

# PAPER WARS



Issue #23

\$4.50

Avalon Hill's  
**Empire of the Rising Sun**

Decision Games'  
**On to Moscow**

Clash of Arms Games'  
**La Bataille D'Albuera-Espagnol**

Clash of Arms Games'  
**La Bataille d'Espagnol Talavera**

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**Okehazama 1560 \* Piercing the Reich \* Marengo**



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December 1995

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# PAPER WARS



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In the Pipeline

Rich Erwin

Cover Illustration: Reproduced from the front cover of Avalon Hill's *Empire of the Rising Sun*

*"War is the province of uncertainty; three-fourths of the things on which action in war is based lie hidden in the fog of greater or less uncertainty" -Karl von Clausewitz*

Avalon Hill's

# Empire of the Rising Sun

Published in 1995 • Designed by Tor Abrahamsen and Dave Casper

reviewed by **Bruce Mansfield**

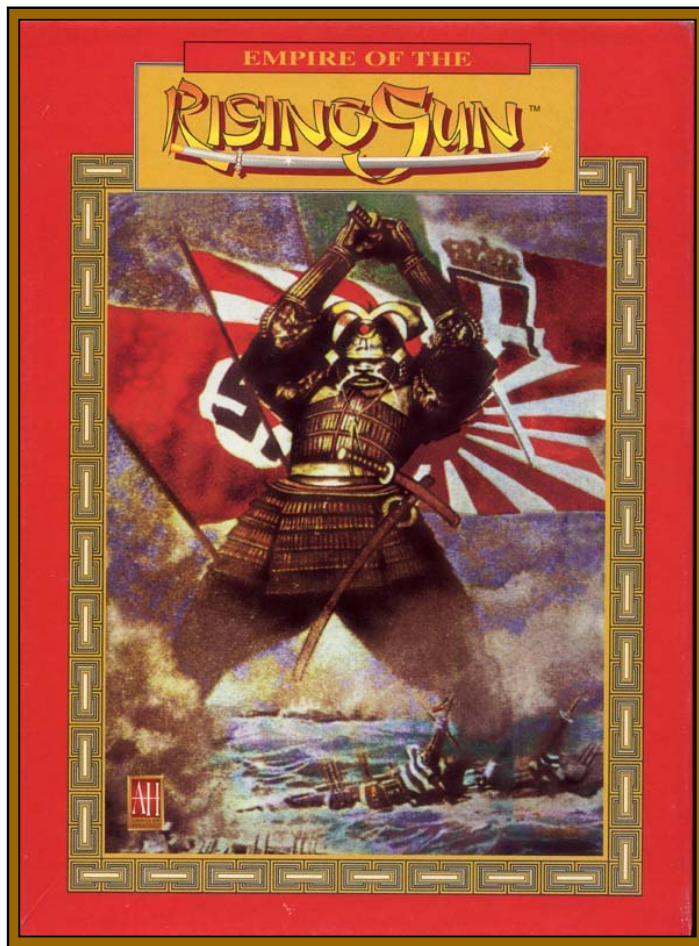
*Empire of the Rising Sun* is the long awaited Pacific version of *Advanced Third Reich*, and has much in common with its predecessor. The two systems are more or less interchangeable, the rules for one can often be used as a reference for the other, and the same design team that worked on *Advanced Third Reich* built *Empire of the Rising Sun*. While looking over *Empire of the Rising Sun* it is best to keep an eye on *Advanced Third Reich* as well; it's likely that most serious players of *Empire of the Rising Sun* will have started with *Advanced Third Reich*.

*Empire of the Rising Sun* is a grand strategic game of the war in China and the Pacific, 1941-1946; the combatants are Japan, Britain, China, and the United States. The map covers an area from Dutch Harbor to Australia and the Hawaiian Islands to India. Front lines divide the map into the Southeast Asian front (containing the Dutch East Indies and mainland Southeast Asia), the Asian front (containing China) and the Pacific front (containing everything else); front boundaries do not restrict naval movement. Units are similar to *Advanced Third Reich*: Infantry, armor, air and naval. Two campaign scenarios are included - one begins with Pearl Harbor and the other begins in mid-1944. Four introductory scenarios allow players to learn the carrier rules: Pearl Harbor, Coral Sea, Midway, and Leyte Gulf. Victory is determined by the timing of the surrender of Japan.

The differences between *Advanced Third Reich* and *Empire of the Rising Sun* may appear to be slight, but they alter the play of the game dramatically. The most basic is a change of scale, from one hex

equaling sixty miles to one hex equaling one hundred miles. This reduces the movement factors of ground and air units, generally by one point. The scale also limits naval interception to fifteen hexes and interception chances are likewise lessened, which factors heavily in the planning of invasions and location of the fleet. Submarines can now be used to attack any naval activity. Both Japan and the US are allowed to build submarines in *Empire of the Rising Sun*; these can be used to attack damaged ships before returning to port, cut sea supply lines, or intercept any naval activity without a roll. Several new types of terrain have been added, including jungle and jungle/mountain.

- All units entering any terrain must end their movement,
- Zones of control do not extend into or out of any terrain or across rivers,
- Both jungle and jungle/mountain hexes cannot be entered during summer turns in the Southeast Asian front due to monsoons, and...
- Only clear terrain may be occupied during an attrition.



Compared to the open terrain of Russia, Asia is choked; offensives become difficult and the pace of the war is much slower. Due to the great size of the Pacific, new island rules are used in *Empire of the Rising Sun*. One is the ability to base up to nine fleet factors on one hex islands, the other are island groups. An island group is a collection of islands; only one island in the group needs to be supplied to supply the rest, and control of a group is defined as control of at least one island while the rest are free of enemy units. The Japanese can create island de-





fenses on one island of a group, forcing the Americans to attack in order to gain control of the group; conversely, whole garrisons can be ignored if other groups are more lightly defended. By the end of the war, many Japanese units may be left stranded on cut-off islands.

In *Empire of the Rising Sun*, the unit that drives play is the aircraft carrier. The fleets of both the United States and Japan are built around the carriers; the bulk of the new rules deal with these. Carriers are important not only for ground support and other similar air missions, they are also the best weapon to stop enemy invasions or interceptions. Consequently, they are the most important units in the game. The carriers required a new air unit: The naval air factor (the old air units of *Advanced Third Reich* are now army air factors). Naval air factors are a third the size of army air factors; like army air factors they are considered to be a mixture of tactical bombers and fighters.

Unlike army air factors, however, only naval air factors can operate from carriers. Naval air factors are designed to attack ships, and they are as effective

in naval air attacks as an equal number of army air factors. Three naval air factors operate from fleet carriers, two operate from light carriers. Carriers may also be used in the Strategic Warfare box to guard against enemy submarines; as every three carrier factors equals nine fleet factors they are a potent anti-submarine weapon.

Naval units are no longer always based directly on the board. *Empire of the Rising Sun* utilizes task forces, six for both sides, that are used to represent factors placed secretly on a Task Force Card. In this way the enemy must guess which task force contains the real invasion and which contains a diversion, which contains the carriers and which contains mere surface ships. No longer is combat fought abstractly in the hex of interception; rather the units are moved to the Task Force Card and placed secretly into combat groups. It is a difficult choice, deciding what to put in how many combat groups; one or two groups will concentrate firepower while several groups give an advantage in searching. The order of the groups may change during combat, but the contents may not; thus the



player must carefully create the groups before knowing the contents of the enemy task force. Once combat groups are set, and if either wish to attack with air units, both sides search for the other. Two dice are rolled and compared; modifiers for the number of groups, land-based air and US Magic points (which may also be used to modify interception die rolls) may change the rolls one way or the other. The side with the higher final total has gained surprise - the difference determines the extent of surprise. The final totals also determine the success of the search, anything from missing the enemy force completely to a detailed account of each enemy combat group.

Surprise also affects the attack. Most often a moderate form of surprise is gained, giving defending ships negative modifiers for air defense rolls, for example. The actual air attack is carried out much like an air attack in *Advanced Third Reich*; an air defense roll is made by the defending ships, and the surviving aircraft make a roll on the Air Attack Table. The process is then repeated for the opposing side's aircraft. After three rounds of air attacks, naval combat begins. Both sides reveal the contents

of their first combat group and make simultaneous rolls on the Naval Combat Chart. Then another round of air attacks followed by naval combat occurs; in each round the next combat group is revealed and joins the others. Combat continues until one side is annihilated or retreats. Marines have been added as new ground units. Marines cost the same as paratroops, and negate the plus one defense modifier for amphibious assault if at least half the attacking ground units are Marines. These become extremely useful to the Americans once the counter-offensive begins, in the first few turns of the game the Japanese Special Naval Landing Forces are used extensively as well.

Although *Empire of the Rising Sun* is based on *Advanced Third Reich*, the two games play very differently. Overall, *Advanced Third Reich* is more strategic in nature while *Empire of the Rising Sun* is more tactical. To play *Advanced Third Reich* well requires broad strategic goals as the outcome of the war is unknown at the start of every game. The outcome of the war in Asia and the Pacific, however, is already known at the beginning of each game of *Empire of the Rising Sun*. Every player knows Ja-

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pan cannot win the war. The goal of the Japanese player, however, is not to win the war but the game. To do this, the Japanese must hold out as long as possible to wear the Allies down and make an early defeat of Japan, and thus an Allied victory, impossible. It is hard to play the Japanese. In *Empire of the Rising Sun*, the German player is generally assured of several years of good gaming bursting through France, via a calculated attack on Britain or with a titanic struggle in Russia before the Allied counter-offensive begins. The Japanese, however, have only two turns or so to make their conquests, then the Japanese player must wait patiently for eighteen turns in order to win. It is difficult to play the Japanese.

The Allies, in turn, must calculate every move in order to do maximum damage in the least amount of time. The Allied player, however, does not face the daunting challenge the Japanese player does, as the balance of the game tends to favor the Allies. This seems to be the only problem the game has. A well thought out and brilliantly played Japanese strategy often crumbles against sub-par Allied play. In order for the Japanese to achieve even a pyrrhic victory (the lowest level), they must surrender in Fall 1946. In nearly all games the author has seen, the Japanese surrendered by the end of 1945, assuring an Allied victory.

*Empire of the Rising Sun* is a fine game, based on a sound system. It is unfortunate that such an unbalance sours play of the game. A simple solution would be to move the victory conditions forward, perhaps a year, so that a game that ended in Fall 1945 would result in a stalemate. In this way the goal of each player would be to better his historical counterpart.

I recommend *Empire of the Rising Sun* to anyone familiar with the *Advanced Third Reich* system or to anyone interested in a grand-strategic game of the war in Asia and the Pacific. While the rules admittedly are a little long, anyone familiar with *Advanced Third Reich* would be able to start the introductory scenarios quickly and move onto the full campaign game within a few days. This is only a brief overview of the *Empire of the Rising Sun* system; anyone who is interested in more details directed to Dave Casper's article, *The Sun Also Rises*, in the Winter 1995 issue of *Ultra*, which is included in every box. Or, better yet, just buy *Empire of the Rising Sun* and enjoy many years gaming pleasure.

(Publisher's Note: *Advanced Third Reich* and *Empire of the Rising Sun* have been updated and combined in *A World at War*, a 2003 release from GMT Games.)





## CHEAP THRILLS

## Game Designers' Workshop's

# 8th Army: Operation Crusader

Published in 1984 • Designed by Frank Chadwick

reviewed by **Kieran Bartley**

Five years after Frank Chadwick published his monster game *Operation Crusader* (reviewed in Paper Wars #15), he designed another, smaller game about the same campaign with a similar title but differing emphasis. Fans of fog-of-war will find a lot to like in *8th Army: Operation Crusader*, the middle game in what Game Designers' Workshop eventually labeled its Double Blind Series. (The others were *The Normandy Campaign* and *Operation Market-Garden: Descent into Hell* - they came out in small, flat boxes between 1983 and 1985.) Each game in the series keeps opposing units invisible by providing players with identical maps meant to be hidden either side of a screen (the screen's not included), an idea similar to Avalon Hill's old *Midway*.

*8th Army's* fog starts especially thick. Whereas the other games lessen the initial ignorance of the double-blind system by beginning with at least one army in a prescribed set up, and with both awaiting needed reinforcements, *8th Army* starts with armies near full strength, strong enough to hit each other hard, and free to deploy their bulks as they see fit. Historically, the British were attacking to relieve Tobruk. The Germans and Italians were set to assault the same, and so had forces ready to respond. Surprises were and are inevitable, and a poker face essential.

The fog is probably unrealistically thick, but I prefer its erring on the side of confusion. Players can forget about radio and Ultra intercepts, reconnaissance flights, and Rommel's Little Fellers; the only way to find out what an unfriendly hex holds is to try moving into it. Each map displays only a

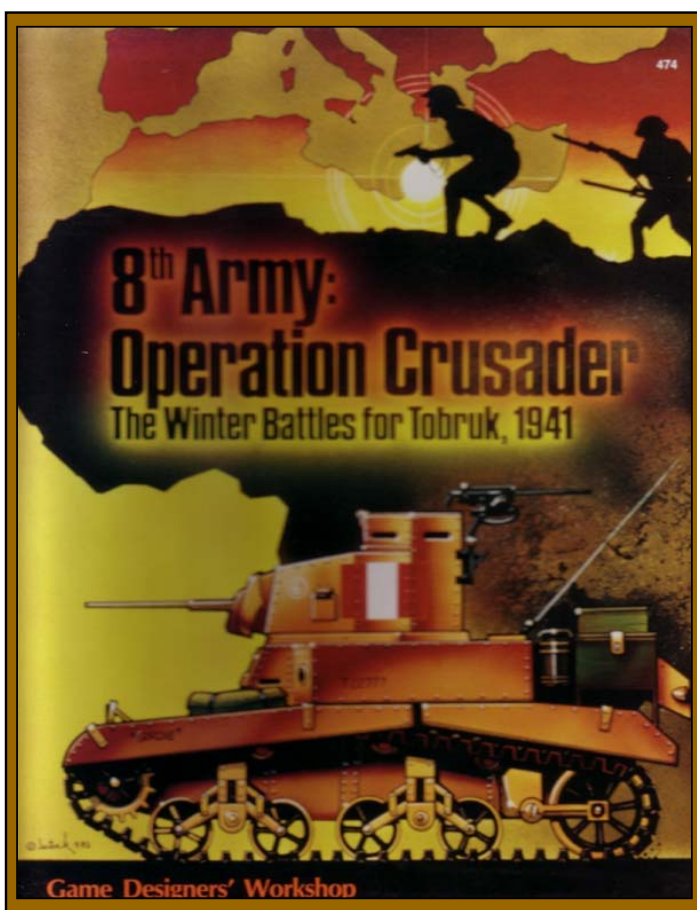
player's own units and the markers that distinguish friendly territory (i.e., no enemy units, guaranteed) from unfriendly (where enemy units may lurk). Movement through friendly hexes occurs without a murmur. Entering unfriendly hexes, however, requires calling out the hex number to learn if enemy units are present.

If no, players shift markers to reflect the stretching or shrinking of friendly territory, and movement continues. If yes, the unit's movement ends, and the phasing player must make what will be an important and recurring decision: Before moving another unit, and before he knows what enemy unit or units occupy the hex, he must announce whether he will probe the hex in the coming Combat Phase, or launch a full attack into it. Many things will affect his decision.

Was air power called in? Air power is simplified, yet hard to employ effectively. It helps attacks, but not probes. Before movement, a player assigns his plane counters (eight for the Axis, seven for the British) to specific hexes and must designate them as aiding either attack or defense by flipping them to their A or D side, which

will appropriately raise or lower battle odds one column per counter (with the exception of three German Stuka counters that each boost attacks two columns). Since more than one plane can be assigned per hex, and their effects are cumulative, any hex can be taken or held with enough unopposed planes in support. Since they must be assigned before movement, coordinating them correctly requires some guesswork.

Players who wish more control over their planes







could ignore the A and D designations, allowing assigned planes to aid attack or defense as needed; or allow each side to assign planes at the end of either player's Movement Phase, that is, after attacks are announced.

Increasing players' control over planes removes a wanted uncertainty in the game. The appeal of this game is its enforced ignorance, its feel of fighting, and fighting off, a perpetual night attack. In this particular case, two things would be lost. Currently, the defender can try to avoid a pummeling from the air by pulling out of hexes that he expects his opponent to attack - almost a continual option in this game where few specific hexes are worth holding. When successfully done, it gives the defender the sense of having avoided a fire-and-brimstone bombing attack. Attackers who find their target hex empty must then choose whether to be content with their patch of sand or continue on without air support into what may be a hex strongly defended with a swarm of defensive combat air patrol.

More control also unbalances the game in the British favor. Although all planes operating in combat

run an automatic risk of being downed, Axis planes run a significantly greater risk: a one in two chance of being downed for them, while only one in three for the British, who can lower their odds further by capturing the three airfields on the map. Interception, per se, is not allowed, being abstracted, I suppose, into the risk. Destroyed planes eventually re-enter play, but at a rate of one per turn beginning two turns after being shot down. Planes in excess of the rate are bumped back to succeeding turns. The result is Axis planes pack more initial wallop with their Stukas, but the British planes stay in the air longer.

Supply, which is required for attacks, but not for probes, movement, or defense (with the exception of defending in an isolated Tobruk), may be tight. The amount of supply each player is allotted (rationed is more appropriate in the Axis case) is both finite and subject to destruction. As with air power, supply works simply. To attack, units must be within five movement points of a supply unit that will be expended after the battle. It may be purchased at the beginning of subsequent turns if sufficient supply points are available. The British get



thirty-five points and may have six supply units on the board at a time. The Axis gets a mere seventeen points and five supply units. Since no single supply unit may supply more than one attack no matter how close the attacks are, these points also equal the maximum number of attacks each army can make during the eighteen turns.

Any supply units caught are destroyed. (Using the other army's supply units is not allowed, though it would be an interesting optional rule.) The British stockpile can be halved if the Germans successfully raid off the board's edge.

Probing, despite what its name suggests, is not primarily aimed at revealing what is in a hex. The defenders are indeed revealed, but only in the Combat Phase, which is after movement; and so defenders will get a chance to move before the phasing player brings more units to bear. In certain situations the information is still valuable. For example, finding the slow moving Italian infantry regiments gives the British a good idea where they will be next turn.

Only one unit may probe a given hex, and the probe is subjected to the defender's first fire, which may sound like often being a lone duck in an enemy shooting gallery, but there are saving compensations. Probing units, unlike attacking, may retreat rather than return fire, thereby reducing any losses incurred by one step. Such savings are significant in this game where replacements are even more skimpy than supply. Saving a single step often means units with large defense factors, like the British brigades and German regiments, walk away unscathed. The combat results table is bloody in the sense that low odds still give a good chance to hit (one-to-three hits with a die roll of four through six;

one-to-four odds with a five or six), but it is a chart made more for mauling than killing outright with single-step losses being the most common result. Most units have two steps. Only a few are single-step units.

Fortuitously arranged probes can be effective offensive actions, even though probing units fire at half strength. Since defenders are not allowed loss-reducing retreats from probes, a strong probing unit can beat up a weak defender; even single hits stick. The probing unit need not be the first of the phasing player's units to enter the hex. That is, the player could subsequently move a second, stronger or perhaps more expendable, unit into the hex, choosing it

to be the probing unit during the Combat Phase. But probes' real advantages are in their saving on supply (requiring none) and their lessening the risk of damage to units who search for gaps in the enemy line and bump into unwanted company.

Units from opposing sides never actually occupy the same hex (probing or attacking units, however, must have enough movement points to enter the hex). A probing unit's retreat, then, means merely that it chooses to reduce losses rather than return fire. It remains in the hex from which it tried to probe. Defenders who opt to retreat from attacks, however, actually vacate the hex.

Attacks allow one or more units to attack a

hex with their full attack strengths, and let planes do their stuff. In contrast to probes, fire here is usually simultaneous, although some terrain allows defenders to fire and inflict damage first. As attackers may not retreat to lessen losses and defenders may, defenders can give as much damage as they get - and sometimes more. The combat results table favors such Parthian tactics because, as mentioned above, the low odds give good chances of inflicting

Eighth Army

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damage, while the greatest odds inflict at most a two-step loss.

Retreat, however, is no defensive panacea. Not everyone is free to retreat. During probes the probes have the option. During attacks, defenders often do. Infantry units with a movement allowance of three or less (most of them) attacked by an armor unit with a movement of three or greater (most of them) must stick it out. And no one is allowed to retreat into an unfriendly hex, not even on the chance that it may be unoccupied.

Stacking and advance after combat also make retreating tricky. Partial retreats are not allowed, and so a fast armor unit defending with a foot slogging infantry battalion against a tank-led enemy assault shares its fate. Stacks must retreat as stacks, and so a stack of mobile defenders who retreat can't split up to block the attackers from advancing through different hexsides, possibly surrounding these or other defenders, preventing future retreat or resupply. And since stacking limits apply at all times, defenders must be sure that they leave themselves enough room to get out.

As with air power, players could manipulate these rules, arguing that partial retreats, retreating into separate hexes, risking retreat through unfriendly hexes and overstacking are significantly more realistic. But the effect on the simulation is a more static campaign, a kind of trench warfare, where attackers bludgeon themselves against retreating defenders who give up only one hex. Better to my mind are the current restraints, which make defending a more difficult business.

A successful attack creates a situation where the defenders won't or can't retreat, and the attackers have a clear superiority, preferably with planes when the defenders have none. Yet with limited intelligence, situations are always uncertain. Few hexes are essential to hold. Suspected soft underbellies sometimes disappear altogether, or reveal themselves armor-plated. And armor is big here. Not always in numbers, but in effect. Units are defined by how much of it they have, and how good their guns are at damaging it. Units without anti-tank capability (which appears as a dot in the upper right corner) have attack strengths halved against tanks.

Not all tank units, however, are created equal. The British have many (nineteen of their initial forty-six units): Some with good punch, some with good defense, and some with speed. But none have all three, as do the four German panzer units. The German disadvantage in numbers is partly made up for by their quality, and partly by much of the German infantry having anti-tank capability, while none of

the British do. All Italian tanks have poor defense, a crippling liability when attackers are always exposed to defensive fire.

In the phasing player's Combat Phase, for each announced probe and attack, the defender places his units in the center hex of a display area to the side of the screen, which shows six enlarged hexes encircling a seventh. The phasing player then places his units in the hexes representing those from which he is trying to enter the defender's hex. If a hex is cleared, the probing or attacking units are allowed to move again. They are free to disappear back into their own territory, or advance into unfriendly territory. If an advancing unit bumps into enemy units, it stops in the last hex successfully entered. If, on the other hand, the hex is not cleared the defender will know exactly which hexes the attacker's units are sitting in, a longed for insight into the enemy's disposition.

Each turn a player may rebuild one step of either an existing armor or infantry unit, drawing from his limited stock of replacement points (three armor, one infantry for the Axis; six armor, three infantry for the British). Additionally, he may scavenge one unit per turn from his eliminated units box, provided there is a second, equivalent unit in that pile he must then remove so it can neither return to play nor help scavenge another unit.

The movement system would be cumbersome with many pieces, large maps, or large movement allowances. But *8th Army* has only about fifty units per side (not counting territory markers); the maps are only 16.5" x 10.5", with 3/4" wide hexes; and half of the units have movement allowances of three or less. Occasionally there are line-abreast sweeps across the desert, or speedy lunges down the Via Balbia, but much movement is a shifting of forces within one's own territory to mass where least expected. And so, overall, movement is not appreciably slower than in a comparably sized you move - I move game.

Victory is based on control of Tobruk and destroying enemy units. A player's turn consists of doling out replacements, allocating air power, moving ground units, and combat, with possibly some movement after combat. A turn represents a day, and units for the most part represent brigades, regiments, and battalions. They have a standard Game Designers' Workshop look, with armor and aircraft units sporting silhouettes, while the usual military symbols suffice for infantry, motorized infantry, recon, machine gun, anti-tank and flak units. The only distinctions that matter for play, however, are armor, anti-tank, and whether a unit has anti-tank capability.



A chart with the combat display area, turn record, supply and replacement tracks is provided to conveniently place beside the screen for both players to see. Each player is also given a copy of the combat results table and terrain effects chart to place where he likes. The unmounted maps depict the area from just west of Tobruk to just east of Sollum, and just south of the Trigh el Abd. A hex represents about four miles across. Coloring is unfortunately bland. Clear hexes are brown. Other terrain hexes have a darker brown added, blobs being hills; specks, rough; and fuzzy hexsides, escarpments. Black lines are trails; red are roads.

A wonderful thing about the map, though, in terms of opening-turn tension, is the length of its start line. It not only stretches across the widest part, from east to west (placing the Germans and Italians in the north and the British in the deeper desert to the south), it does so with a wide zig and zag. Neither army, then, can effectively cover the entire start line. And as each has diverse geographic objectives (attacking or relieving Tobruk, attacking or protecting the airfields, raiding off the eastern edge to destroy British supply, or controlling the western edge to block Axis supply), predicting the enemy's initial orientation is difficult. The result is early-game adrenaline rush as armies thrust ahead into they know not what.

Because so much is hidden from view, the game continually requires decisions based on too little information, and invites great gambles. It plays like a test of *Kriesenfestigkeit*, the ability to endure multiple crises without panicking. Many of the crises will of course be imaginary - there'll be no pieces where players fear they are - but the screen prevents that discovery. As armies wear away, players will feel less as though they are playing to their strengths than hiding their weaknesses. Always, they will try to mass where least expected. Even when they succeed, though, they will wonder what will happen next.



## THE CLASSICS

## Clash of Arms Games'

# *La Bataille D'Albuera-Espagnol*

*Published in 1987 • Republished in 1994 • Designed by Monte Mattson and Dennis Spors**reviewed by* **Geoffrey Phipps**

Clash of Arms Games has recently reprinted *La Bataille D'Albuera-Espagnol*, part of a series of grand tactical Napoleonic games that use the Marshal Enterprises system of rules. *La Bataille D'Albuera-Espagnol* is a second edition game, as are *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera* and *La Bataille de Preussisch-Eylau*. This particular battle was the bloodiest in the Peninsula campaign, pitting Soult and a French corps of four divisions against Beresford with a mixed British, Portuguese, and Spanish force.

The current series of *La Bataille* games use the third edition rules. The second and third editions are very similar in content, differing mostly in the layout of the rules. The second is more precise and much easier to read and use. Physically, the game appears to be an exact reprint, even to the extent of including the original printing errors. For example, four of the Portuguese and Spanish units have their backs interchanged. They can be fixed by a little steaming and re-gluing, but it would have been nice for Clash of Arms Games to have corrected this minor problem. The Portuguese 5th Cacadores should be swapped with the Spanish Vol. d'Catalonia, and the Spanish Vol. d'Leon should be swapped with the Spanish Vol. d'Navarra. Two counters are provided for the Spanish cavalry unit Loy Santiago (7-12), with no errata indicating which counter should be used. The correct counter is probably the yellow one. The effect is minor because the two counters are very similar, and Spanish cavalry is very weak.

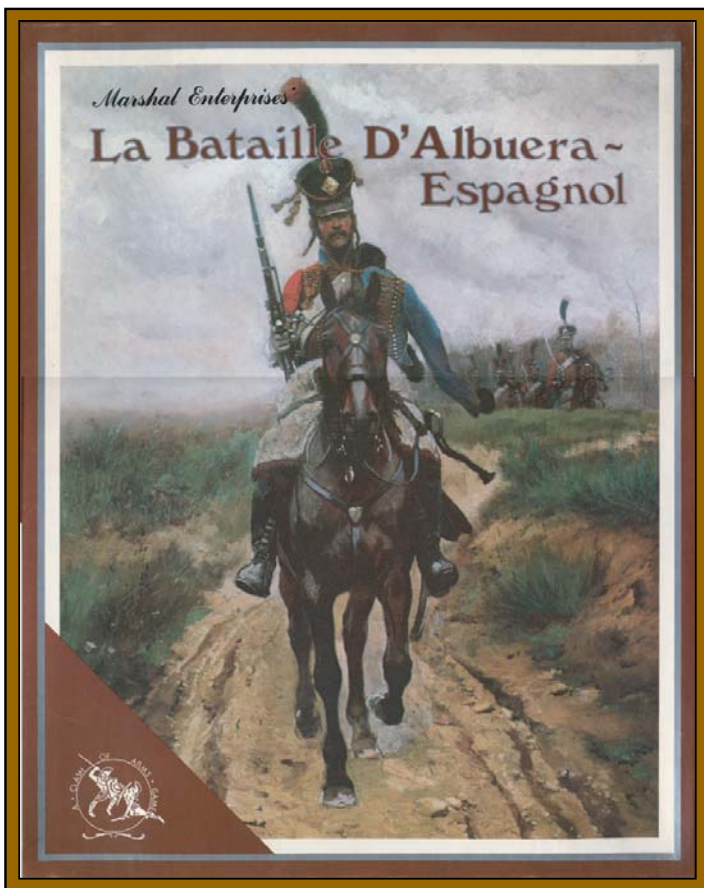
The game has two maps, two rule books (series rules and scenario rules), a couple of tables, and 480 counters (approximately two hundred are combat

counters). The components are definitely second edition: They are quite colorful and well designed, but not up to the exceptional standards of *La Bataille de Mont St. Jean*. The colors used are better than in my copy of the first printing of *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*, but the designs are the same.

The counters are a little larger than usual, which makes it very hard to correctly face the units within their hexes. This is a big problem because unit facing is so critical in the game system. It would have been better to have smaller counters, or to have lost a little terrain in exchange for larger hexes. As it was, a considerable amount of trust between gentlemen was required to play the game.

The Marshal Enterprises rules are probably familiar to some readers, but here is a short summary for those who have not encountered it. Apart from a few exceptions, each unit in *La Bataille* is either an infantry battalion, a cavalry regiment, an artillery battery, or a leader. Each unit has a number of steps which are lost to fire combat or melee. The key to the system is unit formation and facing, which gives the system its detailed, miniatures feel.

Unit formation is either line, column, general, square, or skirmish. Units have a front, flank, and rear, and so must face one of the six possible directions. Each unit has values for fire combat, melee combat, and morale. Morale values are given in two-digit base-six format. A unit with a morale of twenty-three will break if a twenty-three or greater is rolled on two dice, reading the first dice as a tens column. Units vary tremendously. For example, British infantry units having a fire multiple of four, French have a three, and the Spanish either two or





one. The best British units have a morale of fifteen, while the worst Spanish units weigh in at around forty-five. As with *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*, morale values in *La Bataille D'Albuera-Espagnol* are generally worse than in the third edition games. It is a pity that base-six is used, because it makes adding up the various modifiers more difficult than necessary. At the time the system was designed few wargames had taken the heretical step of using those ten-sided dice so favored by role players.

More difficult than base-six addition is the mental arithmetic required by melee combat. The value printed on the unit is the total melee value, which must be prorated as steps are lost. For example, suppose we have a unit with seven steps and a melee strength of sixteen. If two steps have been lost, then its new strength is  $5/7$  multiplied by sixteen, which is  $11 \frac{3}{7}$ . The mental arithmetic becomes a little tiring. The fire system uses multiplication rather than division, which is much easier for humans to compute. It would have been easier if the melee system had been the same. It might be better to produce a small table giving the melee multiplier for each type of unit (infantry, cavalry, artillery, cross referenced by nationality) and simply ignore the number printed on the counter. I have not tried

that design.

The fire defense of a unit depends on its type, its formation, and the terrain it occupies. For example, infantry in a square have a fire defense of four, whereas infantry skirmishers in a village have a defense of twenty. Forcing the opponent to use inefficient formations is a skill worth learning. A common tactic is to launch a cavalry charge in order to force the opposing infantry to form square, then follow up with infantry and artillery to shoot at the squares. Heavy casualties can be inflicted very quickly, but with the possible loss of a large amount of cavalry. It is this complex interplay of different elements that makes the combat so interesting. It is not a simple matter of looking for the three-to-one attack.

The turn structure is standard. Each turn has a French player turn, followed by a non-French player turn. Charges begin the player turn, followed by normal movement, defensive fire, offensive fire, melee, and rally. Opportunity charges and withdrawal before melee can occur during enemy player turns. Each turn represents twenty minutes of real time, and each player is strictly limited to ten minutes for their Movement Phase. The effect is to force players to move impressionistically, to make





errors, which make the game more interesting and much more likely to be finished.

As mentioned above, *La Bataille D'Albuera-Espagnol* uses the reasonably precise second edition rules. I started the *La Bataille* series with the third edition, and its incompleteness drove me to write my own complete set of rules. We used the original second edition rules for this review.

The scenario has an interesting set up. The Allies are deployed statically behind a ridge, and the French must decide how and when to attack them. The Allied position is fronted by a river. On the Allied left it is virtually unfordable. The Allied center is protected by the small (nine hexes) town of Albuera. On the Allied right the river is easily crossed and provides no protection. The French can either opt for a daring frontal assault across the river near Albuera, or a frontal assault on the Allied right, or the historical outflanking maneuver against the Allied right. The first option has the twin advantages of quickly bringing the British units to battle, and being close to the victory objectives of Albuera and the Badajoz road. Its major drawback is the massive tactical problem of fording the river against certain British opposition. The middle choice is much safer tactically, but the groves in front of the stream will slow the attack, allowing the Allies time to organize a proper defense. The last option allows concentration of French force against one part of the Allied line, but gives an efficient Allied player enough time to form an effective line of battle in the center.

The battle is too small to allow more than one scenario. Our playing of the game took about nine hours of real time to cover five hours of simulated time.

The scenario rules have a neat solution to the command inflexibility of the Allied army. The initial layout is fixed, with only division (approximately) being released for free movement each turn. A fast French assault against a complacent Allied player could catch sections of the Allied army unawares, causing nasty morale checks and perhaps defeat in detail.

Historically there were some very heavy thunderstorms during the battle, which had a large effect on certain actions. In the game they occur unpredictably. They have effect of shutting down fire combat, and sometimes melee as well. Although they are not predictable, be certain that your deployment will work in both fair weather and foul. More on weather later.

The Spanish army in *La Bataille D'Albuera-Espagnol* is not as pathetic as it is in *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*, but it still is largely decorative. Most Spanish infantry units are mobs. They can only be in mob formation, need to make a morale check to even move, and must make a morale check every time they are fired upon. To everyone's surprise, some Spanish mobs actually took three hits before they routed off the board. Some even managed to rally. However, a single turn of determined French assault will break any line of mobs. Think of them as a way to buy time while you organize the poms and the Portuguese. Be careful they don't rout over the top of your own units. The Spanish line infantry are more useful, but are still markedly inferior to the British and French.

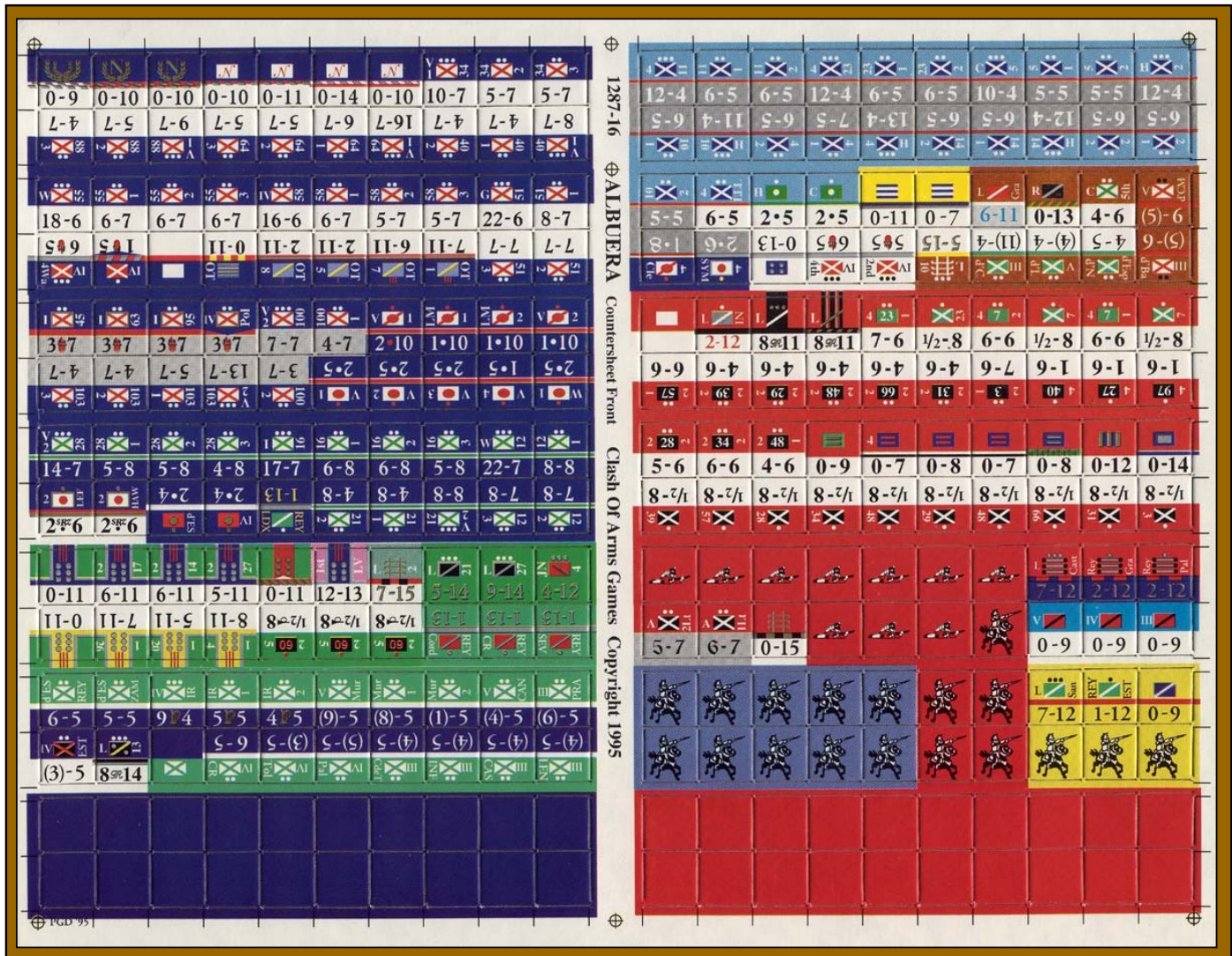
Some of the Spanish infantry are organized into regiments, notably the Irlanda regiment. This organization is usual for the French, but not the case for other nationalities. Be careful you do not deploy both the regimental counter and the battalion counters.

The Spanish cavalry is mostly useless for three reasons. The first is most of it is organized as very small units, and they are not allowed to attack with more than one unit at a time. The second is Spanish cavalry must make a morale check in order to charge, and their morale values are bad. The third reason is the French have an overwhelming amount of good cavalry. Any Spanish cavalry charge will be met with an annihilating French counter-charge. The British cavalry, although good, is also too few in numbers to risk in wild charges.

Like *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*, *La Bataille D'Albuera-Espagnol* includes three companies of the dreaded Yankee killer rifle unit, the 60th Foot (Loyal Americans). No French artillery can unlimber within rifle shot (two hexes) of them, and all French units checking morale within two hexes are six for the worse. Not to be sneezed at, and virtually unkillable. It is, after all, an American game.

The only other units that are unexpectedly powerful are the British light companies. Even with only half a step (fifty men), they have the firepower of four steps of French skirmishers (four hundred men). Their fire defense is also better than that of other skirmishers. Their high value does not change the game very much, because they tend to be killed early. By taking up their natural positions in front of their parent battalions, they absorbed the first few rounds of fire from the French. They were much more deadly when I played *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*, because the French player stood toe to toe with them in a musketry duel. This can be avoided by assaulting the light companies. They will be forced to withdraw underneath their parent battalions. It does expose the French units to one





extra fire from the light companies, but it is better than a prolonged duel with them. The third edition games do not favor the British light companies.

In our replay the French player considered the position and chose the historical strategy of outflanking the Allied right. The entire French army stormed onto the board as soon as they were allowed to use the Southern map edge (10:20 AM), and headed for the Spanish.

The French strategy did not work as planned because it took too long to reach the Allied position. Beresford was able to form a coherent Spanish line, behind which the British and Portuguese could safely deploy. Albuera was well garrisoned by Spanish Guard, Irlanda, and Portuguese. The Allied line stretched from Albuera to the Arroya de Valde Sevilla.

The Allied player had played *La Bataille de Ligny*, and had learned the lesson that bad troops do much better in a town than in the open. There are three reasons for this:

- Troops in a town do not need to make mo-

rale checks to defend against assault, so their bad morale values are less of a problem.

- They take fewer casualties to fire attacks, so again their bad morale is not so much of a problem.
- Poor units have proportionally better melee values than fire or morale values. This is especially true with the Prussians in *La Bataille de Ligny* and *La Bataille de Mont St. Jean*.

Prussian Landwehr fire and morale values are terrible, whereas their melee values are almost equal to the French. Put them in a town and then pray that the French attack. The Spanish troops are not Prussians in that their melee values are lower than the French, but the town does almost even the odds. The victory conditions for the Allies only depend on the morale level of the British; the Morale of the Spanish and Portuguese is irrelevant. Every casualty the Spanish cause is a bonus. It does not matter if you lose the whole Spanish army (and you probably will) in exchange for a single French division.

However, the mobs are useless no matter where you put them because they must check their pathetic morale values any time anyone even fires on them.

Repeated French assault on the town just produced heavy casualties on both sides for no gain. The French attempted to turn the Allied right (western) flank with light cavalry, but stupidly allowed themselves to be charged in the back by the British heavies. Three French light cavalry regiments were destroyed for no loss to the English ruling class. A charge by a single French dragoon regiment was easily repulsed by a British battalion that did not even bother to form square. The French heavy cavalry sulked for several hours as a result.

The battle settled down into a fire fight. After a while the French realized they would necessarily lose, because on average the British would cause three casualties to the French two. The French player decided to risk everything on an assault aimed at destroying the British infantry. Under the cover of a sudden downpour, they rushed forward in large columns and assaulted all along the line. They won enough melees to capture most of the Allied artillery. The rain prevented the British from firing, so the French could use their large columns in complete safety. The battle then again settled into a (more even) fire fight. Impressed with success of their first great assault, the French had another desperate, but brilliant, idea. They launched a grand charge over the top of their own troops. They did this so as to achieve complete surprise. The British either had to form square at one hex range (risky), or try to stand in front of a grand charge (also risky). In exchange for the loss of one step of French infantry, and one temporarily disordered battalion, the French destroyed three British battalions in just twenty minutes (which also happened in the historical battle). From then on the battle became a matter of survival for the British infantry. The exhausted French heavy cavalry were roughly handled by the English heavies, who then launched their own counter-charge against the French infantry in a necessary attempt to break the French attack. Losses were very heavy on both sides, the French left wing being reduced to about six battalions each of one step. However, the British were no better off, had used all their reserves, and could only hope for a draw.

Unfortunately we had to call the game due to lack of time. The issue was still in doubt, it depended on whose army broke and ran first. The losses were staggering. The French lost fourteen battalions out of thirty-eight, for a total of 126 infantry steps from 187. The British lost seven out of fifteen battalions for a total of fifty-two from eighty-one steps. The Spanish losses were lighter. The Portuguese only

lost one battalion, and that was due to rout. The Allies lost most of their artillery. The British player did not want to concede, but was going to hit level three morale within a few turns. It all depended on the Portuguese. They had hardly been engaged, and only a few battalions had taken any hits at all. Their major problem was their bad morale values (thirty-four), and the fact they check their morale values on every odd numbered step lost beginning with the first. Emplaced in the town they were immovable, but out in the open the French would probably have broken them. The French would not have been able to take Albuera, and had just reached level two morale themselves. It was becoming very hard for the French infantry to pass those pre-assault morale checks. The Allies lacked sufficient cavalry to destroy the many one-step French battalions, so the French would have been able to disengage before reaching level three morale. The end of the day would have probably seen the Portuguese and Spanish still in Albuera, the British on morale level three, the French on morale level two (or perhaps three if they had a rash of rout results), and the Portuguese on morale level one. A very tight game, and a pity we had to stop when we did. The French could reuse the same strategy without the game becoming boring, and there are still at least two more strategies to try.

The above result was quite similar to the historical battle. The real battle ended with the French army finally breaking. The Allies could not pursue because they were greatly outnumbered in cavalry, and they had also taken huge casualties. The French lost the historical battle because they tried to win fire fights in column. That won't work in *La Bataille* either, and no sane player will try it. Hence the French have an easier time of it in the cardboard realm.

So, is worth buying? Most definitely if you already like the *La Bataille* series. The combination of troops involved and the initial set up require some interesting and varied decisions from both players. It is reasonably balanced, although the French probably have the edge because of weight of numbers. It is a comfortable size, being playable in a weekend, or possibly one long day. For me, it ranks above the games covering Ligny, Eylau, Auerstadt, and Talavera, but below Mont St. Jean. If you have not tried *La Bataille*, then it is a great place to start.



## THE CLASSICS

## Clash of Arms Games'

*La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*

Published by Marshall Enterprises in 1979 • Republished in 1986 • Designed by Monte Mattson and Dennis Spors

reviewed by **Marc J. Grad**

*La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera* is the reprint of the earlier game of the same title, portraying the major battle of Sir Arthur Wellesley's daring counter-offensive into Spain in the spring and summer of 1809. *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera* is one of Clash of Arms Games' Napoleonic series games that uses the tactically based *Les Batailles Dans L'Age L'Empereur Napoleon Premier: 1792-1821* rules system.

(Whew, say that three times quickly.) Included with the game is a copy of the now-dated third edition rule book, along with a preview of the fourth edition rules, which should be officially released with the next *La Bataille* game. Since only a preview was included, my fellow reviewers and I used the third edition rules.

Many people are probably not familiar with the situation that resulted in the battle outside of Talavera, a town situated on the Tago river, about 70 miles southwest of Madrid. Perhaps this is because L'Empereur was not present for the fight. In fact, several weeks before, Napoleon had defeated the Austrians at Wagram, outside of Vienna, that being the last major battle of the Danube campaign.

Even among the plethora of Peninsular War battlefields and sieges, Talavera is something of an unknown. Certainly, it's not as desperate a situation as that fought at Corunna, nor as bloody as Albuera, yet Talavera does present a fascinating predicament for the French and English/Spanish opponents, and many options for attack and defense exist for both sides. A quick reading of the nine-page historical commentary is enough to get the juices flowing!

