Garden, The drive to the Rhine, and The Battle of the Bulge, but from a strategic standpoint. Here the author treats the reader to an in depth look at the political as well as strategic considerations of each of these more famous parts of the campaign. There is also a pro and con type discussion about these famous battles along with the leaders that were involved.

One of the more interesting parts of the book has to do with the operations in southern France, where U.S. and French forces at first faced little opposition, but then started suffering large numbers of casualties the closer they got to Strasbourg. The combination of dealing with the French, differences between the U.S. commanders and Eisenhower, staunch German resistance, plus the terrain and weather made for a grueling campaign that was very similar to the Italian campaigns in 1943 and '44.

The campaigns in Germany are again beset by politics and whether or not the Allied forces should drive on Berlin, which makes for interesting reading. At this time in the book you begin to realize that this story is more about Eisenhower and the front line soldiers than anything else. Various leaders come and go, campaigns begin and end, but Eisenhower and the common U.S. soldier is what is present at each battle. Eisenhower's strategies, dealing with the Allies, and managing the ultimate victory with the G.I's paying the price for it is what the book is really all about.

This is one of those books that by itself is very good, but when judged with the others in the series becomes outstanding. The only analogy I can come up with that is similar is the Lord of the Rings movies where the third film received all of the Oscars. Here as well the third book is going to get a lot of glory, but most of that I feel is due to having completed a trilogy that adds something important to the historical record. In this day and age where everything has been analyzed to death, getting something like this series is very refreshing. I strongly recommend this book to anyone interested in the U.S. Army in Europe during WW2 and you should try to read the entire trilogy.

# The Wars of Alexander's Successors 323-281 BC   Book Review

Upon Alexander's death the Greek empire that his father and he had built up so rapidly was torn apart in a series of wars that pitted many of his former commanders and their troops against each other. As many of you who are interested in the Ancient periods know, there is little information about the Successors that is readily available.
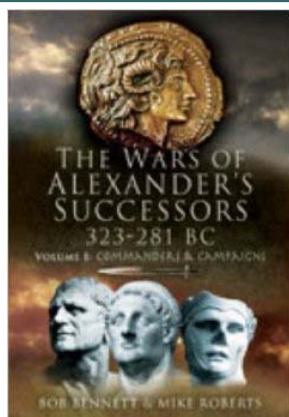
Bob Bennett and Mike Roberts, however, have set out to provide the definitive work on Alexander's successors with this first book, entitled The Wars of Alexander's Successors 323-281 BC Vol 1; Commanders and Campaigns. This book is an attempt to explain the roles of the various generals, armies, political situations, etc., during the Wars of the Successors or the Wars of the Diodachi as it is also known.

While many know or might have heard of names such as Anitpater, Ptolemy, Seleucus, Perdiccas, and more, the authors take you to the bedside where Alexander is dying and start from there. Almost immediately problems begin as to who the actual successor is and it is at this point where the authors do a good job of listing out the preliminary players. Ranging from Alexander's generals, royalty, family, and more, you are quickly able to see the multiple layers of complexity that were obstacles to each of the participants. Add on top of that everyone having different goals for their armies, families, and Greece itself, then you have a bewildering situation.

Naturally, this sets off a series of assassinations, executions, bribery, and so on that leads to wars breaking out over the vast Greek empire at that time. From this point forward it becomes a series of putting down revolts or challengers, destroying support for potential rivals, making or breaking deals, and basically running around the empire putting out fires.
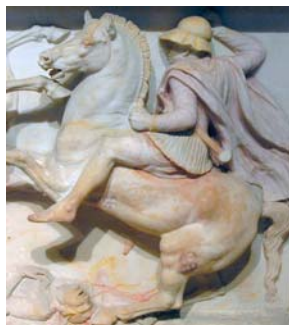
One of the fascinating aspects of this era is that is was one of the first large scale wars and could be considered almost a "world war". The campaigns and battles during these wars ranged from Greece throughout the Balkans, to the frontiers of India, down through Syria and present day Iraq, and all the way to Egypt. Various armies, fleets, and would be rulers of Greece fought actions across the width of the Mediterranean area.