Most interesting of all is the fact the French face two very different opponents. The Spanish battalions are so fragile that they can be sent reeling back in disorder simply by firing in their direction. Conversely, the French are, for the first time, outclassed by the stoic British infantryman. Thus the enjoyment in this game is found in how the players handle this dichotomous situation.

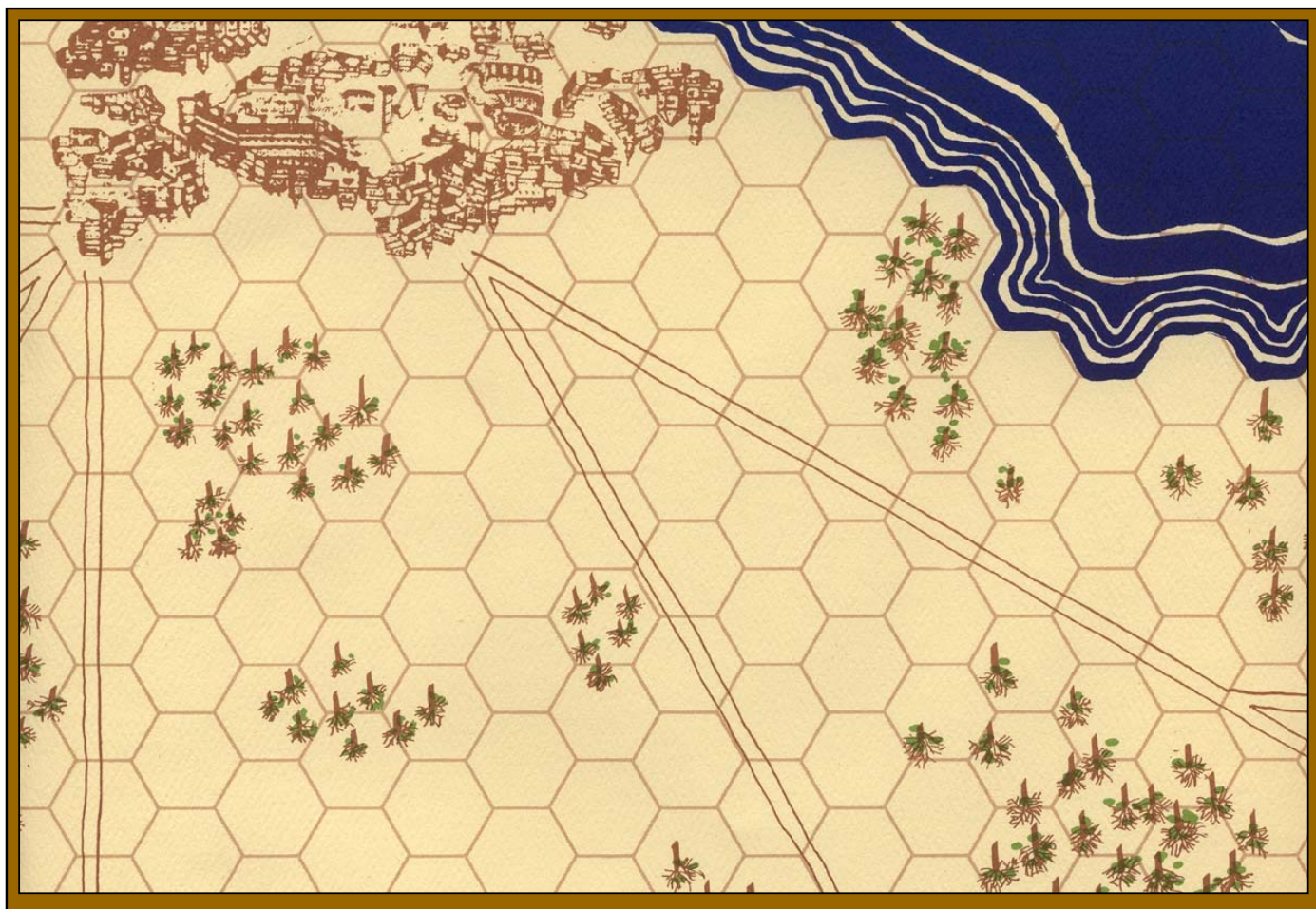
There are a few differences between the first and second editions of *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*. The thicker and brighter counters are, by far, the best change. Also, the back-printing is significantly more legible, because Clash of Arms Games discarded the venerable, Old English-like script and instead used a type which is much easier on the eyes. One note about the game markers is that there still aren't enough of them. This is especially true of the disorder/rout markers, which quickly get used up by the multitude of retreating Spanish battalions. After a while, we went to our tried and true method of using markers from some of the other *La Bataille* series games.

Although the back of the box states four 17" x 22"

maps were included, I was at first surprised to find only two larger maps. The artwork on the new edition parchment-colored maps is identical to the old edition's artwork. Unfortunately, my maps do not match up correctly. While one map is 22" x 34", the other map is 21" x 34", an inch shorter! Apparently, someone hacked off just a little too much. Despite the slight annoyance, play is not significantly affected, though I would have preferred four good maps to the two unmatched ones.

What I find most disappointing is all the little errors





from the old edition were not cleaned up in the new edition. For example, one of the Spanish battalion counters is incorrectly marked as being part of the 5th Division when it is really part of the 3rd, while one British rifle company from 1st Division is not assigned to anyone at all. Furthermore, there are mistakes in the scenario starting positions for the French cavalry divisions, and if I didn't own an older set of maps, I would have had a difficult time finding the set up hex for the Spanish 4th Division. Am I nit-picking? Perhaps, but I think it's intolerable to publish a new edition of a game without correcting the old mistakes. At the very least, include an errata sheet or print the errata in the company newsletter.

As for the errata:

- A Spanish battalion counter, The Provinciales de Guadix battalion, is incorrectly labeled on the top of the counter as belonging to the 5th Spanish Division. It actually belongs to the 3rd Spanish Division. The back of the counter correctly shows this.
- One of the rifle companies (5th battalion/60th foot) in scenario four that belongs to the British 1st Division is unassigned. It fought with the guard battalions, so place it with ei-

ther a Coldstream or Scots guard battalion within two hexes of GD.

- In scenario four, the set up instructions for the two French dragoon divisions is reversed. The first division, commanded by Latour-Maubourg, should be placed within two hexes of LM, and the second dragoon division, commanded by Milhaud, should be placed within two hexes of MI. The map correctly puts Milhaud's division on the left of IV Corps and Latour-Maubourg's division on the right of IV Corps.
- On my map, it is difficult to find the D placement hex for Manglano's 4th Spanish Division. The hex is adjacent to the stream that passes through Talavera, and it is situated on a fold in the map. It is located between hexes C and E, equally five hexes away from both. Don't confuse the C on the map, which looks like a D. The C is located in a road hex, and the D, as just stated, is next to the stream.

*La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera* includes five scenarios of varying lengths. The players have the option to play each scenario separately, skip to the fifth Grand Battle scenario and recreate the battle in



stages as it was initiated by the French, or play the fifth scenario but attack with the French in a different and probably more effective manner. If the players opt for the historical option, they will want to play scenarios one, two, and four in succession, as delineated in scenario five.

Scenario one, Ruffin's Attack, simulates the initial night action of July 27th. The skirmish pits Ruffin's three regiment division against a collection of KGL and British battalions charged with the defense of the Cerro De Medellin, a large hill on the left flank of the British line. Some highly restrictive night rules almost guarantee the French will be repulsed. Not a particularly interesting situation, unless used in conjunction with the other scenarios, although it works well solitaire.

Scenario two recreates the French early morning attack of July 28th, again spearheaded by Ruffin's men. To win, the French must capture several hexes located behind the British line. Not an easy chore since the French are restricted initially in which units they can use, only Ruffin's Division plus half a dozen artillery batteries and a like number of cavalry regiments. Against this, the British can use their entire force. Another French division is released once Ruffin captures his objective. This second division, with whatever is left from the initial attack force, must then capture another objective hex, situated behind four Coldstream Guard battalions, before they earn the right to use the rest of their troops (the French had a total of six infantry divisions and three cavalry divisions at the battle). Play then reverts to scenario four. The French player must work quickly in scenario two, since he only has four hours (twelve turns) to capture his objectives. A difficult but not impossible task.

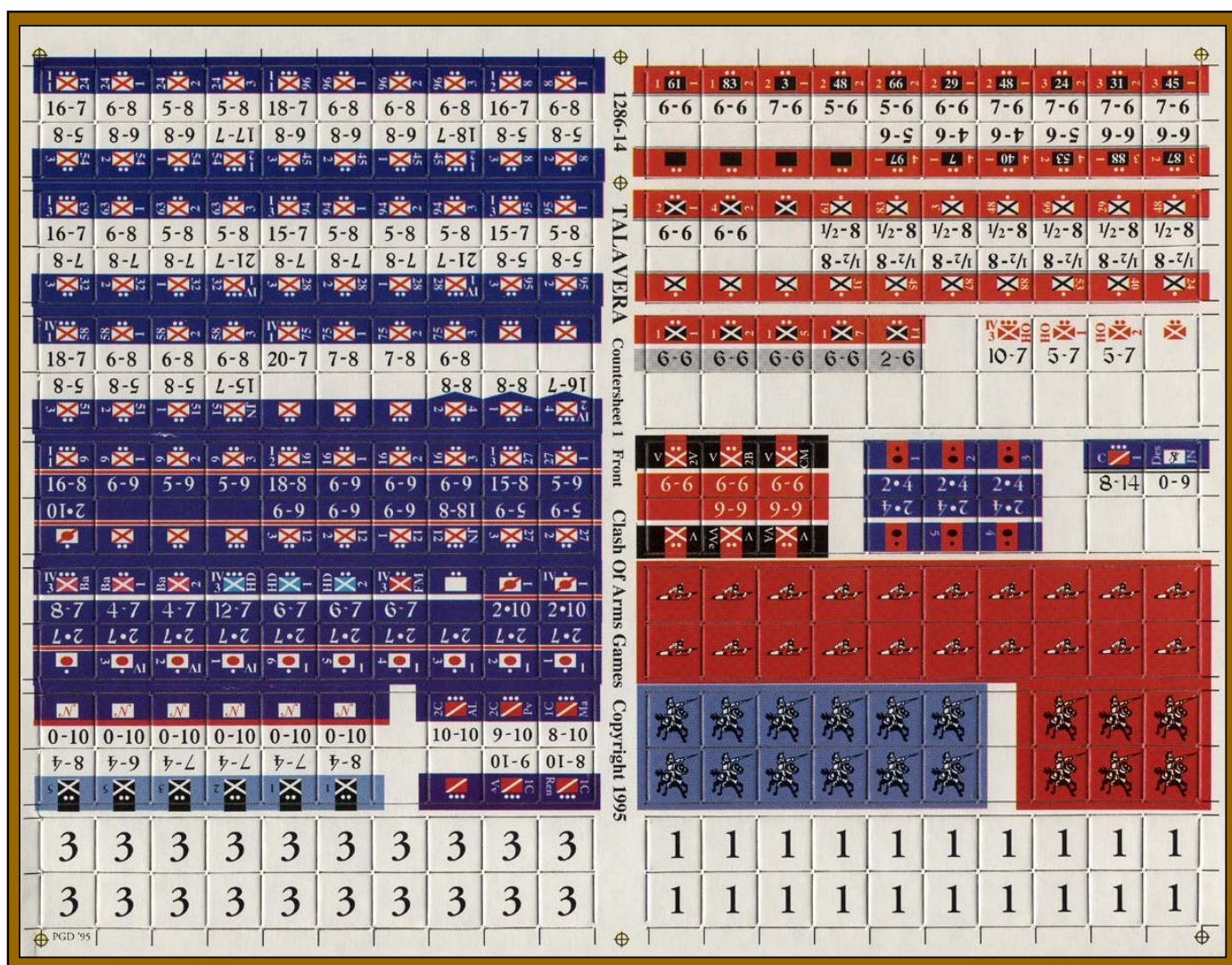
Finally, with the start of scenario four, The Afternoon Assault, the big battle everyone has waited for begins. At this stage, the French player must decide where he wants to attack. He can either continue smashing his way through the British, trying to exit a corps off the map at the Route de Oropesa, the Anglo-Spanish line of communications, or he can redirect his efforts and turn on the Spanish. If he chooses the Spanish option, he must clear all the enemy troops out of Talavera. A third option is to force the British army to morale level two or higher, accomplished by destroying or routing at least twelve of the British infantry battalions. The Anglo-Spanish win by placing both French corps on morale level two, an overwhelming victory, or morale level one, a victory. A tie results if both or neither side secures victory.

The remaining scenario, Marshal Jourdan's Plan, pits a French corps of mixed nationality against the whole Spanish army as they attempt to capture Ta-

lavera. With battalions from Poland, Holland, Hesse-Darmstadt, Frankfurt-Am-Main, Nassau, Westphalia, and Baden as well as France, this is certainly the most colorful and unreliable of French corps. But against the Spanish hordes, even the Badeners can hold their own, and the Dutch and Polish troops are actually better than most of the French. Not to be outdone by their invading neighbors, the Spanish also have some foreigners in their army, namely a 1,200-man Irish regiment. Clash of Arms Games does a great job with simulating period uniforms on their counters. When these two forces engage each other, it is more than swords and muskets that clash.

Although the burden of attack falls on the French player, the Anglo-Spanish player will have ample opportunities to execute a few assaults of his own, especially if the Frenchman has concentrated on one army. Although both armies are better on the defense, the Anglo-Spanish player has to remember that in order to win, he must inflict casualties. If the French player gets too cocky (as he always does) and leaves his flank open, hit it hard. This maneuver is easy to do with the British, but damn near impossible to do with the Spanish. In fact, it is difficult to do just about anything with the Spanish troops. Special rules allow for the potential release of only one Spanish division per hour. Unreleased Spanish units, just like the French ones, can't move unless the enemy comes to within four hexes of them. In addition, the Spanish battalions have terrible morale, little firepower, and even less capable leadership. The only thing they are good at is running away from the battlefield.

Normally when a game has three armies, I like to try it with three players, but anyone who plays the Spanish in this game will get skinned! On the other hand, nothing brings a quicker smile to the Anglo-Spanish player's face than when he uses a forty-five morale-rated Spanish cavalry unit to rout a French unit (right, Steve?). Two different colored dice are used to make morale checks, with one die being the tens and the other die being the ones. Thus morale ratings vary on a base six scale from eleven to sixty-six. A unit passes if its morale roll is higher than its morale rating plus or minus modifiers, thus the lower a unit's morale the better. In *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*, the British infantry units' morale values average about twenty-two, with the guards ringing in at fourteen or fifteen. French infantry battalions average an uncharacteristically poor thirty-one, while their cavalry rate in the high twenties. Most Spanish battalions have morale values in the mid-forties. Only the cazadores light units are comparable to the French, while the voluntarios de Madrid battalion, with its fifty-four morale will probably not



hang around for too long. Make sure the person in command of the Spanish forces has lots of patience. He will need it!

My opponents, Steve Guilbert, Clinton Ray, and I have played many *La Bataille* system games over the past three years. Although we anxiously await the new fourth edition rules, we have grown to accept the third edition. Much controversy has surrounded the lack of command and control in the series. While the long awaited command and control additions will be welcomed by all, I must admit I like the ten-minute moving rule, which according to the Clash of Arms Games designers also functions as the command and control rule. Basically, the players each in their own turn have ten minutes to move anything and everything they want. At the end of ten minutes, the turn is up and anything that was not moved is stuck till the player's next Movement Phase. In larger games this rule becomes difficult to follow, especially since stacking regulations are adhered to at all times during the turn. With more manageable games like *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*, my

opponents and I were usually able to move what we wanted where. More importantly though, the ten-minute rule keeps the game moving at a realistic pace. It might be all right to sit around for two hours and analyze an *Advanced Third Reich* game map when each turn simulates three months of time, but in a game with twenty minute turns, you want the action to stay fast and furious.

I would have to give *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera* high marks for color, historical accuracy, and most importantly, excitement. I can't think of any other period in time where three different combat arms, namely infantry, cavalry, and artillery, were so balanced in regard to each other. Certainly the *La Bataille* games have always done a great job of recreating these balanced Napoleonic era battlefields. To master the *La Bataille* system, one must know how to use the three weapon systems. When do you charge with your horseman and against what target? Do you risk placing your infantry units in square formation to defend against a cavalry charge if enemy artillery batteries are nearby? And how close do you want



to place your guns to the enemy? Too far away and the guns are ineffective, too close and they risk being outflanked or destroyed. Grand tactical questions like these swirl through your mind when you play *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*, and at ten minutes per move, an exciting game of charges and retreats takes place that will keep you on your toes all night.

Those of you who own the older edition of *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera* shouldn't run out to get the new one. Nothing much has changed besides the counters, and all the minor errors still exist. But to owners of other *La Bataille* games, and to those who are looking for a realistic and exciting tactical Napoleonic game, I highly recommend *La Bataille d'Espagnol-Talavera*.

## ACROSS THE POND

Six Angles'

*Okehazama 1560*

Published in Six Angles #2 in 1995 • Designed by Masahiro Yamazaki

reviewed by Rich Erwin

*Okehazama 1560* (Six Angles #2) highlights the surprise attack by Nobunaga Oda against Yoshimoto Imagawa's forces in Aichi Province on May 19, 1560. Oda's victory was the first of many which, along with success in political marriages and intrigue, led to his eventual capture of Kyoto in 1568 and the installation of his candidate as Shogun of Japan.

Instead of a counter sheet, the buyer is provided a sticky-backed, four-color sheet that requires mounting and cutting to have the ninety counters required for the game. When all of the dirty work is finished, the counters are appealing, but I for one will be glad when Six Angles provides games, starting with issue #4, with die-cut counters.

The map covers the battlefield and is double the size of a standard A4 sheet of paper. The map is broken into areas, with each border delineated specifically to indicate how many movement points are required to move through that given border to the next area. Like the counters, the map is far from shabby and uses color liberally.

Only forty-nine of the counters in this game are combat units and leaders. Most of the remainder of the counters are chits, used in each turn. Each turn is made up of a series of impulses, which can determine which leader of which force moves in their turn (action chits), or whether event chits like thunderstorms or the sudden desire of leaders to go berserk or rest come to pass. Some, but not all of the action and event chits are put into a cup for the first turn. Further, various event chits are in play for a series of turns, some ac-

tion chits are reinserted into the cup every turn, and some action chits can be inserted for only one turn, to be permanently removed if not played in the given turn. There are multiple force action chits - five for Imagawa's main body, for example - but, typically, only the first action chit can be used.

Combat is very simple to resolve. Once both sides have tallied their attack and defense factors, then the modifications for terrain, each rolls a die and the net difference between the attacker and defender is assessed and that difference determines the combat result, which is a single column of possible results.

The game is essentially a relatively small force trying to hold onto a series of forts before the main body arrives (Oda), versus a much larger and slower force (Imagawa), some of which occupies three castles. It appears inevitable that Oda's forces at Forts Marune and Washizu will go berserk, deliberately attacking the opposing forces laying siege to their fortress. The usual result is the loss of at least one leader and of both forts. (In fact, given how easily all of Oda's leaders except Oda himself can go berserk, I wonder sometimes if half of Oda's plan was

to eliminate potential competitors in his ranks through battle.) Typically, the best one can expect on Oda's side is a two-leader force at Fort Nakajima.

When Oda's main body arrives on turn three, Imagawa's forces attacking Forts Marune and Washizu (led by Mazdaira and Asahina) must be united. Apart, they are likely to be destroyed piecemeal. Together, they gain defensive advantages from hav-





ing multiple friendly leaders in a given area and, with their high intrinsic defense factors, can take on Oda's main body. The only way to safely keep these two forces separate is if you are lucky enough to be able to move Kuzyama's large but incredibly hesitant force toward either the friendly confines of Narumi Castle or against Oda's main body. Don't bet on it, though - much of Imagawa's forces can only be moved by the one-time-only availability movement chits, and Kuzyama's force is one of the toughest to use effectively.

Then there is Imagawa's main body. It is slow, it is far from the battle, and an event chit can occur that disrupts his forces for two entire turns - given that the entire game is nine turns in length, this can be disastrous. Finally, his distance from his home base, Kutsukake Castle, at the end of the game counts as victory points in favor of Oda.

Nevertheless, if Imagawa's forces know when to fight and when to defend, he can end the game with two, possibly three forts under his control and many of Oda's leaders dead from deliberately, gleefully marching toward massacre.

Since we've broached the subject, let's quickly review the victory conditions. Oda gains from killing Imagawa's leaders (who are much more valuable in victory points versus Oda's leaders) and occupying Imagawa's castles. Imagawa gains from killing Oda's leaders and occupying Oda's forts. As you would expect, both sides gain dramatically by the death of the opposing leader.

Oda suffers from leaders that go insane at the drop of a chit and relatively weak forces on a unit-by-unit basis. However, his main body is strong and he has the extra advantage of being much better able to deal with thunderstorms than Imagawa's forces, which must move at half-speed until an Oda action chit is next pulled. Finally, when a Thunderstorm event chit is pulled a second time gives Oda the capability to raid forces. This means Oda is allowed to make use of two of the Oda action chits in a given turn.

Oda must try to set up a defense in the heights be-

hind Forts Marune and Washizu, or preferably, at Fort Nakajima. When Oda's main body arrives on turn three, it must quickly take Narumi Castle, then strike either at forces near Fort Nakajima (and, if successful, then strike at Ohdaka Castle) or at Imagawa's forces if they are disrupted.

The inevitability of each sides' general strategy, with very limited objectives and small forces, is counterbalanced to some extent by the multitude of chits - there is no way on earth to assume your best laid plans will work. One game I played recently resulted in three straight turns where no more than one action or event chit was pulled before the turn was ended. (Imagawa also never rested during this game - it was a very frustrating day for Oda.)

There are some typos, and the English translation of the rules is vague in a few spots. The most obvious mistake is references to black stars on many of the chits - these are white stars. But nothing is such that a thor-

ough reading of the rules cannot fix. One thing I would strongly recommend is the Imagawa player be the one to remove and replace the action/event chits each turn - in this way, he can hide the status of which single-use action chits have been used and which will be used in the next turn. It makes the Oda player more wary of, for example, Kuzyama's force striking from behind or the flank.

This design is a great improvement over Six Angles' first effort, *Zaporozhye 1943*. It's re-playability is limited and some will panic at having over thirty chits at a time in a cup, but for such a small game, it's very entertaining. Let's hope that Masahiro Yamazaki can keep up the pace and continue to improve at the difficult art of magazine wargames.



## ACROSS THE POND

Ludopress's

*Green Inferno*

Published in Alea #15 in 1993 • Designed by J. Manuel Tortosa

reviewed by **Randy Moorehead**

Vietnam. I know of no better way to start an argument than to mention it (well, maybe the O. J. verdict, since that is more topical, while Vietnam is more tropical). Enough of the Berg-isms. The fact remains that Vietnam scarred our country deeply, and still evokes emotional responses from those of us old enough to remember it. In fact, my wife has often remarked that it seems wrong to play a wargame on the subject. Strange, that millions dead on the Eastern front doesn't bother some, but Vietnam is still quite touchy to many.

Alea, the Spanish magazine with a wargame in it, has given us another nice little issue. While still having a mix of wargaming, role-playing, and miniatures, this issue will not appeal simply for the game. Gamers who have contemplated purchase of SimTac's *Sagunto* should take a look at the full color ad on page eight (map and counters shown), as well as the historical article on pages fifty-seven to sixty-one, complete with order-of-battle information down to the regimental level. The other major article, American Graffiti, is a compendium (with some thumbnail sketches) of all the Vietnam games known to the authors. While brushing up on your Spanish is a must for both articles, I found them well worth the trouble.

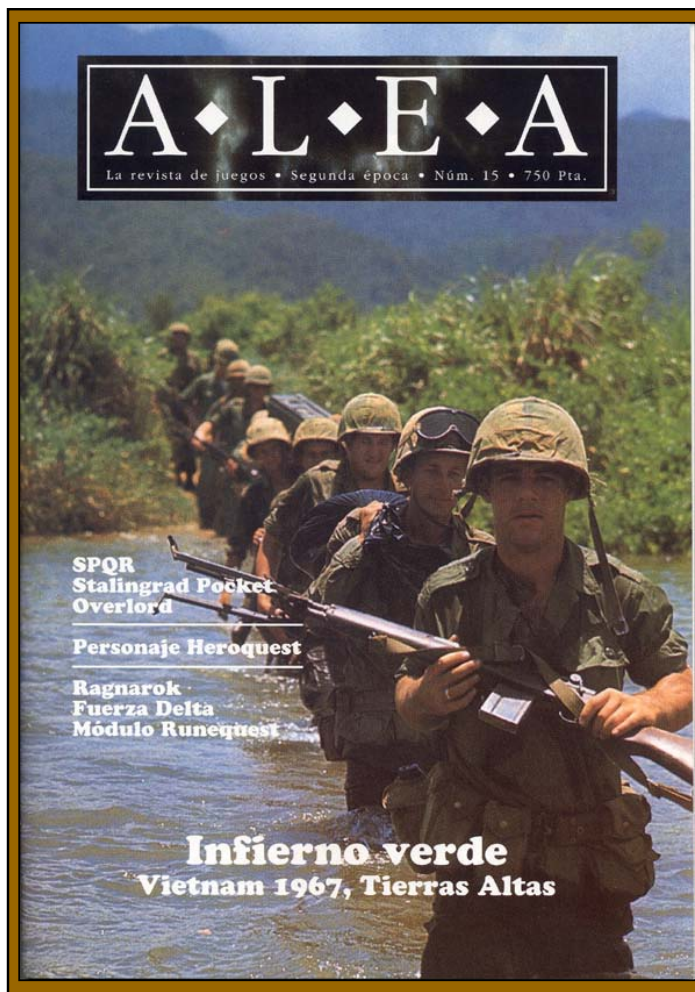
The game included is *Green Inferno*, a tactical game covering two battles from the Central Highlands in 1967. This is the last of the Alea issue games to use the old, thicker (Battleline-style) counters. The two hundred counters break down into one hundred American units, fifty-four North

Vietnamese units, thirty-six South Vietnamese units, and ten markers. The Americans feature white icons on a dark green background, while the North Vietnamese are yellow on an orange-brown, and South Vietnamese are the orange-brown on yellow. The icons are simple (infantryman with a gun, choppers, etc.) outlines, nowhere near as nice as in the later Osprey-inspired issues. Most units have

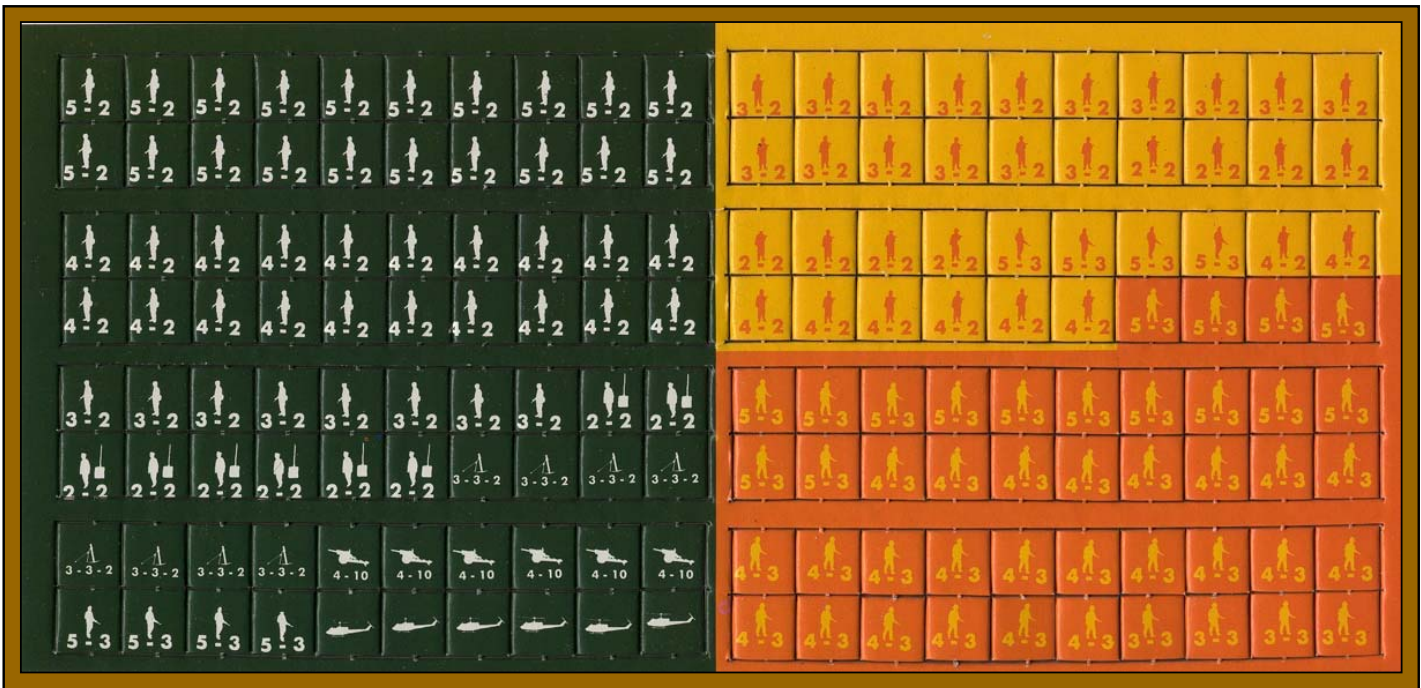
two numbers underneath the icon (fire value and movement allowance), while ranged units (artillery and mortars) have three (the range in hexes). There are also sixty black and white hit markers printed in the magazine, which must be photocopied, mounted and cut. Overall, the counters are functional, but no great shakes.

The 17" x 22" map is nicer. It is divided into two halves, one for each battle (Dak To and Hill 875). The basic color scheme is a nice grassland green, with darker jungle/forested areas that look like jungle, villages that sport a couple of bamboo huts, and fortification hexes that feature a circular ring of sandbags. A turn record track is printed in the margin between the two halves, and the overall effect is both functional and easy on the eyes.

The rules and charts are provided in English, and reveal a nice, simple game. Each hex is one kilometer across, units represent several sections (seventy to one hundred men each), and turns represent twelve hours of real time. Air units range from four airplanes per counter to between six and eight choppers per airmobile piece. The sequence of play is quite long, and is the hardest part of the game to get used to, since it is not quite symmetrical. Plotting







on paper is required for US air strikes and North Vietnamese ambushes, and along with the counting of losses for victory purposes, means that a fair bit of bookkeeping is required.

The sequence of play has twelve phases (I don't count the thirteenth: Advance the turn marker):

- Pre-plotting of air strikes (bombardments) and ambushes,
- US reinforcements enter,
- Assignment of artillery fire missions,
- Assignment of air strikes for aiding attack and defense,
- Resolution of US artillery fire,
- Air assaults (which includes anti-aircraft fire and combat),
- North Vietnamese movement,
- North Vietnamese combat,
- North Vietnamese artillery fire resolution,
- US movement,
- Resolution of US air strikes,
- US combat and ambush resolution.

Like I said, fairly detailed, and it will take a few turns before things seem like they flow. Note there are several subtleties built into the sequence of play, like the North Vietnamese being able to move out of hexes the US player has targeted for air strikes before these air strikes are resolved. Lesson for both sides: If you keep moving, that artillery and air bombardment won't be able to hit you (unless your

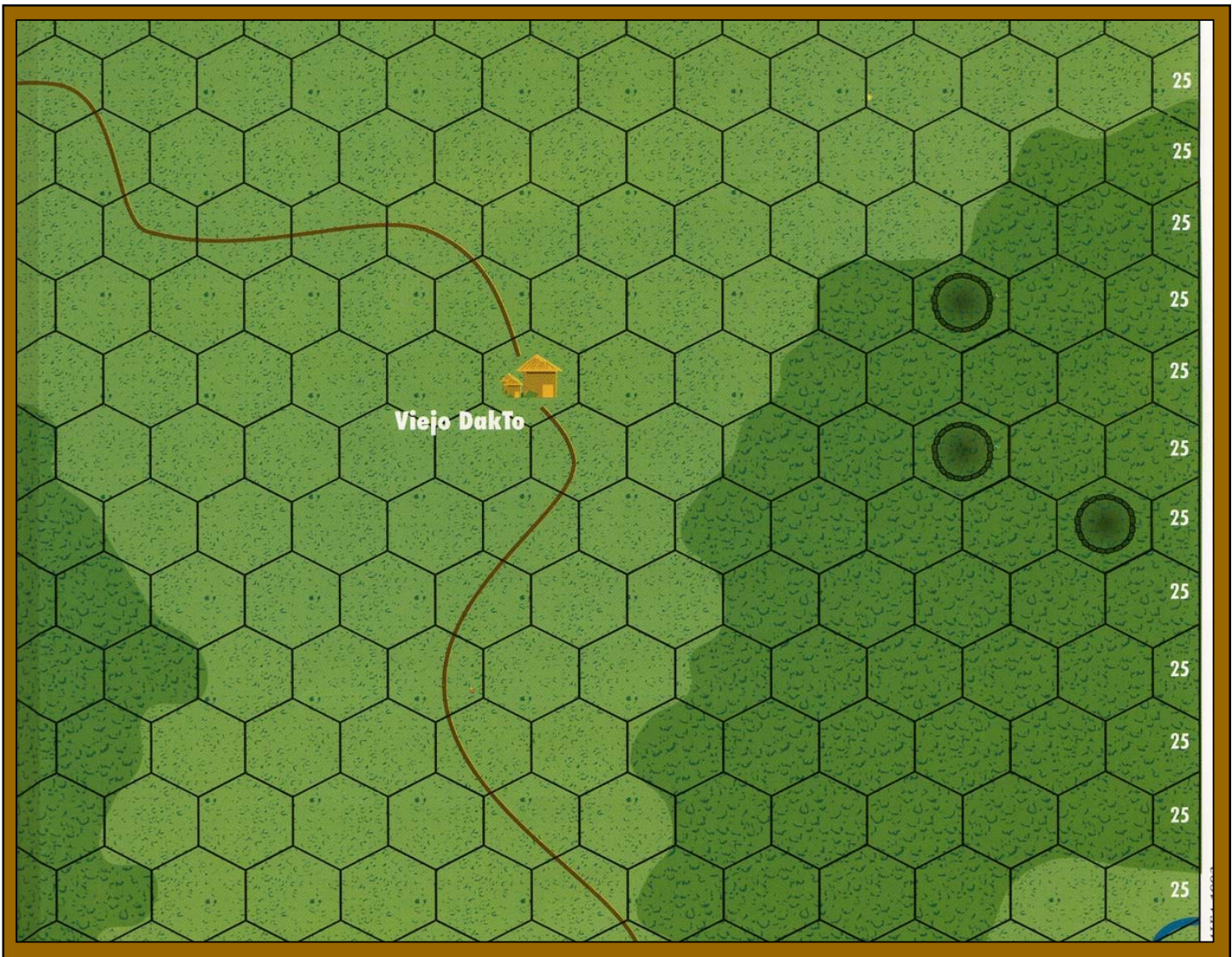
move is that predictable).

The rules themselves are quite simple. Movement is straight forward, with infantry slogging along trails or moving the length of the map if airmobile. The North Vietnamese units have a higher movement allowance than US units on the ground, but those choppers can negate that. Units do not have zones of control, but rather a zone of patrol that extends two hexes in all directions and reduce the likelihood of enemy spotting and modify air assaults. Combat between adjacent infantry units is resolved with simultaneous fire, which inflicts hits on the opposing units. Hits are recorded for victory purposes (representing killed and wounded), and eventually cause a unit to become demoralized or eliminated. Mortars and artillery add to the losses, while entrenchments reduce losses. The US player may also use his choppers to land infantry via airmobile assault, which means the North Vietnamese always has to watch his back (vertical envelopment, anyone?).

Chrome is also added in the form of North Vietnamese ambushes (written down for specific hexes) and the Harassment and Booby Trap Table. In fact, all the major stereotypes of combat in Vietnam seem to be present in the system, which is laid out in less than four pages of rules. And it all plays out quite nicely.

Hill 875 sees the North Vietnamese forces entrenched in rough terrain only a few clicks from the Cambodian border. A contingent of US forces enter the north map edge by chopper, while two more groups slog their way by foot from the east and northeast. Victory points are earned for inflicting losses, and for possession of Hill 875 at the end of





ten turns. This scenario is a real slugfest, usually with lots of casualties. The river fords and grassy areas between the jungle will tend to channel the US attacks, and ten turns is not a long time to achieve the objectives. This one is a real hard-fought scenario.

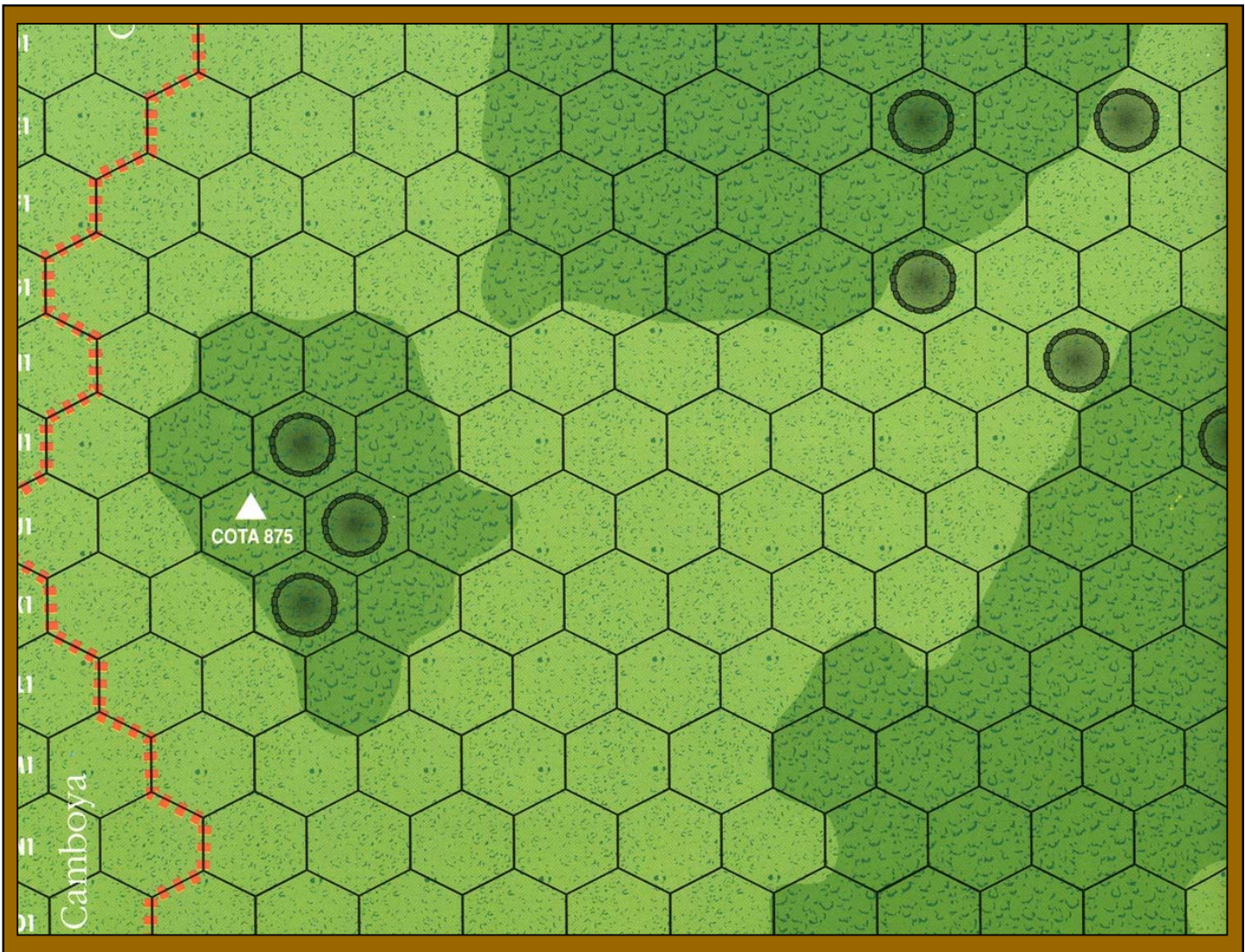
Dak To sees another situation, as the North Vietnamese has free deployment, and sets up to defend the villages of Dak To, Old Dak To, and Tan Cahn. An airmobile US force enters on the west edge while a US ground force slogs its way onto the map from the east. The North Vietnamese has no available artillery, so life is not as hard on the US player in this scenario. The North Vietnamese player has the choice as to whether to defend all of the villages, only one or two of the villages, or to defend none (leaving only the booby traps to inflict casualties) and counterattack near game end to retake one or two villages. There is lots of jungle to hide in, the US artillery takes time to emplace, and there is never enough of it. Build the fire base in one place, and watch the North Vietnamese attack the village

that isn't protected.

A third scenario, *Under the Fire*, was published in a later issue. This scenario uses the Dak To map, and gives the gamer the opportunity to use those South Vietnamese units and the white markers (civilians and tunnel entrances). This is my favorite scenario, because of the situation and chrome. The South Vietnamese player must hunt for tunnels and try to destroy them, while at the same time extract the civilian forces from the map. The North Vietnamese units pop out of the tunnels starting with turn three, and the race is on. A rearguard action at its best, and a real nail-biter.

The system is simple (except for the lengthy sequence of play) and moves quickly once players are accustomed to it. Players will try to inflict casualties using artillery, mortars, and (for the US) air power. Closing to regular combat can be bloody as well, but usually not as productive (or one-sided) as ranged fire. The game seems to encourage proper tactics. Don't try to assault that hill without soften-





ing them up with artillery and air, or you will take extreme losses. Keep moving if you don't want the artillery to zero in on you. The indirect approach will probably minimize casualties and achieve the desired results. If you (as the Americans) must enter that village up ahead, be prepared to get shot at. The easy river crossing at the ford will probably turn out to be an ambush. These Spanish designers must have seen all the right movies (but no Robert Duvall counter). For those who like comparisons, this game reminds me most of the games *Grunt* (SPI, 1971) and *Search and Destroy* (SPI, 1974). While the scale on those oldies was even more tactical, *Green Inferno* feels more like these than like *Silver Bayonet* (which was company level, one mile to the hex, and one day turns).

Each scenario is good for a couple of plays, but then the game feels played out. The problem is having only a few scenarios. After all, *Silver Bayonet* (GMT Games, 1990) gave us twelve scenarios for the battles in the Ia Drang valley near Pleiku. My feeling is that unless a gamer is truly a fanatic, they will move on to other games - there are way too

many I haven't had a chance to play yet. That is one of the drawbacks of the magazine game (play it once and then move on) format, but also part of the appeal (didn't cost an arm and a leg). So, if this sounds like a few evenings worth of enjoyment, give it a try. I think you will find it interesting and entertaining (and much more interesting and entertaining than actually having been there).

## THIRD WORLD

## Simulation Workshop's

*Operation Dragon Rouge*Published in 1995 • Designed by *Randy Moorehead*reviewed by **Rich Erwin**

It's amazing to me sometimes, what I don't know about recent history. In an age where we have lived through such events as Entebbe and the Iran hostage crisis, nobody in my memory - not only the American media, but also such luminaries as the BBC or The Economist - has brought up a successful and in some ways tougher hostage crisis; that of the attempt to rescue hostages being held in Stanleyville, the Congo, in late November of 1964. In this incident, the Simba Rebellion had resulted in the occupation of Stanleyville with over 1,600 foreign residents. The American, Belgian and Congolese governments assembled four plans to take the city and save the hostages. Operation Dragon Rouge, which utilized mercenaries and Belgian paratroops, was selected and implemented on November 24th.

Randy Moorehead, a reviewer for Paper Wars, has been trying for a number of years with his friend, Mike Collier, to create a board wargaming company. After displaying a number of their ideas over the years at various conventions, they finally have set up shop as Simulations Workshop. *Operation Dragon Rouge* is one of their first set of four games, with more on the way.

Simulations Workshop's first efforts are strictly desk-top published in production quality - good, but as with many third world efforts, limited. Counters have to be cut and the graphic quality, while very clean, misses some of the touches many of us are becoming accustomed to. Still, if you can live with high-quality laser printer output, the counters are easy to interpret and the map, with strong hues of

blue and green added to the standard black and white, is quite serviceable.

A standard turn is:

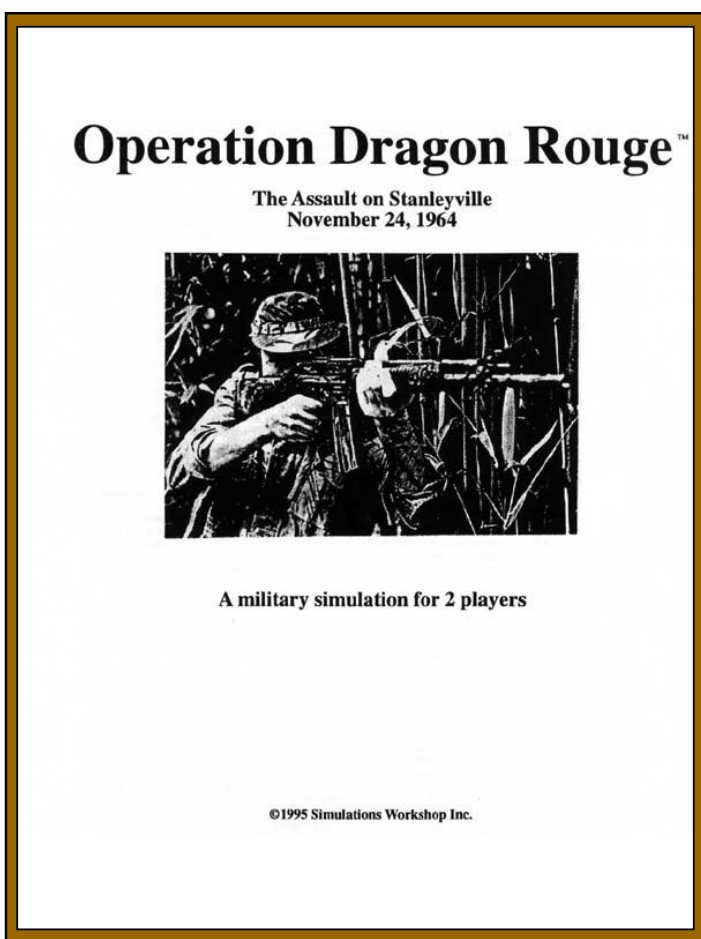
- Allied player air operations (air strikes and insertion of forces),
- Allied player movement and combat, and...
- Simba player movement and combat.

There are no stacking limits for units, though Simba stacks can only have three units at any one time firing out of the hex.

Victory points are gained and lost only by the Allied player. He needs to, in effect, insert his forces, get as many hostages as possible checked out medically (the Allied player has two units for this purpose) and airlifted out as quickly as possible, then remove as many paratroopers as possible while keeping casualties to his forces at a minimum. (If he's lucky, sometime in the game the mercenary forces will show up and relieve some of the pressure on the airborne troops.) This is not all that easy, as the victory point requirements are quite high. (And a little

distasteful, as American and Belgian hostages are worth more in victory points than Pakistanis or Indians, but then no one should pretend racism, even if of the relatively benign "taking care of our own first" variety, was dead in the 1960s, let alone today.)

All combat units have a fire value, an effectiveness rating and a movement factor. In combat, each unit fires separately, and defensive fire usually occurs first. Roll a die; if your value is equal to or below your fire value, you may have scored a hit. Your





opponent then rolls a die; if his roll is greater than his effectiveness rating, the unit is eliminated.

The Simba units are two-sided, to hide their identity from the Allied player. They can be made up of either troops or hostages, with the occasional blank and the Simba leader, Christophe Gbenye, also included in the mix. Most of these units are simply guys with assault rifles and little else, and thus tend to be mostly fodder against the Dragon Rouge force. But there is a nasty 20mm flak unit out there somewhere (which should be used very wisely - it's the only thing that can fire at evacuating units), and lots of Simba units will arrive as reinforcements from all over the map.

Unfortunately, command and control for the Simba forces isn't so hot. If Gbenye is at the radio station or the Prince Leopold Military Camp, he can roll two dice and determine how many units he can move. (Of course, anything at either spot becomes a target for air strikes...) If not at either location, the Simba player rolls one die. This puts a premium on the wise location of Simba units and hostages before the game begins.

Especially the hostages, unfortunately.

One of the options of the Simba player is to kill hostages to deny the Allied player victory points. This attempt is by no means guaranteed success, and the hostages can run away in a limited fashion once fired upon.

The Allies have the potential for reinforcements (usually the mercenaries mentioned above), dependent on the scenario. When they'll show up is a bit of a problem though, as it was in real life.

Along with the historic scenario, there are five others, ranging from an Americans-alone attempt to rescue the Americans in Stanleyville, to using only mercenary forces and no Belgian airborne forces, to an attack via the Congo River.

As a game, it is difficult to be the Simba player in the basic scenario. Most of your units are speed bumps, and it seems nothing can stop the Western imperialists. But one or two lucky die rolls and

continuous units being thrown at the Allies will eventually have an effect. The question is, will it occur in time? The other scenarios provide a better chance, usually, for survival and victory, but watch out for the High Beam scenario - it's difficult for the Allies, but with their positioning at the start of the scenario, they become a lot more nasty.

For the Allies, it's easier - concentrate your fire, kill Simba military units, and get the hostages out as quickly as possible once processed by your medical units. Allow no stragglers, or else they'll face a rain of Simba fire rolls.

While *Operation Dragon Rouge* is in many ways a challenge for the Simba player, smart play and a

couple of lucky die rolls can catch the Allied player flat-footed. As a game, *Operation Dragon Rouge* is a solid, simple design, and I hope to see Randy and Mike come up with more games on equally esoteric topics - I need the education.



## THIRD WORLD

## Simulations Workshop's

*Rommel at the Meuse*

Published in 1995 • Designed by Randy Moorehead

reviewed by Mark Olson

The campaign in France in 1940 is one of those battles that provokes debate and inspires intense scrutiny, but that also typically makes for a lousy game.

I have experience with only two attempts to game the entire campaign. *France 1940* (SPI/Avalon Hill) is out of date and wasn't much fun; the Germans could win easily even with the Schlieffen Plan. *Victory in the West* (GMT Games), a more recent publication, is more interesting to play, and has many plausible what-ifs to help balance play. Most other game publishers, however, have chosen to ignore the campaign entirely or focus on a smaller piece of the action that still highlights the differences between the combatants while allowing for some game balance. A number of quality tactical games have simulated a subset of the campaign in interesting and competitive treatments.

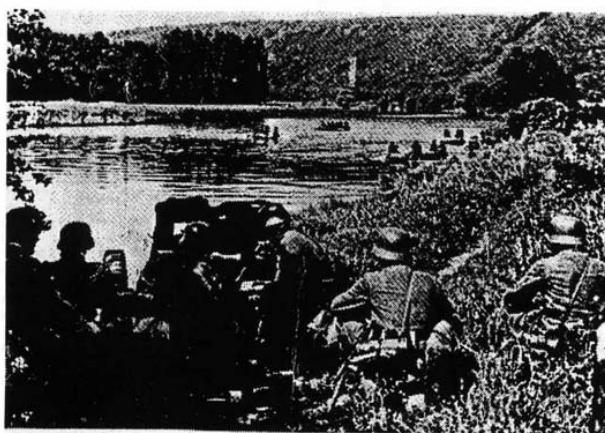
Simulations Workshop, Inc., a new entry to the ranks of wargame publishing, has adopted the small piece approach in their game *Rommel at the Meuse*. *Rommel at the Meuse* is a battalion-level game covering the operations of General Erwin Rommel's 7th (Ghost) Panzer Division as it attempted to secure crossings over the Meuse River in the early days of the France '40 campaign. The map scale is 1.5 km per hex, with four-hour turns. The entire game lasts eighteen turns, depicting three and one-half days of real time (May 12 through nightfall on May 15, 1940).

*Rommel at the Meuse* is an easy to learn, playable game that can be completed in one sitting (three to four hours). It is simple without being simplistic (I

know, a cliché, but it applies). The approach is close to ideal for introducing new people to the hobby; the combat system in particular will seem more intuitive to an inexperienced player, and the interactive nature of combat keeps both players involved. To keep younger players coming back, let them be the Germans the first few times.

Simulations Workshop is firmly rooted in the third world when it comes to production values; *Rommel at the Meuse* sports a pure desktop-published look, complete with color-copier quality map and counters that must be cut out (and in some cases, re-mounted almost immediately, as the mounting does not hold up well). The 11" x 17" map is printed in four colors (if you count black) on plain twenty-pound paper and really doesn't look bad at all; it gets the job done. It needs to be on heavier stock, however; just moving counters on it causes it to slide around quite a bit. (I know, I know... tape, plexiglass, glue it on cardboard, etc.) The rule book, accompanying charts (in duplicate, nice touch), order of battle sheets, and turn track are of the same quality. A plastic ziplock is provided for storage. In another good effort to add quality, two small ziplocks are provided to keep your counters segregated.

As a result of my association with this magazine, I have encountered a number of third world efforts, and I have learned to look past production values. That said, I must also say that *Rommel at the Meuse* is the most disappointing game, graphically, I've seen lately. This is not because the graphics are that bad, but that they color one's impression of the game, which limits its value as an introductory

**Rommel at the Meuse™**The German Breakthrough  
May 12-15, 1940

A military simulation for 2 players

©1995 Simulations Workshop Inc.



game, a role I believe it otherwise fills well. A big part of anything's appeal today is flash, especially when dealing with young people. *Rommel at the Meuse* is devoid of flash, and lacks sufficient professionalism to even convince a prospective hobbyist of wargaming's legitimacy (if, in fact, there really is any).

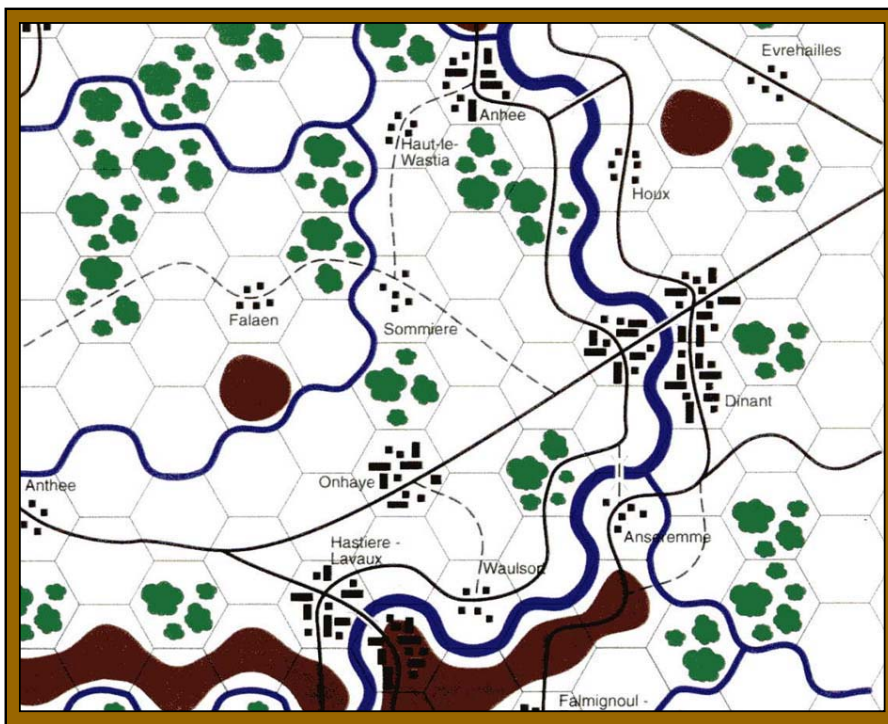
The heart of the game system is the Operations Phase. In his Operations Phase (one per side per turn), the player moves and attacks his units one at a time or in stacks (up to three battalions or equivalent per hex) sequentially. The unit or stack must complete all movement and fire before the next unit/stack is moved. Units may move and fire in the same turn, but firing always ends the movement of a unit or stack, even if it has leftover movement allowance. This mechanic provides the main challenge in the system; sequencing is key to competent play.

The combat rules are a bit of a departure from most games of this scale. Units attack by firing at an enemy unit. The target is hit if the roll of one die is equal to or less than the firer's attack strength. Attacking units may not combine fire; all units fire individually. The phasing player, upon declaring his fire, must first undergo defensive fire from target units (and often any nearby artillery). When a target is hit, it rolls one die against its effectiveness rating to determine if it stands in place or is eliminated by the fire. There are no intermediate results; you live or you die. Fire and prosper/perish die rolls are modified by terrain, weather, a combined arms bonus (only the Germans get this), and fuel (only the hapless French 1st DCR (armored division) is affected by fuel). Regardless of modifiers, a roll of one is always a hit/pass, and six is always a miss/fail. I expected to be annoyed by the incessant die rolling during combat, but once you learn the modifiers, it goes quickly and is relatively painless. Unfortunately, the rules covering fire combat are not very explicit. The rules say the at-

tacker must announce fire, but do not state specifically whether all fire must be announced or not before any is resolved. They also say all units in a defending hex may fire at attackers regardless of whether they themselves are being attacked, but do not specify whether units being attacked must fire on their attackers, or may choose other units in the attacking hex. Some agreement as to how these rules will be interpreted before beginning play will save arguments later.

The concept of zones of control is well handled, but has one loophole. A zone of control does not inhibit movement, but if an unfriendly unit moves directly from one hex in your unit's zone of control to another hex in that same unit's zone of control, your boys can fire, using terrain modifiers from either hex traversed. The unfriendly unit may not fire

back. This is a nice mechanic that bridges the tactical overwatch/opportunity fire systems and the more abstract effects of operational level zone of control rules. The loophole is that unfriendlies may move from the zone of control of one of your units directly into the zone of control of a different friendly unit with no ill effects. The loophole may be intended but it is deadly to the already beleaguered French in later



turns, as units become scarcer.

Command and control are addressed, and the rules are unobtrusive, but in practice seem almost unnecessary. Command ranges are too long, so apart from keeping divisions together (a seven-hex radius, about half the width of the map), they are no issue until French units begin to get cut off. By then, the Allies are probably done anyway. The Germans can disrupt French command and control with air strikes, but lack of command and control does not overly restrict the defense. The French are only annoyed by this, not crippled.

There are a number of special rules to handle crossing the Meuse River:

- Bridges can be blown and repaired or built,
- Engineers can help German combat units cross the river or assault across it (Don't do it! You Will Die. Got that?), and...
- There are a few sneaky ways across near villages and towns.

These rules are important, and work well to make the river crossing interesting without lots of complication.

The Luftwaffe is unopposed in *Rommel at the Meuse*, and can be decisive. Interdiction slows movement of French reserves during the crucial early river crossings, and the air strike threat forces the French player to keep his artillery and headquarters under cover in inconvenient places.

In the chrome department we find the out of gas rules for the French armor, refugees clogging the roads, and the only Rommel counter outside of a North Africa game.

Overall, the game is fun to play. The Germans have the edge, but the French can win even without the optional rules, and they even get to attack some once the 1st DCR comes in (if they have gas). Each game tends to have two distinct phases; the early static river crossing battles, and the subsequent breakout from the bridgehead that inaugurates the mobile part of the battle. While the crossing is nearly inevitable, the Germans must get to the mobile phase of the game early and largely intact if they are to win.

I have a few problems with the design, mainly centering around unit values and combat results. I am puzzled by the high attack strengths assigned to German anti-tank and recon units. I question the historical validity of these strengths. I find it hard to believe German anti-tank units were that powerful or were used en masse in 1940. I can't contest the strength of the recon units, but the result of their high attack strength is they are often used to bust up powerful defensive positions, a most ahistorical use

of recon assets. I also dislike the live or die aspect of combat. This may actually be appropriate for the French B units, but it seems wrong that four hours of combat would destroy a good quality French or German battalion. Some manner of retreat or temporarily dead but coming back later result would make more sense.

My problems with *Rommel at the Meuse* are strictly those that a fan of design for cause and process-heavy simulations would have with this design style. The game is fun to play, and while it is not a heavy simulation, a lot of important concepts are included in a clean, easy to understand way. The battlefield situation is interesting, and the two distinct phases of the battle provide a nice challenge to your ability to shift tactical gears. I really like this as an introductory game. Some may say that it is too hard for a first-experience game, but I agree with Richard Berg that difficulty is relative; the uninitiated don't have a basis for comparison. If you don't tell your new opponent its hard to learn, he may never realize it. What's important is an interesting and fun experience that's over in one sitting, and *Rommel at the Meuse* has it. If the graphics were of high quality, I would carry this game everywhere, prepared for the chance to evangelize. I might anyway.

### German Forces

**XVth Panzer Corps**

1/84 7-5-5	2/84 6-2-5	3/84 6-2-5	4/84 6-2-5	5/84 6-2-5	6/84 4-5-5	7/84 3-2-5	8/84 5-2-5	9/84 2-2-5	10/84 2-2-5
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**Elements of 8th Infantry Division**

1/84 5-4-4	2/84 5-4-4	3/84 5-4-4	4/84 4-2-5
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German 8th Infantry units must remain north of the xx03 hexrow (inclusive).

**Elements of 32nd Infantry Division**

1/84 5-4-4	2/84 5-4-4	3/84 5-4-4	4/84 4-2-5
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German 32nd Infantry units must remain south of the xx09 hexrow (inclusive).

**5th Panzer Division**

1/1/15 1-4-5	2/1/15 1-4-5	3/1/15 2-4-5	4/1/15 1-4-5	5/1/15 1-4-5	6/1/15 1-4-5	7/1/15 1-4-5	8/1/15 1-4-5	9/1/15 1-4-5	10/1/15 1-4-5
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**7th Panzer Division**

1/2/3 2-4-5	2/2/3 2-4-5	3/2/3 3-4-5	4/2/3 2-4-5	5/2/3 2-4-5	6/2/3 2-4-5	7/2/3 2-4-5	8/2/3 2-4-5	9/2/3 2-4-5	10/2/3 2-4-5
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**Notes:**

German player may enter 4 battalions each turn. HQ's do not count against this limit. No artillery before Turn 5. No units of the 5th Panzer before Turn 4. Rommel enters automatically on Turn 4. No units of the 8th or 32nd Infantry before Turn 5.

**German units exited**

**Air units**

Available	Used
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**German units eliminated**

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## Avalon Hill's *Geronimo*

Published in 1995 • Designed by **Richard Berg**reviewed by **Wade Hinkle**

The great chief Tashunka Witco sat silently on his magnificent war horse and waited silently as the column of American cavalry drew closer. Crazy Horse, the disdainful white barbarians called him. This was partly because so few of the white horse soldiers spoke any of the language of The People - the Sioux people. But it was mostly a mark of profound disrespect.

Crazy Horse. Crazy indeed. For today, this fateful day in the early autumn of 1872, the Sioux, for so long the virtually undisputed Lords of the Great Plains, were fueled by a blood lust that might indeed have been called crazy by the white soldiers had they been able to glimpse the Sioux's frenzied preparations to strike the hated American cavalry.

The Sioux, guided by their war chieftain Crazy Horse, perhaps the finest military mind the Indian nations of the West had ever produced, intended the coming battle as the savage first blow in a campaign to drive the white man from the Sioux homeland. For the Sioux, the initial trickle of white prospectors and explorers in their South Dakota home had turned into a flood. And this flood had swelled to the point where there would soon be no room for the Sioux.

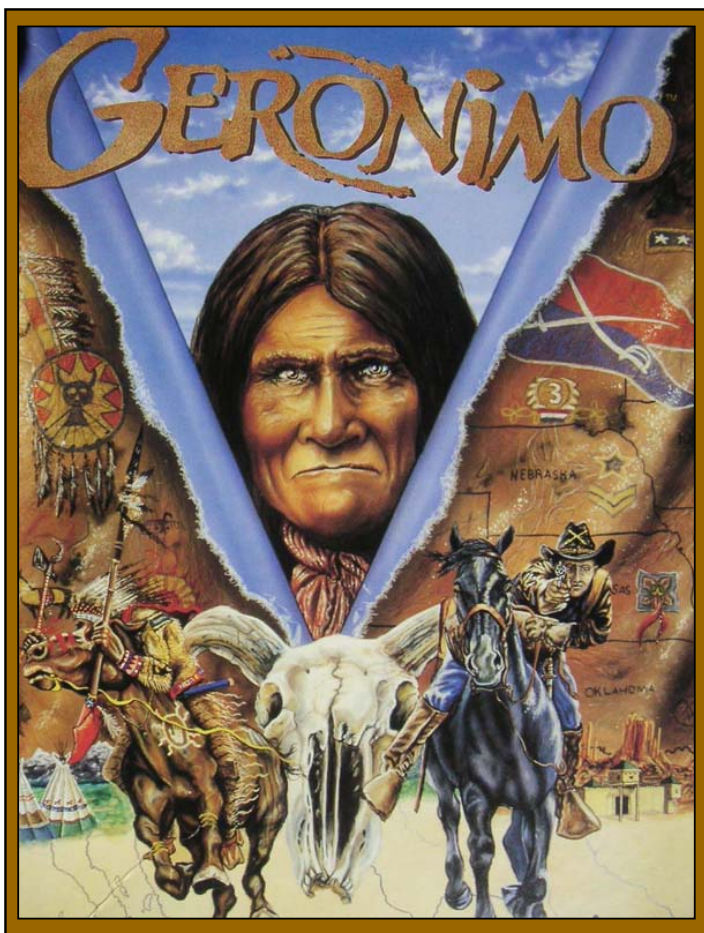
In the preceding few years, the Sioux and their neighboring tribes had begun reacting violently to the white man's ever-increasing encroachment into the Great Plains. Just three years ago, the Sioux themselves, led by another great warrior chieftain, Red Cloud, had moved sizable war parties into next-door Montana, attacking settlements and the

construction crews pushing working on the new the railroad. But these Indian attacks had ultimately backfired, as the US Government responded by pouring more and more soldiers into the area. And now, with their life-blood, the buffalo, disappearing rapidly, with settlers pouring in a torrent, and with the American army threatening the Sioux's very settlements, a leader had arisen to whip the Sioux into full fury.

Crazy Horse planned carefully, and by threatening to attack settlements on the South Dakota western frontier, had been able to draw General Nelson Miles, veteran campaigner, and seven companies of US cavalry, accompanied by artillery, into a pursuit of the Indians. And now the largest war party the Sioux had ever assembled waited as the Americans rode into the ambush Crazy Horse had carefully prepared.

History, of course, has recorded the result of this now most-famous battle of the Nineteenth Century's Indian wars. It has recorded how Crazy Horse inflicted upon the US Army its single most costly day in the history of those wars. It has recorded how the initially-surprised troopers dropped

in scores at the Indians' initial attack. How over sixty percent of the American force perished. How the survivors desperately formed defensive positions by piling the bodies of dead horses and their dead comrades in front of them as shields. And how the final rush of the Indians was only stopped by the last few remaining artillery shells. And yet history has also recorded how this, the greatest feat of arms ever achieved by the Indian tribes of the American West, was also ultimately the end of the Sioux nation, which lost over forty percent of its





warriors in the battle and, most devastatingly of all, its great leader. (Legend persists that it was General Miles himself who felled Crazy Horse with the final bullet in his pistol.)

You do remember this famous battle from your American history class, right? If you don't, congratulations. You were awake in class the day that Miss Souder explained how Crazy Horse led the Indians at the Battle of the Little Big Horn in 1876. But the battle described above did really happen. Only it occurred just a few weeks ago, as a group of Northern Virginia gamers played *Geronimo*, Avalon Hill's new game of the Indian wars that flared on the Western frontier from 1850 through 1890.

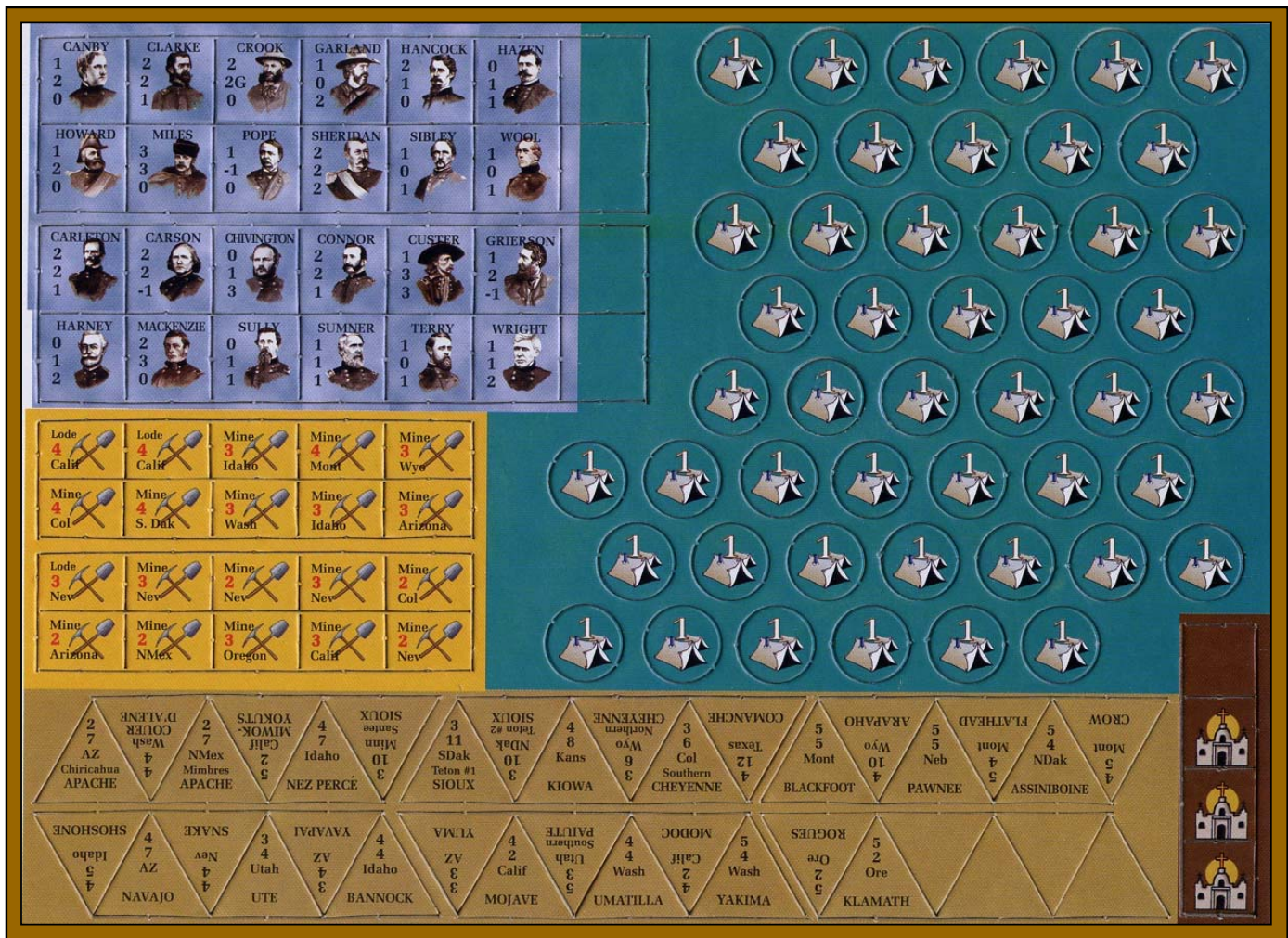
#### And Now for Something Completely Different...

*Geronimo* does not meet the Monty Python definition of something completely different, but it is certainly not in any respect a run-of-the-mill wargame. It is, to begin with, a strategic-level game with a vengeance. The operating theater is essentially all of the western United States, with games lasting anywhere from twenty to forty years. As econo-

mists like to say, in the long-term, anything is possible, and you'll believe it when you play *Geronimo*, as cavalry columns gobble up territory with an agility German panzer commanders could only dream of, while Indian raiding parties appear to be beamed back and forth by the *Enterprise's* transporter. First-time players will find themselves shaking their heads and reminding each other the movements are taking years to accomplish.

Second, the game scale makes *Geronimo* mostly a contest of marshaling resources. The American player is trying basically to pump sufficient resources (settlers, mines, railroads) into individual territories so that Congress will admit them as states. As these resources spread, they reduce the ability of the indigenous Indians to survive (partly because buffalo begin to disappear). Military operations are, in a sense, secondary in the game, and combat itself is highly abstracted. I've mostly imagined the colorful tactical description of the battle described above. There are a few, but not many, tactical considerations in the game's combat system. Mostly, combat consists of adding abstract





strength points, a few modifiers, rolling dice, and looking up how much attrition has occurred.

Third (and this is a point I'll return to at the end), *Geronimo* is one of the few wargames (at least I hope there are only a few of them) that encourages players to perpetrate war crimes and rewards at least the American player handsomely when he does. Genocide is explicitly offered to the Americans as a war aim in the rules. (Indian players lose three victory points for each tribe that becomes extinct, as the rules charmingly put it.) This made all of the review players slightly queasy, and led to the suggestion by one that Avalon Hill should have subtitled the game *America's Balkan Wars*.

Perhaps the most strikingly different aspect of *Geronimo's* design is the fact players draw lots at the beginning of each five-year turn to determine who will play the Americans and who the various Indian tribes. (See the complete description of *Geronimo's* sequence of play at the end of this article.) This means that over the course of most games, players will likely play both the Indian and US sides. Switching back and forth like this certainly makes game strategy more complex. (Imagine, as the American player, reducing the tribes in

Idaho almost to extinction and then having to play them next turn.) But the real reason for this aspect of the game design is to correct an otherwise fundamental play imbalance. As the rules put it, the Indians can't win, "at least in the sense that they will retain control of the West." I think it is open to question how well the game system corrects for this imbalance, and this may in fact be the game's biggest flaw. But to understand why, we first need to cover some more of the game's objectives and structure.

### It's Statehood, Stupid

The game objectives seem fairly straightforward at first glance. In multi-player games (using from two to five players), players are attempting to earn victory points or reduce their opponents' totals. The game can be played solitaire, and in those cases the only measure of success is whether the US manages to admit more states (fourteen) than were actually created during the same period in history.

Indian players get victory points for a variety of actions such as conducting a successful raid or attacking settlements, mines, or railroads. They also get points for winning battles with other Indian tribes (the tribes did indeed frequently fight one another)

or with US troops (wherein Indians get one victory point for each US strength point lost that exceeds Indian losses). Indian players can lose points chiefly by having the tribes under their temporary control become extinct. For the Indians, most victory points come in ones or twos. Essentially the only big victory point payoff for Indians is to successfully attack a town. Towns are worth five victory points, but because they are five times larger than settlements, they are more heavily defended, and receive a nearly prohibitive die roll modifier.

US players can also get victory points in ones and twos for winning battles against Indians, for completing the Transcontinental railroad, and for forcing tribes onto reservations. But the US player gets really big victory points for turning a territory into a state. The actual number of victory points depends on the number of players. In a three-player game, states are worth ten victory points, seven victory points with four players, and five victory points with five players.

State-creation is worth so much that it is in fact the dominant objective for the US player, and preventing it is the dominant strategy for the Indians. As mentioned above, states are created by amassing resources in a territory. Each individual territory has a specified number of resource points needed to qualify for admission to statehood. Settlements, towns, railroads, and mines all have resource points associated with them. At the start of each round of play (see the sequence of play summary for details on this), the US player gets to place a minimum of one new settlement in any territory he wants. He may get more new resources than that, as he rolls a dice and has a ten percent chance of receiving a mine and additional settlement to place somewhere, and a thirty percent chance of getting a railroad marker.

The number of rounds in a game varies with the number of players. There will be eighty-four rounds in the standard game and 168 in the campaign game for three players, and eighty rounds in that standard game and 160 rounds in the campaign game for four players. As these numbers make clear, the United States side is going to be awash in resources during the course of the game, and in all likelihood is going to create states like nobody's business.

For Indian players, stemming the tide of settlement is therefore something like standing in front of a tidal wave. A proactive Indian strategy of attacking the US military or raiding (that is conducting small-scale attacks) is going to lose for certain. The Indians will suffer attrition, which kills them in the mid-term, and earns them only penny-packet victory points to boot. In the battle described at the beginning of this article, the Indians won four victory

points to three for the US, but only because they had a bloodlust modifier in a Shaman, or chance event, card. (See the sequence of play summary for more on Shaman cards.) And even then, the Indian player lost over forty percent of his tribe doing it.

### Roll Six to Win the West

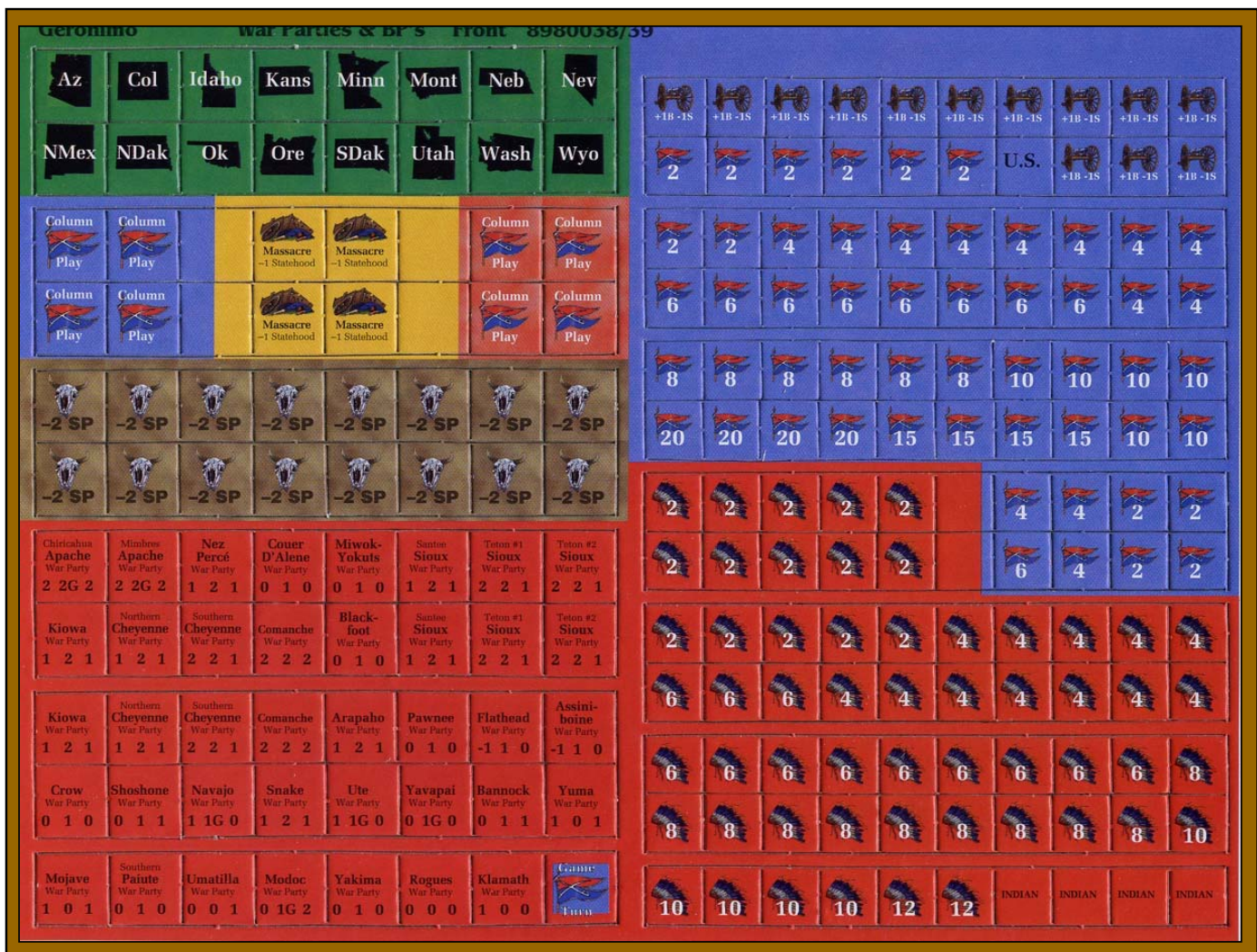
For players controlling the Indians in a given player turn, the only hope is to try and prevent the US player from creating states. Essentially this means attempting to attack resources as they are placed in territories that are close to meeting the threshold for statehood. This is easier said than done. Only some Indian tribes are active each turn (others are in reservations or inactive), so there may be no tribes nearby to use for this purpose. Tribes hardly ever cooperate, so concentrating forces is difficult. And there is no guarantee your fellow Indian players will help. They can in some circumstances get points for attacking your tribes' villages while you are off fighting the blue coats. Moreover, most US players will position concentrated forces near areas whose resources most need protection, making Indian attacks on resources even more difficult.

Obviously, the side-rotation rule is supposed to correct this imbalance. The United States is inevitably going to pile up victory points, so the game system tries to correct for this by making it impossible for players to predict what side they will play next turn, and by giving each player an equal chance at being the US player in any given turn. Unfortunately, in my opinion at least, the cure may be as bad as the disease.

Side rotation does indeed alter play strategy by introducing the element of uncertainty. Neither side can plan ahead. The US player, for instance, risks a lot in pursuing a multi-turn strategy for concentrating cavalry columns to attack Indian settlements. Those may be your settlements next turn! This does make for interesting twists to game play. But those twists are only interesting eventually. Their unintended drawback is to make the game completely non-intuitive initially, especially to gamers used to more standard game systems. Most of my review group needed at least one game, and some two, before they got the hang of winning strategies. This gives the game a very high time cost to players who may be interested in learning it. If our experience is a guide, beginners will easily need eight hours to set up and play their first multi-player games, not counting rules reading time. That's a lot to learn a one-off game system, especially one that requires at least three and more probably four people to play.

Why more probably four players, you ask? Because of the game system's other big flaw. With any kind of experienced players at all, the US side is easily





going to create two states per turn. Most US players in our games did much better than that, averaging three and occasionally four, especially once the Indians begin to be attrited. This level of victory point generation generates big margins in favor of the US player in a given turn. It was not unusual in our play for the US player to score more than double the number of victory points of his competitors. This has the very unfortunate consequence of meaning the game outcome is all too often settled by the chit pulls that choose sides at the start of the game. If one player gets lucky and plays the US side a disproportionate amount of time, he is, on average, going to win. Note, by the way, the standard-length four-turn, three-player game is guaranteed to have this problem, as one or two of the players will play the US side at least twice to everyone else's once or never.

At least for our group, the dominant role chance seems to play in deciding game outcomes was seen as a serious drawback. You can minimize it, of course, by playing the longer campaign game with the largest possible numbers of players. This increases the number of chit pulls, and thus increases

the possibilities of an even distribution of US player turns. There is still a seventeen percent chance someone will never get to play the US side even in a five-person campaign game. And of course, the longer and bigger the game, the more difficult it will be for the average group to manage the logistics of playing it.

### C'mon - Say Something Nice About the Game

Even with the drawbacks noted above, the game does have its positive aspects. One pleasant surprise for me was that it seems to interest non-gamers in a way a more-traditional shoot-em-up war-game might not. I did convince a complete non-gamer to take a shot at a two-player game one weekend when Mother Nature rained out plans of a more romantic nature, and she enjoyed herself. The lack of emphasis on combat, and the strong historical content of the game probably makes it of appeal to a broader audience, though I'm a little concerned about whether newbies would stick out the game's high learning curve.

My group did also enjoy many aspects of playing the game, in part because it covers an under-simu-

lated time and place, and partly because of its slightly off beat game system. I suspect lots of experienced gamers will want to buy the game just for its coverage of the period, or to fill out their collection. But I would bet playing frequency will eventually be bi-modal. Most people will play a couple of times and give it up as too checkers-like or too time- and effort-consuming. Those who like playing *games qua games* rather than as a simulation of military strategy may well decide this is a favorite and play it often.

### **I Don't Mean to Sound Like the PC Mafia, But...**

I understand gaming is first and foremost a hobby, and we are playing games here and not, thereby, endorsing the political philosophy or morality represented by the historical figures portrayed in the simulation. Having said that, however, it should be pointed out that *Geronimo* is a pretty morally problematic game. With all due respect to Richard Berg, who is a fine person and well-respected senior member of our community, Avalon Hill ought to take a close look at the gestalt of the games and its rules.

Pure and simple, this game models (and as a game strategy encourages) the attempted near-extirpation of an entire people. Now, true, what is being modeled is historical reality. But all of us play reviewers were made highly uneasy by the way the game system (with a few exceptions) actually rewards behavior that today would find you hauled before a UN dock in a war crimes trial.

I personally would have been more comfortable if some designer notes or similar materials had been included setting the game in a larger moral context. But to the extent the game designers did this at all, they did it ham-fistedly, by including without other elaboration or discussion, quotes in highlighted boxes from notable US generals demonstrating that they were racists and bent on the extermination of the Indians. (Example: Phil Sheridan's famous statement "The only good Indians I ever saw were dead.") This strikes me as sort of like demonstrating racism is wrong by telling an inappropriate racist joke to make the point. Berg and Avalon Hill could, and should, have done more.

### **And Speaking of Designer Notes, and Other Nits...**

It is difficult to understand why there are so few designer notes per se in the game. Surely a system as novel and complex as this one deserved it. There are a few notes on play sprinkled throughout the rules, but nothing like a discussion of play strategy or tricks or traps. And there are several other minor annoyances, such as:

- The rules are a mess. Their organization is poor, important points are buried visually within paragraphs and are seemingly applied at random. You have to read every word of the rules very carefully. For example, the combat section of the rules does not tell you all of the things necessary to conduct combat. And, as readers of on-line services know, there is a goodly amount of important errata for the game.
- The rules are difficult to use for play. There is no index or table of contents. There is a sort of glossary of terms buried within the rule book, but it's hard to flip to immediately. They should have been on a separate card. You are going to spend a lot of time leafing through the rule book.
- Set up time could have been shortened considerably by printing initial locations of resources and tribes on the map. They aren't, so set up entails lots of enjoyable card-shuffling, page-turning, and eye strain.

### **The Bottom Line**

Very different. Probably a disappointment to those who want skill and military strategy to decide the outcome of most games. May be appealing to those for whom the game's the thing. A very interesting, and seldom-covered, period of history and location. And somewhat troubling from a moral perspective, though perhaps (one hopes) thought provoking on that score, too.

### **Sequence of Play for *Geronimo***

- **Side Determination Phase** - As mentioned in the main text, this is perhaps the most important step in the game, and unfortunately it is completely determined by random chance. Players draw chits from a cup. One player will draw the US chit, making him or her commander of US forces for the turn. Draw the US chit just once more on average than your opponent(s), and you stand a very good chance of winning the game.
- **Card Distribution Phase** - The deck of Shaman (action) cards is shuffled, as is the deck of Indian tribes not on reservations. These are dealt to players, and the US player also receives and places new military assets and commanders.
- **Player Order Determination Phase** - Determined by a die roll for the first turn; automatically the player with the least victory points thereafter.



- **Card Play Phase** - This phase takes place in rounds, with three segments in each round.

- **Resource Allocation Segment** - Regardless of who is eligible to play a card next, the US player first places a settlement somewhere on the map and rolls to see if he receives additional economic resources or settlements.

- **Shaman Card Choice Segment** - The active player then plays a Shaman card, which may itself enable or cause actions (example: The Gatling gun is invented), or discards a Shaman card (for instance, an Indian player would not want the Gatling gun invented), which ends further play for the person in that round. A played card permits players to proceed to the next segment of this phase (the Operations Segment).

- **Operation Segment** - The active player may now perform any actions permitted US military columns or Indian tribes. Generally, US forces are either in fort, which makes them more difficult to attack and permits them to receive reinforcements, or on patrol, which permits them to move into adjacent states or attack Indians in the same state. Combat (if any) is resolved at the end of the Operation Segment. The next player sitting clockwise to the player whose round just ended then begins a new round. The rounds continue until all Shaman cards have been played or discarded.

- **Survival Phase** - Actions during the course of the turn may have deprived Indian tribes of the resources or population they need to sustain themselves in their home territories. Tribes whose resources fall below survival level will lose battle strength (essentially meaning they have lost braves capable of fighting and/or the infrastructure needed to sustain their villages). Tribes that lose half or more of their strength roll to see if they are forced to relocate to a reservation.
- **Statehood Phase** - States that lose more than specified levels of population or economic resources cost the US player victory points. Territories with more than specified levels of human and economic resources are made states. The victory points for state creation are so large relative to all other activities for either US or Indian players states

are essentially the be-all and end-all of the game.

- **End of Turn Phase** - Victory points are tallied, cards restacked, and US commanders removed from play pending their re-allocation next turn.

Thanks for help in preparing this review are due to Northern Virginia PacWarriors Sean Barnett and Dean Cheng, and to Marian Wait.

## Moments in History's *Piercing the Reich*

Published in 1995 • Designed by Dirk Blennemann

reviewed by **Carl Gruber**

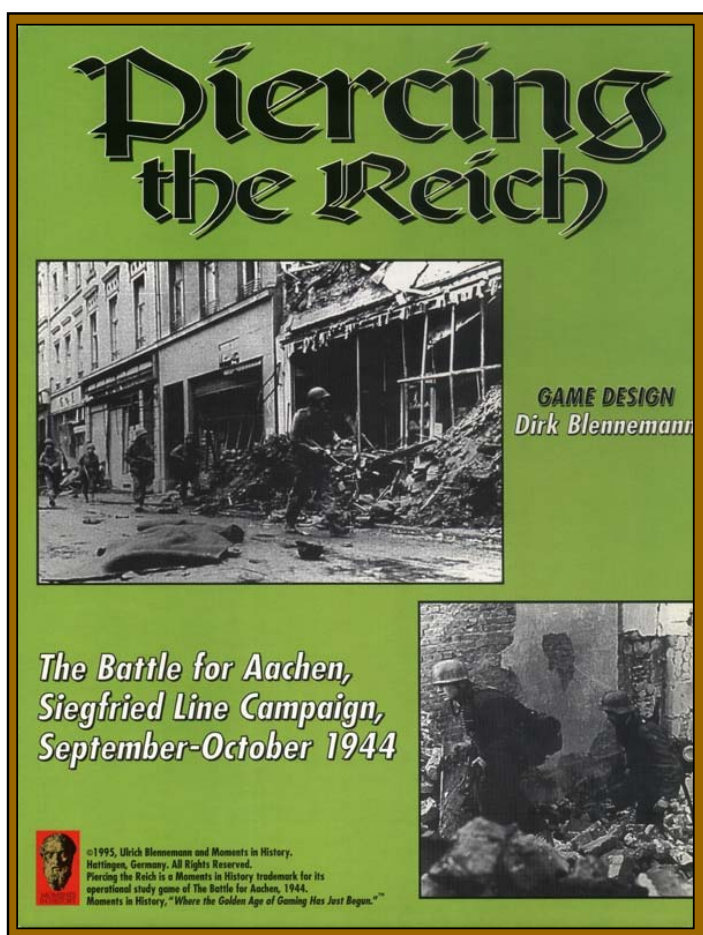
Remember TSR's *Terrible Swift Sword*, or Victory Games' *Omaha Beachhead*? With their garish colors and tortured terrain symbology, no one could say the maps for either of these games had that play me look. Yet both of these were fine games. Such is the case with Moments in History's latest release, *Piercing the Reich*. In the last few years, such a high standard in wargame graphics has been set by The Gamers and GMT Games we may be getting spoiled. In fact, modern computer graphic programs make it hard to produce an ugly map. Following the quality of their first three games, one wonders how Moments in History managed to drop the ball on *Piercing the Reich* and turn out a map done in pastels.

At Origins in Philadelphia this summer, where *Piercing the Reich* was released, most of the people who saw (and didn't buy) the game commented mainly on "that godawful map". The counters are very well done but the map, with its pastel greens and pinks, is more appropriate to a nursery room than a battlefield. Having played and enjoyed my share of ugly games (*Imperium Romanum II*, anyone?) and being very excited about *Piercing the Reich*'s predecessor, *Triumphant Fox*, I took a deep breath and bought the game. I'm glad to say it's one of the better World War II games in my collection.