The reader is also given a healthy dose of Greek politics at the time. A flow chart would have been a saving grace here as trying to keep track of who is loyal and who isn't to which leader becomes increasingly difficult. I was explain the situation to a gaming friend of mine who remarked that it was like Game of Thrones, but without dragons! Actually, this is a good analogy in that you can see that there were many ambitious men and women of that era along with a wide cast of characters with varying goals that come in and out of the narrative.

Most of the book is taken up by the campaigns that each of the main protagonists undertakes. Usually there is a brief biography, what role they had under Alexander, who they served under after he died, their family attachments, and where they start their campaign at. What follows is their military campaigns along with their goals for those campaigns, which at times seem to contradict what they were trying to accomplish. One of the confusing aspects of the book is that often these campaigns are occurring at the same time or after other campaigns that come up in future chapters. This does cause the reader to sometimes have to flip back and forth through the book to make sure you understand where these things occur in the timeline.

I was astounded that time and time again the various successor generals were able to raise large forces to do their bidding. It is definitely one of the more unique annals in military history and one that is hard to explain. A general could almost appear out of nowhere, toss around some bribes, call in a few favors, etc., and he has a sizeable army and/or fleets to go take someone else's territories!

The one thing that this book desperately cries out for is maps. There is one general map before the introduction, but that's it. In a book where you have a large number of campaigns and characters that are moving over a wide expanse of the planet, this would almost seem to be a crime. Trying to understand where each of the successor generals were trying to carve out their empire without maps was extremely difficult. Fortunately, I own the outstanding GMT game called Successors that has a beautiful map which aided me greatly during my reading of this book.

Also, for those who are looking for campaign maps, orders of battle for the various armies, a description of the major successor battles, etc., you've come to the wrong place. Battles are treated with a few sentences and done away with, moving quickly to the next campaign, deal, assassination, etc., that make up the book.

Overall, this is a very hard book to rate. There are so few books on Alexander's Successors that this should be added to the library of anyone that is interested in the period. However, it's the level of interest that needs to be defined here. If you're looking for an Osprey type book with maps, color uniform plates, and a short summary of the battles, then this book is not for you. If you want to learn about the various generals, the politics of this era, and get a birds eye view of the campaigns in summary form, then this book is invaluable. I love this period, but after awhile the constant backstabbing, deal making, keeping track of all the characters, etc., begins to take its toll. There is a second volume on the battles and tactics, so I might try that out to see if both combined are worth the time.

Terrain Markers

The first article in this issue dealt with making our games a bit more realistic and this feature focuses on the terrain aspect. Very few games have what could be termed "unpredictable" terrain, meaning that most gamers know exactly what the terrain is, what the movement penalties are, and what cover benefits are provided. The markers provided here are an attempt to provide some fog of war for your games. Simply place a marker upside down near a terrain feature and once a unit approaches it you can then flip it over to reveal what the real terrain is. Also, you may want to create some blanks so that gamers won't know if the marker represents the terrain they actually see or it is something different.

Light Woods-Not as dense or as difficult to pass through as normal woods. There should be a minimum movement penalty and no disorganization penalty.

Woods-Normal woods.

Heavy Woods-Area of woods that is much more dense and difficult to move through than normal woods. There should be severe movement and disorganization penalties.

Woods Path-An unknown path or not marked on any map. Troops and vehicles can move through the woods with minimum movement penalty.

Sunken Road-This section of road offers extensive defensive benefits equal to a trench. While moving along the road poses no problem, crossing the sunken road for cavalry, artillery, and vehicles would be almost impossible.

Mud-Recent rains and/or thaw has made this road section almost impassable. Movement should be 1//4 to 1/2 of normal speed. If the mud is severe, you could roll for each artillery unit or vehicle to see if it becomes stuck.

Open Village-The village is laid out so that there is a lot of room between the various buildings. There are no movement penalties for moving through this village and little defensive benefit.

Dense Village-This village has far more buildings and they are closer together than it first appears. There are movement penalties for going through the village and good defensive benefits.

Fortified Village-The village has quite a few stone buildings along with stone/brick walls along the buildings on the perimeter.

Damaged Bridge-Bridge has been heavily damaged and only foot traffic can cross, but at half movement. You could also add a provision that all or some troop types can cross, but on the roll of a 5 or 6 on 1D6 each turn the bridge collapses.

Light Bridge-This bridge will only support foot traffic and cavalry. No artillery or vehicles can cross.

Bridge-A normal bridge that can be crossed by all infantry and mechanized forces.