*Piercing the Reich* covers the American operations against the city of Aachen and Westwall defenses in September-October 1944. On the American side, we have the 1st, 29th and 30th Infantry Divisions, part of another infantry division and the 2nd and 3rd Armored Divisions. The German line up features a

few tired and badly trained Volksgrenadier divisions, two under-equipped but experienced infantry divisions, 9th Panzer, what's left of 116th Panzer (it starts off as a weak battlegroup but is withdrawn, reinforced and returns with some real teeth), and 3rd Panzergrenadiers. In addition to their fighting units, the Germans also have the Westwall (or Siegfried Line) defenses. One of the interesting points of the game is it shows just how weak those defenses were, really nothing more than thin belts of dragons teeth, anti-tank ditches and pillboxes rather than any series of Kursk-like entrenchments. They cannot withstand a determined assault and are more like speed bumps than fortifications. The stage is therefore set for this long battle in which the Americans had finally reached the point at which they could stand up to and fight the Germans on almost equal footing, while the Germans have the same late-war hodgepodge assembly of good and bad units that they used to launch their Ardennes offensive some months later. Variable victory conditions for the Americans also keep the Germans guessing as to where the hammer is going to fall.

As mentioned before, *Piercing the Reich* is based on the same system used in *Triumphant Fox* and is in itself an operational World War II system that rivals The Gamers' Operational Combat Series. The sequence of play is initiative-driven; players compare die rolls to see who gets the next impulse. The higher roller goes while a marker on the impulse track adds a favorable die-roll modifier for the losing player's next initiative die roll. Therefore, the longer you get the initiative and run successive impulses, the greater the chance the opposing player will get the initiative





for the next impulse.

On receiving the initiative, the player commences operations with one of his divisions. Operations include:

- Movement actions,
- Headquarters relocation,
- Refits (or rallying disrupted units),
- Building improved defenses,
- Infiltration attacks (Germans only) and...
- Hasty, regular or prepared combat.

These actions all cost varying numbers of action points. Players are not limited to activating a unit once during an impulse either. For example, you could activate a battalion to move it, then perform a prepared attack, rally it (if needed) and then move again, as long as you do not exceed the number of action points allotted that division.

The number of allotted action points is determined by the division's formation activation marker on an action point track. The German 526th Volksgrenadier has an action point rating of five. However, once a division activates, the formation marker moves down one number on the track so that the 526th's next activation would give it just four points.

The formation activation markers can go all the way down to zero and at the beginning of the next turn, can climb back up the track to recover action points for that turn's operations. However, if a division has been so active that its formation marker goes down to zero, it will never recover all the way back to its highest activation rating unless it spends a turn idle which makes players rest their units to get the most out of them.

Another feature of the activation system is reaction. When the active player moves a unit into the zone

of control of the non-phasing player, the latter can roll against the division headquarters' initiative value. He then receive a varying but limited number of action points to be used immediately for anything he wants (including attacks). While not overly hard to master, the initiative and activation system is hard to describe. And yet it produces a great amount of tension and is one of the game's best features. I've seen many penetrations of the German defenses go unexploited because the attacking division simply ran out of action points and would have to sit out the next turn to do anything worthwhile on the turn after. If that isn't in itself a good argument for operational reserves, I don't know of another one.

Combat is performed a unit at a time which in *Piercing the Reich* are mostly battalions. To attack,

you spend one action point for a hasty attack, two for regular attacks and three for prepared attacks. Aside from the action point costs, the difference between the three are headquarters support and support by adjacent friendly units.

- In the case of a hasty attack, no adjacent friendly units participate and there is no headquarters combat support (die roll modifiers for artillery and specialist troops).

- A regular attack allows one-half headquarters support and a die roll modifier of plus one adjacent unit of the same formation as the attacker.
- Prepared attacks provide full headquarters support and a plus two modifier for adjacent friendlies. Obviously, prepared attacks are the most effective but their high action point cost can make them prohibitive. They are best saved for use against entrenched enemy units in protective terrain.

Armor is important in combat because it too adds





[illegible]

defensive and offensive die roll modifiers. Some infantry units have an anti-tank rating which is compared to the other side's armor rating (if tanks are present). The difference between the two is the die roll modifier. The same applies to combats where both sides have tanks. Simply add or subtract the weaker and stronger armored ratings to get a plus or minus die roll modifier. Armored and anti-tank ratings are also modified for terrain. Usually, the worse the terrain, the worse off armor is and the better the anti-tank effects. Those poor trembling Volksgrenadier retirees and adolescents grasping their panzerfausts can therefore take some comfort from rough terrain and Westwall pillboxes.

That's not all: Dirk Blennemann has given us a Tiger tank scare rule in which the GIs might mistake any German tank for the dreaded Tiger. I'm not sure how realistic this rule really is (it makes the Americans look like a bunch of hysterical greenhorns - this is Europe 1944, not the Kasserine Pass!) but it adds a lot of fun. One more element of combat is uncertainty as to actual combat strength. Before computing odds, players draw strength chits for their sides. The combat strength on the chit is de-

terminated according to whether the attacker is making a hasty, regular or prepared attack and whether the defender is disrupted, in good order or has entrenched. Generally, the attack strengths increase according to the respective attack intensity of condition of the defender, but Dirk has also thrown in a few wild chits just to keep you wondering. The combat odds are then determined, all die roll modifiers (which are cumulative) are compared and players roll to get a numerical result. Results can be taken as losses and/or hexes retreated. Some of the results are printed in boldface, which requires the owning player to do a die-roll check against the unit's efficiency rating to see if it disrupts. Disrupted units are basically worthless, are sitting ducks for the next attack and cannot really do anything but rally.

The entire combat routine sounds complex and is in fact hard to describe. Once you get used to it, however, it is quite simple. The large number of die roll modifiers ensure sometimes even a small force can whip a larger one. To add one final kink to the combat routine, the Germans have infiltration attacks. The designer never stated exactly what this



represents, but you get the feeling it is German night raids, sudden mortar barrages and so forth intended to disrupt and surprise the Americans (which is exactly what it does). It's a good rule and gives the better German divisions something better to do than take it on the chin all the time.

A game of this intricacy (not to be confused with complexity) is hard to review and describe. *Piercing the Reich* and its sister game, *Triumphant Fox* are both highly original and creative designs. They manage not only to simulate so much of the nuts and bolts of World War II warfare, but also successfully show the effects of unit training and morale and command efficiency in a really playable and exciting format. I actually asked to review this game because I like it so much, I didn't want to see it go down for its unattractive map. A game this good deserves not only a better map but a chance to prove itself in spite of regrettable graphics. If you can get over the map, you will find *Piercing the Reich* to be one of the best wargames produced in the last few years.

## The Gamers'

# Black Wednesday

Published in 1995 • Designed by **David Friedrichs**

reviewed by **George Pearson**

For some time now, GMT Games and The Gamers have maintained a more-or-less friendly rivalry. Both companies have gained fame from their highly popular series games, state-of-the-art maps and counters, and an admirable blending of innovation and playability. It sometimes seems Dean Essig and Gene Billingsley, perfectionists both, are locked in a duel of upstaging one another in the realms of graphic presentation, game topic, and design. Occasionally, one detects a whiff of paranoia generated by this earnest match-up: Witness The Gamers' recent decision to stop tracking the progress of games in the pipeline, lest rivals anticipate new releases. But this competition, friendly or otherwise, has proven a boon to consumers, producing one must-buy wargame after another. With *Black Wednesday*, The Gamers have once again set a benchmark, creating THE standard for tactical, World War II gaming.

*Black Wednesday* is the seventh game in the Tactical Combat Series. The game chronicles an attack by three (count 'em, three) Russian divisions against the Spanish Blue Division at Krasni Bor in February, 1943. As is their wont, The Gamers offer a component-rich package: a Tactical Combat Series 3.1 series rule book, a special book for *Black Wednesday* (packed with a generous number of maps for out-of-the-box play), two 22" x 34" maps, two booklets of charts and tables (one for each player; always a nice touch), and a whopping 1,040 counters. At \$39, *Black Wednesday* is quite a bargain.

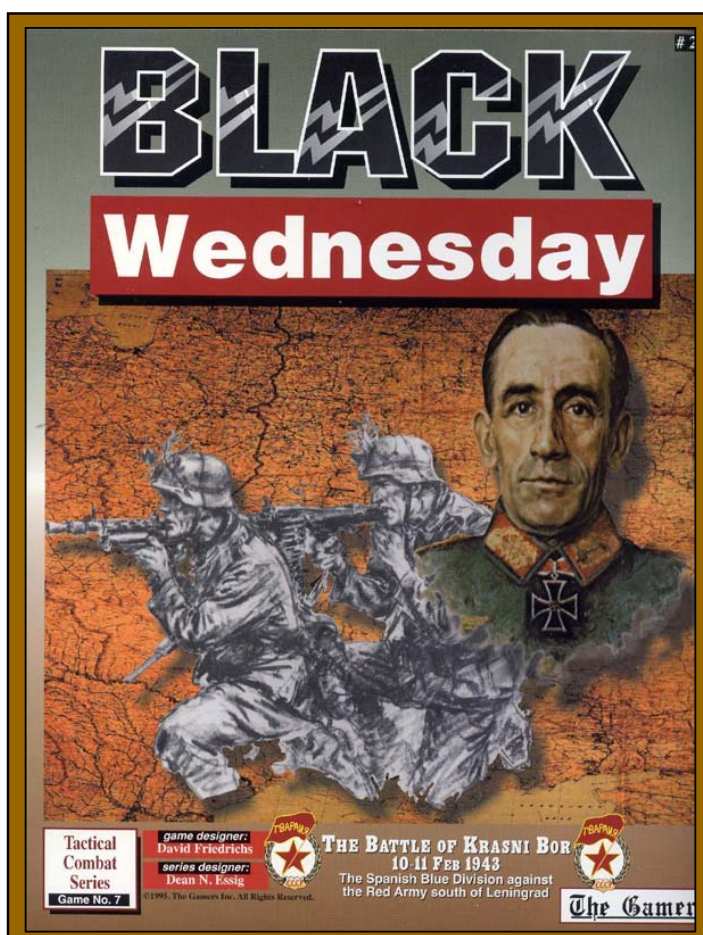
Graphically, things have come a long way since the scrawly muddle of *Bloody 110*, the first entry in the

series. Essig has become something of a keyboard virtuoso, using his computer to create an impressive and distinctive style. Perhaps inspired (or challenged) by the awesome pictorials of GMT Games' *Great Battles of History* series, he has created a counter set that even a hardened miniaturist could love. Infantry is depicted in a variety of poses and uniforms, sporting weapons from submachine guns

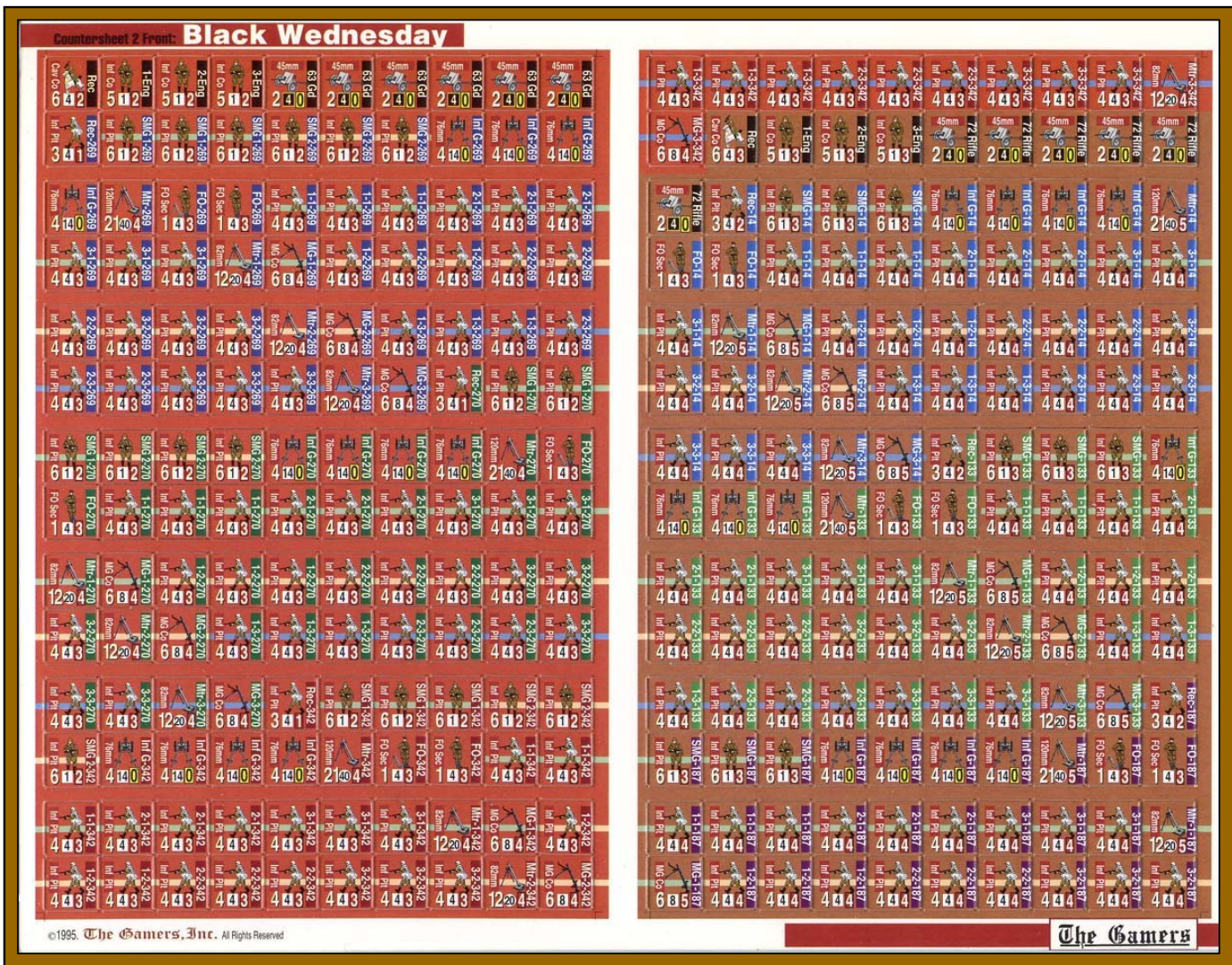
to cavalry sabers, while tanks and guns appear in profile, overhead, and three-quarter shots. The counters are nicely detailed without looking busy, despite imparting a goodly amount of information. Essig wisely forgoes the circus-rider look of some of the recent Gamers releases, such as *April's Harvest*.

In *Black Wednesday*, he selected somber green and brown earth tones to convey the bleak, frigid desolation of Russia in winter. Lest the map look so subdued as to be blah, trenches, shell holes, buildings, and the railroad were rendered in minute detail, providing a contrast with the barren woods and swathes of open terrain. There's even a downed FW-190 fighter, one of the more peculiar terrain features you'll come across (and yes, Virginia, it is functional, serving

as a reference point for artillery spotting). The rules and chart layouts, liberally sprinkled with photos and illustrations, are crisp and clear. The game is packed in a box with an eye-catching, if somewhat neo-fascist looking, collage, featuring General Muñoz, the original commander of the Spanish Blue Division (but not, oddly enough, at the actual battle of Krasni Bor). All-in-all, *Black Wednesday* makes a pretty good case that the computer's proper role in our hobby is not in the realm of simulation, but graphics; at least in the hands of a talent like Essig.







Though Essig authored the original system, David Friedrichs did the actual design work on *Black Wednesday*. Each turn is twenty minutes, each hex 125 yards, and most units represent platoons or individual guns and vehicles. With the exception of the tumbling-dice artillery, the system's basic rules have always been pretty straightforward. The Gamers have shown a commendable willingness to modify, fine tune, and even chop root and branch in order to improve their various systems. Coupled with a broad topical selection ranging from France to the Pacific, the Tactical Combat Series has proven to be a happy blend of the familiar, the new and the improved.

After six series games and several versions, the Tactical Combat Series system has acquired tried and true status. The sequence of play is disarmingly simple:

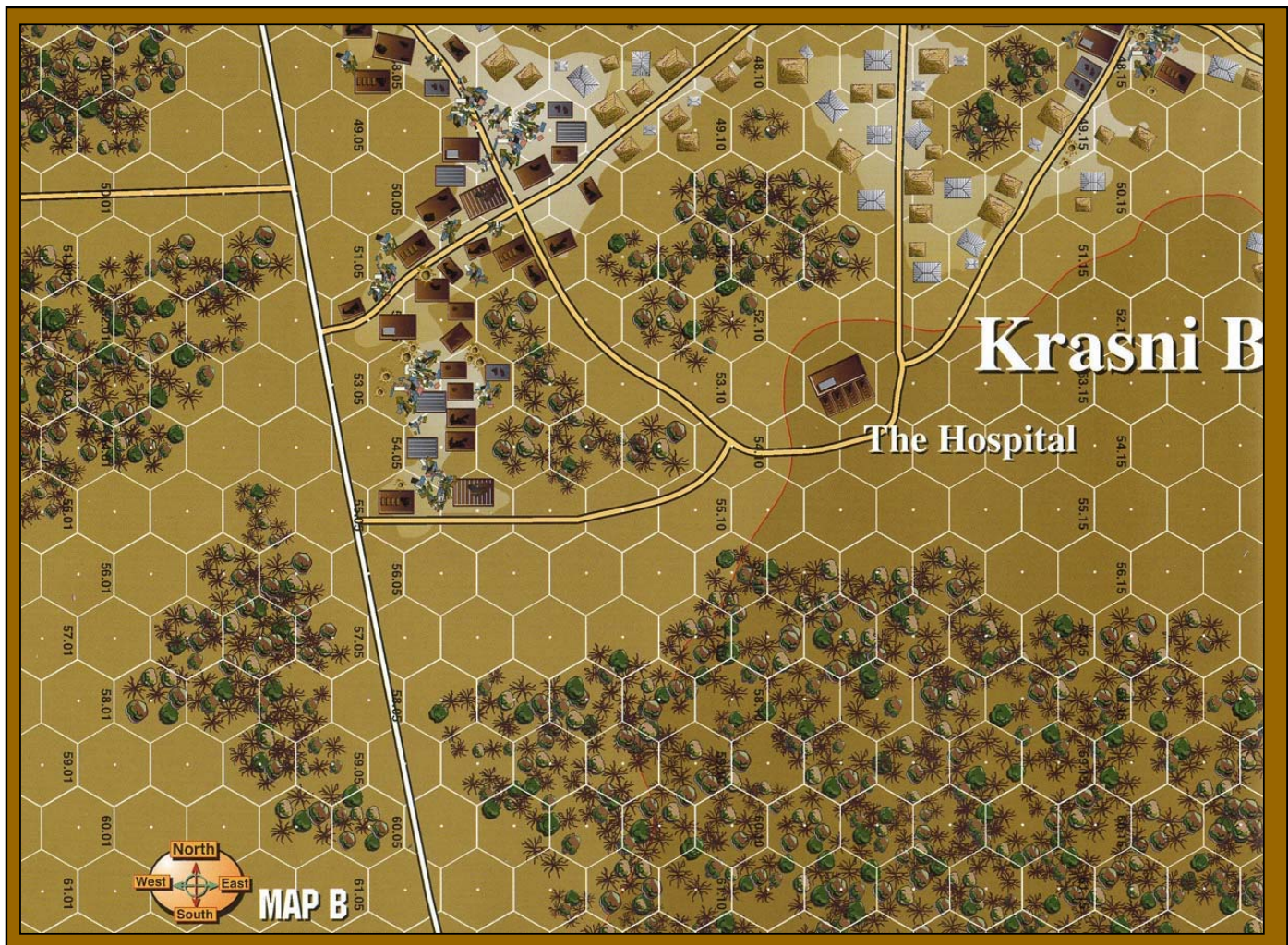
- Command Phase,
- Aircraft Phase,
- Action Phase,

- Clean-Up Phase.

Things are relatively sequential (I do my Command Phase, you do yours), though the determination of who executes their Action Phase first is randomly determined. This, plus the fact the non-phasing player has the option of overwatch fire (a form of opportunity fire), keeps both players involved in the proceedings. Not surprisingly, most of the action takes place in the Action Phase.

Compared to the likes of *Advanced Squad Leader*, the action in the Action Phase is pretty straightforward; no bailing-out tank crews, exploding mine dogs, or sewer combat here. Forgoing the gritty detail of *Advanced Squad Leader*, the Tactical Combat Series manages an interesting, and at times elegant, representation of small unit combat. The key to the Action Phase is that a player can do things in any order desired: This stack moves, that artillery battery fires smoke, these tanks conduct an overrun, and so on. A unit's mode (either fire or move) determines whether the unit is maneuvering or shooting, and what sort of modifiers are accrued when it is fired upon (for example, guys moving in the open





tend to die). Only units in move mode actually move. Move mode units may also engage in combat, entering an opponent's hex with assaults (infantry), overruns (vehicles), and combined attacks (vehicles and infantry). Such attacks are a very bloody business, and usually require the target be softened up with artillery or suppressive fire actions to be successful.

The phasing player can designate units for a suppressive fire action, allowing them to fire at enemy targets. Suppressive fire actions can be used in a variety of ways, with multiple units ganging-up on a chosen target, or firing sequentially, one after another, until the boys on the receiving end yell "Uncle Joe!" In a typical Tactical Combat Series attack, some units operate in fire mode, suppressing the target with suppressive fire actions, while others in move mode follow-up and occupy ground. Good old fire and movement, as it were. The problem with a suppressive fire action is firing units are not available for overwatch fire in the opponent's subsequent turn. Overwatch fire is triggered when the phasing player moves or shoots while in the line of sight of the non-phasing, overwatching player. Most importantly, there is no limit to the number of

overwatch fires a single stack of units can make in a given turn. Overwatch units are critical to channeling, or even stopping, an attacker's advance. An aggressive player who over-commits units to moving and firing is liable to be overwhelmed by an opponent who judiciously maintains a reserve for counterattack. By adding overwatch to the mix, players are in for a heap of decision making as the turn unfolds. Even without the command system, mere counter-pushers are meat on the table for a player who wisely allocates and plans.

Most combat involves fire, of which there are two types:

- Area fire, which affects everyone in the hex, and...
- Point fire, directed against single targets.

There are tables and modifiers for both, with enough variety in modifiers and combat results to give each type of fire a distinctive flavor. To further spice up the point fire, the version 3.1 rules added the *Button Up* result, whereby tanks and armored vehicles have their movement and firepower reduced and restricted. The dice-intensive artillery



has also been simplified with Occam's Guillotine. Artillery shoots no longer occur in a special phase after pre-plotting. Now, they are just plain old actions, resulting in a:

- Good shoot (lasts a turn),
- Bad shoot (lasts a phase),
- Scatter (bad shoot, but falls randomly), or...
- No shoot. ("Fire? I didn't hear no order to fire!")

The quality of the shoot is greatly dependent on nationality (the US is superb, the Germans and Brits are good, while the Japanese and Russians are playing horseshoes and hand grenades), as well as modifiers for spotting range. If the daunting reputation of the artillery rules in games like *Bloody Omaha* has kept you from the system, rest assured that even the limpest of wrists no longer need fear the tubes of Tactical Combat Series.

If the heart of the system is movement and combat, then the soul of the Tactical Combat Series is the Command Phase. The command rules distinguish Essig's design from any other tactical World War II game on the market. This is not command as a function of morale modifiers, or ranges and radii, as in most wargames. In the Tactical Combat Series, command is about planning ahead, flexibility, and timing. In *Black Wednesday*, as in other series games, players must pre-plan the goals, objectives, and movements of their various formations (usually battalions and regiments, though the clunky Soviets in *Black Wednesday* must use divisions).

Players are given a sketch map of the battlefield, the op sheet, with which to draw a visual representation of their orders. The sheet also has room for a brief, written description of such details as time, mission, goals, and line of retreat. The types of orders are limited to prepared defense, attack, hasty defense, and movement, but the permutations of lines, objectives, axes of advance, and boundaries are endless. Players are encouraged to use standard NATO terminology and symbols in conjunction with their own motifs, producing such amusing bits of military surrealism as Phase Line Wonderbra, or Objective Corset. Alas, the gleeful production of maps is not enough to ensure martial glory. Until implemented, an op sheet is a mere scrap of paper, leaving units to operate under the aegis of old, potentially dated plans, or worse still, no plan at all.

The likelihood of implementing a given plan depends on several variables, such as the type of plan, the number of units involved, the command preparing (representing staff and command functions), and the passage of time. Most games use some form of randomness to replicate problems of com-

mand control. The method used in the Tactical Combat Series is both more naturalistic and more realistic. An army blessed with an efficient, well-trained staff, like the Germans, has a shorter lag time between the creation and execution of orders than an army with a less professional command staff, like the Russians. As the battlefield situation develops, the forces with a superior command preparing will be able to exploit and react faster than their opponent. The key variable, of course, is the player - how well does he see through the fog of war, and anticipate the moves of his opponent. In the Tactical Combat Series, you cannot think a turn or two or even three ahead, and expect to win. Victory requires both an overall plan for the entire battle, and the flexibility to adapt that plan to ever-changing circumstance. In most games, this maxim is a trite cliché; in the Tactical Combat Series, it's the way the game actually works. All of this adds up to a system that is engrossing without being overwhelming, that achieves verisimilitude not with a numbing array of techno-heavy rules, but by simulating the machinery of decision making in the dynamic environment of battle. This makes possible big but playable games like *Black Wednesday*, which involves several divisions, something the rules harried *Advanced Squad Leader* players can only dream about.

*Black Wednesday* is the first game to transport players to the icy regions of the Eastern Front. Ironically, there are plenty of Russians (two (plus) divisions, a Red Banner tank brigade, plus a tank battalion), but Germans are relatively scarce. The Axis are represented by Team España: The 250th Infantry, or so-called Spanish Blue Division. There are a few German-types in the person of Kampfgruppe Heckel and the 390th Infantry, but these potential reinforcements tend to view discretion as the better part of valor, and usually show up late, if at all. Francophiles will be pleased to note the 250th Division is packed with solid, high morale infantry, lots of attached guns, and some nifty elite types: a ski company, mobile reserve, engineers, and a recon battalion. The Russians are a mixed bag of lousy regular infantry, a so-so Guards division, and over sixty killer tanks (T-26s, T-34s, and KV-1s). This is supplemented by a genuinely awesome off-map artillery park for preparatory bombardment: Three battalions of Katyushas, six battalions of 122mm guns, and three battalions of 152mm guns. That's battalions, comrade, not batteries. In addition, there are a slew of on-map infantry and anti-tank guns and mortar companies. Sometimes, quantity does have a quality all its own.

As with other games in the series, special rules help give the participants a distinctive character. The

Red Army is, if nothing else, distinctive. A bunching rule forces Soviet companies to stay within a three hex radius (very bad when the Axis artillery zeroes in). All elements of a Russian division must be on one op sheet, which forces attacks in a powerful but ponderous mass. Initial Russian op sheet attack objectives can be no further than five hexes from the main Spanish trench line. This simulates Ivan's proclivity to liberate captured stocks of Spanish Madeira, and forces a pause which enables the Axis to regroup. Though something of a *deus ex machina*, the rule is historical, and probably essential to preventing a complete blowout. For the truly Red at heart, there is the Encouragement of the Commissars, whereby suppression results can be converted to an additional step loss. I knew you'd see it my way, Tovarich.

Despite the streamlined version 3.1 rules, the campaign scenarios are going to take quite a chunk of time. Happily, the eight smaller scenarios cover a wide spectrum, including:

- The overwhelming Soviet dawn assault,
- City fighting in Krasni Bor,
- A desperate hedgehog defense at the strong points of El Bastion and the Mill,
- A breakout and retreat by the shattered Spanish remnants, and...
- A hypothetical Axis counterattack spearheaded by Tiger tanks.

The campaign scenarios include rules for free set up, and can begin at various points in the battle. The scenarios are well thought out and balanced, resulting in sharp, tense, and highly playable confrontations. To provide a taste of this unique system, here is a capsule summary of a scenario two game, Assault of the Guards.

The scenario covers the initial attack of the 63rd Guards Rifle Division against about four companies of the Spanish 250th, with the Blue's engineer and recon battalions in reserve. The Russians must cover a fair amount of open ground before reaching the concave Spanish trench line. The advance is hampered by a peat bog on their left, which slows movement (but does provide limited cover), and two frozen streams on their right. In the center is a small woods, which provides cover for a final assault on the trench line. Behind the trenches is Krasni Bor, the main Soviet objective. If the Soviets capture five hexes of the city, or the strong point El Bastion, they win. If not, they lose. Pretty straight forward, except that for every Axis company released from reserve, the Russians are credited with one hex of Krasni Bor.

Despite being outnumbered by over three to one, I was quite sanguine while setting up my crack Spanish infantry. To get at the trench line, the attacker must first penetrate a wire entanglement, a procedure triggering overwatch fire. The trench itself, with a net minus five column shift to area fire, seemed almost invulnerable, so I ignored the designer's notes (uh-oh) and deployed everyone in it. It looked like a bristling, inverted steel crescent, recalling the glory days of trench warfare in World War I. Unfortunately, I failed to remember that other great hallmark of the Great War: Artillery bombardment. My opponent kindly reminded me of this historical lapse by blasting the center of my line to smithereens. The Russians only get about one-third of their total artillery prep fire for this scenario, but it proved to be more than enough to settle my paella, er, hash. In three turns, one company was reduced to a solitary step, and a six hex gap had opened in my center. After five turns, the guns concentrated on the shoulders of the gap, wiping out or paralyzing another two companies. Under this rain of steel, I did not dare try to activate my reserve units on the flanks, as any lateral movement to the center would have been suicidal. I hunkered down to await the Russian steamroller.

My opponent had deployed one regiment on his left to drive in my outposts, one in the center to secure the woods, and another on his right, slightly refused, as a sort of reserve. My artillery, puny in comparison to the gargantuan battalions blowing apart the trench line, went to work on the massed bunches of guardsmen crossing open ground. The Spanish guns caught several units overstacked, and poured in fast fire missions (artillery firepower times two). I was wrecking entire companies, taking out as many as ten steps a shot, but, as Muhammad Ali said about Joe Frazier, "he just kept on comin'". As the Soviets filtered into the woods, I was now frantically rolling to implement reserve orders for the recon battalion. They finally activated, and swung around through the minimal protection of Krasni Bor, racing for the gap. The Russians bulled through the wire, while my surviving mortars pounded away in overwatch fire. The Russian 270th Regiment had won the race to the trenches in the center, so the shredded, shell shocked remnants of the recon battalion manned the houses on the edge of town. The preparatory fire was finally over, but now his mortars and guns, sheltered by the woods, were zeroing in. He rushed a battalion forward, but miraculously effective fire by the surviving recon troops paralyzed it. The respite proved a short one, as another battalion squeezed through the wire and boiled into the city. The decision to forgo a reserve in the center had doomed me; the thin-feldgrau-line had snapped. I had run out of men,



and Providence had smiled on the side with the last battalion.

As a company, The Gamers have made an exemplary effort to secure customer support, not with glitz and your-game-is-in-the-mail promises, but through personal service, quality control, and product improvement. Perhaps the surest sign that we are witnessing a second golden age of wargaming is *Black Wednesday's* inclusion of a counter tray! With the tight, incisive rules of version 3.1, and the spectacular graphics of *Black Wednesday*, The Gamers have established their Tactical Combat Series as the premier model of platoon-level combat in World War II. In *Black Wednesday*, players will enjoy an exciting game, and a unique, instructive simulation. When I first saw the eye-popping graphics, I wondered if it would play as good as it looks. It does. Now, I'm singin' the blues, and lovin' it.

## Decision Games'

# On to Moscow

Published in Strategy & Tactics #171 in 1994 • Designed by Joseph Miranda

reviewed by **Arnaud Bouis**

*On to Moscow*, published in Strategy & Tactics #171, is the second and latest issue in Joe Miranda's Wars of the Age of Reason series. The game takes us east of the theater of war of *The Seven Years War* (Strategy & Tactics #163), and back in time, to the opening of the Eighteenth Century, when a man born for battle, Charles XII, suddenly ascended the throne of Sweden and embarked on an enterprise which was to ruin his empire, the invasion of Russia. This war was the beginning of Russia as a modern military power, led by another figure of history, Peter the Great.

On to the game itself, and a proper review of its surface components. The map, of standard Strategy & Tactics format, is as functional and simple as that of other Mark Simo-nitch efforts, and is a vast expanse of blank hexes dotted by fortress symbols and a few major rivers. Only in the north around St. Petersburg do forests form a large patch. The Pripet Marshes form the traditional obstacle in the center. All this is very classic, unremarkable but easy to read, and the map spans from Warsaw in the Swedish west to Moscow, the prize of the game.

The counters, 220 in number (twenty others are errata for *Clontarf*, *Operation Shock Troop* and other games), are, on the other hand, beautiful. Individual multi-colored figures represent the various types of units in the game: Leaders (noble mounted on a horse), a neat infantryman with a musket, a cavalryman proudly erect on his horse, a cannon in profile for artillery, a dismounted dragoon, a sapper, and a wagon for a supply train. I like the replacement of the NATO symbols used in *The Seven Years War*

by these beautiful silhouettes, with the names of the regiments portrayed, which help me imagine what I am manipulating. I encourage Joe Miranda to continue in this custom, should he read this article.

The game offers not only Russians in green, Swedes in blue, Saxons in gray and Brandenburgers in white, but also Cossack units and a rather large Ottoman army (It was disappointing to see them represented by the same European-looking silhouettes. I would have liked to have Turks with oriental turbans and Tartars with lances.). The Swedish fleet is not omitted (it can perform dangerous landings). Each combat unit bears three characteristics: Combat factor, quality, and movement factor.

On to the system. For those of you who liked *The Seven Years War*, the game inherits all the features which made this series outstanding: Random movement rates, hidden units, and an elegant combat system. Due to the large scale of this war, or rather these wars, a game turn is one season, and the game spans years 1707 to 1711. This means twenty possible turns, but the standard scenario only lasts eight, and the extended scenario, sixteen.

In our experience, the standard game can easily be concluded within five hours. It is, by the way, a little disappointing that the game does not propose two really different scenarios. Will the Strategy & Tactics buyer have to purchase Moves to find them?

The goal of each side in the game is to win by knockout - accumulating enough shock points (these will be explained shortly) and bringing the enemy so low that he has to capitulate. This brings an instant Continental victory. Failing this, victory





will typically be judged by the cities captured. The Swede begins with a great and superb army poised in Poland, Baltic fortresses and what is now Finland, while the Russian starts with an even larger army somewhere in Russia. The upshot being that, since this is a fog-of-war game, where is this army? The other minor armies wait in their countries until a random event brings their entry into the war.

The Swedes have some excellent generals, like Charles and Rhenskold, while the Russians tend to have to rely on Peter, an able tactician but matching Charles neither in strategic nor tactical value. The former rating is used to urge your troops on to march, while the latter is of utmost importance in combat. The pace of the game will classically be dictated by this difference, Peter trying to bring a halt to the string of successes of the great Swedish king. Hopefully, the Russian can mobilize enough forces to slow the Swedish advance.

Mobilization, conducted each winter (during which it is harder to move and be supplied), is proportional to the number of fortresses owned by each player. In this,

Russia vastly overwhelms Sweden (thirty-nine at-start mobilization points for the Russians versus fourteen for the Swedes). This second crucial factor will dictate strategy, as captured fortresses will recruit for you. Note that Russian regiments are in no way just rabble.

The great strength of the system lies in the availability of off-map leader boxes. Joe Miranda has improved upon *The Seven Years War* by providing a garrison counter for each fortress, which allows you to hide just what is stationed within its walls (since there is always a counter in the hex). This is easy fog-of-war, and with the system of off-board boxes, counter density becomes very low, a real pleasure.

Stacks move to the sound of cannon and the roll of a die. Yes, the roll of a die, and the old SPI motto "the die has nothing to do with the movement of

units" is brushed aside. This innovation, dating back to *Trajan* (another of Joe Miranda's designs), allows luck to pervert the most perfect plans, but brings suspense and opportunity to every game. The harder troops are pushed (each turn sports three march impulses, each becoming harder for movement), the greater the risk of attrition. March rolls are modified by your general's strategic ratings, which means that impulsive commanders like Charles XII march to the guns (move toward the nearest enemy stack), while lethargic ones risk standing fast

in the snow. Both can happen despite your frustration and rage, to your opponent's pleasure.

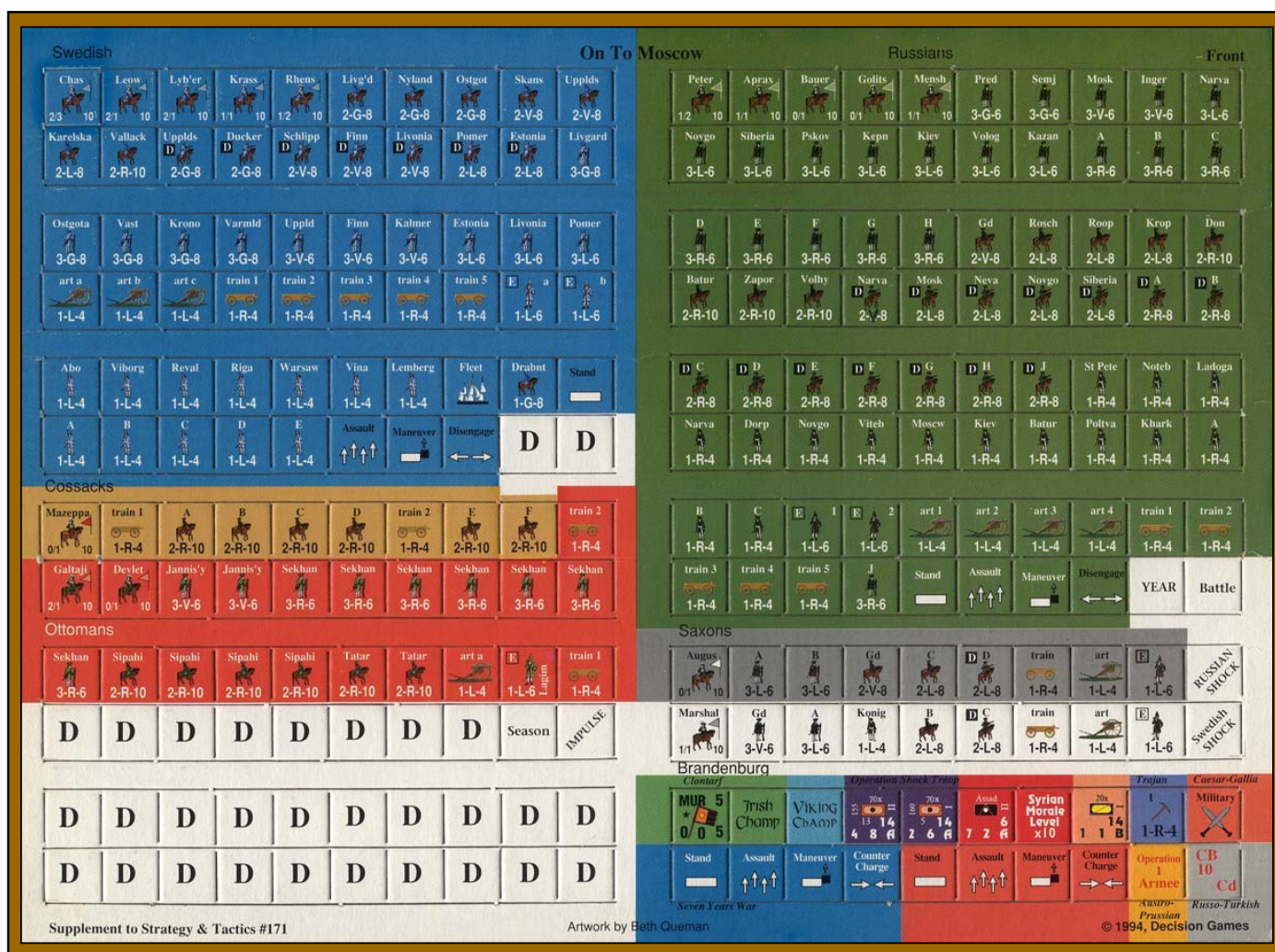
When two stacks collide, battle is joined. And to those unused to Joe Miranda's systems, this is another surprise. The combat table looks classic - gone are the chits of *The Seven Years War*. Players calculate odds, round off in favor of the defender, add leader values, shock points (see below), cavalry, quality superiority and artillery points to the die. Losses caused increase with the odds.

Wait... look a little closer at the chart. The losses caused are based on the size of the at-

tacker's forces, not the defender! This means if each takes losses of twenty-percent, an attacker with fifty factors attacking a puny force of five factors will lose ten factors, versus one for the defender! Fortunately, the chart is such that this is a rare event. However, beware that small elite Swedish force which bars your way. They once inflicted a humiliating defeat upon my army (see the replay that follows).

Combat can cause morale checks, routing many units (hopefully rallied soon by your commander - since two routs in a row result in elimination). The key to success, players will find out, is the die roll modifiers. Quality is a factor, but in our games both sides are usually able to obtain the quality bonus and deny the cavalry modifier to the enemy given proper strategy. The difference will usually be found in the accumulation of artillery (the Russians





have four and the Swedes have three), leaders (of course), and the use of shock points. Using one shock point gives a plus one advantage to combat.

Shock points are the quantification of the morale of the nation. A victory brings from one to three shock points, as does the capture of fortresses (the capture of Moscow or St. Petersburg can be such a boost to Swedish morale that it can cause strings of victories), pillaging and some random events. Since shock points are lost mainly by using them voluntarily, one can wonder how a side can bring a knockout victory since this requires his opponent to be down to zero shock points. Fortunately, victory is also judged by victory point count.

Sieges are not forgotten, and are conducted like field battles, except that engineers add a combat bonus while cavalry does not. A city can also be starved, and here we come to another strong point of the game, the supply rules. Armies periodically roll for supply attrition, in an age where chaos and the dubious loyalty of supply contractors ruled logistics (see Napoleon, the supreme organizer, who failed a century later). A force further than three hexes from a fortress is risking adventure. If star-

ing, it can consume a precious supply train counter, or the corpses of its soldiers will cover the frozen steppes. Winter and bad leadership add to the hazards of the supply table.

The game is nicely wrapped up by twenty-two possible random events, which will make each playing different. Will the Turks march north or the Brandenburgers sortie out of Koenigsberg ? Will Poland revolt or the Cossacks rebel? Certainly, this game is not for those who do not like luck to go astride their planning. More so in *On to Moscow* than in its prequel, *The Seven Years War*.

My only quibble with an otherwise great game is the usual messing around with the rules presentation which Strategy & Tactics has a habit of demonstrating. Aside from the fact photocopies must be made of the charts inserted in the rules, an improvement can be noted since some are directly printed on the map. However these are not always the essential charts, like the supply and the march table. These should at all costs have been printed on the map, where much space is wasted by a percentage calculation table! The combat results table is nowhere to be found! On page fifty can be found a combat re-



sults table, labeled “revised table for use with *The Seven Years Wars* only, NOT to be used with *On To Moscow*”. It turns out, after a letter to Joe Miranda, this is *On To Moscow*’s combat table!

The set up also suffers from couple of errors as usual, I am afraid to report. It is time someone at Decision Games took the hour necessary to set up games and check the scenarios for obvious errors.

I would not like to conclude with a negative comment. *On To Moscow* is a superb game, playable, elegant and, above all, very fun.

## Replay

This is a short replay of the standard scenario, starting in the Winter of An de Grace 1707. It pitted my friend Guillaume Daudin, victor of several Wars of the Imperial Ages games, against your servant. I play the Russian.

**Winter 1707 - Random Events:** Cossacks! Hordes appear from the Don. The die is cast - bad luck! They declare war on the Czar and side with Sweden. Those horsemen appear north of Baturin, almost undefended, but my opponent doesn’t know it.

**Impulse 1** - Russian General Bauer dashes from Dorpat and takes the great Swedish fortress of Reval. Look at the face of my Swedish opponent...

**Impulse 2** - Charles XII bypasses the huge Russian army at Minsk and takes Vitebsk in their rear. Peter goes West! His huge horde moves to Vilna, Charles’ base, and lays siege to it. Surprise, the fortress is defended by an elite but small army under Rhenskold! The Russians take an ignominious and totally unexpected defeat.

**Impulse 3** - Peter tries to escape eastwards to his base at Minsk. He fails to move. He spends his whole supply train to survive in the open. The Cossacks decide not to tempt Baturin which they think is heavily defended, and survive in the snowy plain.

**Spring 1708 - Big Recruitment:** The Russian buys almost all of his available counters, making up for all losses and beyond.

**Impulse 1** - Swedish General Lowenhaupt leaves Riga heading eastwards with a small elite force. Objective: Moscow. The capital is undefended. A Siberian relief mob fails to move there in time due to an error by Peter (me).

**Impulse 2** - Lowenhaupt takes Moscow!!

Swedish prestige (shock points) soars. Charles leaves Vitebsk for Minsk and attacks Peter the Great who has reconstituted his huge army. At one to three odds Charles attacks him outside the city (two factors versus fifty-four). Peter is routed and, mad with vodka, withdraws into the city. In the south, the Cossacks join with a Russian force which has left Lemberg.

**Impulse 3** - Swedish General Krassauw arrives before the walls of Kiev and storms it. He takes it with severe losses. The Russians aren’t beaten but are ejected, under General Golitz. Charles XII storms Minsk and takes it. What was once the best Russian army is still alive but hard to rally. As if this were not enough misfortune, Peter keeps failing all his move rolls and is at the mercy of another strike by Charles. At Kiev, Golitz counterattacks! He fails with even losses. In the north, the Russian concentration in St. Petersburg fails horribly when, in the forest, the last of a Russian force which has left Dorpat for St. Petersburg ends dying to the last. Not one arrives and Dorpat is now empty.

**Summer 1708 - Random Events:** The Ottomans stir trouble in the South. I shudder at the thought. The die is cast - they side with nobody. Pheww.....

**Impulse 1** - Rhenskold moves north and seizes Dorpat. Charles re-attacks Peter, intent on annihilating him for good. He continues to disintegrate the Russian army east of Minsk. Brave Russian General Gorlitz again attacks Kiev, now entrusted to Cossacks, all that is left of the decimated small elite Swedish army once there. Further bleeding. Peter finally leaves Minsk in flight to Vitebsk, lays siege and retakes it! Swedish troops, as well as a good Swedish general, are surprised in their beds and surrender to Peter’s mob. Charles is incensed at such unfair behavior.

**Impulse 2** - Gorlitz, The Hero of the Russian Nation (so says the propaganda) now assaults Kiev with one rabble counter. Rabble against Rabble. Both armies disintegrate. I move the Russian garrison from Baturin and re-enter Kiev! Patriotic delirium in Russia. The Cossacks have seen what it costs to rebel. Charles pursues Peter’s bleeding remnants (the Guard and whatever else survives) but breaks his teeth on Vitebsk. His prize again escapes him. Rhenskold now takes Reval with his support of the Baltic Fleet. All the north seems at his mercy. But there is a last trump to be played by the Russian. In secrecy, the great St. Petersburg army, originally intent on attacking

Finland, has begun creeping south, towards Vitebsk. Charles XII, triumphant, nonetheless is so thoroughly depleted his force is seriously inferior to the St. Petersburgers. Charles, moreover, is totally ignorant of this danger on his north flank. This army is Russia's last hope.

**Impulse 3** - Peter, besieged within the walls of Vitebsk, sees the great St. Petersburg army smash itself with an ugly die roll of two against Charles's veterans. The last Russian army disintegrates hopelessly.

There is now such a pile of Russian dead units in the recruiting pool and so many undefended Russian fortresses at the mercy of the Swedes that I concede the game to my opponent. There's not a Russian living. We stop the game, which we both enjoyed, promising to play it again.



## Pacific Rim Publishing's *Balkan Storm*

Published in 1995 • Designed by Tom Honsa

reviewed by **Rich Erwin**

Where once we obsessed about life just east of the Iron Curtain and when or whether that land beyond would erupt into West Germany with endless thousands of tanks and aircraft, bound for Frankfurt, Hamburg and, if lucky, Paris, we now have an uncertain enigma. Blood has been shed by the gallon in what was once Yugoslavia, Rumania and Hungary watch each other warily, Czechoslovakia is split in two with little argument, let alone violence, and Poland is a nascent full-bore capitalist society about to be ruled by a former Communist minister of sports. (And we won't even discuss the Ukraine or Belarus.)

Nature abhors a vacuum, and humans especially abhor power vacuums. Nobody really controls or holds influence over all of Eastern Europe, and eventually an attempt will succeed to be dominant in this land. For now it's a struggle between tribalism (let's not pretend with the cheap veneer called "ethnicity"), the desire to be part of NATO (and hopefully, with it, greater access to the economic cornucopias of the European Union and the United States) and Russia's desire to maintain a barrier between itself and a world it, even now, can only barely comprehend.

It takes a bit of nerve, when the folks that once went into drool mode over the publication of *Red Star/White Star* have a real lack of desire today to tread in such a unformed void, to produce a game that tries to provide, even in a low-key mode, an idea of where things could end up in this region of the world.

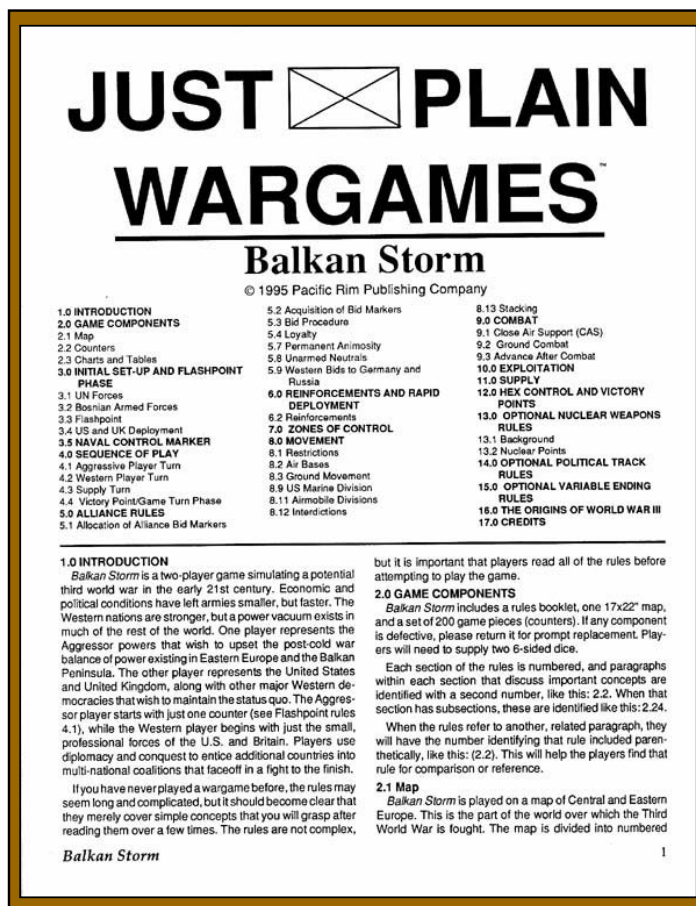
*Balkan Storm* postulates a time when an economi-

cally-wracked, militant Germany and Russia eye each other warily across a fractured landscape. The Depression of 1997 and multiple military coups, respectively, have pushed Germany and Russia into aggressive postures that each see Eastern Europe as a cheap means of acquiring greater power, prestige and stability in their homelands. Each sees the other as their opponent in dominance over an Eastern Europe that relies on ethnicity and low-level warfare as staples of daily life. Sarajevo and Kalinin-grad have UN-established permanent peacekeeping garrisons. NATO is all but a memory, replaced by an American/British strike force that can reach anywhere... eventually.

As with all of Pacific Rim Publishing's Just Plain Wargames series, the system is extremely simple. Ground units are divisions which have a combat strength, a unit quality and a movement allowance. Air units only have a combat strength, and are but one level of sophistication above air points. The map, however, is probably the most colorful thing Pacific Rim Publishing has ever done. A warning by the Reviewer General; prolonged viewing of this map has the potential to cause Typeface Recoil -

there are at least eleven to twelve different fonts in use on the game map. And the days of bland but serviceable maps are swept away - the colors on this map are intense. Not in an ugly glow-in-the-dark way, but in a way that makes you say, "Hmmm... not bad at all."

One player is the Aggressor nation - a die roll determines whether it's Germany or Russia (with a heavy lean towards Russia, but hey - who says you can't just choose?). I assume it then forces the British-American forces/Eastern European victims player to





not overly orient forces against one side or another, but I don't think that's likely, for reasons I'll go into later.

A turn sequence consists of attempting to acquire an ally, movement and combat. Acquiring allies is very, very important. You see, the Aggressor nation acquires victory points, and needs to get fifteen of them to win the game. Yes, you can smash into Krakow or Kiev the old fashioned way, but a less painful way is by acquiring an ally token and using it to roll an attempt for an alliance. Both Aggressor and Allied players have this capability. The Allies have all the ally tokens initially, and the Aggressor player acquires them through the occupation of an opposition victory point city. Each time an ally token is used, it is gone from the game. An Aggressor player should therefore plan a combination of battles and diplomacy that will reduce, as quickly as possible, the ability of the Allied forces to acquire allies in Eastern Europe. When the Aggressor player gains a country as an ally, he acquires both their military forces and victory points equal to those available in that country.

Combat is odds-based, with combat air support and terrain bound to be a major factor in most battles. Combat is very bloody and units do not have a reduced side, so it's not uncommon for the Aggressor player to sweat as he finds, after preparatory die rolls,

the good news is he's maxed out the odds at five-to-one, and the bad news is all those irritating American and British aircraft have resulted in a die roll modifier of minus four.

Because victory points are gained by the Aggressor through the acquisition of victory point cities, almost all battles tend to orient around the victory point cities. For this reason, regardless of whether fighting the Germans or Russians, set up tends to be very much a similar affair from game to game, dependent upon the personality of the Allied player. The Allied player can also reduce the Aggressor's victory point standing through reconquering victory point cities and the elimination of one victory point per two Aggressor ground units lost.

As a result of all this, *Balkan Storm* is a game in two parts. For the first four turns or so, the Aggressor nation is in Mad Dash Mode, trying to grab the fifteen victory points as quickly as possible, before the British and Americans come in force. It can be done and the arrival of British and American forces is relatively random (which can help with a few bad die rolls), but by any standard it is tough.

For the Germans, the obvious route is the Czech Republic, Rumania and Poland by force, and Slovakia, Hungary and Serbia by diplomacy if possible. Poland is the toughest nut to crack, but because they are so likely to become an ally of the Allied forces,



the German Aggressor player has to try to break them quickly. Warsaw will most likely make or break you, but Gdansk and Kalinigrad must be taken now. An alternative is to avoid Poland and try to grab the Ukraine, but I can't recommend it with any confidence - terrain and overstretch are going to be painful as it is for the German Aggressor player.

For the Russians, the route is the Ukraine and Belorus simultaneously by force, followed by Rumania - for diplomacy, acquire Serbia, Hungary and, if circumstances permit, Slovakia. Poland could be used as a spring board for rolling you back, but realize, unlike the Germans, you have the potential to knock off Rumania from two directions, and with five, victory points in Rumania, remember what matters - victory points. Odessa has the potential to be the rock upon which Russia is broken.

After turn four, if the Aggressor hasn't won *Balkan Storm* outright, the second game usually begins - rolling back the Aggressor. If the Aggressor has one victory point at the end of sixteen turns, he wins. Again, the battle will focus around the victory point cities, and they will be bloody affairs. Again, the Russian Aggressor has a distinct advantage over his German counterpart - there's lots of steppe between the Allied forces and the Russian homeland, allowing a greater possibility of trading space for time.

To spice things up just a tad more, there's political options and nukes. Both are optional, but realistically, you want this game to have maximum replayability. These two options will increase that many fold. Intense propaganda, declaring open cities, ethnic liberation and defining war aims are but a few options. With enough political victories, victory points are acquired. Nuclear attacks are devastating, as you would expect, though whether the Ukraine's and Russia's stockpile will work when desired is questionable. I would add a simple dice roll with every attack for both Russia and Ukraine after they have lost a given number of units - say three ground units for Ukraine and six ground units for Russia. Boxcars means the player must attempt to use a nuclear weapon in the next attack. Each side loses two political points if they are the first in the game to use nuclear weapons. If things do get as bad as portrayed in this game, a single nuclear attack ought to be considered for Poland, with similar lack of control to that of Ukraine.

All in all, *Balkan Storm* is a pleasant game which plays quickly at first, but more slowly and brutally in the second phase. No one side has the ultimate advantage - it relies very much on the dice and how well you plan your attacks. It ranks as one of the best of the Just Plain Wargames, both in looks and playability, and gives us a chance to think of a place and a possibility in the not too distant future.



## Games USA's *Friedland 1807*

Published in 1995 • Designed by **Mark Searle**

reviewed by **T. J. Kutta**

*Friedland 1807* is a grand tactical simulation of the Napoleonic battle fought on the morning of June 14, 1807, southeast of Königsberg. The game is the second in the Eagles of the Empire series produced by Games USA and is a unique, highly detailed, graphically impressive, simulation of the battle.

The first unique feature of the game is the map. It is a 17" x 25" multi-colored map (I stopped counting at ten), printed on the heaviest map stock I've seen in a long time. All key terrain is on the map and a nice little feature is a regular terrain key in the corner, just like a real map. The map also includes both the order of battle of both armies and the set up of the various wings and corps, as well as their commanders. This allows the players to see the organization of the two armies, giving a historical perspective of how the various forces were organized. It also reduces set up time. Everyone who I showed the map to was impressed with its quality, color, utility and order of battle.

*Friedland 1807* uses a geomorphic area grid, developed by Mark Searle, instead of the standard hexagonal grid to regulate movement and combat. The geomorphic system was developed from an in-depth study of the movement of the various armies across actual terrain. This unique approach to terrain analysis allows the designer to canalize the various units across the terrain which the actual commanders of the time felt was important without adding pages of rules regarding prohibited terrain. Basically, if you can physically fit your larger units into the confines of the grid, the unit could have actually moved across that piece of terrain.

The geomorphic system also augments the critical facing function of units. The direction a unit was facing during this historical period influenced its ability to fire at the enemy and defend. While most games simulating this period include facing, none allow for the detailed interrelationship of facing and terrain. Units of the time occupied a piece of terrain and then adjusted their facing to conform to the lay of the land. The geomorphic system forces the various unit types to assume historical facings based on their size and the terrain.

This feature will drive many of the purists of the hobby crazy. Units appear canted and turned at various angles, and at times are left with their flanks

hanging, exposed to the enemy. While this will upset many gamers, the geomorphic system does give an accurate feel to the battle and injects an element of real life into the game.

The game counters are beautifully drawn and colored and represent all the units that were actually there, or that could have arrived at the battle. Units depicted are infantry (broken down into grenadiers, guards, etc...), cavalry (which includes Cossacks, uhlans and dragoons), artillery and commanders. The French are blue, while the Russians are green. While the counters are a bit crowded with information and a bit too colorful for my eyes, anything and everything you need to know about the unit is on the counter.

The unit counters come in two sizes. The infantry units appear as large rectangles (line formations) and smaller regular square units for decimated infantry, cavalry, artillery and commanders. Size of the unit and strength points determine stacking and possible movement into a given area - if the infantry line does not fit into the geomorphic area, it can't go there.

The flow of the game is quite simple and consists of only four major phases.

- The weather is determined for a particular turn. This affects artillery and things on fire like burning towns or bridges.
- Each player receives any available reinforcements.
- The players determine which of their units are in command.
- The players alternate attempting to activate their units and move them into battle. All attacks are resolved during the Activation Phase.
- Once both players have moved all of their activated units, the turn is over and the turn marker advanced.

Movement rates are standardized by type of unit. Leaders move four areas, cavalry and horse artillery move three areas and infantry, headquarters and artillery move two areas. Movement rates are modified by terrain, special features on the map and command status.



**Eagles of the Empire™ 1807: FRIEDLAND - Countersheet -1**  
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French Army of Emperor Napoleon I

Russian Army of General Bennigsen

Counter Art: Brian J. Miller

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The detailed command rules are the heart of *Friedland 1807*. A given unit's ability to move and fight is determined by its command status. As with the real armies of the time, units did not move independently but rather were ordered to do so by commanders. The orders originated with the army commander or chief of staff, and then flowed down through corps or wings to divisions and brigades. These messages were physically carried across the battlefield along what was known as a line of communication. The line of communication is established by the command radius of the leaders. In order to be in command, a leader must be able to trace a path of connected areas, within his radius, to the unit and then back to the next higher commander. The next higher commander may also use his command radius to augment the range of his commanders while he too is tracing a line back to the next level.

While many games of the Napoleonic period have such detailed command rules, few have included the chief of staff of the respective armies (Ever wonder what the chief of staff did? He's the three hundred pound gorilla that gets things done...) and the physical headquarters. Both are important elements to the control of a Napoleonic army, and have been absent from the simulated battlefield for too long.

In addition to the command radius, the leaders also have a tactical rating which influences combat and an initiative rating for those times when they find themselves left out on the proverbial limb. The ratings reflect the abilities of the actual commanders and seem to be a fair representation of the leader-

ship abilities of the men who actually fought in the battle.

All of the actual commanders are present in the set up and there are also several actual high level staff officers who can be used as replacements for commanders killed in action (the joy of command).

The combat system is also well done. Combat comes in either bombardment or close assault modes. Artillery bombardment is pretty straightforward. The combat strength of the artillery piece, modified by terrain and a few other factors, is determined. Once a final number has been calculated, a die is rolled and the results cross-referenced on the chart.

While artillery combat is straightforward, close assault combat is a beast of an entirely different color. The game has the simplest close assault combat results chart ever produced. It has two columns and seven lines. (That's it! That's all!) and does not use a die to determine results (Oh God, no die? What'll I do?!).

However, players should note that despite the simplicity of the table, getting there is a detailed, convoluted, process that requires the players to subtract defense strength from attack strength and arrive at a differential, subtract the defender's morale from attacker's morale, and subtract that number from the combat differential. After that, the players factor in a series of differentials between all of the various specialized abilities of the units on the board.

Aside from getting a possible bonus from the direc-





tion of the attack (flank or rear versus front), players also receive bonuses for cavalry superiority, heavy cavalry superiority, lancer superiority, artillery superiority, the presence of guard units, the ability of the leaders, previous damage to the unit and the presence of any special units (outlined in specific scenarios). All of these factors result in a differential, which is subtracted from the initial combat differential. Finally, each player rolls one die and the differential between the two numbers is factored into the equation. The final result is a number between minus five or lower and twenty-three or greater. Players then cross-reference that number on the combat chart and determine their losses. Results are taken either as retreats or losses, with some results requiring mandatory step reductions.

Infantry units have between four and six steps and cavalry, artillery and leaders have only one. As an infantry unit takes losses, its counter is replaced with a reduced force unit. In addition to showing weaker attack numbers, the unit counters also have a nice graphic display which shows the regiments or brigades in each unit as it relates to the relative strength of the units. Units which have taken losses show fewer regiments or brigades at full strength.

While the combat system, especially the heavy use of modifiers, may seem lengthy, it does require the players to use the various specialized abilities of their units. Uhlans, for instance, are unique because of their ability to use their lances. While this ability might have been simulated by simply increasing the combat value of the unit, breaking out the value as a special modifier makes the player aware of this unit's special ability and gives an interesting period feel to the game.

With unique movement capabilities, a plethora of units and diverse unit sizes the game plays like a miniatures battle. The infantry advances forward, while the artillery seeks to find suitable terrain from which to begin bombardments. All the while the cavalry, great hordes of horseman, loiter just behind the infantry and on the far flanks waiting to pounce on any battered or routed enemy units. The accuracy of the game and the need to evaluate the capabilities of each unit tends to make movement a slow, thoughtful affair which is often mitigated by shouts of joy or despair as the attempt to activate supporting units succeeds or fails.

Perhaps the only major fault of the game is the lack of rules for routed units which have suffered sub-





stantial casualties. This is a common rule in most games of the era, and with such attention to detail lavished on the types of cavalry and artillery and terrain, it would seem natural that such a rule would be present. Yet infantry units can take four or five step losses and still be on the board.

Five scenarios are offered with the game, with the first two scenarios being the cavalry action on June 13, prior to the full battle, and Marshal Lannes' holding action on June 14. Both scenarios have small numbers of units and act as building blocks to familiarize the player with the system and how it works, before pulling out all the stops and allowing the players to fight scenario three, the historical scenario. Scenario four is a what if situation and scenario five allows the players to start the battle at 0600 instead of the historical 1600.

Each scenario has its own special rules, victory conditions and activation tables which allow the players to fight that particular scenario. All of the scenarios were interesting. The first scenario accomplished its mission but was a bit boring, although the first outing showed both players to be a bit clumsy in

their handling of the troops. Scenario two was exciting, quick and had much replay value. Scenarios three, four and five are going to take you a while to get through. Scenario three was fun, but the French have a leg up and its hard to defeat them. Scenarios four and five are more evenly balanced, but are still difficult fights for the Russians.

*Friedland 1807* is a brilliantly-conceived game design, with stunning graphics and many new and innovative game mechanics. The innovative approach, which is the games greatest strength, is also its greatest weakness. Many gamers will not like the movement or combat systems and will be lucky to get through a turn or two before they relegate the game to the pile of simulations with great potential that are never played. However, for the Napoleonic grognard, miniatures buff or gamer who can handle a game that is a little different, this game is a must have and will reward those patient enough to master the system with hours of enjoyment.

reviewed by **Dan Barnett**

In the Summer of 1994 I was asked to review GamesUSA's first game in the Eagles of the Empire series, *Borodino*. Rob Frezza and I enjoyed the game, but had several difficulties with the structure and presentation of the system. (See Paper Wars #18 and #19.) Imagine our surprise when we opened volume two of the system, *Friedland 1807*, and discovered that the problems enunciated in the review had been addressed. It is flattering to know that my review had been read. It is more flattering to find that the difficulties I had with the game were judged to be valid complaints. Gentlemen, Mrs. Miller, thank you.

One of the problems we had was the difficulty in determining how many step counters each unit has. The map still lists the command organization of each army. Now, though, each unit has been tagged with either a letter or number defining how many counters are included in the unit.

The rules have been clarified significantly. While only changing a few items the explanations are a great help, particularly because the game does not follow the basic traditional hex board game format.

The combat system remains intricate with many factors involved in determining the combat results. In *Borodino*, this required serious flipping to the rules. Now each factor is listed directly on the map so it is somewhat easier to calculate combat. The calculations themselves are not easy, but it is a whole lot more convenient to consult the map rather than flip through the rules. A minor thing to be sure, but it is nice to know the convenience of the gamer is important to GamesUSA.

Rob complained there was no game purpose to be served by forming a Napoleonic grand battery, and *voila*. Now the artillery combat tables allow artillery fire to inflict casualties at sufficiently high volume. Artillery fire will not blow away whole brigades at a time, but it can inflict enough casualties to ease the way for the attacking ground troops.

While essentially unchanged, there are a few differences in the game system, with the most important being that defending units which receive a combat result must retreat, unless the player makes a roll against the unit's morale. The unit may take a step loss only if the result after modifications is less than the morale. Additionally, cavalry must retreat when attacked by anything other than cavalry. I do not notice anything prohibiting Rob's small unit sacrifice trick, although given the longer game, he may run short of units.

The addition of a charts and tables card is a major

plus, particularly because each of the scenarios uses a different activation chart and scenarios use different charts depending on the turn.

*Friedland 1807* also has the added advantage of giving the Russian player something to do beyond holding the redoubts. Yes, the Russians have problems, yes, the French troops are much better, yes, the command structure will still not allow the Russian nearly the flexibility of the French, but it is fun to attack once in a while.

All in all, *Friedland 1807* is a substantial addition to any gamer's collection. While the Russian troops are clearly inferior to the French and the Russian command structure is not all that could be wished, the balance offers each player more than enough to explore the abilities of his army. A game to be played and enjoyed.



# Reconnaissance in Force

reviewed by **Fritz Heinzen**

*As I mentioned in Paper Wars #22, one way to enhance the status of board wargaming is to establish a firm relationship with media outlets. I've decided that one natural alliance to develop is with the publishers of military history books. They, like us, are nervous about their future - far too many have been told that, with the end of the Fiftieth Anniversary remembrance of World War II, large and small publishers will see their sales dry up.*

*Further, they know they have a limited audience and thus have a strong desire to interpret and focus on to whom they should present their wares. Conversely, wargamers have a frustrating time finding those high quality works that are most useful to them and their hobby. For these reasons, Paper Wars has decided to start a military book column.*

*I say we prove the nay sayers wrong. When you convince your friends or loved ones to indulge in purchasing something related to the hobby of board wargaming (or you sneak out and get something for yourself) over the holidays, consider both games and books. Both provide pleasure, knowledge and insight. And if board wargamers are recognized by military history publishers as a major market segment for their sales, they will be more likely to produce what we want.*

*Fritz Heizen brings excellent credentials to the table, having been a buyer for Waldenbooks and Brentanos and a reviewer for Armed Forces Journal International. He is currently Director of KrADeG Book Review Services. I look forward to a long and fruitful relationship, and hope you will find this new section of as much value as our game reviews.*

Rich Erwin

## Classics

The library of every serious wargamer and military historian should possess a copy of *On War* by Carl von Clausewitz. *On War* is quite simply the most significant piece of military scholarship ever written. Since 1832, this work has influenced every generation's military officers and statesmen. Clausewitz analyzed not only the nature of war and

its use as an instrument of policy, but also strategic, operational, and tactical concepts of warfare.

As to which English language edition to acquire, the choices are straightforward. The best edition is the hard-cover from Princeton University Press (orig. 1976, with minor changes and an index added in 1984, 0691056579), but it is now a hefty \$70 (£43.50). The editing and translating by Michael Howard and Peter Paret are first-rate. Along with Bernard Brodie's, their essays on Clausewitz and *On War* are most useful and provide a fuller appreciation of this masterpiece. Princeton has released this work in a more affordable, albeit not as durable, trade paper (0691018545) at \$19.95 (£13.95). Everyman's Library (a Knopf imprint) re-released the Princeton edition in 1993 (volume 121, 0679420436, \$20) in a cloth edition with a nice chronology added. However, being smaller in size, it has smaller type and margins (so although it is more convenient to carry, it is more difficult to make your own annotations in), and the paper appears to be less opaque than the Princeton edition. Yet no matter which version you choose, if you could read only one significant military/political work, it would have to be *On War*. (Princeton is the trailblazer in Clausewitzian publishing in the U.S. and I will elaborate on this in a future issue.)

## New & Noteworthy

The Fiftieth Anniversary of World War II has come and gone, and in its wake are left two things - a greater appreciation for the sacrifices of the veterans and their families, and many fine additions to the historical literature. Let me elaborate on the latter development with a marvelous single volume history just released in paper, i.e., Gerhard L. Weinberg's *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge University Press - 1994, 0521443172, \$34.95 cloth; 05215558794, \$19.95 trade paper). This exemplary effort pulls all the elements of the war together to offer a truly global perspective.

The interactions of the military and diplomatic fronts mesh with the home fronts, the ideologies, weapons technologies, and economic developments.

Weinberg, known for mining archives in his past work on Germany in World War II, concentrates on the period from September 1939 (when the conflict truly takes on its full dimensions) to its bloody con-

clusion in the Pacific, and then adds a concluding chapter and a twenty-four page bibliographic essay. Wisely, the author avoids two problems in his effort, first in the background chapter he does not see World War II as the continuation of World War I, and secondly, he writes looking forward rather than backward, so the reader receives a sense of the war's leaders and the decisions they faced. If you want detailed accounts of all the battles, they're not here; but if you want to understand the significance of the battles in a world war, read this book. Pay the extra \$15 for the hard cover - this is a book you will want to keep, and with around nine hundred pages of text, plus over 250 pages of notes, maps and the index, the average reader will tax the binding on the paper edition.

*The Oxford Companion to World War II*, edited by I.C.B. Dear and M.R.D. Foot (Oxford University Press - 1995, 0198662254, \$49.95) is a reference work on the grand scale: 1,343 pages with hundreds of maps, tables, charts, diagrams, and photographs. Entries are cross-referenced and offer suggested readings.

This is more than a military work. The essays also cover the political, diplomatic, economic, cultural and social dimensions of the conflict (e.g., the women at war entry is over six pages long). There are extensive country essays, such as the Germany entry, written by Jurgen Forster, Charles Messenger and Wolfgang Petter, which is almost thirty pages long, and themes like diplomacy span six pages. As an example of military coverage, consider the entry for strategic air offensives - it is over twelve pages long and written by A.N. Frankland, Richard Overy, and Stanley L. Falk.

It has a map showing the Allied targeting of Germany and fighter escort ranges, a map of US Army Air Force operational ranges in Europe, and one also for Japan and Japanese-occupied territory; a table showing monthly sorties flown, tonnage dropped, and operational losses for Royal Air Force Bomber Command and US Eighth Air Force, another table for the US Fifteenth Air Force, and a table showing tonnage dropped and losses for the B-29s of the US Twentieth Air Force in 1944-45. Good scholars, familiar with the latest research, make this book a very convenient reference to have handy. The one disappointment is that some contributors submitted skimpy lists of suggested readings.

John Pimlott's *The Historical Atlas of World War II* (Henry Holt and Co. - 1995, 0805039295, \$45.00) offers over 150 full color maps covering all significant military campaigns and some of the key battles, along with a sprinkling of helpful political maps. Significant text and additional illustrations

round out this helpful work.

For those wanting to focus on just the Pacific, another large book (about five hundred pages) now available is Harry A. Gailey's *The War in the Pacific: From Pearl Harbor to Tokyo Bay* (Presidio Press - 1995, 089141486X, \$29.95).

Most gamers will recognize the name of designer John Prados. His *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II* (Random House - 1995, 0679437010, \$37.50) is a must read for all interested in the war in the Pacific and/or intelligence. John has carefully pieced together the Allied and Japanese conduct of the war with full regard for all aspects of intelligence, from its impact on strategy and operations to individual battles, and derived from whatever source, whether cryptographic, photo recon, interrogations, spies, etc. One sees just how crucial the US strengths and Japanese weaknesses in naval intelligence were to the outcome of the war. My biggest frustration with wargames often centers on the problematic nature of intelligence. This book will help in the understanding of the role of intelligence while reinforcing the case for incorporating it in future simulations.

World War II was ended in a controversial manner (the atomic bombings), and several simulations wrestle with its hypothetical conclusion by examining an Allied invasion of Japan instead. New works of note dealing with such issues include: Thomas B. Allen's and Norman Polmar's *Code-Name Downfall: The Secret Plan to Invade Japan - and Why Truman Dropped the Bomb* (Simon & Schuster - 1995, 0684804069, \$25.00), a work heavy on the military dimensions of the proposed invasions (Operations Olympic and Coronet); Robert James Maddox's *Weapons for Victory: The Hiroshima Decision Fifty Years Later* (University of Missouri Press - 1995, 0826210376, \$19.95), a short but well-argued defense of Truman's decision and a sharp critique of the revisionists; Donald M. Goldstein, Katherine V. Dillon and J. Michael Wenger, *Rain of Ruin: A Photographic History of Hiroshima and Nagasaki* (Brassey's - 1995, 1574880330, \$31.95), a graphic look at the ruin that terminated World War II; and finally, David Westheimer, *Death is Lighter than a Feather* (University of North Texas Press - 1995, 0929398904, \$18.95), a novel originally published as *Lighter than a Feather* in 1971. Westheimer's story is a fascinating depiction of individuals on land, sea, and in the air caught up in Operation Olympic.

Westheimer shifts to and from American and Japanese combatants and civilians in masterfully detailed situations which accurately convey the scope and nature of combat in the southernmost of Japan's



four main islands. The author's extensive research is also apparent in the largely nonfiction prologue. And in contrast to Allan and Polmar and Maddox, Westheimer concludes the campaign would have been much less costly in lives, a point reinforced by John Ray Skates' after word.

The largest battle of the Vietnam War has been neglected by most historians, but a masterful corrective is Dale Andrade's *Trial by Fire: The 1972 Easter Offensive, America's Last Vietnam Battle* (Hippocrene Books - 1995, 0781802865, \$24.95). Dale makes extensive use of primary sources in this fascinating account of U.S. advisors and air power and ARVN soldiers attempting to halt and then reverse the massive North Vietnamese invasion that used all but one of its divisions. His analysis extends from the highest levels of decision making down to brutal combat in the streets of Quang Tri and An Loc. Incidentally, Dale offers an articulate corrective to the Giap hero worship we all too often hear. One only wishes for more maps amongst the six hundred pages.

(Having discussed John Prados earlier, let me mention his interesting new book on Vietnam, *The Hidden History of the Vietnam War* (Ivan R. Dee, Inc. - 1995, 1566630797, \$27.50). It is a wide-ranging set of essays covering diverse topics such as individual experiences of the war, the Tet Offensive, the Phoenix program, the Army of the Republic of Vietnam; and throughout John opines on the lessons of the war and why victory was not possible for the U.S.)

Superb coverage is given to ancient warfare in the new printing of John Warry's *Warfare in the Classical World* (University of Oklahoma Press - 1995, 0806127945, \$19.95). An oversized trade paper edition of the 1980 Salamander release, this work makes extensive use of maps, diagrams, drawings, and photographs to support the very informative text. Uniforms, weapons, and naval vessels are well-illustrated, as are tactical diagrams and methods of combat. The fourteen chapters cover key periods of warfare (and their prominent commanders) stretching from Homeric and Mycenaean warfare up to the barbarian invasions (roughly 2,400 years).

It wouldn't be the holidays without the oversized coffee table books on the wish list. Two in particular stand out. The first (released late last year, so it missed many gift lists) is *The Art of William S. Phillips: The Glory of Flight* (Howell Press - 1994, 0867130229, \$60). William Phillips is my favorite aviation artist and more than eighty pieces of his work are beautifully reproduced here and supported with text by Edwards Park. For the Civil War aficionado, I must highly recommend the collection of Don Troiani's artwork in Don Troiani's *Civil War*

(Stackpole Books - 1995 (distributed in the UK by Greenhill Books), 081170341X, \$49.95). Arguably the best-known Civil War artist alive, Troiani's accurately rendered paintings capture the color and the drama of America's bloodiest war. Brian C. Pohanka's text provides the historical context to each work (over one hundred are in this volume).

### Publisher Resources

For the past eight months a new firm, Ryan Place Publishers, has been releasing a most welcome line of military history with the series title, *Civil War Campaigns and Commanders*. The books are heavily illustrated with numerous maps, photos and illustrations; they contain biographical sketches of all significant personages, and they conclude with suggestions for further reading and tables of organization (when appropriate). The maps, by Donald S. Frazier, are exceptionally clear and useful.

All the titles are quick reads, so Civil War novices will appreciate the works by noted historians Grady McWhiney's *Battle in the Wilderness: Grant Meets Lee* (1886661006) and Perry D. Jamieson's *Death in September: The Antietam Campaign* (1886661014) (this book makes an excellent companion to Spearhead Games' sharp design, *Antietam: The Bloodiest Day*). For those already knowledgeable on the key battles, there are more specific works, e.g., Anne J. Bailey's *Texans in the Confederate Cavalry* (1886661022); John C. Waugh's *Sam Bell Maxey and the Confederate Indians* (1886661030); Thomas Mays' *The Saltville Massacre* (1886661057); and Judith Hallock's *Longstreet and the West: A Monumental Failure* (1886 661049). All the books are released in trade paper editions with a price tag of \$11.95, excepting *The Civil War Crossword Puzzle Book* (1886661081), which is \$9.95. There are currently eight titles available, and approximately eight to ten additional titles will be released in 1996. The Spring season will feature Richard Lowe on the 1863 Texas overland expedition, Steven E. Woodworth on Chickamauga, Donald Frazier on the battle of Galveston, and Spencer C. Tucker writing on Semmes and the *C.S.S. Alabama*. Dr. Hallock does hope to add a children's line of books in 1997.

Take the time to check out this dynamic new line at your local bookstore.

*All ten digit numbers are ISBN, which allow for quick searches and ordering in bookstores.*

## The Gamers' *Marengo*

Published in 1995 • Designed by **Dave Powell**reviewed by **George Pearson**

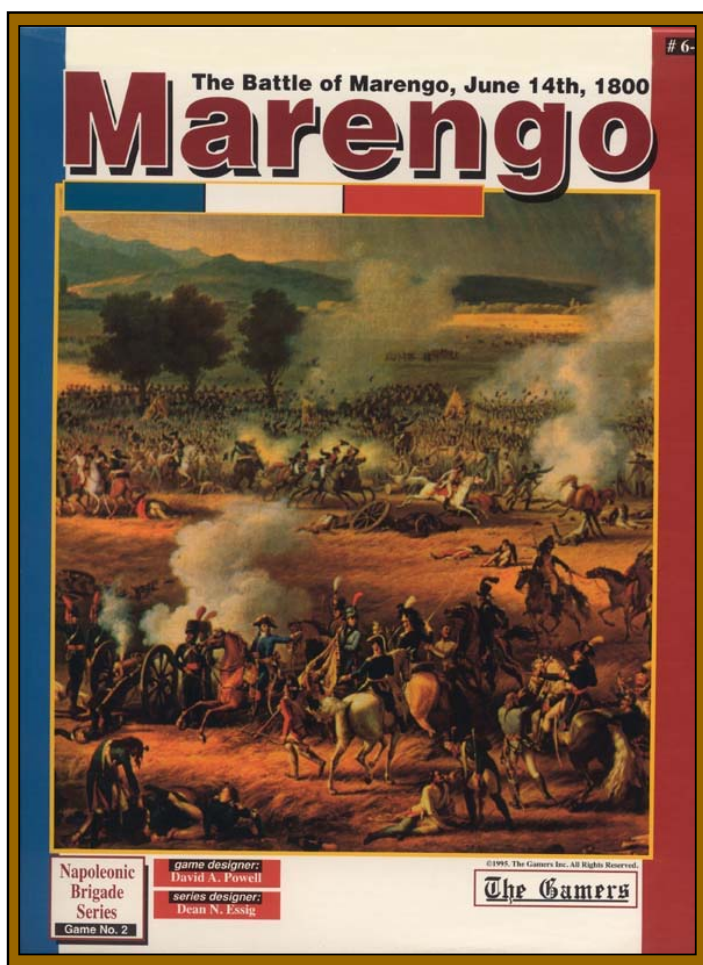
It hasn't been the best of years for the poor old French. The bourse in Paris is down, the mushroom clouds in Polynesia are up, and folks from Stockholm to Singapore are dumping out their Beaujolais in protest. Happily, there's always past glory to dwell on, and nobody dwells on the past better than the French. And what better exemplar of Gallic glory than Napoleon? In recent years, wargaming remembered what the miniatures world never forgot - that nothing beats the excitement and panache of Napoleonic. Clash of Arms Games, long recognized as the standard bearer for games on the era, revived the Kevin Zucker operational system, and is also turning out *La Bataille* releases and re-releases at a dizzying rate. GMT Games won renown (and a Charlie) for Richard Berg's *Three Days at Waterloo*. Third world companies are particularly fond of the Corsican Ogre, with New England Simulations and GamesUSA betting the bank on the continuing popularity of line, column, and square. So, it wasn't surprising when The Gamers, normally preoccupied with Yanks and tanks, decided to port their best-selling Civil War Brigade Series back to the days of *la gloire*. Unfortunately, like many a science-fiction time traveler, going back in time produced more glitches than *gloire*.

*Austerlitz* was the first entry in the Napoleonic Brigade Series, and worked about as well as the Czar's battle plan. The rules were written in a dense, opaque prose that would do a government regulation proud. The workings of cavalry were particularly Byzantine, though horse rules seem overly

complex in most Napoleonic designs. (Must be the nature of the beast.) Due to a lack of zones of control, movement was disturbingly fluid, with units zipping about, flanking each other like some martial version of ring-around-the-rosie. Many of the bugs, like the profusion of Allied skirmishers, were quickly remedied by errata. Other problems remained, awaiting a second edition fix. Happily, the core system was solid, and most grognards (including myself) were optimistic The Gamers would soon get it right. Sure enough. *Marengo*, the second game in the series, turned out to be a fast and furious one-mapper that addressed the problems in *Austerlitz*.

One reason The Gamers can lay claim to a vociferous following is the company's dogged determination to perfect their products. Years ago, while touring Civil War battlefields in Virginia, I picked up a copy of The Gamers' first effort, *In Their Quiet Fields*. Despite the kernel of an interesting system, gruesome graphics and wretched rules consigned the game to the deepest bowels of my storage closet, sharing space with such lepers as *Kriegspiel*, 1862, and anything with an Fresno Gaming Association logo.

Fast forward a few years, and I'm browsing through my friendly neighborhood gaming establishment. Something new catches my eye: The strikingly attractive box cover of *Perryville*. Hmmm, isn't this the same company that did that miserable Quiet Cornfields game? Yeah, but it says here they revised the system, and these counters look sooooo good... Well, such were the changes in graphics and rules that I quickly bought up all the other entries in the series. Even dragged *In Their Quiet Fields* out of exile, retrofitted the rules, and





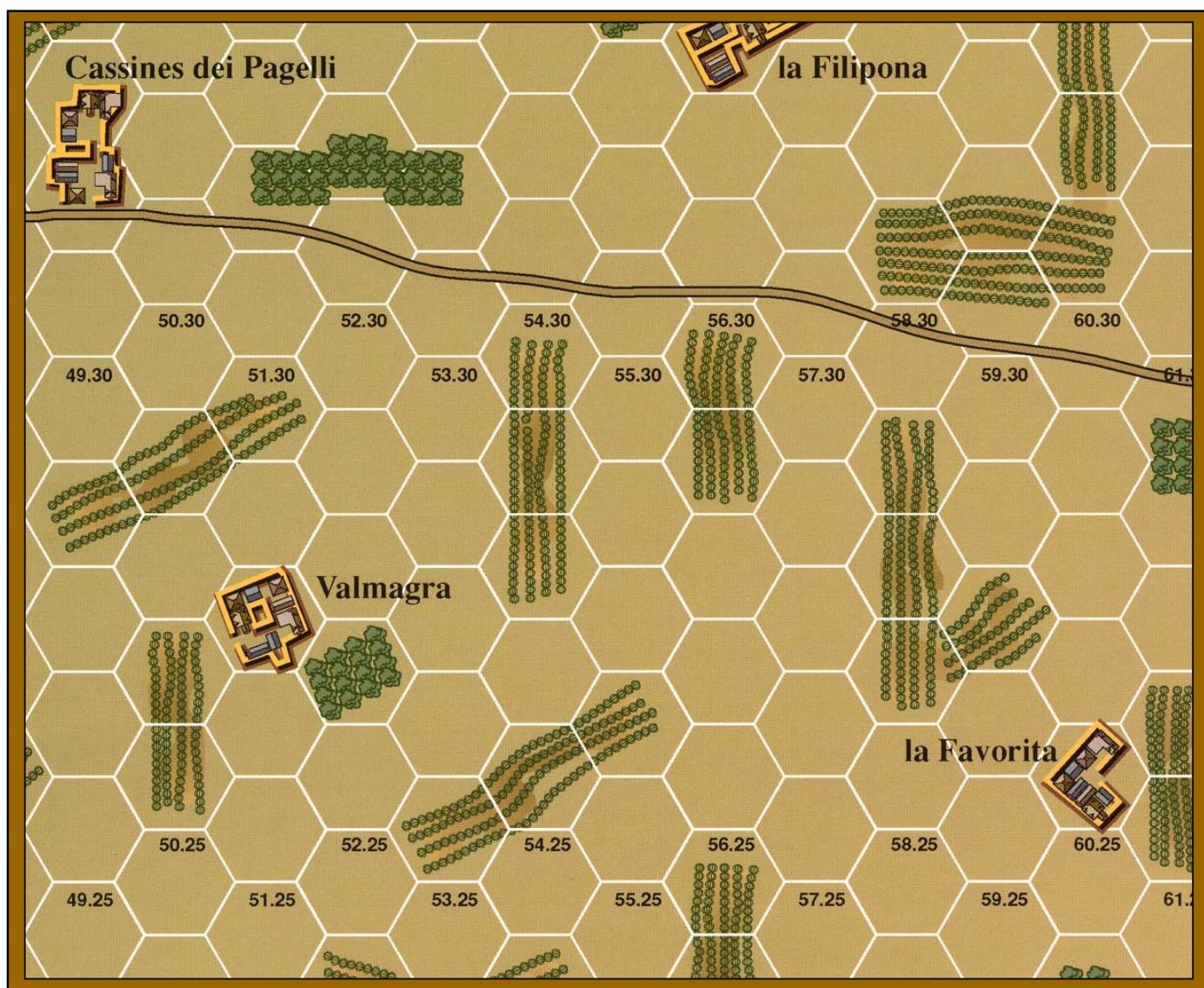
wore it out before the release of the second edition. For The Gamers, improvement is not the exception, but the rule.

Like *Perryville*, *Marengo* is something of a hook, designed to lure entry-level gamers as well as veterans looking for a good, quick rumble. The scale is brigade/regiment, with steps of 150 men for infantry, one hundred for cavalry and three guns per artillery point. Hexes are two hundred yards, while turns cover thirty minutes. *Marengo* includes one map, 280 counters, rule books for the series and the game, charts, tables, and dice. Due to production problems, the much-ballyhooed counter tray was not in evidence. Most companies would let it go at that, but The Gamers enclosed a coupon redeemable for the cost of the missing tray. There's no escaping the long arm of Murphy's Law, but Essig and Company strive as hard as anyone to set things right. When it comes to customer service, The Gamers walk the walk.

Graphically, the counters sport nifty little icons of

infantry, artillery, and cavalry, all decked out in their period finest. Despite the nattering nabobs of NATO-symbolism, I prefer this miniatures look to X's and dots in boxes, especially at the tactical level. The rule books are well laid out, and include copious examples of play in shaded boxes. Commendably, several sheets of army loss charts are supplied, so photocopying is not a prerequisite to game play. The rules themselves are comprehensive and relatively easy to absorb, though the experienced Civil War Brigade Series player would do well to read carefully. Despite a family resemblance to the *Blue and Gray*, *Marengo* is a distinct and decidedly Napoleonic wargame.

As with most of their work, the heart and soul of The Gamers' Napoleonic Brigade Series is the command system. Orders are written out by players, then transmitted down the chain of command, from army to corps to division to regiment/brigade. What makes this process unique is the element of time. In most games, decisions are made on a turn-



by-turn basis. Sure, planning ahead is important, but I can quickly change my mind, reacting to events as they unfold. In the Napoleonic Brigade Series, it may take several turns before an army leader's order is accepted by a corps commander. Acceptance depends on dispatch distance (movement points separating the leaders), leader ratings, method of transmission (written or oral orders delivered by an aide de camp, or man-to-man with the army commander), and the type of order (attack or non-attack). Because all of this results in a much slower reaction time to events, players stop living from turn to turn, and begin to think of the long haul.

In thinking ahead, players must struggle to envision the nature of the battlefield as it will appear hours in advance. You may see an open right flank at 10 a.m., and gleefully write out an order to "attack the village of Bummersch with III Corps." Alas, by the time the order arrives at III Corps Headquarters, and the King's brother, General Putz, has figured it out, the enemy has re-occupied the once open flank in force. When your attack finally goes in at 3 p.m., you gain nothing but casualties, neatly supporting Hegal's aphorism that "history is a butcher's block". In this manner, the system cleverly portrays the command superiority of, say, the typical French Napoleonic army. Boney is certain to whip out more orders, and Lannes and Desaix will implement them more quickly, than your typical Hapsburg half-wits.

As a result of this simple and naturalistic command system, face-to-face play is greatly enhanced. Because changes in plan are difficult and time consuming to implement, feints, gambits, and deceptions can place an unwary or deluded commander in mortal peril. Though it may seem counterintuitive, solitaire play is also a lot more fun. Most solitaire play degenerates into an alternating series of best moves for each side, resulting in a zero-sum stalemate. Now, the challenge of solitaire play lies not in seeking perfect moves, but in executing the proper spirit of each army's plans. The plans become a script, and the player takes on the role of director.