Ford-An area where the stream/river can be crossed safely with a small movement penalty. Roll 1D6 to see how wide the ford is and if vehicles use the ford there should be an additional die roll to see if they become stuck.

Shallow-Area of the river/stream that is not as deep as had been previously thought. Can be crossed by infantry, cavalry, and vehicles.

No Cross-River/stream is far deeper in this area than thought, prohibiting any kind of crossing.

Steep-Much harder to move than it would appear. There should be heavy movement penalties and no artillery can move in this area.

Rocky Area-The area is strewn with rocks and is treacherous for artillery, cavalry, and vehicles. Only foot troops can cross this area and there should be some movement penalty associated with the area.

Hill Path-A path that is not marked on any map leads through steep or rocky areas. Infantry, cavalry, artillery, and vehicles may use the path with minimum movement penalties.

Ditch-A deep cut or irrigated ditch is encountered. Infantry can cross, but at the cost of most of their movement allowance. Cavalry, artillery, and vehicles are unable to cross.

Marshy Ground-Waterlogged area that is difficult to cross for infantry as well as cavalry and very difficult for artillery. Artillery and vehicles should have to roll to see if they get bogged down while crossing this area.

Plowed Field-A minor movement penalty to all troops (except vehicles) for crossing.

Enclosed Field-These fields either have large hedgerows, bocage, or vegetation marking the borders of the field. There could also be stone walls and there should be at least one opening.

Depress 1-An area that provides some cover and line of sight issues. The size of the area could be determined at set up or by rolling dice once encountered.

Depress 2-Large area that is not visible from the surrounding terrain and it should provide reasonable cover. This area should be at least twice the size of the Depress 1 terrain.

How many markers are set out initially is up to the scenario designer. The normal counters are provided solely to keep the gamers honest as if you only put out special markers they may avoid those areas. In many cases the scenario designer will have to roll for the effects or list them separately for when the markers are encountered during the game. The other important aspect is to make the terrain in the initial set up seem as average as ever. So, for example, if there is a woods on your map, then place out an area of normal woods. When units of one side or the other reach it and find out it is light woods, then the scenario designer can remove sufficient tree models so that the tabletop terrain resembles light woods.

There are a large number of other markers that could be added on top of this short list, so feel free to experiment. Craters, rubble, blocked roads, etc., are a few that come to mind quickly. Other elaborate markers such as booby trapped buildings, sewer movement in cities, minefields, and more can all be added. Also, don't be afraid to add multiple markers to a terrain feature. An unknown ditch at the end of a field with mines on both sides could be a nasty surprise!

Terrain Markers (cont.)

Light Woods	Light Woods	Light Woods	Light Woods	Light Woods	Light Woods	Light Woods	Light Woods	Light Woods	Light Woods
Woods	Woods	Woods	Woods	Woods	Woods	Woods	Woods	Woods	Woods
Heavy Woods	Heavy Woods	Heavy Woods	Heavy Woods	Heavy Woods	Heavy Woods	Heavy Woods	Heavy Woods	Heavy Woods	Heavy Woods
Woods Path	Woods Path	Sunken Road	Sunken Road	Sunken Road	Mud	Mud	Mud	Mud	Mud
Open Village	Open Village	Open Village	Open Village	Dense Village	Dense Village	Dense Village	Dense Village	Fortified Village	Fortified Village
Damaged Bridge	Damaged Bridge	Damaged Bridge	Light Bridge	Light Bridge	Light Bridge	Bridge	Bridge	Bridge	Bridge
Ford	Ford	Ford	Shallow	Shallow	Shallow	No Cross	No Cross	No Cross	No Cross
Steep	Steep	Steep	Steep	Rocky Area	Rocky Area	Rocky Area	Rocky Area	Hill Path	Hill Path
Ditch	Ditch	Ditch	Marshy Ground	Marshy Ground	Marshy Ground	Marshy Ground	Marshy Ground	Plowed Field	Plowed Field
Plowed Field	Plowed Field	Plowed Field	Enclosed Field	Enclosed Field	Enclosed Field	Depress 1	Depress 1	Depress 2	Depress 2

10mm Samurai by Magistar Militum   Figure Review

Although I already have quite large forces for the Samurai period in 28mm, I love Warmaster Ancients and the 10mm scale. As we are gearing up for a fantasy type campaign I thought I would help another member of our club by painting some of his Samurai forces for him. The only manufacturers that I know of in this scale are Pendraken and Magistar Militum, so since he bought the army pack from MM I thought I would get started there.