The key element in order acceptance is the interaction between army and corps leaders. All leaders are rated between zero (unfortunate General Mack types) and four (Nappy, Davout, and other luminaries). This distinction in leader quality is further enhanced in *Marengo*, which introduces a new Order Acceptance Table.

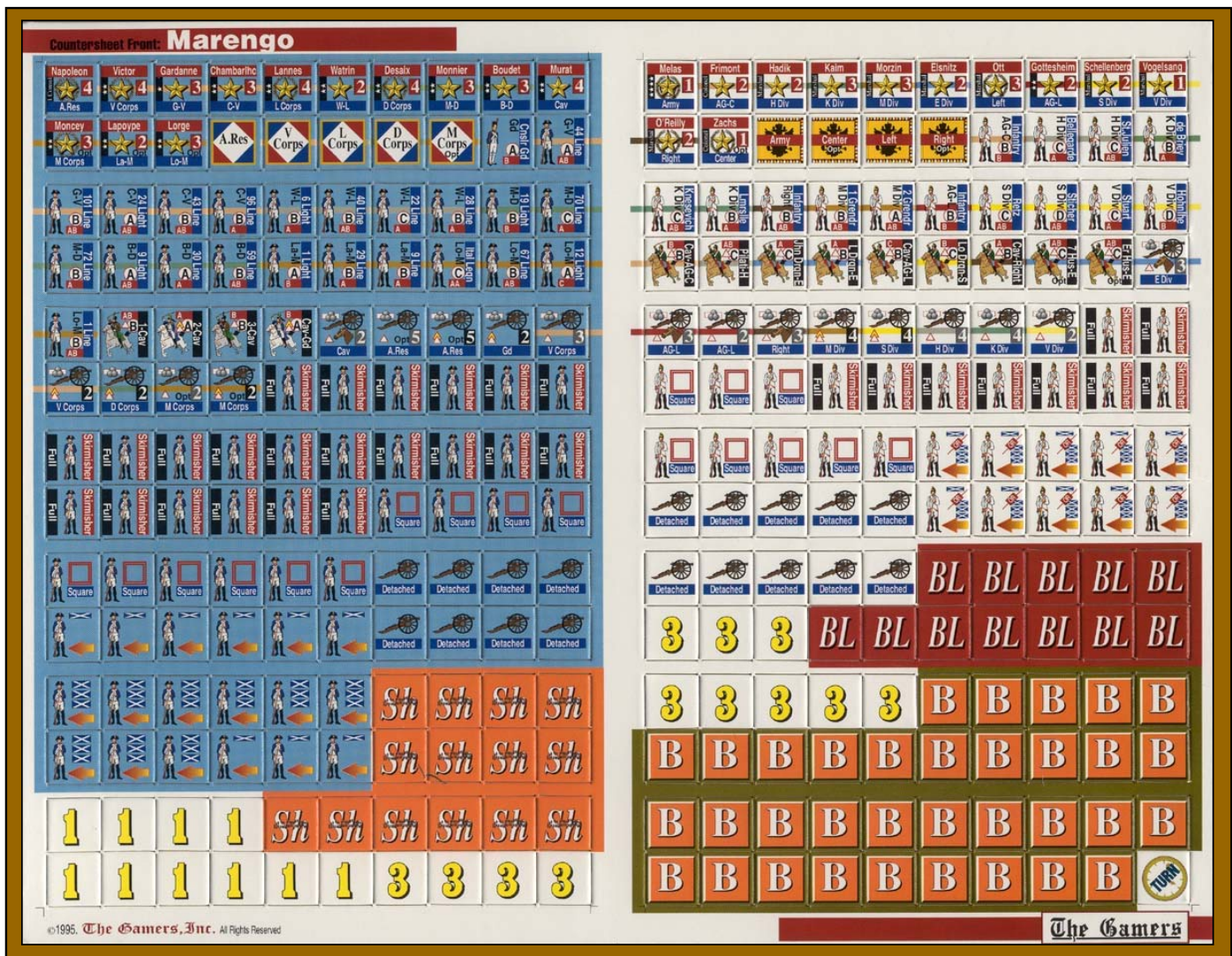
Another interesting feature of *Marengo* is the lack of a corps structure for the hidebound Austrians, who must make do with a purely divisional organization. Bad organization and bad leaders - despite

large numbers and good troops, the Austrian army of *Marengo* is a casebook study in military bankruptcy. This is not to say leader ratings are destiny, or play will proceed with deterministic inevitability. Players can attempt to short circuit the hierarchical chain of command by having corps or division leaders roll for initiative. Success, which is greatly dependent on the leader's rating, means an order is instantly written and implemented. But failure can bring on the dreaded Loose Cannon rule, whereby the opposing player issues a one-turn order to the general's hapless formation. Usually, even good leaders will only try for initiative to seize a fleeting, game-winning chance, or halt an imminent disaster. The penalty for failure is just too high to use initiative with impunity.

Since at least the early days of Avalon Hill, designers have struggled manfully to blur the gods-eye view with which players perceive the battlefield. Early efforts focused on the fog of war, and literally tried to hide units: Inverting, plotting hidden movement, double-blind systems, and so on. Such attempts were frequently cumbersome, gimmicky, and made solitaire play all but impossible. Another approach was to bring chaos into the mix, sort of an application of the randomness of traditional combat results to the realm of command and control. From crude beginnings ("everybody in a hex number ending in three is frozen for the turn"), friction grew into a sophisticated, if often exasperating, tool of the design trade. The Napoleonic Brigade Series' command system cleverly incorporates both approaches. The fog of war limits your vision of both armies: You are in ignorance of your opponent's orders, and never quite sure when your own will kick in. Chaos is generated by the loose cannon rule, which makes possible such phenomena as Ney's cavalry charges at Waterloo, or Sickles' forward movement on the second day of Gettysburg. These are simply not actions any sane players would make, but will occur with depressing regularity when the enemy is writing your orders. The command rules, then, have made a smooth transition from the Civil War to Napoleonics. After a thorough refit in *Marengo*'s second edition, the rest of the rules have proven equally effective.

With its profusion of possible formations, Napoleonics offers a nice change of pace from the usual Civil War infantry scrum. Deciding when and how to use column, line, square, and skirmisher leads to a lot of pleasurable agonizing. By incorporating cavalry charges in the regular movement phase (a second edition change), the system does a good job of representing the combined arms tactics of the period. Charges are a form of close combat, the Napoleonic Brigade Series' version of eyeball-to-eyeball fire, followed by a dose of bayonet and saber.





There are no real revelations here - lines fire, columns move fast, horses bounce off squares, cannon balls don't, and so on. And even with the new, streamlined rules, it still takes time to get the hang of the equine situation, which requires mastering the difference between heavy and light horse, charges, counter-charges, and blown cavalry. Though still complex, the cavalry help reflect the decisive importance of this arm. Besides, there's nothing like riding down an infantry brigade that fails to form square to get your day off to the right start. Of course, even if infantry does manage to form square, the artillery can wheel up blast them into wreckage, so there you go. The second edition rules successfully bring it all together in a good, solid package. Of course, the average Walter Mitty gamer wants more than merely solid when it comes to the dash and glamour of Napoleonic. To this end, The Gamers have wisely added some spice to the basic Civil War stock.

*Marengo* is modifier-intense, and requires a fair amount of rules look-up for morale rolls, charges, forming square, and close combat. This could have

been a real chore, had not the excellent charts and tables provided a comprehensive listing of modifiers. Skirmishers, always colorful types, receive extensive coverage. Rules detail the intricacies of detachment, stacking position, fire from French columns, retreat before combat and other light infantry doings. Curiously, the second edition treats skirmisher units as separate from their parent regiment/brigade, allowing detachment without affecting base strength. This is a change from the first edition, and, frankly, the rationale escapes me. Unless deployed in loose formation, most skirmishers fought as regular line infantry. Indeed, during some battles, entire regiments of guard and light troops would shift back and forth between line and skirmish mode. The rule does avoid the *Wellington's Victory* syndrome, wherein clouds of skirmishers turned that game into a shako-bedecked version of *Squad Leader*. Of course, the Gallic Gang get their usual perks, what with special rules for mixed order formations, more effective skirmishers, and real live corps.

Dave Powell's treatment of *Marengo* provides a

fine example of the Napoleonic Brigade Series command system in action. Despite a massive preponderance of infantry, cavalry, and artillery, the Austrians are burdened with an unimaginative battle plan, and leaders who couldn't walk and chew strudel at the same time. The French, starting with a tiny force of two divisions, must deflect the massive Austrian army until help arrives. As the white coats come tumbling out of their bridgehead on the river Bormida, the French player is liable to suffer a panic attack and run up the *fleur-de-lis*. Take courage, citizen! A third of the Austrians will run up to Castle Ceriolo in the North and then halt, waiting for further orders. Another bunch will be held in reserve, leaving only a fraction of the army to attack towards Marengo. Even if the French are driven from the field, odds are the Austrians will do their historical worst, milling around while their inept leaders frantically try to implement new orders. In the meantime, the French player can prepare his patented winning counterstroke. *Marengo* showcases the Napoleonic Brigade Series system by demonstrating how an inferior force can defeat superior numbers, without the designer stooping to such tricks as fudged combat strengths or stupidity rules.

Of course, design virtue does not necessarily make for unadulterated gaming pleasure. If *Marengo* has a flaw, it is that the historical situation suffers from a certain predictability. The Austrians are straight jacketed into a preordained plan, and, with their low leader ratings, will have a tough time making a timely change. Of course, you could allow the Austrian player to change his initial plans, but you wouldn't be playing *Marengo*. In truth, you wouldn't be playing anything for very long, because the game would be over pretty damn fast. While hard fought and decisive, *Marengo* as a battle lacks the scope of a Wagram or Leipzig.

Not that the game should be pasted with a Custer-Rorke warning label. Both sides will find ample opportunity to demonstrate their offensive and defensive skills. It's just that the game is going to follow a particular pattern - the Austrians attack, stall out after reaching their initial objectives, and then struggle to hang on while the French battle back. Of course, this is the stuff of such wargaming icons as Barbarossa and the Battle of the Bulge, and goodness knows they get plenty of play. It also helps that designer Powell has added some interesting optional variants, allowing players to investigate such what-ifs as Austrian corps command, and the arrival of forces that both commanders scattered about before the battle. With its high production quality and intriguing command system, *Marengo* is a must-buy for anyone with an interest in the period.

The system is also worth a look if your gaming interest transcends mere hacking and slashing. Still, like a tasty but petite French pastry, *Marengo* leaves you wanting more.

Happily, more is on the way, with Freidland scheduled for sometime in 1996. The "old grumblers" will have to be patient, as The Gamers are planning only one Napoleonic Brigade Series game per year. In the meantime, we'll just keep ourselves busy barking out orders with *Marengo* (and the retrofitted *Austerlitz*). "General Lannes to drive on Vigna Santa immediately!" First Consul Bonaparte, aide-delivered, oral. "General Ott to crush the Consular Guard at Villanova!!" General Melas, aide-delivered, written. "But first, General George will clean the cat box and take out the garbage". Wifely order, in-person, oral. That's one initiative roll I'm not even going to try.



## Decision Games'

# Rebels & Redcoats

Published in 1994 • Designed by Christopher Cummins

reviewed by **Carl Gruber**

*Rebels & Redcoats* is a two-volume set of games covering eleven battles of the American Revolution on a regimental scale and at two hundred to three hundred meters per hex. Each volume is sold separately: The first contains the battles of Bunker Hill, Brandywine, Germantown and Monmouth. The second, the Saratoga battles, Bennington, Cowpens, Camden, Guilford Court House and Eutaw Springs. The combined cost of the two volumes is \$60.00 (\$30.00 each). The maps are very nicely done as are the counters, which sport icons portraying a wide diversity of uniforms (or the lack thereof among the colonial militia). Overall, the maps and counters are attractive and except for a few glitches, the general rules hold together (even if the unstapled rule books don't!)

Unfortunately, the designer, Christopher Cummins, refers to *Rebels & Red-*

*coats* as simulations of the battles. I don't mean to quibble over semantics here, but there is an important point to be made. If you buy *Rebels & Redcoats* expecting simulations from the American Revolution, you are going to be terribly disappointed. A simulation recreates as faithfully as possible the environment, tactics, weaponry and psychology of warfare. *Rebels & Redcoats* fails in all of the above. One does not get the slightest idea of relative rates of weapon fire, tactical formations or command confusion. Despite the regimental scale, there aren't even any unit facing rules for either movement or combat. No one is demanding every pre-Twentieth Century wargame be another *Kölin* or *Wellington's Victory*, but if it's going to be called

a simulation, it ought to simulate something. On the other hand, if you approach *Rebels & Redcoats* as a game (meant to entertain within an historical context), you will for the most part be getting your money's worth.

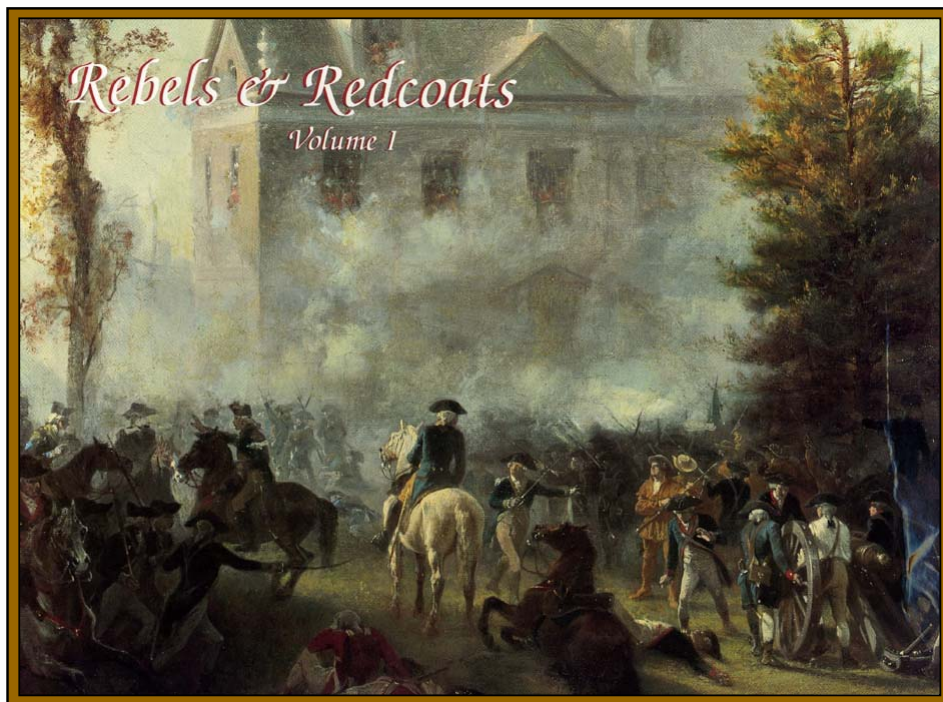
Both volumes share a common set of rules with exceptions and specific rules for each battle. The units are regiments and batteries and are rated for their combat strength, movement allowance, morale and range for artillery. Leaders with command ratings and range values are added. The leaders represent the brigade

leaders for the colonials and division leaders for the British and Hessians at each battle. The game turn segment is classic Igo-Hugo, each player turn consisting of a command segment (simply tracing a unit's distance from its commander), bombardment for artillery, reinforcement segment, movement, assault and rally. In each battle, losses are added

up and compared to each side's disintegration level.

Movement is the standard march and count off movement points procedure. There are no formations for road column or for combat line so you just get your ducks in a row and it's off you go. Force marching (increasing your movement allowance and then rolling for disruption) and entry of enemy zones of control are allowed only for units who were within their leader's command range at the start of the turn. There are sixteen types of terrain with varying movement and combat effects. Given the wooded terrain in most of these battles, roads are important for rapid movement and because they also channel the action.

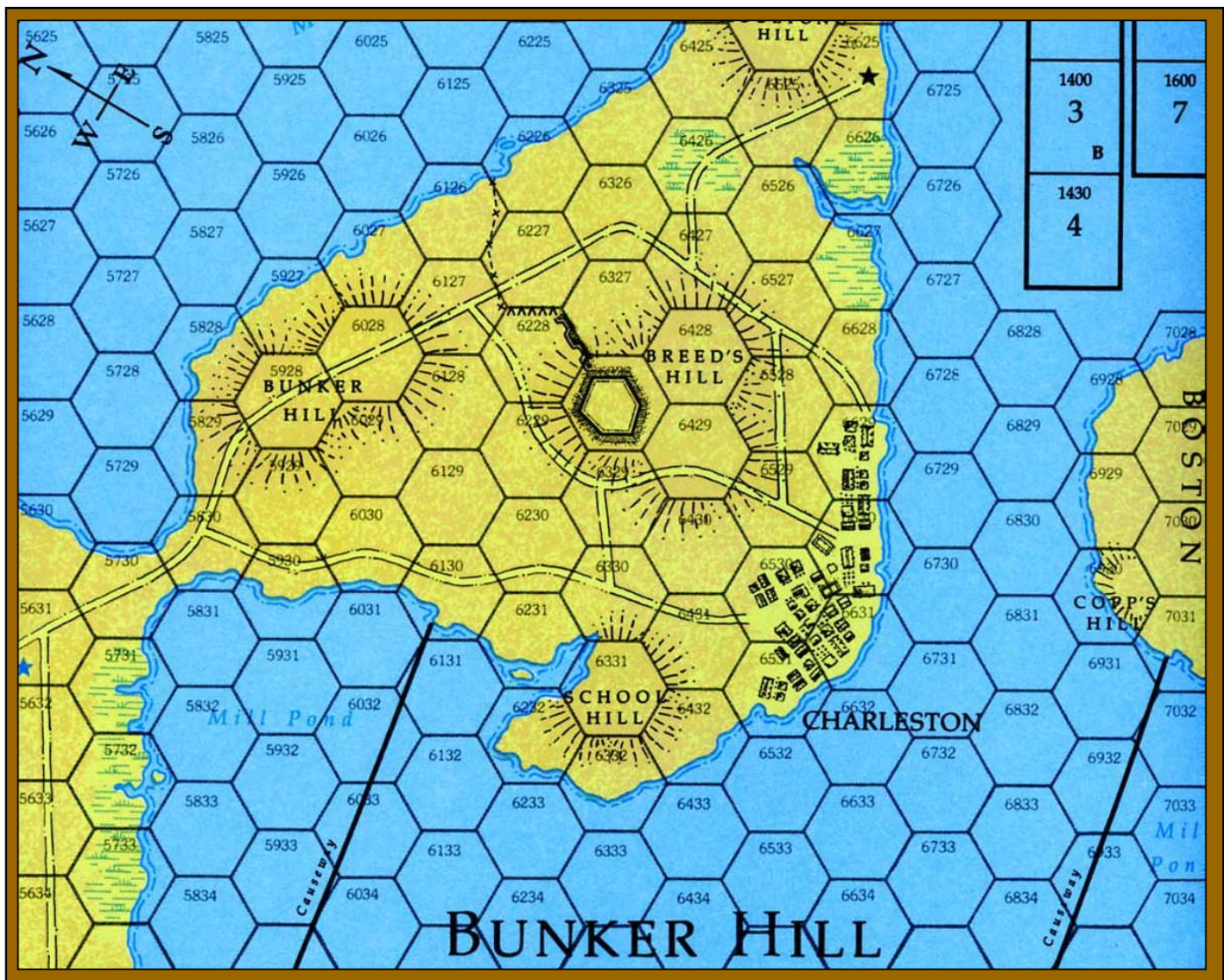
Zones of control are of the active variety. Unless





<b>Germantown American</b>   
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might expect, the British have the best morale, although there are many Colonial army units that are almost as good. The Colonial militia is largely hopeless. Unit morale makes itself felt in so many aspects of the game it gives players a good appreciation for the relative training and man-for-man fighting power of the opposing forces. Force-marching units compare their morale to a disruption die roll, and combat and disengagement require morale checks. The checks are made by rolling a ten-sided die (with various modifiers) so it's obvious that low-morale units will fail these checks most of the time. Units disrupted by failing a morale check from a prior combat are eliminated if attacked and disrupted again before they can rally. Rally is mandatory and if rally checks are failed, units either retreat or are eliminated. Again, the really bad units are going to fail more often than not. The morale checks, combined with mandatory combat in enemy zones of control, has the bad units dropping like flies. In a battle like Guilford Courthouse, it is quite a sight to see a grossly-outnumbered British force

route two entire lines of colonial militia!

Command and control is fairly rudimentary. As stated before, units not within their leader's command range cannot enter enemy zones of control or force march. Leaders also add their command rating as combat die roll modifiers and use them to help units rally. For any other command effects, *Rebels & Redcoats* uses what are commonly known as idiot rules specific to given battles. For instance, at Bunker Hill, the British cannot attack on the first two turns with any units other than their light infantry and grenadiers. At Germantown, Stephens' Division is required to follow a prescribed line of march and then attack its fellow Colonials. At Camden, most of the Colonials are automatically disrupted and retreat before the Brits even move a single unit. Alternate scenarios do allow players to dispense with the idiot rules and just fight it out as they see fit.

As a complete package, the two volumes of *Rebels & Redcoats* are fairly uneven in quality - that is,

players may find many of the battles highly interesting and others (such as Camden or Hobkirk Hill) not even worth the trouble of setting up. German-town offers a tantalizing flank attack against the British, but the lack of unit facing rules unfortunately turns it into nothing more than a shoving match. Admittedly, it is not the role of a reviewer to say that he would have designed a game this way or that, but *Rebels & Redcoats* succeeds in so many respects (especially in its unit morale rules) that the temptation to tinker with the system is almost overwhelming. I finished playing all eleven scenarios with the feeling that with just a few more rules, *Rebels & Redcoats* could have been a playable but engaging classic like West End Games' *South Mountain*. Still, the game is simple enough that it can accommodate the addition of simple house rules to include whatever the player feels is otherwise lacking. That being said, *Rebels & Redcoats* with its eleven battles covering a wide diversity of situations and force levels offers a fairly decent overview of the American Revolutionary era. While it is not an especially astute study of these battles, it does have its merits and with some errata and optional/advanced rules, could be a promising addition to this inexplicably ignored period or wargaming.



## Columbia Games' *Dixie - Shiloh 1862*

Published in 1995 • Designed by Tom Dagliesh

reviewed by **Skip Franklin**

This review will be more of a comparison of Columbia Games' *Dixie* card games *Bull Run* and *Shiloh* collectable card games than a complete review. *Bull Run* was reviewed in Paper Wars #21.

The cards of *Shiloh* are basically the same as its older brother, *Bull Run*, but twice the number. There are generals, infantry, cavalry, artillery, terrain and special cards. *Bull Run* had an even number of cards for the Confederate and Union players, but not so in *Shiloh*. Them Yanks have 236 cards, and Johnny Reb has only 164 cards. One note - only the Union player has terrain cards.

The special cards have some new surprises. There are lost reserves, sharpshooter, battle confusion, bayonet charge, battle smoke, ammo depletion, John Barleycorn, field hospital, stragglers, counter order, prisoner escort, battle fatigue, mascot, ambulance corps, last stand, rearguard, Henry rifle, looting, Johnny Shiloh, rain, Pittsburg Landing, river transport, *USS Tyler* and *USS Lexington* cards in the Union deck. The Confederate deck includes some of the above, plus Purdy Road Bridge, Bedford Forrest, skulkers, brush fire and Shiloh Church cards.

When you build the battle deck prior to play, you may not have more than two of each special card except for cards marked No Duplicates. This is a change from *Bull Run*, where you could have any number of special cards. The Confederate player starts with thirty cards and the Union player starts with forty. You may vary this number, but they must keep the three to four ratio of cards. My math shows that the ratio in a full deck with no duplicates is lower than that. You would have to boost the number of cards for the Confederate player by thirteen to keep a ratio of three to four. I don't know

which special cards could be duplicated to get thirteen more. Five of the six special Confederate cards can be duplicated. For a tournament game you get thirty-six Confederate and forty-eight Union cards.

From the battle deck, both players muster eighteen cards regardless of the size of the battle deck. The remaining cards in the battle deck, now called the reinforcement deck, will of course vary depending on how many cards you have.

The battlefield is the same as in *Bull Run*, with six playing positions, but all start under Union control. The Union player must deploy at least one card and no more than four cards in each position. The remaining cards are put in the reserve. The Confederates do not start on the table but must attack from the reserve position.

The terrain cards are played somewhat differently in *Shiloh*. Two terrain cards can be placed in each position and count against stacking. Note Union terrain cards have codes on them for where they

can be played. There are three cards printed for each position on the map even though you can only play two per position. Another change is the ability to place terrain cards drawn as reinforcements in locations not currently engaged. If you used custom battle decks from a full *Shiloh* set, the Union player could remove six terrain cards, leaving the Confederate player duplicating seven cards to keep a three to four ratio.

I really enjoy the victory conditions. The Confederate player wins if he captures the center or back position. The Union player wins by occupying the center or front position any time in day two of the battle. Day Two?!? Yes!! The first day ends when the Confederate player exhausts his reinforcements. The second day of the battle must end with a win.

The battle turns are the same with morale, combat,



move and reinforcement. The rules writing is better. *Shiloh* helps the players out by putting the rules where they are needed most. Here are three examples:

- The rules for the Combat Phase of a turn discuss both fire combat and melee. The *Bull Run* rules tell you about melee later, and you might miss them at first.
- The Movement Phase rules state an outflank move allows players to both move and fire. This is a good place to clear this up. I didn't catch it at first in *Bull Run*.
- Players now draw two cards during the last phase. This is a change from *Bull Run* and makes the game move faster, having more units engaged sooner.

The morale rules were also cleaned up. In *Bull Run*, if you rolled a number equal to or less than the card's combat value, then a hit would be absorbed. What does absorbed mean? In *Shiloh*, it means you remove the hit. In both games, a natural roll of six is a rout or elimination, but any roll of one in *Shiloh* results in no effect.

The combat rules are improved as well. In *Bull Run*, "A player may fire any/all engaged cards..." That isn't true. You can fire artillery long range without being engaged. The melee rules let you know all units engaged in one position must either fire or melee. You can't split them up to fire and melee. The enfilade rules were totally rewritten. All enfilading cards now fire at *F1*. If the enfilading cards are also adjacent to the enemy reserve position the enfilading cards fire at *F2* instead. In *Bull Run*, enfilading cards fired as normal in all situations.

Terrain effects are very clear in the *Shiloh* rules. The terrain in an enfiladed position affects the fire into it, but does not affect the fire coming out of it. Though not specifically stated, I'd assume two adjacent positions with unengaged enemy cards could enfilade each other. Envelopment is the same - enfilading a vacant victory position is an automatic win - but is considered specifically in the Combat Phase only.

The battle moves rules have been extensively rewritten for clarity. The battle move redeploy is not a term used in the new rules. To my mind, the term is superfluous anyway. Redeploy could have been a disengage move, besides what would you call a move that wasn't an engage, disengage, redeploy or outflank move? Just a move! The new rule states a card that did not fire or melee can make one battle move to an adjacent position. That is a simple to understand rule. Disengaging is not a simple movement from an engaged position anymore. Now you have to worry about movement limits and disorganization. The movement limits are mostly the creeks which restrict how many cards can cross in a turn. Disorganization is when you are overstacked for any reason. When this happens you must roll an immediate morale roll for excess cards. Those that pass go to the reserve and those that don't are history. A problem could exist depending on how you read the rules. Rule 8.2, Disengaging, states excess

disengaging card that violate stacking are routed. But Rule 8.43, Disorganization, states overstacked units roll for morale. I have decided Rule 8.2 applies only to disengaging units that can't cross a creek properly. If a creek limits crossing to two units and you have three, one card bites the dust. The two remaining cards could, however,

overstack the position to which the disengaged moved. You must roll for the excess in that position. The stacking limit is still four cards (remember to count terrain), but generals can provide bonus stacking. You can also force-march infantry and artillery in *Shiloh*. To see if the infantry or artillery cards survive it, make a morale roll. Those that fail don't move at all - a good rule. If you are the Union player insure you cover the front during set up.

You get two cards during the Reinforcement Phase. Remember you can play any special cards drawn at this time.

Terrain cards are different in *Shiloh*. Each card has a specific place they may be played. For each position there are three cards. You can only play two cards at most, but this helps keep play less predictable. Fields have been added to the game. Fields increase the defending cards by one (plus one com-





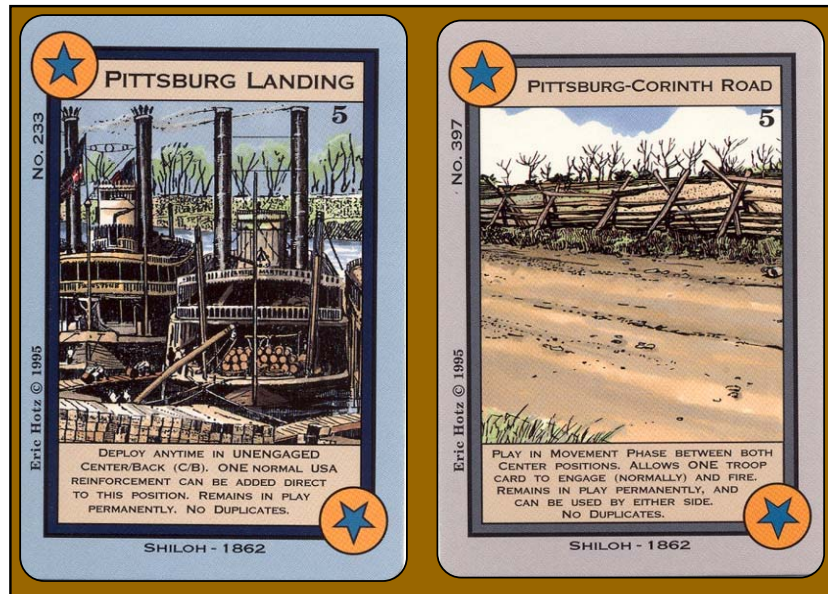
bat value). Woods are the same, but creeks are deployed to a position instead of in the middle ground. There are also ponds - a big change to the game. Creeks and ponds movement limits only affect the enemy player. I wonder what happens if you take a position with a creek. Is the creek yours now, and must the enemy now be concerned about the creek? It sounds like it, but I'm not sure. Remember terrain cards can be played DURING the game, unlike *Bull Run*, but only in unengaged positions.

General cards are pretty much the same. I recognize a few, but not many. General cards do have a new rating, stacking. A general can overstack a position by one, two or three cards. Generals of the same command rank (brigade, division, whatever) cannot stack. The highest rated general in a position is in command of that position, regardless of rating.

A limitation has been imposed on special cards in *Shiloh*. Only two different cards may be played on the same position in the same phase.

The last item to cover is the battle days. The first day ends when the Confederate player takes his last two cards, resolving any hits on the Union cards and disengaging all engaged attacking cards. The Union player then takes half of his remaining reinforcements and adds them to his reserve. Both players then deploy any reserve cards directly to any friendly position but can't alter any cards already in the field.

What do I think of the game? Well, I'm not going to sell my computer for it, but I am going to keep my two decks of *Shiloh* to play between a game of SPI's *Cobra* and XTR's *Proud Monster*. It's fun, even with the few questions I have. I just have to figure out how to afford the six to ten decks I need (and do some hot trading) to get all the cards in the deck without bending the budget. Hopefully by the time I get a full deck I can figure out how to win. Unbalanced? I don't know. I lose no matter which side I play.



Avalon Hill's

# *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader*

Published in 1995 • Designed by Charles Kibler

reviewed by **Greg Ullrich**

You could hear groans from one end of the building to another when *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* was first plopped down on a table at Metro Seattle Gamers. There goes Avalon Hill, cried one ill-informed miscreant, trying to make a quick buck off those poor fools who've sold their soul and mortgaged their home to *Advanced Squad Leader*. A warm welcome it was not. To be sure, my reaction was similar. Why on earth would I need to buy *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader*? I can find an opponent for *Advanced Squad Leader* any time I want at Metro Seattle Gamers and besides, I've never had a problem playing through the scenarios by myself (in fact, some of my most spectacularly brilliant moves have been pulled off against my unsuspecting self). Until our humble editor suggested I review it, I had not planned to give *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* one more thought.

In a way, it was fortunate I had no solid expectations regarding the game when it arrived for me to review. I had heard some small talk prior to its release and expected a game designed to promote solitaire play of the existing system and scenarios. Let me make it clear from the start, *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* does not provide a means to play existing scenarios solitaire. *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* is a system for generating solitaire missions that can be played in isolation or as part of a campaign game. It is designed to challenge the player by the nature of the random situation built around that particular mission's structure.

*Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* is not a complete game and ownership of the basic rules and *Beyond Valor* at a minimum are required. It is recommended (Avalon Hill says required, of course) that you also own *Yanks*, though in actuality, besides the Germans and Russians included in *Beyond Valor*, what is really required are lots of game boards to ensure some variety of terrain. *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* comes with Section S (for solitaire, strangely enough) to put in the rule book; twenty-two pages of additional rules and terms for you to learn. There is also a standard counter sheet full of many new and somewhat mysterious informational counters (I'm positive that at this point *Advanced Squad Leader* has more individual types of informational counters than some games have in total counters). In addition, there are oodles and oodles

of charts and tables, one for each of the nationalities covered in the module (Americans, Germans, Russians and heroic resistance fighters), a double-sized card stock set of basic tables, and the section divider itself; basically enough new charts to keep even a statistician happy for days.

Oh, did I forget to mention that it comes with missions? There are fourteen missions on seven standard-sized scenario sheets. The *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* mission cards (read: Scenarios), cover most of the possible types of actions which one would expect to encounter. The missions include:

- Cautious Advance,
- Pockets,
- Recon,
- Bunker Busting,
- Take the Highway,
- The Fortress,
- Block Party,
- Patrol,
- Enemy Offensive,
- Hold the Line,
- Tank Attack,
- Besieged,
- The Bridge, and...
- Human Wave (my personal favorite).

In each mission you control an approximately company-sized force of infantry (no armored fighting vehicles or guns with your starting forces except by special mission rules) using either the Americans, Germans, or Russians. (Partisans may only be an enemy).

All right, if you've made it this far into the review, you're probably wondering "So how do they pull it off?" In *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* you, the warm body, are always the friendly force and the enemy is always the force controlled by the system (kinda has a sinister connotation, don't it?) The enemy's board edge and the friendly board edge are designated. S? markers are used to denote suspected enemy units (more on these little animals



later). Mission set up can be pretty involved, so to help clarify it, I've outlined the steps below based on the mission Cautious Advance:

- Step one of mission set up involves no die rolling (very strange, I know...) since you must determine the mission's date and the nationalities involved.
- Randomly determine the EC, wind and weather as well as the possibility of camouflage.
- Check the Mission Tables on the mission card and roll for each side's SAN, enemy activation check number, and each side's random event number.
- Randomly determine the map boards and the enemy and friendly edges of the board. The number of boards and the tables used are identified on the mission card.
- Randomly determine the number and location of victory point objectives.
- Finally, you may begin placing the *S?* markers for the enemy and deploy your forces.

The above steps vary slightly from mission to mission, particularly the *S?* placement procedures. The sometimes extensive mission special rules can also throw a kink or two into the procedures, such as in the Cautious Advance mission where, in the course of play, a number of additional boards (all full of *S?* markers) can potentially be activated. *S?* units are placed according to scenario guidelines, which usually means most buildings, victory point objectives and groupings of trees get one or more *S?* units placed in them. Special rules are provided for placing *S?* units on city or forest boards.

The *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* system revolves around two new features: The *S?* units and random events. The *S?* units are at the heart of the system mechanics. An *S?* represents a suspected enemy location, either real troops or dummies, as determined by the activation process. Prior to activation, *S?* units are treated as squads under concealment. The conditions for activation are generally the same or similar to those for concealment loss with a couple of new wrinkles. Each enemy nationality has specific proximity and net FIT die roll modifier to a friendly target which can trigger activation and an *S?* in advance attitude activates when moved adjacent to any friendly unit. When activation criteria are met, the player makes an activation check by attempting to roll less than or equal to the enemy activation check number. If this succeeds, a roll is made on the Enemy Activation Table to determine the category of unit activated (squad, half-

squad, gun, armored fighting vehicle, leader, etc.) followed by a roll on the appropriate nationality table(s) to determine the exact unit type(s).

The actions of *S?* units are governed by the enemy force's prevailing attitude. This can either be hold or advance. In a hold attitude, the *S?* units will never move prior to activation (and infrequently thereafter). After activation, they tend to sit in place and attempt to fend off the friendly hordes. In an advance attitude, *S?* units generally attempt to move from the enemy board edge to the friendly board edge with occasional detours to take out victory point objectives. Each activated enemy unit requires a die roll (based on its attitude) to determine its actions for the turn. This can lead to some bizarre actions which run counter to common sense, but that's part of the charm built into the system; you can get a pretty good idea, but never quite know what the enemy will do.

The random events are the spice of the system. The flexibility of friendly forces as compared to the relative immobility (or relatively predictable movements) of the enemy would quickly lead to a dull game as the friendly forces dance around the dazed system. This is where the random events come in. During the mission generation process, each side has a pair of consecutive random event numbers generated (for example, the enemy has random event numbers of five and six and the friendly side has numbers of three and four). Should a wind change die roll at the start of a turn result in a friendly or enemy (or both!) random event number, then that side rolls for a random event. The friendly side uses a nationality-specific event table while the enemy uses a generic table (partisan enemy forces have a separate table). Random events have the potential to throw the game completely out of balance (in either direction). The first game I played had my thirteen first line German squads suddenly reinforced by eleven elite 4-6-8s, an unneeded but certainly welcome addition which capped my triumphant romp over the enemy. Imagine the reverse situation - the impact of a sudden appearance of three enemy T-34s in a 1941 scenario where your only anti-tank weapon is a handful of ATRs. Or consider the last mission I played, Human Wave, where not only did five human waves appear in the first five turns (the width of each wave is random and conceivably could stretch the width of the board), but an additional fourteen enemy *S?* units from a random event result swarmed on to the board from the flank on turn four.

Short of someone developing a super computerized artificial intelligence, it's really not yet possible to have an artificial intelligence which can suitably challenge the average player once the mechanics of

the system are grasped. *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* is no different. With the rules governing the *S?* units alone, players can easily exploit the restrictions and conditions of *S?* unit conduct to quickly and inevitably defeat the enemy. In a holding attitude, the enemy will not mass reserves in response to your moves. In an advance attitude, the enemy will not mass on your weak point(s) but will blindly (and in almost total ignorance of the terrain) move across the board toward either the friendly board edge or a victory point objective. Random events force you to take the extra precautions against the impact of enemy reinforcements, artillery, fortifications, or the sudden withdrawal of key elements of your command (not to mention the possibility your entire mission objective suddenly is changed in mid-stride).

To be fair, *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* does allow for common sense to judge a number of situations where decisions must be made for the enemy. And in any case, this is a solitaire game; you only have to live up to your own standards of rule interpretation. If you really feel it is in the enemy's best interest to perform some action or another, who's going to mind if you go ahead and do it? Careful application of appropriate common sense to the enemy actions can go a long way to improving the enemy performance and increasing your challenge.

*Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* is designed for campaign play and includes comprehensive rules for playing your own solitaire campaign. A campaign is basically a series of randomly determined missions, played out in the same manner as the normal missions, but with your starting forces based on the surviving units from the previous mission. Each mission represents one month of the war and you can try to have your company survive the entire war by continuing to play missions through to the end of the war (and see how well you can keep your men alive through it all). In the missions, you have 130 BPVs to spend on multi-man units (squads, half-squads, and crews only) with support weapons and leaders determined by the design-your-own game process from Section H of the basic rules. In the campaign games, you start with a standard company for the era which results in a starting force slightly richer in men and equipment than the design-your-own method. The catch is, of course, these men must last through many missions. Opportunities exist for seasoning your troops, improving leaders, and receiving replacements (the rules for which are directly derived from existing *Advanced Squad Leader* campaign games such as *Red Barricades* and *Kampfgruppe Peiper*), though all mission or random event-generated forces attached to your command are returned to the counter mix after each

mission.

I've saved one other feature for last since it has a direct application to the last topic I'd like to discuss with regards to *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader*, - its suitability for use in normal *Advanced Squad Leader* face-to-face play.

*Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* includes rules for friendly command and control. Each unit must make a morale check (with specific modifiers based on the unit status) at the start of each friendly player turn. A leader who passes his morale check automatically puts all friendly MMCs and lower-rated leaders within two hexes and line of sight in command without requiring a die roll. In addition, any troops the lower-rated leader has within two hexes and line of sight are also automatically in command. Failure means the unit in question panics. A unit with a panic marker is basically immobilized for the remainder of the turn and has suitably nasty penalties should it be engaged in melee. The enemy forces do not have command rules per se, the possibility of panic being built into their action table.

While its inclusion in normal games has the potential to upset the balance of certain scenarios, it would be interesting to include command control in normal play. Each player simply checks for command at the start of his turn and applies the effects of panic as appropriate. Command and control will have a profound effect on your style of play, since such mundane considerations as communication between your forces and control of isolated units now suddenly takes on a whole new meaning. You will have to check the effect of this rule on each scenario on a case-by-case basis, since some forces are not provided with enough leaders (or quality troops) to allow them to operate effectively within its restrictions. You might allow for the inclusion of one or more 7-0 leaders in addition to the starting forces for a particular side to help balance the situation. If you are at all interested in adding a new twist to an old scenario, by all means throw in some command and control.

In addition to command and control, *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* has some additional potential for spicing up your face-to-face play. When setting up a design-your-own scenario, the various mission cards can be used as a basis for assigning victory point objectives, boards, and even troop allocation. Have your opponent design his forces (using 130 BPV or a standard company), while you set up a mission as if you were going to play solitaire. After you've deployed the *S?* units and your opponent has deployed his forces, roll for the activation of each *S?* on the board(s) using the activation check number obtained during mission set up. You get to play



with the forces thus revealed. Of course, this does not necessarily lead to balanced games, but if done with the inclusion of the original *Squad Leader* campaign game as the basis for judging performance, it can result in an interesting campaign or series of battles. One could also use random events in basic scenarios to add another element of spice, though here you are basically throwing balance to the wind.

You might have caught on at some point in all this that there are a lot of die rolls involved with the basic *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* system. A meticulous player of *Advanced Squad Leader* who is accustomed to slow, careful play will probably take this in stride. Once you have the rules down and a couple of the key tables memorized, things can get taken care of automatically. Personally, I don't enjoy the pace of play presented by the full gamut of *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* rules (rolling every time to determine actions, whether or not a unit will enter close combat, how a unit will conduct close combat, who it will fire at, why it will fire at it, how it feels about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness - you get the picture). In response, I apply a judicious amount of common sense in place of many of the action die rolls and am able to speed play to my level of satisfaction. As I've said before, it's a solitaire game, do what you have to do to make it enjoyable for yourself. Besides, there isn't a snowball's chance in hell of there ever being *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* tournaments at conventions where an in depth knowledge of the *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* is a requirement ...is there?

If I have any real complaint, it's the limited number of nationalities available for use with the module. You don't get to play with popular nationalities like the Japanese or the British, at least until the first *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* expansion set comes out (if ever), or until, if ever, you see them in *The General*. (*Publisher's Note: Multi-Man Publishing has released a second edition of Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader which contains numerous nationalities.*) All you get are Germans versus Americans, Russians or Partisans with the later only available as an enemy. Granted, the scope of different missions is virtually unlimited given the random set up nature of the game, but I would really like to be able to use my favorite forces, the French, instead of the tried (and tried and tried and...) and true ones included. In addition, you are quite limited in the type of initial forces. Once you've played this game a few times, you'll probably evolve a standard force mix which you are happy with and end up using it eighty to ninety percent of the time. The game should have allowed for the construction of

combined arms forces (which it allows only in a couple of the missions, and even then it's a special purpose force at that).

*Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* is a good solid addition to the now extensive line of *Advanced Squad Leader* modules. Whether it is right for you is another matter. *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* requires the player to have a pretty good handle on the rules and access to most if not all of the non-desert boards. It should not be considered a training aid for the novice except where that novice has direct access to an experienced mentor. A lot also depends on your access to other players. If you don't get more than a couple opportunities a year to play *Advanced Squad Leader*, you might find *Solitaire Advanced Squad Leader* a worthwhile acquisition. If you have plenty of opponents, you might want to pick the game up for its command rules and to try out the various options it allows for design-your-own and randomizing your scenarios.

## HEN'S TOOTH

## Close Simulations'

*Forward Edge of the Battle Area*

Published in 1985 • Designed by Gary Morgan

reviewed by **Terry Rooker**

*Forward Edge of the Battle Area* is a game about NATO versus Warsaw Pact conflict in the 1980s. It was one of the games in the Project Warrior program of the US Air Force - an attempt to use commercial wargame technology in training Air Force personnel. *Forward Edge of the Battle Area* concentrates on the interaction of close air support and troops in combat. It was later enhanced and published by Avalon Hill as *Tac Air*, but the original game in its plain white box is a very tough game to acquire.

The sequence of play uses a combination of simultaneous and individual phases. Each turn begins with Disruption/Depletion Removal and Logistics Determination Phases that are conducted simultaneously. Units that are out of supply will have reduced capabilities. Then there is a simultaneous Air Allocation Phase. Eligible air units are assigned to one of three missions: Air combat, close air support, or strike. Strike missions additionally have primary and secondary targets designated.

Then the ground activity begins through a sequential phase for each player. In his turn, each player moves any ground units he desires and conducts combat. The second player then repeats this procedure. There is a similar Helicopter Phase, where one player moves his helicopter units and attacks with them. One difference from ground units is that enemy anti-aircraft units may fire on a helicopter unit if they move within range. Then the other player may move and attack with his helicopter units.

Finally, the air units move through a Fighter Phase that has ten identical air rounds. All air units with assigned missions are placed on the friendly map edge. The first player then moves all of his units or stacks the allowed movement allowance (there may be up to two air units in a hex). As they move, they may attack enemy air or ground units, depending upon their capabilities. If an air unit moves within range of an enemy anti-aircraft unit, that unit may fire at the air unit. After the first player has moved all his air units, the second player then moves all of his air units. The air round is then repeated if necessary. All air units must exit their friendly map edge by the end of the tenth air round, or they are eliminated.

Combat is resolved using simple differential-based combat results tables. For ground combat the attacker's attack strength is compared to the defender's defense strength. Air units have two combat values; an air combat strength and an air attack strength. The first is used against other aircraft, while the air attack strength is used when attacking ground units. Helicopters use a little of both. In combat with a ground unit, the helicopter attacks and defends like a ground unit. When attacking another helicopter, the attacker applies a plus one die roll modifier, while the defending helicopter doesn't get any terrain advantage from the hex it is in. When attacked by an air unit on an air combat mission, a fighter uses its air combat strength versus the helicopter's defense strength. If the helicopter is attacked by an air unit on a close air support or strike mission, then the air unit uses its air attack strength against the helicopter's defense strength. There are three different combat results tables; one for air combat resolution, one for air defense fire, and one for everything else (ground combat, air attack, and helicopters).

Combat results are applied in terms of disruption steps for ground units. Disrupted units cannot attack, but they can defend. Units with one step of disruption may still move their full movement allowance. Units with more steps of disruption may not move. When the fourth step is received, the unit is destroyed. Disrupted command and supply units still provide their respective services until destroyed.

Air combat results are applied in terms of abort, half and flight. An abort causes the unit to leave the map. A half result means half the flight is lost. A flight result destroys the entire air unit. Ground unit disruption can be removed through command rally, or with a die roll in the Disruption/Depletion Removal Phase.

If you want to look at supporting troops in combat, there are other targets than opposing troops - there are also headquarters and supply units. Both use a simple radius-based mechanism for determining command and supply. As long as the subordinate or attached units are within the appropriate command or supply radius, then they can function normally. The table of equipment and organization must be followed. If a ground unit's superior headquarters



is destroyed, you cannot attach it to another headquarters. Likewise, supply units are assigned to specific brigades (two supply units per brigade) or artillery or air defense units. If that supply unit is destroyed, then no others can replace it.

If a unit is out of command, then it cannot move. If a unit is out of supply, then it may not attempt command rally. If a superior headquarters is destroyed, then the subordinate units lose one point from each of their attack and defense strengths. If the attached supply unit is destroyed, then the supported units are considered out of supply. Supply status does not affect command rally, where a unit may recover one level of disruption if they are adjacent to a superior headquarters.

Remember - this is a game about the interactions between units. The importance of headquarters and supply units as targets should be apparent by now. It is often more productive to attack them with your air units, since their destruction may immobilize or impair several maneuver battalions. For example, if you can get two or three disruptions on a headquarters, then it is immobilized such that the subordinate ground units can only move around inside the command radius of that headquarters. This can be especially tricky, as the penalty for destroying the headquarters is not as severe. The units only receive a minus one to their combat values, but can still move independently. Of course, the effect varies, depending upon whether you are on the offensive or are near your objective if you are on the offensive.

This system, in both *Forward Edge of the Battle Area* and *Tac Air*, has been criticized. Yes, the ground combat rules are very simplistic. Yes, the air combat rules are very simplistic. Yes, the command and control rule is archaic, even for 1985. Yes, the supply rule is simplistic. But remember the intent of the game - *Forward Edge of the Battle Area* was designed to focus on the interaction of all these elements. So if any of them alone or all of them together were complex, this focus would be lost. It would be a case of not being able to see the forest for the trees. By providing simple systems, the players can master their interactions. Even the NATO player will have limited air assets. It becomes terribly important to decide where to best use them. There are short- and long-term tradeoffs involved.

Obviously, it is important to disrupt or destroy headquarters and supply units. But which headquarters and which supply units? Some supply units support maneuver battalions, while others support artillery or anti-aircraft units. This is one overlooked simplification of the game design. Air units flashing across the sky may not really be able to focus in on just the supply infrastructure that is sup-

porting a particular artillery unit. The supply counters really represent assets spread over several hexes, so there would be some overlap of these assets in a real situation. Still, the basic idea works. Attacking an artillery supply unit may remove that support at a critical moment, but if a friendly unit is about to be overrun, then it might be better to attack the superior headquarters. It might even be necessary to attack one of the maneuver battalions to provide the most immediate relief, even if it has limited long-term potential.

Early in the game there is another decision facing the players. Just how much effort do you spend on suppressing the enemy air defenses? Any sorties used for these missions is not available for winning the ground war. If it is ignored, then there will be increased attrition of friendly air units, which may eventually result in losing the ground war anyway. Even in this decision there are several competing elements. When an air defense unit fires, it may become temporarily depleted where it may not fire any more that turn. This depletion may open a local hole in the air defense system. Of course, destroying a unit opens a permanent hole, while disrupting the supply unit creates a longer term degradation of several units. Unfortunately, too many gamers have lost the opportunity for investigating these tradeoffs by criticizing the lack of detail in specific mechanisms in the game.

Most of what I have already discussed in this review applies to the basic game. Artillery and anti-aircraft supply is an advanced game feature, as is the concept of higher echelon command units. There are three counters that represent the division headquarters. If all three are disrupted, or if all three move on the same turn, then the division maneuver units suffer division disruption - the subordinate command units cannot move, and the division radar surface to air missile headquarters is suppressed. Suppression is another advanced rule, but it only affects air defense units. When the air defense headquarters is suppressed from division disruption, or suffers a disruption result directly, out of command range of a superior headquarters, then the attached fire units have their strength reduced by one and their range halved. If an individual fire unit is outside of command range, then it is suppressed.

Other advanced rules include night conditions and adverse weather, which restricts which units may fly. There are engineer rules that allow for bridge demolition, mine laying and removal, and which can provide an urban combat advantage. Each side may also perform one special electronic warfare combat suppression mission per turn. This is a modified strike mission that can only occur against radar surface to air missile fire or command units,

representing a Wild Weasel attack. There is also a rule for a NATO joint air attack team, representing the pairing of attack helicopters with A-10s. Finally, both sides can attempt limited chemical warfare and tactical nuclear attacks.

So how well has *Forward Edge of the Battle Area* stood the test of time? Well, the trivial answer is not well, since the NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation thankfully never happened, but that is true of all such games. They still have the potential to provide insight into their respective doctrines. The more exact answer is that simplicity of the system has, over time, highlighted both the weaknesses and strengths of *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*.

One weakness concerns the doctrinal differences between the two military systems, which are largely washed out. NATO units have slightly better combat values, and Warsaw Pact ground and air units are slightly superior in numbers. Probably the biggest difference in terms of successfully playing the game is the difference in number of air defense units. Usually, the Warsaw Pact player will have some surplus units, while NATO will find the loss of every air defense unit painful. Granted, the NATO fighters can take up some of the slack, but some Warsaw Pact air units are bound to slip through, and the accumulated effects can wreak havoc on NATO.

For all the deficiencies of *Forward Edge of the Battle Area*, however, the simple mechanics do allow the players to concentrate on the interface of air and ground missions. They don't get bogged down in details of air intercepts and bombing runs. No other system captures this interaction nearly as well.

And I think this is part of the reason the system wasn't accepted as well among wargamers. The interaction of the air and ground war portrayed in *Forward Edge of the Battle Area* is in large part a management of limited assets. While this is the type of decision military officers deal with regularly, some wargamers don't always find them very interesting.

Yet, the simple mechanisms, because they were never individually state-of-the-art, don't seem dated now.

All in all, *Forward Edge of the Battle Area/Tac Air* is a solid system that is focused without adding distracting chrome. It is still the best system on its topic, and that is a pretty strong statement for any game.



## Spearhead Games' *Bloodiest Day*

*Published in 1995 • Designed by Peter Perla*

*reviewed by* **Jason C. Pipes**

What other period in military history has the appeal and the flavor of grand tactical and operational American Civil War battles? Each period has its own appeal, but the Civil War has a pull all its own; an allure that provides the market with the ability to produce a plethora of games. Next to World War II and the Napoleonic Wars, the Civil War ranks as one of the more popular genres in our hobby. It is no small surprise certain battles from the Civil War are designed over and over again. Wargamers never cease to purchase games, even those that have been done before, if they offer something new, something better, or something worth gaming. With Spearhead Games' new release, *Bloodiest Day* by Peter Perla, gamers are given the chance to once again refight a familiar and fascinating battle, Antietam.

The game simulates the Battle of Antietam, fought on September 17, 1862, at one inch equals 285 yards. Combat units are brigades for infantry and cavalry, and battalions for the artillery. The game comes with the following: a game box, one counter sheet, a rule book, the map, four player aid sheets, two zip-lock counter bags, and the usual registration card. Although I will refrain from measuring the size of the fonts used in this game à la the GameFix controversy, I will give a rundown of the game material and its presentation. The box for this game is well designed and well presented, with a good choice of cover art gracing the front of the box. Many well designed games suffer a small bit when the box art chosen detracts from the overall feel for the game. Of course, as we all know, anybody who would judge a game by its cover is not much of a gamer.

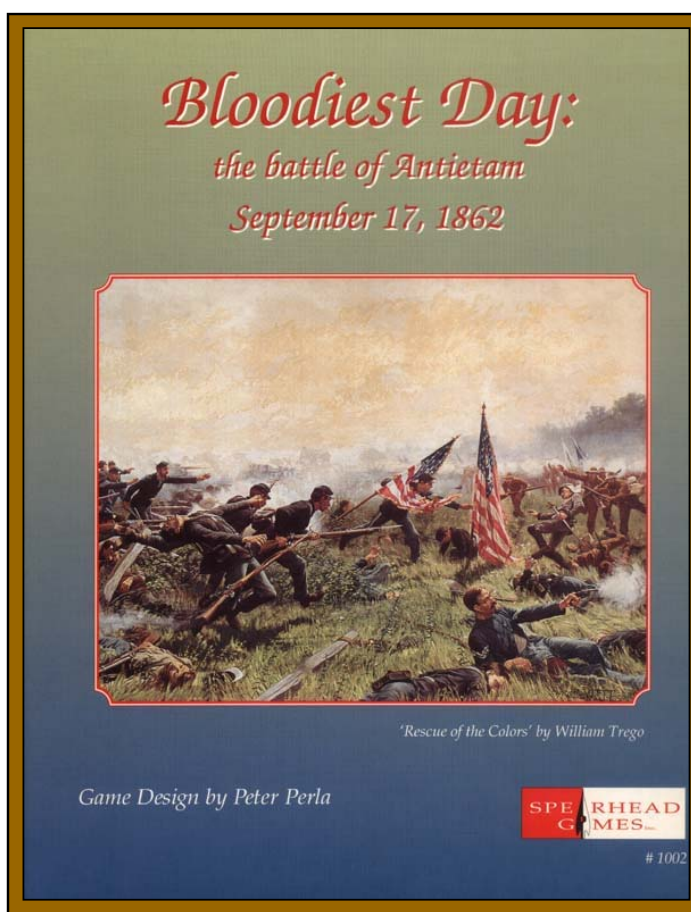
In the realm of cerebral and creative thinking one needs to be a part of when playing consims, the atmosphere that is given by the choice of cover art can indeed set the mood for the game being played. The box itself is a lot like the type now used by The Gamers for their releases. It is glossy, lightweight, and seemingly a bit weak. This type of box seems to bow a lot faster and easier than, say, the old bookcase boxes from Avalon Hill.

The game comes with a beautiful 22" x 34" area movement map. Although I prefer hexes to area movement, this system works well and what is more, the map really does look incredible. The thirty-four page rule book contains twenty pages of rules, one page of variants, seven pages of history and notes, and two pages of counter sheet reproductions. The rule book is wonderfully written and the layout is very easy to follow and easy on the eye too! It includes examples of the items being discussed in the margins and is illustrated to explain all the major points of movement, supply, and combat.

The game has one counter sheet of 176 5/8-inch counters that will need

dog-ear clipping, if you do that sort of thing. Icons of either cavalry sabers for the cavalry, artillery for the artillery, or a unit's divisional symbol grace the front side of the counters. The counters themselves look good, but personally, unless the counters look like the GMT Games mini-works of art, I usually don't like symbolic counter art. The standard NATO-esque icons work well for me, and they are functional too.

So how about game play? Two players take the sides of the Union Army of the Potomac and the





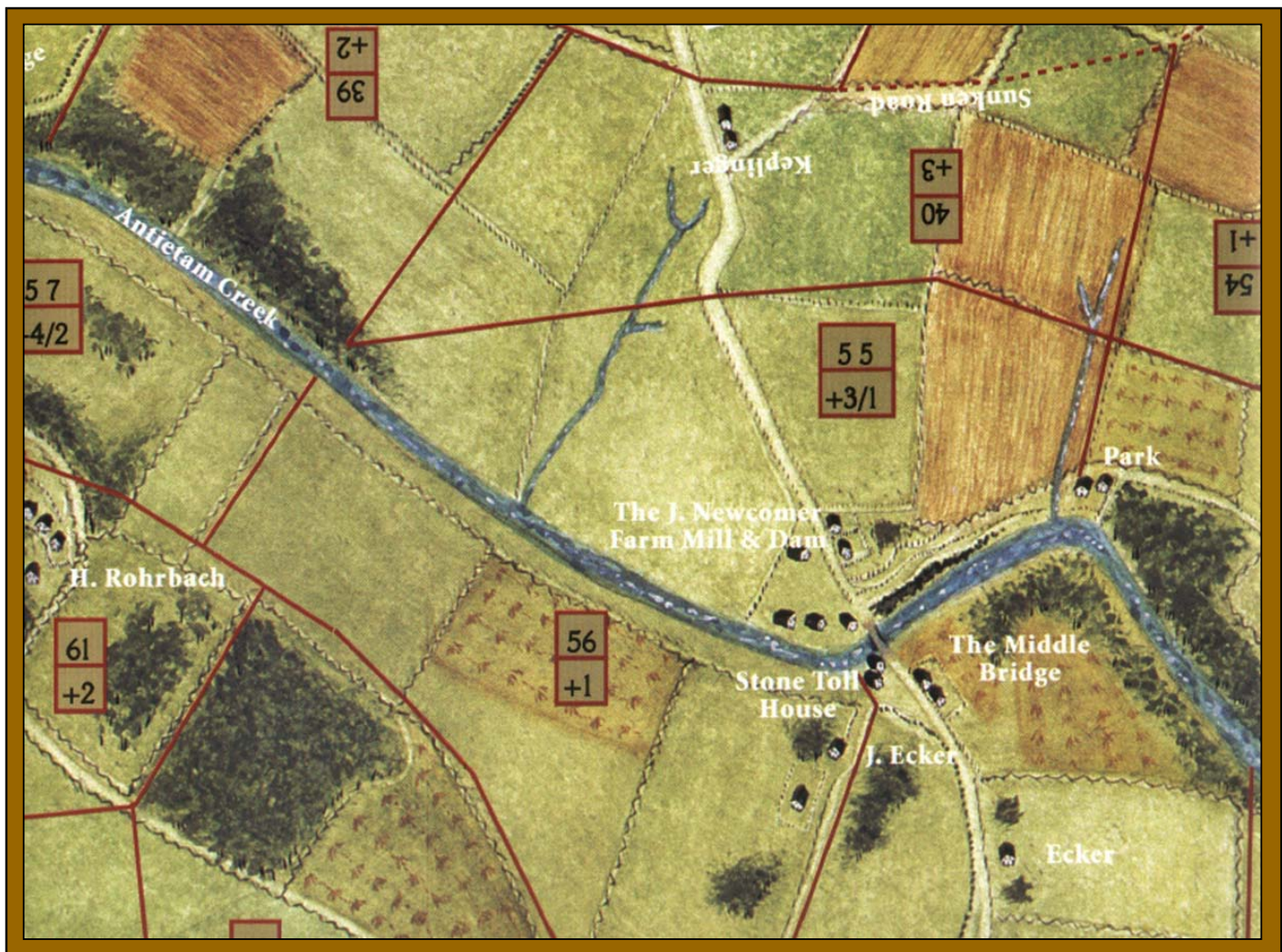
Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, and attempt to crush the other player or force him from the field. Players are awarded victory points for destroying enemy units and for controlling certain areas on the map. Certain areas on the map are marked with stars. Areas with a star that the Union controls which include the West Woods, Dunker Church and the Sunken Road provide a plus one die roll modifier for all impulse die rolls. Areas that have a star in a box that the Rebs control give a minus one die roll modifier to the Union impulse die roll. Areas with two stars are locations that, if the Union controls them at the end of the game, results in a decisive Union victory. By determining victory or defeat through geographical locations on the map, the players are forced to play somewhat historically, but are not forced into playing as if they were actually Lee or Little Mac. The locations serve to say, "This is where you need to be..." but don't constrain the players into using idiot rules.

The sequence of play in this game consists of a series of player turns with phases and impulses. Each turn begins with the Union Artillery Phase, in which Union long range artillery of the V Corps reserve

can rake Lee with shells. Next is the Action Phase, in which the Union and Confederate player alternate impulses until one or the other can't or won't activate an inactive leader, designate any one area as the active area for the impulses, bombard, conduct volley attacks, move, reinforce, or assault. Next is the Rally and Reorganization Phase, when both sides attempt to rally spent units and to reorganize eliminated units. The turn ends after the Rally and Reorganization Phase, and the turn marker is advanced. The counters have two sides, the front being the fresh side and the back the spent side. Spent units cannot attack and usually cannot move. Leaders are included in the game, and they must be activated before their subordinate units can in turn be activated and used.

Units must be activated during the current impulse in order to initiate an action or combat. Combat consists of close range assault, volley and artillery bombardment. Assaults can be made during or prior to movement, and in both cases, unlike volley and bombardment, must be made into an adjacent area containing enemy units. All three kinds of combat are resolved using a seemingly complex





(but that can be easily made second nature) equation that results in casualty points that are subtracted from the units. Units may be eliminated outright, spent or forced to retreat. Overall, the combat system is simple and elegant, while maintaining a crisp grand tactical feel of units rushing into the line, sending volley after volley into the ranks of the enemy, raking them with canister and shell, until finally, the line surges forward and slams into the enemy in a massive frontal as usual.

Movement is a simple matter of activating units in activated areas with activated leaders (sounds complex, but once again, it becomes very clear once you stop and think the rules over, as with most any game). Movement costs are printed on the map in the area movement boxes. Movement is standard and depends on the terrain and the fatigue level of the units moving. Units attempting to cross water must control or capture a bridge, or find a ford to cross. As for the area movement boxes on the map, one of the small problems I had in playing was in determining the end of some boxes and start of others. The red lines that make up the area boxes don't all connect exactly, and when some of the shapes are not simple boxes, it can cause one to strain a lit-

tle to see exactly where the lines are meant to connect. This problem is made worse by the weak color of the rivers and creeks on the map, which themselves are treated as area borders. This doesn't effect game play at all, but merely slows play while the players figure out the correct path of movement that is allowed.

The game plays very smoothly once all the finer details are worked out and all the modifiers and such are remembered - once again, this is standard fare for most wargamers. This by no means is a complex or difficult game. I would say The Gamers' version of Antietam is harder by far. If you are looking to play a more simple but equally as challenging game on Antietam, or if you're just in the mood for a good Civil War game, this game may be it. It is beautifully done, and great care has been taken in its design. Game play resulted in fairly even historic results with many play throughs. Be prepared to put a little time in at first to work through all the finer details, though. A great game from an aspiring new company. Let us all hope the future is as bright for this company as this game is to the Battle of Antietam!



## GameFix's *Winceby*

Published in GameFix #5 in 1995 • Designed by **Robert Markham**

reviewed by **Viktoras Kaufman**

Having just returned home from work, I go to my mailbox to retrieve what promises to be yet another batch of bills, advertisements galore, and pleas for contributions to this or that worthy cause. Lo and behold! Out comes an envelope from Paper Wars! I remember that I had agreed to review GameFix #5 for Rich, and I return inside. I open the envelope with some trepidation, as I have not really been an enthusiast of wargaming magazines, with or without games inside. My first glance reminds me why: The map is as dull and boring as any of the truly old board games, where color was provided by rivers, lakes, and cities, and everything else was stark white. Here, I saw a sea of brown, with a tan to the top and bottom. Boring!

Stoically, I start reading the articles. First, the editorial. Not bad. Actually, it's pretty good. A short discussion of how the editor (Jon Compton) feels rules can interfere with a game, or even be manipulated to ahistorical effect, especially on the operational level. Next are a few announcements, such as GameFix trying to convince Tower Books to distribute their publication. Next come the articles. In Battle Briefs, Timothy Kutta has five mini-articles about Air Force special operations, the special operations helicopter, the M-551 Sheridan, the *USS Seawolf*, and Michael Wittman, an SS tank ace. These articles provide some interesting information, in the same style as the news magazines of today, with short news stories breaking up the longer, more substantive articles.

A little further into the magazine (actually, beyond the halfway mark... we'll go back to the parts we've

skipped later), there is an interview with Joe Miranda, editor of *Strategy & Tactics*, in which he talks about the hobby, how he started designing games, and how to increase interest in the hobby in general. A brief section on industry news, which is short but interesting. A section introducing optional rules to *Bombs Away!* (which I haven't seen or played), and then a longish article by Dave Wood entitled *The Armchair Gamer*.

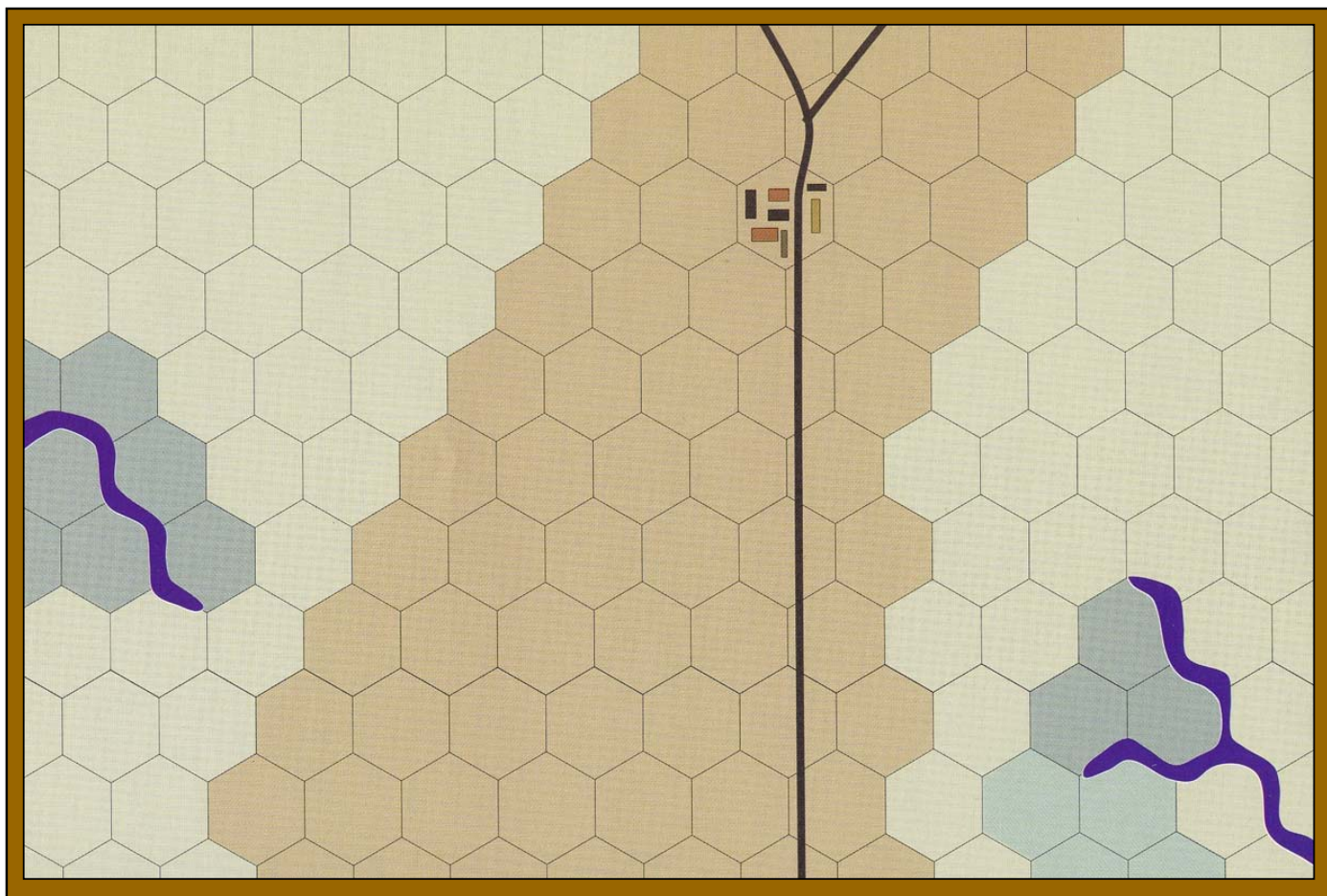
The article, I must admit, didn't interest me much, on first reading, anyway. Two games on the Battle of the Bulge are compared: 3W's *The Last Blitzkrieg*, and The Gamers' *Ardennes*. The article examines the games from an admittedly unique perspective: The presentation, clarity, and organization of the rules, charts, and maps. I have to admit this is not a major factor for me when I read a game review, and it put me to sleep almost immediately. However, now that I re-read the article, and compare it to the presentation of the rules for the enclosed game (I'll get to that real soon now), I can understand the points Dave Wood is trying to make. In my mind, this article would be more interesting as a se-

ries of articles on presentation, etc., using current games as examples of how to do (or not to do) things. Presentation of rules as the most important part of a game review is not my first priority.

The game included in this issue of GameFix is *Winceby*, and there is an accompanying article about the clash, and the events leading up to the battle itself. This battle was a small battle in the English Civil War, but it resulted in the reversal of fortunes, and helped the Roundheads (Parliamentarians) obtain eventual victory. To find out more about the battle, read the article!







*Winceby* uses the *Royalists & Roundheads* system, published by 3W. The rules are about twelve pages long and fairly easy to learn. After reading Dave Woods' article, I must say that the rules followed his recommendations for organization. Using a simple system of leader commands, which limit the options available to the units of the command, the system effectively recreates battlefield chaos. Leaders you want to obey orders don't (failed command check). Units you wish to move from point A to point B have the wrong orders, and sit around waiting for the leader to change their orders. This is a highly effective system, very simple to learn, and one of the better games in the series. The best thing is, once you start playing the game, the rules don't get in the way of play. One can argue about the zone of control rules once again creating unrealistic events, but that is a standard complaint. One truly interesting feature, which I am sure Dave Wood wouldn't like in another game, is the technique of printing charts on the back of the map. This kills a lot of interest one has in playing a game. Ultimately, though, it wasn't that big a deal. Merely photocopy the back of the map, and you are ready to go!

I must repeat that the map is dull. Many people on the internet mailing list CONSIM-L have listed it as the worst ever (although, in all fairness, this is dy-

ing down as some of the true grognards remind us of some truly bad Strategy & Tactics maps). (*Rich Erwin - Geez, the map for Winceby isn't exactly exciting, but it isn't as downright ugly as something like Conflict's Bar-Lev with its neon orange, near-sociopathic map - and I like playing that game.*) Terrain is not very important in this game, or, at least, in the battles I fought. It does force the fight to the center of the map, and merely forces the game into a smaller portion of the map. The pieces are nice, and there is no question who is in which command or on what side.

*Winceby* starts as a battle of maneuver, reaches its peak as an exchange of cavalry charges, and then devolves into trying to rally routed units. Victory is achieved by a successful die roll on the Victory Table, which is based on the number of killed and routed units inflicted on the other side. It is possible for a side thoroughly thrashed by the opponent to win on a lucky die roll, but the bigger the margin, the less likely this is to occur.

In summary, get this issue. The articles are interesting, you learn a lot about *Winceby* and the events leading up to the battle, and the game is a lot of fun. The game is the shortest I own (I don't think it is possible for it to take more than an hour), and will certainly see more playing time in my house.

## Rumors & Such

by **Rich Erwin**

Eric and Jack Dott have allegedly requested between \$4 Million and \$5 Million for Avalon Hill, and none of the known three potential suitors have been willing to bite. This is understandable, given that various valuations of Monarch Avalon, the parent company of Avalon Hill, have been between \$2.35 and \$3.5 Million. Another reason appears to be uncertainty regarding who will own various game titles if Avalon Hill changes ownership. A final possible reason might be related to unsubstantiated but multiple comments of unwillingness by Avalon Hill to allow the inspection of game inventory.

Curt Schilling, a pitcher for the Philadelphia Phillies and a devoted *Advanced Squad Leader* fan, notified one and all in a recent posting on GENIE that he had offered \$175K for the rights to the game series. After being told that \$500K was an acceptable offer, his counteroffer of \$210K was essentially ignored. Curt's post, following closely on the heels of the departure from Avalon Hill of Bob McNamara, the major force behind the expansion of *Advanced Squad Leader*, led to pandemonium on the *Advanced Squad Leader* computer bulletin board.

The retirement of XTR's Command from the Charles S. Roberts Awards turns out to have been premature. Ty Bomba notified Paper Wars via the CONSIM-L bulletin board on the internet that such a situation had not been accepted by XTR, and that they had no interest in a proposed alternative - a Best Professional Wargame Magazines category. John Burtt, Director of the Charles S. Roberts Awards, replied that the Hall of Fame award and retirement was no more than an attempt to reward XTR and provide an incentive to other magazines to meet Command's high standards.



## Cast of Characters

*Avalon Hill Game Co.*

*(Sold to Hasbro)*

*Advanced Squad Leader* series, *Great Campaigns of The American Civil War* series and others are available through Multi-Man Publishing, LLC

*Clash of Arms Games*

The Byrne Building #205  
Lincoln and Morgan Streets  
Phoenixville, PA 19460  
(610) 935-7622  
[www.clashofarms.com](http://www.clashofarms.com)

*Close Simulations*

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*Columbia Games*

P.O. Box 3457  
Blaine, WA 98231  
(360) 366-2228  
[www.columbiagames.com](http://www.columbiagames.com)

*Decision Games*

P.O. Box 21598  
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(661) 587-9633  
[www.decisiongames.com](http://www.decisiongames.com)

*Game Designers' Workshop*

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*Titles are available through:*

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*GMT Games*

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*Critical Hit, Inc.*

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(845) 278-9125  
[www.criticalhit.com](http://www.criticalhit.com)

*One Small Step*

(formerly Game Publications Group)  
1262 Prospect Drive  
Pomona, CA 91766  
[www.ossgames.com](http://www.ossgames.com)

*Pacific Rim Publishing*

2533 North Carson Street  
Box P-317  
Carson City, NV 89706  
(510) 232-7282  
[www.justplain.com](http://www.justplain.com)

*Simulations Workshop, Inc.*

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Albuquerque, NM 87112

*Six Angles*

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## Game Publications Group's *Rebel Yell!*

Published in 1994 • Republished in 1996 • Designed by **Richard Dengel**

reviewed by **Rusty Witek**

The difference between tactical and grand tactical wargames as ways of modeling combat was driven home to me recently when the latest incarnation of the venerable Great Battles of the American Civil War series, Richard Berg's *The Three Days of Gettysburg*, arrived as I was working my way through the rules of *Rebel Yell!*. Both systems focus on the mechanics of the Civil War battlefield much more closely than do such popular systems as The Gamers' Civil War Brigade Series or Avalon Hill's Great Campaigns of the Civil War games, whose design interests lie at the command and operational levels respectively. But if a full-battle game like *The Three Days of Gettysburg* is an enlarged photograph of the entire process of Civil War command, control, and combat, the extensive detail of *Rebel Yell!* puts the problem of Nineteenth Century linear assault under the analytical microscope.

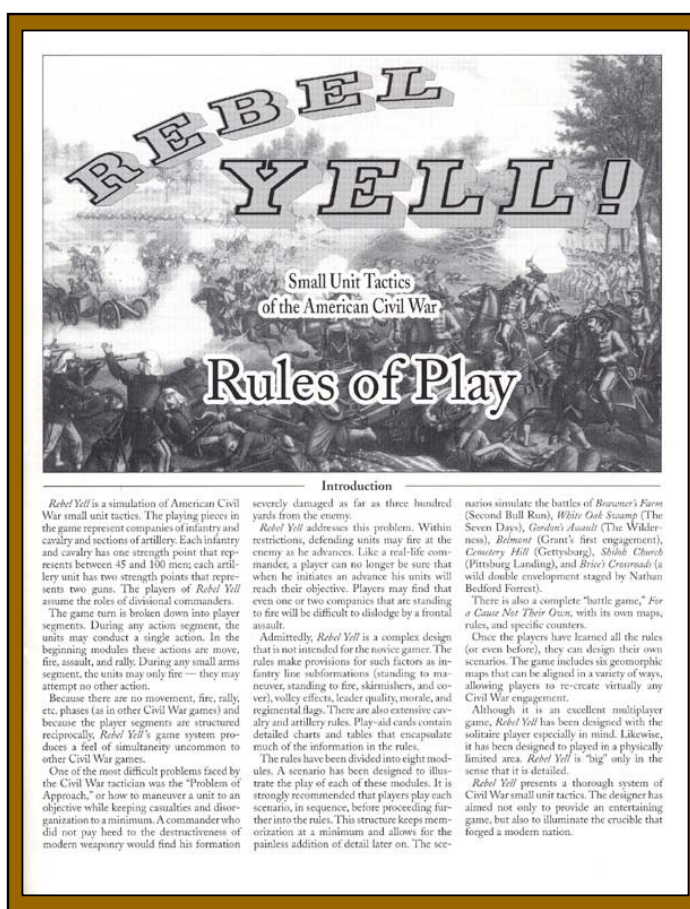
More a scenario design kit than a game in itself, this company-level simulation is, at bottom, a thoughtful, sometimes elegant, potentially influential and long-lasting design. But while the conception is superb, the execution here leaves a good deal to be desired. It would be a shame if a system with so much going for it were to founder right out of the starting gate, because *Rebel Yell!* has the potential to be the equivalent of *Squad Leader* for the Civil War, with nearly limitless scenarios and enough add-on detail to suit the hoariest grognard. But with so many missteps and glitches in presentation, this fine system may never get a chance to prove what it can do.

The most obvious connection with *Squad Leader* (not *Advanced Squad Leader*, mind you) is the pro-

grammed instruction format of the thirty page rule book. I'm often a fan of programmed instruction, which can help players to get their bearings in the maze of complex game systems, since successive layers of rules and details are added in methodical steps. Programmed instruction avoids that "Life's too short to learn all this!" despair in the face of a thick rule book, and likewise it sidesteps that tendency to gloss over appar-

ently familiar rules; after all, not all zones of control are created equal. *Rebel Yell!*'s program gets you through an extensive though not especially cumbersome set of rules, but at the price of some perhaps avoidable confusion. A game like *Squad Leader* presented first infantry and basic terrain, then heaped on armor, off-board artillery, vehicles, and so on, but (within each module anyway) at least once you learned it, you had it. If you only wanted to play with infantry and forget the bloody Stukas, you never had to learn about things like air support at all. *Rebel Yell!*'s rules chunks (called modules) are keyed to specific learning scenarios somewhat loosely based on historical engagements; they allow you to pick up the basics, such as terrain,

movement, and combat results relatively painlessly, but then ask you to unlearn rules and major tactical lessons as the modules progress. As just one of many examples, the first module, Brawner's Farm, taught us to spread out the companies of a regiment, to extend the enemy line and flank it while stacking up to eight companies as a powerful fire group. Later command and control rules and changes to the stacking rules make such tactics impossible, however. So by the time you are done with all seven modules and their accompanying scenarios, you will have absorbed all the rules in reasonably-sized



Sheet 1: Union Infantry and Cavalry										Rebel Yell										Front									

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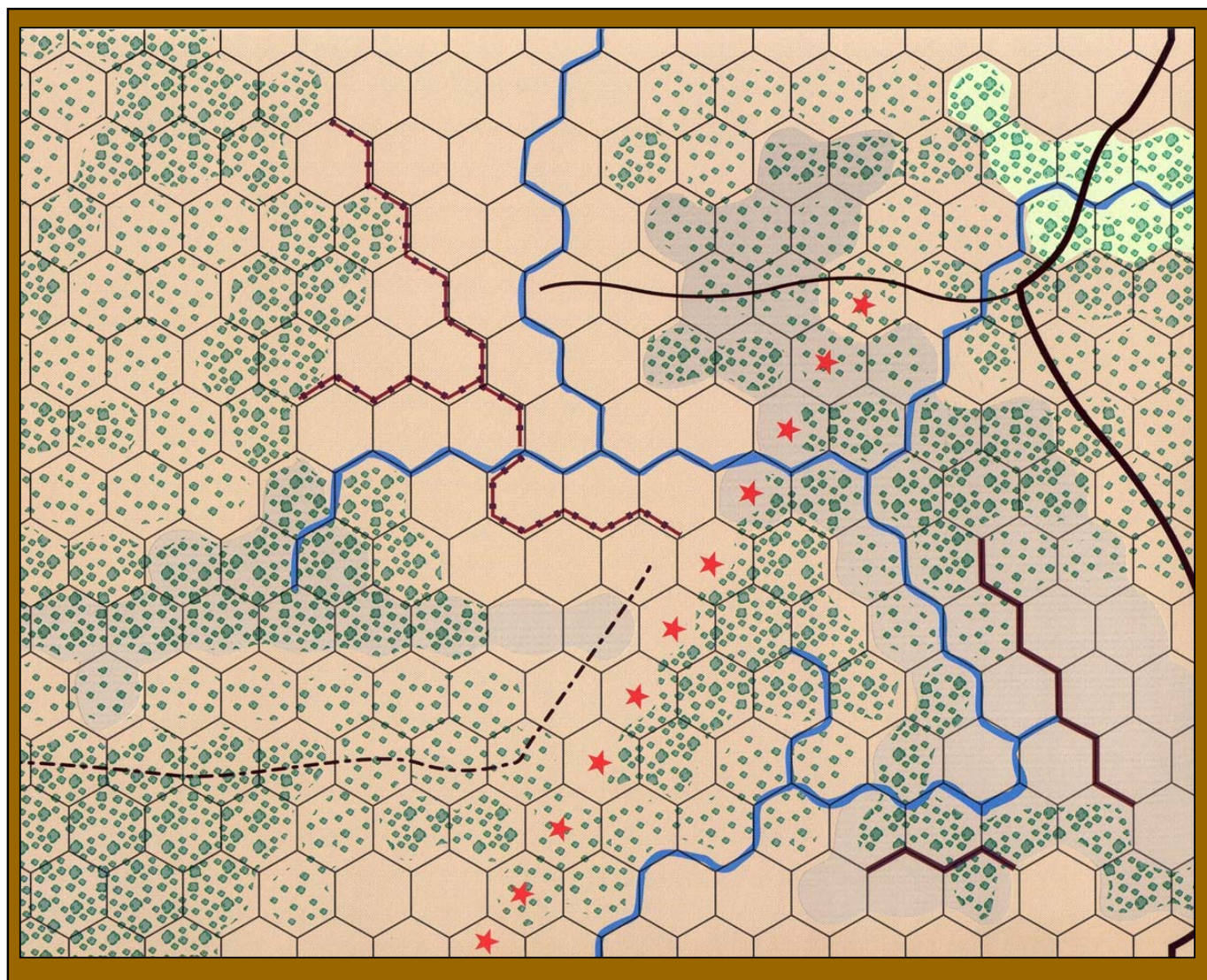
chunks, but for most of that learning process your understanding of how those rules fit together and translate into effective tactics will be only provisional at best, as another rule just over the horizon renders your favorite tactic obsolete.

As another example, for the sake of simplicity and to avoid the notorious convolutions of line-of-sight rules, most of the early scenarios feature troops armed only with short-ranged smoothbore muskets. When you learn the rules for assault (shock combat) and a subtly different flavor, the bayonet charge, you see how devastatingly effective close combat can be. But with the addition of extensive rules for fire zones and various kinds of opportunity fire (and troops armed with rifled muskets), that close-in combat becomes a form of cardboard suicide. There's nothing wrong with this historically; in fact, one feels as the average Civil War colonel must have often felt: "If I could just close with those guys, I'd have it made." From the psychological perspective of a player learning the game system, it can be demoralizing to think you're starting to get the big picture, only to see what you thought you knew go out the window. Assuming a player makes

the commitment to learn all the rules, the programmed instruction format works pretty well, but the less-than-zealous gamer may well decide the whole thing is not worth it.

That would be too bad, too, because *Rebel Yell!* is an extremely playable system, with lots of interesting decisions for both attacker and defender, a fast-moving turn sequence, and an action-packed combat results table that keeps things popping right along as units fire, duck for cover, screw up their nerve to charge, shake out into skirmish lines, and even skedaddle when the firing line gets too hot. The heart of the combat system is the interaction between unit formation and the ability to engage in combat. Infantry can be in line or column, with sub-formations to optimize fire, movement, shock attack, or defensive cover. Combat units exert fire zones, the extent of which depends on armament, formation, morale status, and the presence of enemy units. Within those zones, most movement triggers fire, and given the bloody combat results table, contact with the enemy is short, sharp, and nasty. Nearly all the rules for basic combat, command, (division commanders, brigade leaders, and flags for





regimental control) and movement, are familiar to veteran gamers (think of *Squad Leader* crossed with the Great Battles of the Civil War system, with maybe a bit of Avalon Hill's *Devil's Den* thrown in, and you won't be far wrong). But the subtleties of the turn sequence (an interleaved series of segments for cavalry, artillery, and infantry actions) and the distinctive fire mechanics really make down-in-the-dirt Civil War combat come alive.

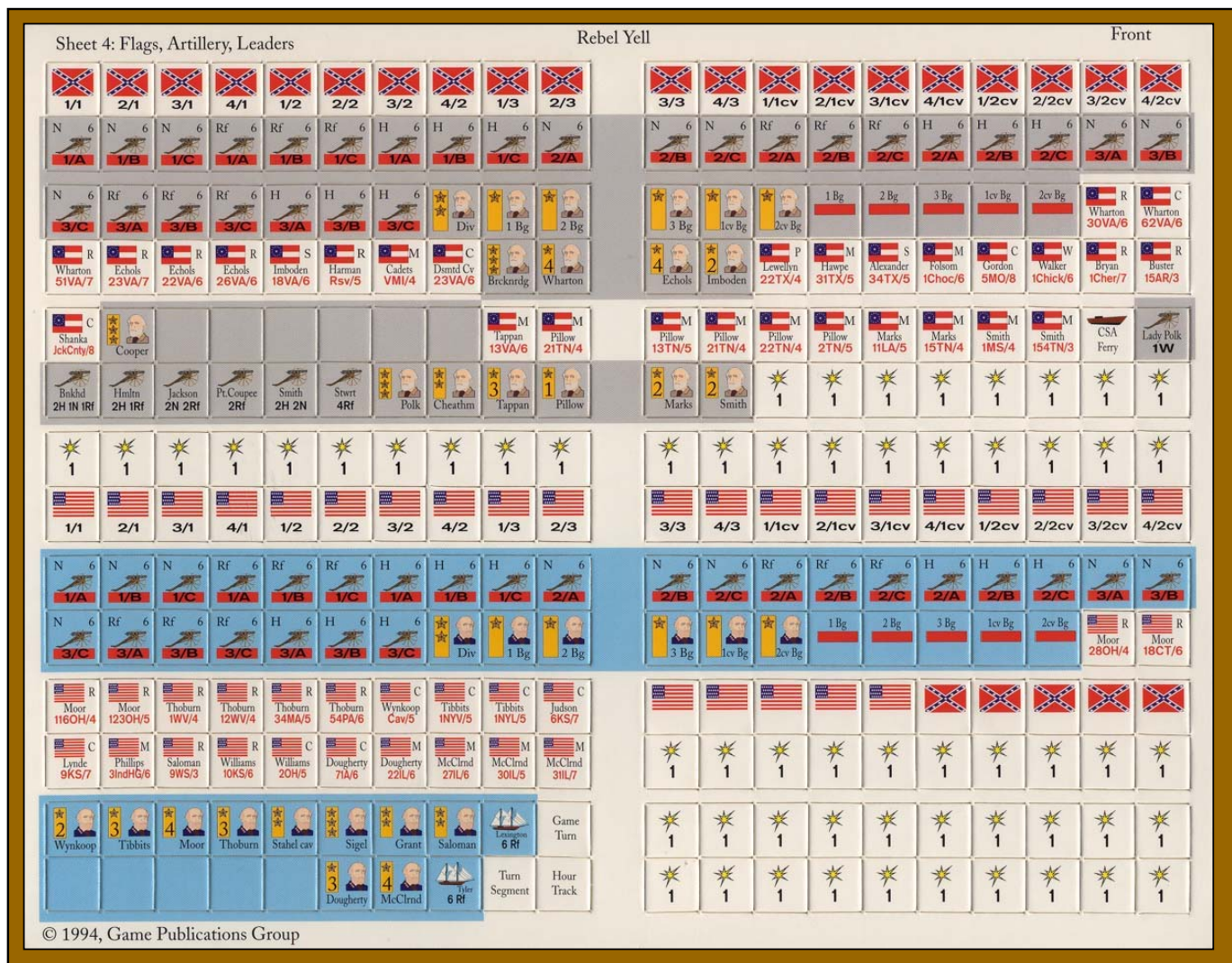
As in any decent Civil War simulation, the defender has a marked advantage as attackers slog through a stiff hail of Minie balls, trying to close for that elusive but perhaps decisive charge. Once contact is made, though, the defender's options also narrow as redeploying or reinforcing a static line triggers equally effective enemy fire; the adroit use of well-posted reserves, the timing of counterattacks, and forethought on command arrangements are all essential to a successful defense.

Attackers need a careful preparation to soften up a defending line with fire before trying to close for assault, and finding an open flank doesn't hurt, ei-

ther. Artillery, naturally, is devastating for close-in defense, while long-range fire (usually the only kind available to attackers) is much more erratic in effectiveness. Mounted cavalry stays out of the way on the combined-arms battlefield, if it's smart, but cavalry-only fights soon turn into a satisfying mess of charging, counter-charging, routing, and skedaddling horsemen.