The figures are a true 10mm and are based singly. Normally this isn't a huge issue, but if you've painted Samurai in any scale, then you know it's going to be a huge challenge regardless of scale. While the Old Glory infantry strips get a few complaints here and there, it does enable you to paint large numbers of them quickly.

The selection is pretty good, with a range of ashigaru with spears, bows, and arquebus, plus Samurai foot troops, cavalry, and command. The figure do come with the sashimonos attached, which saves a ton of time, but they take some effort cleaning them up as the flash seems to be on that part of each figure. With the variety of troops, you can make up almost any type of unit from the later Samurai era.

Painting, however, is at least two to three times slower than the other 6 ancient armies I've done in this scale. There's goo detail on the armor and with each figure being based separately, it can take a LONG time to do units properly. Still, for accuracy, range, and with the figures being sold in units, it's a good deal and the units look great on the board.
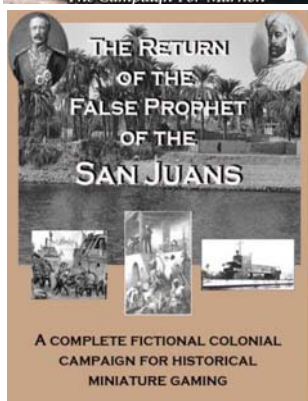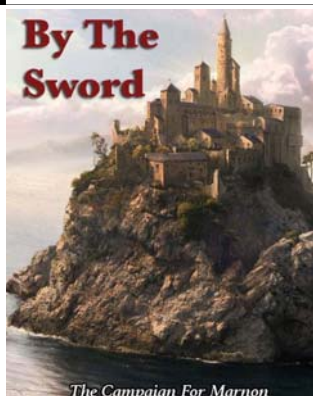
I'm beginning to wonder if the miniatures side of the wargaming hobby has hit a ceiling in interest levels, at least compared to how its cousin in board games is doing. While the 70s and maybe even the early 80s were dominated by SPI and Avalon Hill's board wargames with miniatures gamers scraping to get by in terms of figures, terrain, and rules, that changed in the late 80s, 90s, and until the last few years. Board wargames fell on hard times as SPI, GDW, Avalon Hill, 3W, and more closed down. There were few selections available and miniatures games, led by Games Workshop, the arrival of Old Glory, and a host of new rules took center stage. I can even recall at one stage selling off most of my board games and going full throttle on miniatures. When the Old Glory 15mm range came out I was painting multiple armies day and night for years! Even when board wargaming started to make a slight comeback there was little interest from most of my gaming group, including myself.

Fast forward to today and the situation seems to be greatly changed, at least in what I'm not only seeing but experiencing. Today there are figures in every scale and period imaginable, hundreds of rules, and new terrain companies are creating things for sale that we only dreamed about back in the 70s, 80s, and even the 90s. However, with everything that we have now there seems to be a certain level of apathy getting firmly established in the hobby. Try asking about a new set of rules on the various forums and find out that no one has played them or cares. Gamers can't agree on what to play and at times seem confused and/or perplexed about the range of choices. Everyone is doing 20 projects at once and can't get enough finished to even do a trial game.   On top of all that board war games have come back with a vengeance. High quality games from many companies covering every period known to mankind. For every miniatures period that you can name I can point to several very good board games that cover the same thing, but without the expense and time spent painting.

So now we have everything you could ever want in miniatures as well as board games. Then, to make things even more difficult there are more and more games like Star Wars Armada that have pre-painted miniatures which are a cross between board and miniatures gaming, which also seems to be taking away from the historical miniatures side of things.   It's rapidly approaching the proverbial fork in the road where gamers are going to have to decide what they are going to have to give up. There's no way that any gamer can possibly be involved in what I term as the three kinds of wargaming; board games, miniatures games, and "Euro" style wargames without running out of money or room for their hobby There are simply too many new releases, supplements, etc., to be able to do all of them well. I remember this happening when I collected sports cards for several years. In the span of about two years it went from having three companies producing a few sets to over two dozen producing hundreds of sets. In the end I had to choose one sport and one company to support. Hopefully that doesn't happen here.