The seven scenarios (Brawner's Farm, White Oak Swamp, Gordon's Assault in the Wilderness, Belmont, Cemetery Hill, Shiloh Church, and Brice's Crossroads), frankly, are extended learning exercises rather than true games. The six geomorphic maps (another *Squad Leader* legacy) fit together to form a variety of different topographical situations, and developing one's own scenarios from historical reading is not only possible, it seems to be the main point of the *Rebel Yell!* system. Enough counters are supplied so that each side can field twelve infantry regiments, eight cavalry regiments, and twenty-seven two-gun sections of artillery. If you can bring yourself to fudge a bit and use cavalry as infantry,





just about any typical division-sized engagement can be incorporated into the system, if you're willing to do some research and some troop-strength calculations.

But are you? I'm an inveterate reader of American Civil War history. The tactics and combat doctrine of the conflict have long been an interest of mine, so I suppose I'm as well-suited to take advantage of *Rebel Yell!* as a gaming resource as most gamers, and it may well be that sometime I'll pull out some sources and work up a game on some obscure skirmish that catches my fancy. But the interest of war-games for me is working through someone else's interpretation of why things happened the way they did, not in generating my own thesis on the gaming board. Furthermore, ever since the days when I preferred *Waterloo* over *Tactics II*, the illusory thrill of historical units has had a strong appeal:

*"It's not a piece of cardboard; it's the Imperial Guard! The 1st Armored! The 27th Pennsylvania!"*

Generic units, especially ones as colorless as those in *Rebel Yell!* (about which more anon), just don't

do it for me. (Usually, that is; I'm still puzzling out why the generic *Advanced Squad Leader* counters don't bug me.)

The solution, and it seems to me the real future of this system, is in the battle game, a one-map simulation of the First Battle of Newtonia, fought in Missouri in 1861. (Don't feel too bad; for all my Civil War reading I never heard of it either.) *Rebel Yell!* supplies a map and counters with historical designations for this encounter between two scratch forces, including Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Cherokee units on the Rebel side. What the modules lack in flavor is redressed in what the designers grandly call "For a Cause Not Their Own! Native Americans at The Battle of First Newtonia, September 30, 1861." Here the chrome comes thick and fast with special rules for Indian skirmishing and dismounting abilities, ammunition loss (not a part of the standard rules), and cavalry caracoling (fake a charge, then shoot). The interesting terrain (a town, some enclosed fields, some buildings with special attributes) and the wide mix of unit types makes for a wild and woolly game of feint and counter-charge. The battle game helps to show the basics of this system are



more than sturdy enough to support layers of rules tailored to the specifics of a particular battle. It's amazing how much more convincing the game seems when the counters have historical designations, weapon type, and morale right on the counter rather than on a side record. The counter mix also includes historical counters for what appear to be the battles of New Market and Belmont, so stay tuned; GameFix magazine claims new scenarios and more battle games will be forthcoming.

For all my mixed feelings about generic maps and counters, I think highly of this system. I hope that it's successful, but a series of major and minor problems mar this package. The trouble starts as soon as the box is opened. In the opening scenario (Brawner's Farm) the opposing forces set up on opposite sides of a stream, but the Terrain Effects Chart has no line for streams. Fortunately, avoiding a stasis loop where the units face off against each other forever, a crucial errata sheet fixes this and a host of other glitches in wording and editing, but it by no means catches all of the many typos. The editing of the rule book is extremely poor, even by the dubious standards of the wargame industry. The page layouts ensure you'll have to do a lot of tedious thumbing back and forth. Even worse, the Terrain Key Chart has been totally botched in printing, so that few of the terrain levels are the correct colors, which makes set up rather a comedic affair until you figure out what's going on. GameFix #8 features a corrected version, and a request to the publisher will get you one.

Even when you know what you're looking for, though, some of the terrain levels can be hard to find when overprinted with woods. The maps and counter graphics are little more than serviceable. The overall effect of the blandly colored maps is primordial-SPI, only without the excuse of antiquity. Even more puzzling, the hex grids are unnumbered, making play-by-e-mail (or even good ol' play-by-mail) impossible. The counters too, though usable, are undistinguished, and some of the graphics choices are very peculiar indeed. For example, in an apparent attempt to jazz up the generic leader counters, a period portrait icon is used, as in Joe Balkoski's *Great Campaigns of the American Civil War* series.

The trouble here is that it's the same picture for all the leaders on both sides (the Rebel faces left, the Federal faces right). Worse yet, the washed-out icon is the familiar formal portrait of Robert E. Lee, so that when all the superior officers are deployed on the map, the battlefield looks like some weird Virginia version of the Clone Wars. (As long as one face was to represent all Civil War generals, I would have recommended the ferociously-bearded

William Mahone.) The regimental flag icons are stiff and modern-looking, while the counters for the gunboats *Lexington* and *Tyler*, no doubt intended for a future Belmont battle game, show what historically were wooden-sided steamers as fully rigged two-masted schooners. While I fully sympathize with the myriad difficulties a small wargame company has with capital and production, it's a fact that games such as the *Great Campaigns of the American Civil War* series, some of The Gamers' Civil War Brigade Series entries, and GMT Games' *The Three Days of Gettysburg* have set new standards for period feel in Civil War gaming graphics. It surely is too much to expect that a brand new publisher vie with Avalon Hill in production values, but these days many gamers are looking for more in maps and counters than they'll find here.

There's a good deal to like about *Rebel Yell!*. The game mechanics are exceptionally intelligent and quite dynamic for what are essentially mini-battles of attrition. The system models combined-arms interactions solidly and with few anomalies, and the standard elements of the system will support a wide range of optional and exclusive rules. The result is a coherent and convincing interpretation of Civil War small-unit tactics which can present complex tactical problems in a minimum of gaming space. Whether *Rebel Yell!* will reach its great potential depends on where the system goes from here. Any Civil War buff can name off hand a half-dozen small-to-medium-sized engagements or segments of larger battles for which this system is a natural (let me put in a good word here for Olustee and Kernstown). If those games are ever going to find an audience, though, significant problems of development and presentation need to be addressed. It's not enough to present the gamer with a strong system and cookie-cutter pieces then say, "Go make your own games," but a well-researched set of historically based games with graphics even approaching the state of today's art would make the *Rebel Yell!* system very formidable indeed.

# *Fighting by Minutes: Time and the Art of War*

Published by Praeger Publishers in 1994 • by **Robert R. Leonhard**

reviewed by **Dr. Shawn C. Whetstone**

Throughout history, theories of the art of war have evolved from considering the battlefield as primarily a two-dimensional space to a three-dimensional one. *Fighting by Minutes: Time and the Art of War* continues this evolution of military theory to the fourth dimension - time. *Fighting by Minutes* is an enjoyable read whose clearly presented ideas are not only thought-provoking, but will be useful to gamers seeking to improve their understanding and application of military concepts. The author, Robert Leonhard, is a serving officer in the United States Army whose previous book is titled *The Art of Maneuver: Maneuver-Warfare Theory and Air-Land Battle*.

*Fighting by Minutes* presents a theory of how time relates to warfare. Leonhard does not purport to be the first to recognize the role of time. Rather, he uses numerous examples from classic military theorists such as Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, Jomini and Fuller to show that time is a key dimension of warfare. While the examples often implicitly recognize the role of time, Leonhard explicitly explores time to discover new insights.

Time is perceived by the occurrence of events. Thus, the context for the investigation of time is set by defining the primary activities of a military force: Move, strike, and protect.

- Move is to change location.
- Strike is to employ weapons to attack the enemy.
- Protect are those actions taken by a military force to ensure its own security.

A tradeoff relationship exists among the three activities, namely, a force cannot simultaneously move, strike, and protect itself well.

The nature of the tradeoff provides a basic framework for discussing the three primary styles of warfare: Maneuver, positional, and interchangeability. Each style emphasizes two activities at the expense of a third. For example, maneuver theory emphasizes strike and move at the expense of protect. In-

terchangeability theory emphasizes strike and protect, while positional theory emphasizes move and protect. Rather than suggesting one style is superior, the time viewpoint forces a commander to understand all three and recognize the appropriate style often changes as a war progresses. Having identified the activities of military forces, attention is turned to the four temporal characteristics of warfare: Duration, frequency, sequence and opportunity.

Duration is the length of war. An obvious temporal characteristic, duration, is affected by many factors including: The objective of the war, friction, opposition, incompetence and the number of participants. Short wars are preferred, not only for their lower cost in terms of life, but because they tend to be more predictable. Long wars allow more opportunity for unforeseen circumstances to affect the outcome. The changing relationship between duration and objectives is quite interesting. In earlier times, objectives often took precedence and duration was seen as the time required for their accomplishment. However, recent military experiences show that the public is less willing to support military actions of long duration. Today's commander must not think in terms of time required, but in terms of time available. The difference affects the types of objectives that can be obtained and the context within which military actions will be tolerated. Gamers as well are typically restrained by duration, and must tailor their approach accordingly.

Frequency is the number of significant military events that occur per unit time. Military doctrine is typically developed in anticipation of a certain frequency of events. Problems are encountered when the actual frequency of war is higher or lower than that anticipated by an army's doctrine. For example, the operational frequency of the German blitzkrieg exceeded the French Army's ability to respond with devastating consequences. The Germans used time to conquer space. Conversely, the time-space dynamic is illustrated by the Russian blunting of the blitzkrieg's high frequency by trading space for time. Successfully executed low-frequency warfare can confound doctrines based on



high-frequency operations. Consider Mao Tse-tung's adoption of low-frequency warfare that eventually frustrated his enemies and brought him victory. Leonhard argues that conceptual problems with low-intensity conflict and operations other than war arise because their frequency is lower than that which our doctrine perceives as normal for war. The key point in the discussion of frequency is not to define which is correct, but to understand both yours and the enemy's anticipated frequency. Failure to anticipate and control the frequency of warfare renders planning and preparation efforts irrelevant.

Sequence is the order in which things happen. Although chaotic, war is not one apocalyptic event or several decisive events occurring simultaneously. Rather, key events are typically sequential in time and often related to one another. The commander that grasps sequence and plans for not just the current action, but for the ones that follow, can dictate the flow of war.

Opportunity is a time-sensitive decision point. Opportunities occur at certain points in time and last for a certain duration. To exploit an opportunity, a decision and action must occur before the opportunity is gone. Thus, the commander facing an opportunity must have both the authority to decide and the resources to act.

Using the viewpoint of time provides key insights into an essential characteristic of successful warfare - surprise. Although highly valued by military establishments, surprise lacks a thorough conceptual dissection. Leonhard skillfully constructs an anatomy of surprise.

Surprise is defined as a condition in which a military force is contacted while in a relative state of unreadiness. This definition recognizes an important axiom of warfare: Military forces are perpetually unready for combat. The typical unit does not spend the majority of time in a state of readiness to fight the enemy. Accepting this axiom, the analysis identifies the two key events that affect the attainment of surprise: Detection and contact. The time between detection and contact determines if surprise is obtained. Three situations are considered:

- If the attacking force is detected and does not achieve contact before the defender is fully prepared, surprise is not obtained.
- If an attacking force is detected and achieves contact before the defender is fully prepared, then material surprise is obtained.
- If contact occurs before detection, then the attacker achieves moral surprise.

Surprise demonstrates the importance of time and of military theory for warfighters. Shortening the time between detection and contact is a primary objective for attaining surprise. Leonhard examines methods for delaying detection and hastening contact. Armed with such a theory, commanders can better plan operations and choose tactics to achieve or prevent surprise.

*Fighting by Minutes* is well written and clearly explains key ideas covering a wide spectrum of military theory. The insights integrate with and expand upon established military thought. Leonhard's focus has broadened from maneuver warfare in his previous book to the general topic of land warfare. From the viewpoint of time, he shows that opposing theories are often complimentary rather than conflicting. For example, consider preemptive and concentration tactics in maneuver warfare. Both seek to concentrate superior combat power against an enemy, but by emphasizing different aspects of maneuver warfare.

- Concentration tactics emphasize massing the friendly force, but sacrificing time.
- Preemptive tactics emphasize attacking the enemy as quickly as possible, but sacrifice attacking with the full mass of the friendly force.

While opposing approaches, neither style is inherently superior. Rather, a preemption-concentration cycle is a characteristic of warfare. The German experience in Operation Babarossa in 1941 illustrates the cycle. The opening phases employed preemptive tactics that saw German panzer groups advancing as quickly as possible. As Russian defenses strengthened, the operation transitioned to concentration tactics to achieve breakthroughs and the subsequent transitioning back to preemptive tactics. Excellence in warfare involves understanding various approaches, identifying any sequential relationships, and then mastering the transition points for going from one style to another. The need to understand and recognize transition points emphasizes that warfare is truly both art and science.

Military theorists seek to change doctrine through intellect, rather than through failure on the battlefield. *Fighting by Minutes* is an important step in expanding military theory to take advantage of the fourth dimension in modern warfare. As such, the book will be valuable to all who are interested in the continuing evolution of military thought.

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Terran Games'

# *The Legend Begins - Third Edition*

Published in 1994 • Designed by Mark Simonitch

reviewed by **John Kula**

Most reviews are personal statements which are influenced to varying degrees by the reviewers' experiences and prejudices. I have three character traits of consequence:

First, I believe in the universality of the architectural dictum that God is in the details. Spelling and grammatical mistakes are indications to me of insufficient attention to the details.

Second, I have limited discretionary time, so when an opportunity arises to play a game face to face, I appreciate games which are either fairly easy to master, or worth the investment in a steep learning curve.

Finally, I have a fixation about the North African theater. The two games I use as standards are Columbia Games' *Rommel in the Desert*, which best captures the fast and frantic ebb and flow that was characteristic of the desert campaign; and Game Designers' Workshop's *Operation Crusader*, for portraying the tactical difficulties inherent in the desert.

## Physical Components

The first edition of *The Legend Begins* was published by the Rhino Game Company in a ziploc bag, with the cover of the rule book as the main graphic element. In this third edition published by Terran Games, the rule book retains its distinctive cover, inside a slim box. However, I was unimpressed with the contemporary poster used as the box cover art — it gives few clues about the subject of the game, and is inconsistent with the graphical quality of *The Legend Begins*'s major components.

The box contains two sheets totaling 480 die-cut

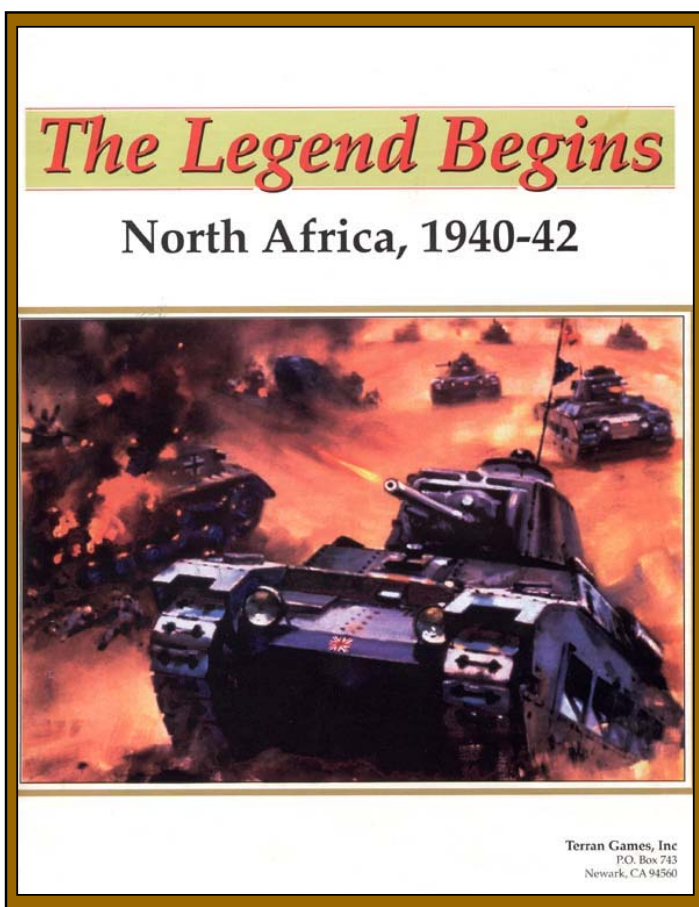
counters, in ten colors plus black and white. The counters are graphically almost on par with those of GMT Games or The Gamers. Most of the counters have standard NATO symbols, but some have silhouettes. There is a lack of consistency, however, in the silhouettes: Some are solid and others are line drawings; some face left and others right; and some depict commonly available vehicles while others depict vehicles which were actually quite rare in North Africa. I also don't understand why RNF is an adequate abbreviation for the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, but Terran Games felt obliged to use awkward abbreviations for many other units, such as RylWiYeo for the Royal Wiltshire Yeomanry.

In addition, most counters have their steps marked on them, but not tank units, "for aesthetic reasons". You must remember that all tank units have two steps, except German tank battalions, which have three steps. Not all units with an armor effect rating have this rating printed on them; you must remember that armored infantry units have an armor effect rating of one. And in instances where the attack and defense factors are the same,

only one of these appears on the counter as a combat factor.

There are ten differently-colored unit counters in *The Legend Begins*, but the only specific reference to color in the documentation is that the minor Allied units are blue. The unit counter frames indicate the nationality for each color; they are repeated here for reference:

- British - red
- Minor Allies - blue





[illegible]

- Australian - beige
- Indian - purple
- Italian (1940) - light green
- Italian (1941 and later) - green
- South African - dark brown
- New Zealand - ochre
- Axis markers - dark green
- Common markers - white

A common problem with games of the North African theater is the maps. The actual map area could have been accommodated on two identical sheets in a multiple of 8.5" x 11" format (as was done in some of Simulations Canada's games) if the geography of Libya and Egypt had cooperated. But the combination of the Cyrenaican bulge, followed by the long and narrow strip of Egyptian coastline, requires a more complex treatment. *The Legend Begins* comes with three maps which are visually very pleasing, colorful without being gaudy, and over four feet long when arranged as required. However, some of the place names are in an unfamiliar dialect

(Cupuzio for Fort Capuzzo); there are inconsistencies in the use of Arabic (El Alamein and El Adem versus el Amiriya and el Agheila); and the Trigh Capuzzo is shown, but not the equally important Trigh el Abd.

The rules booklet's twenty-four pages are printed in ten point type in three columns, which was less than ideal for my aging eyesight. The rules tend to be numbered in a manner similar to SPI's case numbering system, and on the whole they are organized in a reasonably logical manner. I was surprised, however, a game that included proof reading in its credits would contain so many misspellings, typos and overly creative grammatical constructs.

The scenario booklet is twelve pages, in a format similar to the rules booklet, containing seven scenarios and a campaign game. The seven scenarios are:

- **Invasion of Egypt** - Four turns / 101 counters (Easy)
- **Compass** - Four turns / 124 counters (Easy)



- **Enter Rommel** - Seven turns / 103 counters (Easy)
- **Crusader** - Three turns / 187 counters (Moderate)
- **Rommel's Riposte** - Four turns / 172 counters (Moderate)
- **Gazala** - Four turns / 202 counters (Complex)
- **El Alamein** - Four turns / 253 counters (Complex)

These have been constructed to flow smoothly from Graziani's initial Italian offensive in 1940 through to Second Alamein and Montgomery's offensive in 1942. The campaign game is not one separate scenario, but all seven scenarios played consecutively.

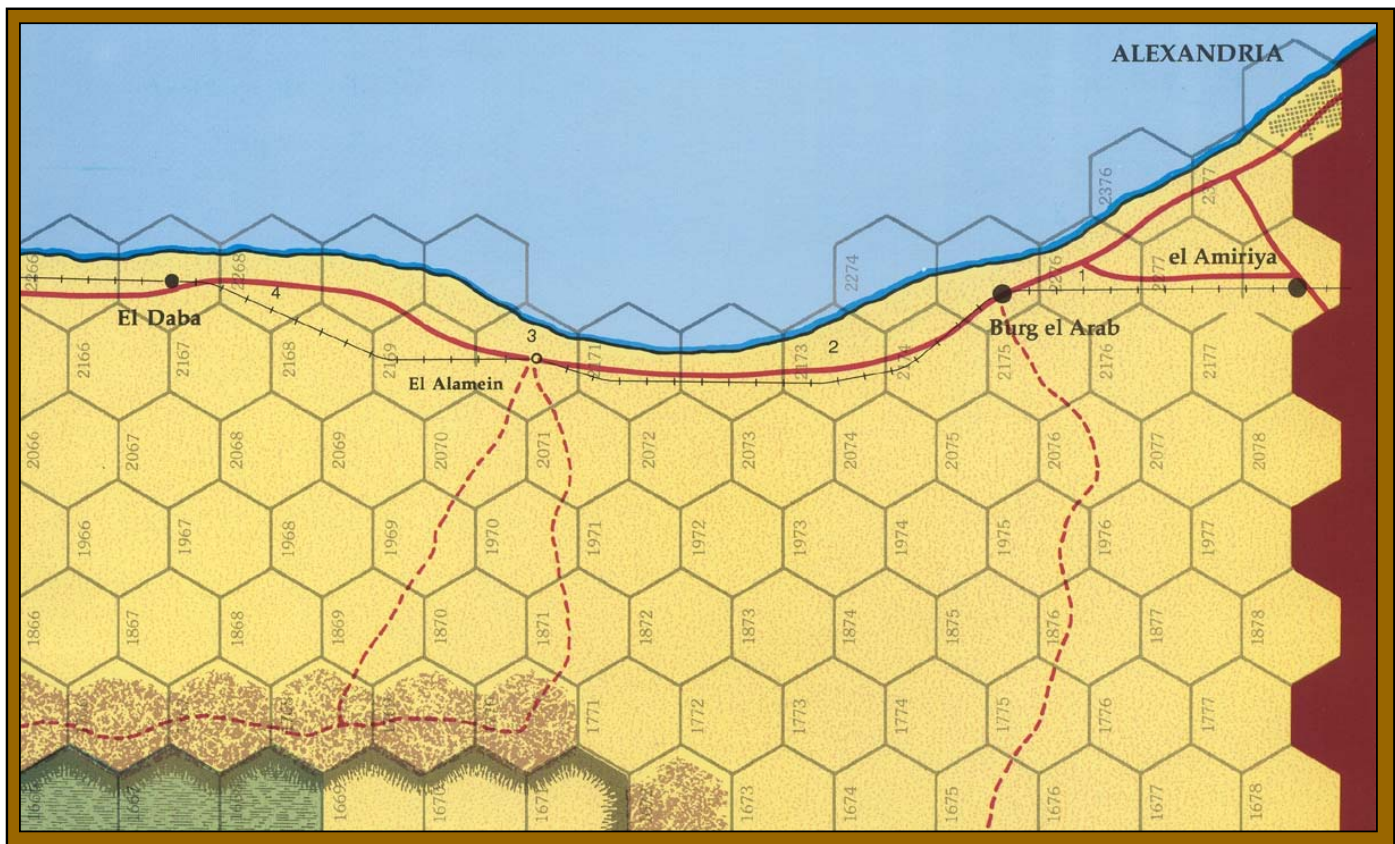
In general, *The Legend Begins*'s documentation is an excellent and logically laid-out reference once you are familiar with the game system. However, it is less useful while trying to learn the game system, particularly because of the abundance of small but significant rules exceptions.

### Changes from the Previous Edition

In addition to five player aid cards, *The Legend Begins* comes with a sheet containing an extensive list of changes from the previous edition, a few minor errata and a bibliography. This version of *The Leg-*

*end Begins* is the third edition, and is the first to be published by Terran Games (the first and second editions were published by the Rhino Game Company). The changes include the following:

- Supply is no longer dealt with once per turn, but once per segment (this could mean from two to five times per turn). In addition:
  - There are fewer supply points available at the start of each turn;
  - Ports may provide general supply in all segments; and...
  - Units suffer attrition if isolated and out of supply.
- Movement allowances and mobility have been increased. Terrain has less effect on movement, but zones of control have more effect.
- Advances after combat may be one hex (an advance) or several hexes (an overrun).
- Eight advanced rules have been added, including:
  - Rules for fog of war,
  - A detailed air subsystem,
  - Combat motorization,
  - Diversionary attacks and...







- Non-phasing reaction.

There are also eleven special rules applicable only to the campaign game or specific scenarios, including:

- Rules for railroad construction,
- The advent of the British six-pounder gun,
- Air transport,
- Amphibious raids and...
- The invasion of Malta.
- A number of new rules have been added introducing mobile assaults, and special unit types such as:
  - Heavy artillery barrages,
  - Engineers,
  - Reconnaissance,
  - Army headquarters,
  - Gurkha battalions and...
  - Amphibious units.
- The most obvious and one of the most useful changes from the Rhino Game Com-

pany's editions is the use of horizontal white bars across the counters to highlight intrinsically mechanized and motorized units. It took me a while before I realized that trucks, which are motorized, didn't have these white bars because they are non-combat units with limited zones of control. Mechanized and motorized combat units, with the white bars, exert more influential active zones of control.

The bibliography is very informative. The designer indicated SPI's *The Campaign for North Africa* formed the basis for *The Legend Begins*' order of battle. In addition, Jack Greene's expertise was consulted, presumably for the Italian orders of battle. However, the lack of acknowledgment for Frank Chadwick, arguably the most knowledgeable individual extant on North African theater orders of battle, is an omission I found surprising. For those *advocati diaboli* who wish to argue this point, Vance von Borries was not acknowledged either.

In summary, *The Legend Begins* is a brigade-level simulation, each tank unit step represents about twenty-five tanks, two turns represent a month, and each hex represents between seven and ten miles.

## Playing the Game

You can't really play any of the seven scenarios without all three maps, and these occupy 17" x 49". There are the two playing aids for each player, but these are more than just aids - they keep track of significant amounts of important information, as well as providing a place to store replacements and cadres.

Plan on allocating a good hour to setting up a scenario, twice as long if you're unfamiliar with the game. Although the scenario booklet is straightforward and sequentially laid out, not all of the important information will be found in the section devoted to each scenario. There is a very important table on the back cover of the booklet which provides important additional information, including the current status of Malta, Crete, port damage, rail-head location, replacements and resource points. Reference to this table is made once at the beginning of the scenario book; reference at the start of each scenario would have been more helpful.

The expanded sequence of play on the inside back cover of the rule book is definitive. However, until you become familiar with the system, it can be daunting to try and find the rule book reference for each of the listed activities. A simple numeric reference to the respective rules would have been useful. Such a reference is included at the end of this review.

There are a few things which seemed to be missing. For example, I couldn't find any marker counters for the Segment Track, nor could I find anything called a Resource Point Track. Fortunately, neither of these is fatal. In addition, I found the Recovered Steps Status Track unnecessarily complex. The process requires one-half page of rules and a separate playing aid for each player, in order that the Allied player can keep track of steps in increments of one-quarter, and the Axis player in increments of one-third. In my opinion, it would have been simpler to keep track of the steps in whole numbered increments, and require the player to convert four increments for the Allies and three increments for the Axis, for each step to be recovered.

The Combat Results Table looks like any standard Combat Results Table: The die rolls are noted on the left (and right - thank you, Mr. Designer), from one at the top to six at the bottom; and the odds are printed across the top, from 1:4 on the left to 7:1 on the right (and including a 1.5:1 column). The table's results indicate the step losses for both attacker and defender, but also indicate who won the battle. This is necessary because the attacker could be rolling up to four dice for each combat, depending on the magnitude of that attack.

This is an interesting concept. The magnitude is determined from another chart on the Combat Results Table. It is based on the lesser of the total steps involved in the combat of either the attacker or the defender. The black die determines which side won the combat; the cumulative Combat Results Table effects of the white dice are the step losses for each side. However, the rules appear to conflict with the information on the chart, and the example in the rule book does more to mystify than it does to illuminate. This is unfortunate, because this combat system tends to be very bloody, and could conceivably result in the winner being forced to remove more steps than the loser.

*The Legend Begins* is definitely a game with a steep learning curve. The number of rules exceptions, complex activities and details, and the amount of chrome in the system, require a constant reference to the rule book. And as I mentioned earlier, the rule book is not arranged in a manner which simplifies the learning process. *The Legend Begins* borders on being too much work for not enough fun. The actual campaign was fast, fluid and dynamic, but *The Legend Begins* doesn't quite capture this feeling.

I'd like to be able to end on a positive note. The map and counters are quite nicely done from a graphic perspective. The thoughtful way that the scenarios have been designed, and the detail in the orders of battle, speak well of the research and development. The system of seven semi-random segments per turn has a great deal of potential, as does the combat resolution system. The scale is nicely manageable. There is potential in this simulation; it just needs a judicious pruning job. To quote another architectural dictum: Less is more.

## Expanded Sequence of Play

[rules references in square brackets]

### Initial Phase [3.1 A.1.]

- Both players place two supply points [20.0] plus their reinforcements [31.0 and scenario booklet] in their entry boxes [27.3 and 27.4]. Both players receive one resource point [30.1].
- Both players roll on their Replacement Tables [Combat Results Table] and place the replacements they receive [28.2] in their entry boxes [27.3 and 27.4]. Each friendly air headquarters on the map allows the owning player to receive one air unit from the Cadre Box [40.9]. The replaced air unit starts on its *Inoperative* side.



[illegible]

- **Recovery Segment:** Both players receive up to half (drop fractions) of their recovered steps back [29.3]. They may be immediately used to augment combat units or converted into replacement units.
- **Organization Segment:** Both players may attach units to a division, even if the unit has a different divisional identification than the division it is attaching to [6.2]. Both players may transfer steps [28.11] and perform conversions [31.7].
- **Malta Segment:** One player rolls for Malta interdiction [3.1 A.4 and 26.2].

### Operation Cycle [3.1 B.]

- Draw a segment  $ch_i$  at random.

### Movement Phase

- Owning player moves some, none or all of his units [4.0]. This includes: Sea movement [23.0], air transport [49.0] and special truck transfer [21.4] if it is the primary segment.
- Mobile assaults occur during movement

(Terrain Effects Chart plus two movement points). The attacker's strength is halved [14.0].

- Cost plus two movement points (motorized) or plus one movement points (non-motorized) to exit an enemy zone of control [7.2.2].
- In lieu of movement a unit may: Absorb replacements [28.5] or build field works [18.2 and 18.3]. In lieu of movement an artillery unit can flip to its non-mobile side [16.2].
- Perform all demolition attempts on friendly ports [24.3] and supply points [20.5] before the Combat Phase. Perform demolition on enemy ports [24.3] and supply points [20.5] the instant the unit enters the hex.

## Combat Phase

- Perform air game sub phase [40.4]:
  - Attacker places his air units on ground support [10.6 and 40.6], interdiction [40.7] and escort [40.5].

- Defender places his air units for defensive ground support [40.6], interdiction [40.7], escort and interception [40.5].
- Attacker places his interceptors [40.5].
- Resolve air-to-air combat [40.5].
- Resolve combat [9.0 and 10.0]. If Italian units are involved, first roll on the Italian Table [17.1].
- Conduct the advance after combat before preceding to the next combat [12.0].
- Place disrupted markers on all units that suffered an overrun or repulsed result [11.0 and 13.0].
- Remove any supply points used for attack supply [20.3] or heavy barrage shifts [20.4]. Do not count attacks against recon units which avoided combat [16.1].

### **Supply Phase**

- General supply is checked for all friendly units [19.0]. Place out of supply markers on units which do not have a line of supply [19.5]. If a port hex is used as a general supply source (during a primary segment) the owning player must check for its availability [19.7].
- Perform attrition on all out of supply units which are also isolated [19.6].
- Remove all disrupted markers from friendly units except those caused by a repulsed result in the previous Combat Phase [19.8].



## Clash of Arms Games' *Command at Sea*

Published in 1994 • Designed by **Larry Bond, Ed Kettler and Chris Carlson**  
and

## Armoursoft's *Shipbase III*

Published in 1994 • Designed by **Jack Ferris**

reviewed by **Mike Cosgrave**

*Command at Sea* and *Shipbase III* are the state of the art in two different styles of modern naval miniatures wargaming. *Shipbase III* is a computer-moderated set of rules for naval wargames from 1895 to 1945; *Command at Sea: The Rising Sun* is the first volume of a traditional paper rules set which currently covers World War II in the Pacific but which will eventually cover all World War II naval operations.

Both look well straight out of the box. *Shipbase III* has a nice clean appearance with a well written manual (forty-eight pages) for the game and a data book (112 pages) with a very complete index of capital ships from 1895-1945 - this data is included in the game, which comes on a single floppy disk and installs into under one megabyte on your hard disk. Armoursoft provides both 5.25" and 3.5" high density disks in the game. The *Command at Sea* rule book (122 pages) and Data Annex (eighty-four pages) are obviously bigger since they have to include all the material that *Shipbase III* has on disk. The *Command at Sea* counter sheet is much more colourful than that of *Shipbase III*, but both are good, cleanly printed and punch out neatly. Neither game tries to include

counters for every unit in the periods which they cover but both manage to fit in a good selection. *Command at Sea* includes a jump start rules booklet, which is only sixteen pages long, and a scenario generation book.



*Shipbase III* does include two sets of extra notes tucked into the box, one of which is on a small piece of paper which is easy to lose (I did!) - both are changes made after the rule book went to print which will, presumably, be incorporated into later re-printings. *Command at Sea* suffers from two big presentation problems - the charts and tables were originally interspersed through the text, but Clash of Arms Games has now added a book of collected charts to save searching through the rule book for the appropriate table. The tables in the Player's Handbook incorporate revisions over the originals which make it worthwhile, ensuring that you get a copy. The other problem is the lack of a Harpoon-style player reference card, but the complexity of

some of the new mechanics mean that a single sheet reference card is pretty much an impossibility.

Obviously, once you get past opening the boxes and looking at the pretty pictures, the two products differ quite a lot.

*Shipbase III* is menu-driven, with an easy to follow interface which is clear even on non-backlit laptops. Selecting an option from the main menu leads you off through the relevant set of clear sub-menus to resolve actions. For example, selecting gunnery leads you to pick the firing ship from a list, then the target ship, and then puts up a screen on which you enter range and select things like target angle, shell type, and so on before pressing the spacebar to resolve the shot. If you make an error, the escape key backs you out to the previous menu. The air and search options load separate programs to execute and then returns to the main program. The slight delay caused by this is hardly noticeable and certainly not inconvenient.

*Shipbase III*'s greatest strength is also its main limitation - since the computer handles all the record keeping and combat resolution, it's a fast game to pick up and play. I have used it at our college game groups Freshers night as a pick up game for newbies, and it has worked quite well. However, because it is a black box into which you feed numbers, more advanced players find it limiting - knowing how it handles armor-piercing as against high explosive ammo, or wind direction and strength, would enable players to make better choices. We know, for example, that at Coronel in 1914, *Monmouth* and *Good Hope* had great difficulty fighting their secondary batteries in a force six storm, but in a *Shipbase III* refight, they easily outgunned Von Spee's cruisers.

There appears to be an annoying limitation on the scenario editor in *Shipbase III*, in that while creating scenarios from scratch is very easy, it is impossible to add ships to existing scenarios. Another minor quibble is that you cannot transfer a scenario created on one computer to another - from desktop to laptop for example. Mind you, neither of these are major problems.

The search function in *Shipbase III* has more seri-

ous limitations. The search module is not a vital part of the game, but it is an optional pre-combat strategic search mode. Search tracks task groups by grid reference, and provides contact and intelligence information, until you have advanced matters to the point at which you chose the translate to tactical option and get on with the shooting. It is a great idea, and the intelligence reports with differing levels of accuracy are wonderful. I love it, but the search module does not keep track of where land is! If you want to use it, for example for the Solomons, you must keep track of the grid references of land on a scratch paper record to make sure you do not sail through an island. Some naval gamers will no doubt feel that this lack of land for the world of

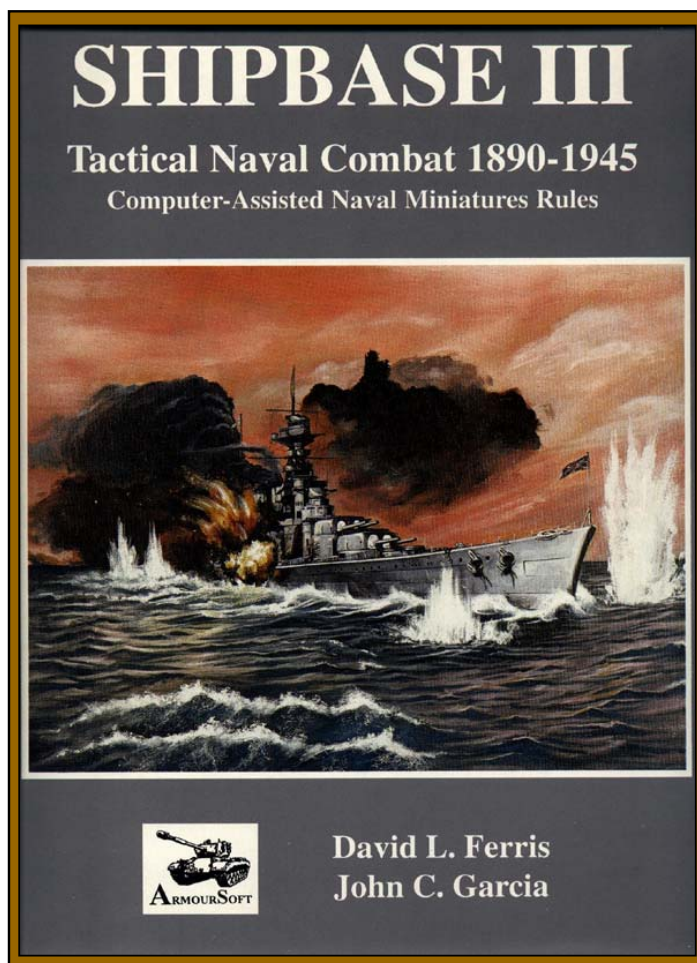
*Shipbase III* is only right and proper! Obviously, including maps in the search mode is possible, but probably only at the cost of a huge increase in the size of the game.

*Command at Sea* is not as easy a game to master, and even experienced *Harpoon* players will find the new gunfire, torpedo and air combat systems require careful attention.

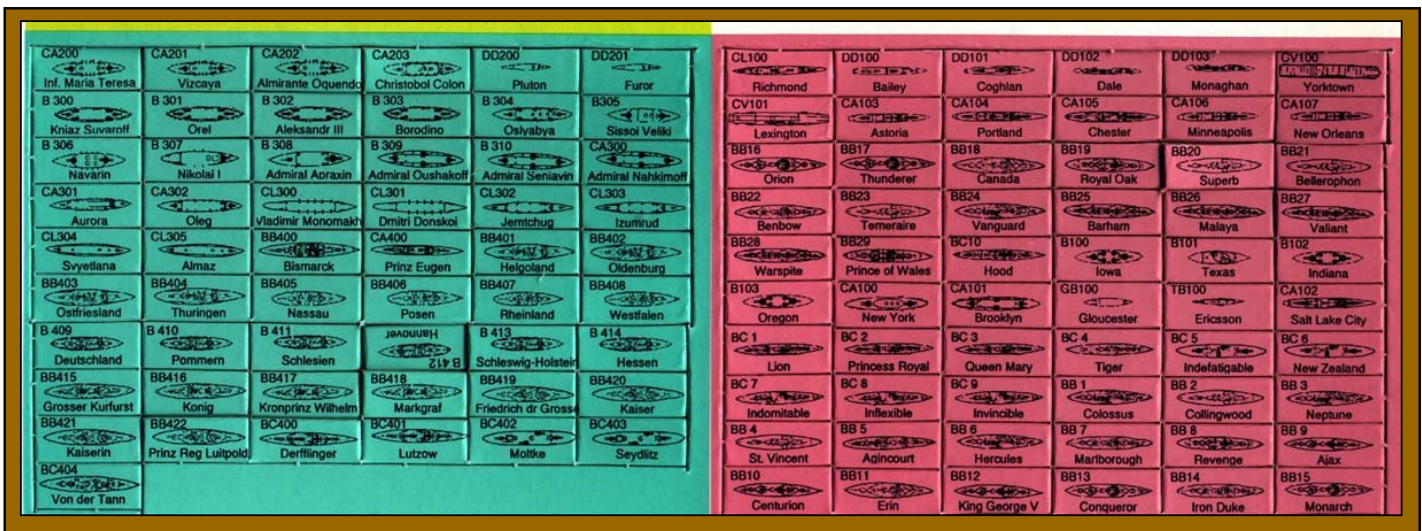
Gunfire, once you catch onto the table layout, is very straight forward and everything you need to resolve does fit on the ship forms. Torpedo firing and resolution appears more complex because there are a lot of tables but is easy once you get past calculating target angle and apparent speed. Purists may grumble about the amount of interpolation required in these latter two key variables but the rule that torpedoes passing within five

hundred yards of a ship check for hits will accommodate most errors.

The depth charge section also has a plethora of attack tables, for different patterns and charge types, but once you get past the shock of seeing eleven different tables on six pages and step through the mechanics, it soon becomes clear. Here at least you can speed play by photocopying the appropriate resolution tables onto the back of the ship forms. The basic air combat systems will look familiar to







old *Harpoon* hands, but the procedures for handling air operations involving large numbers of aircraft with one or two die rolls which, if you are not up to speed on statistics and probability, may leave you feeling a bit lost at first. But with practice, most people will become comfortable with it.

In addition to the core rules in *Command at Sea*, the game includes rules for just about everything you might encounter. All types of ship-to-shore and shore-to-ship gunnery are covered - there are rules for firing at ships with tanks! There is a good section on amphibious landings, which not only covers getting the troops onto the beach, but which also has a simple set of ground combat rules to deal with the beach assault and carry the fighting far enough inland to determine if the landing succeeds. It is not a complete set of World War II land combat rules, but it is an excellent set of simple rules.

The one part of *Command at Sea* that still annoys me is the visibility section. It's not complicated - check environmental conditions on a table which tells you which gives you a base sighting range which is modified by the roll of a ten-sided die on a variation table. This is all well and good, but throughout the rules they insist on using "kyds", short for kiloyards instead of "000 yds," which is what everyone else in the whole world uses, and on calling the variation the "sigma" - what is wrong with calling it the variation? (*Publisher's Note: Sigma is the unit of measure for standard deviations from the mean.*)

*Command at Sea* will inevitably be compared with *Harpoon*, and it is very definitely a World War II version of *Harpoon* with new mechanics for areas like gunnery, air combat, torpedoes and so on. *Harpoon* players will recognize much of the basic structure and should have no problems with the new systems. *Command at Sea* may initially appear more complicated because it has more charts and tables,

but the elegance of Larry Bond's basic design means *Command at Sea* is, in fact, as easy to play as the average magazine issue game.

I would have to say that while *Shipbase III* is good and will no doubt improve in later versions, Armoursoft should publish information on how it resolves combat, add a game clock and the ability to track aircraft endurance, and do a lot of work on the search module for strategic play. *Command at Sea* will obviously see many more data books for the rest of World War II and prepared ship forms, but I would really like to see an option for simpler torpedo and depth charge resolution systems, to provide faster play even if this is at the expense of a little accuracy.

My overall feeling is *Shipbase III* is a tactical game which experienced wargamer will find quick and fun while newcomers will find it an easy and satisfying way to take up naval wargaming. *Command at Sea* is a definitive simulation of both strategic and tactical naval warfare, which may appear intimidating but which can be mastered and which will provide a level of sophistication which most naval gamers will want to savor. *Shipbase III* is very playable; *Command at Sea* tends towards realism and you should choose based on which style you prefer.

## *In the Pipeline*

### **Avalanche Press**

#### **JUST OUT**

- *Red Parachutes* (\$38) 1943 Dniepr Campaign
- *Blood on the Snow* (\$21) Battle of Suomussalmi (Russo-Finnish War)

#### **IN THE PIPELINE**

- *SMS Goeben* (March/??) Naval Warfare in World War I

### **Avalon Hill / Victory Games**

#### **JUST OUT**

- *Machiavelli* (\$35) Reprint of the Battleline original

#### **IN THE PIPELINE:**

- *Global Survival* (January/\$35) Economic warfare game
- *London's Burning* (December/\$35) The Battle of Britain
- Expansion Cards for *We the People* (January/\$5) Sixteen new cards

### **Clash of Arms Games**

#### **JUST OUT**

- *La Bataille de Corunna-Espagnol* (\$30) Latest in *La Bataille* series
- *The King's War* (\$36) Charles Vasey's game on the English Civil War

#### **IN THE PIPELINE**

- *Zorndorf 1758* (January/\$44) Latest in the Age of Reason series

### **Columbia Games**

#### **JUST OUT**

- *Eagles* (\$9) *Dixie* for the Napoleonic period

#### **IN THE PIPELINE**

- *Sam Grant* (December/\$50) *Bobby Lee* for the Western Theater

### **Decision Games**

#### **JUST OUT**

- *Lords of the Sierra Madre* (\$50) Major revision of the original
- *Blue & Gray I and II* quadrigames (\$30 each) SPI reprints
- *Across Suez* (\$13) SPI reprint

#### **IN THE PIPELINE**

- *Emperor's First Battles* (December/\$30) SPI reprint
- *Napoleon's Last Battles* (December/\$30) SPI reprint
- *Thirty Years War quadrigame* (December/\$30) SPI reprint
- *The '45* (December/\$30) The Scottish Rebellion of 1745

### **Strategy & Tactics**

- #173: *Thirty Years War*
- #174: *Indo-Pakistani Wars*
- #175: *Germania*: Final installment in the *Trajan* series
- #176: *Blood on the Tigris*: World War I in Mesopotamia

### **The Gamers**

#### **JUST OUT**

- *Leros* (\$39) Tactical Combat Series game on the 1943 island invasion

#### **IN THE PIPELINE**

- *Stalingrad Pocket* (Second Edition) (January/\$30) New counters, map, rules
- *Champion Hill* (March/\$29) Civil War Brigade Series game on the Vicksburg campaign

### **One Step Beyond**

#### **JUST OUT**

### **Game Fix**

- #7 - *The Big One* (\$7) One-map World War



II in Europe by Bill Banks

- #8 - *Greenline Chechnya* (\$7) Uses the *Redline: Korea* system
- #9 - *Among Nations* (\$7) Players try to meet their national objectives

## GMT Games

### JUST OUT

- *Typhoon!* (\$45) Vance von Borries' version of *Spires of the Kremlin*
- *Diadochi* (\$16) A module for *Great Battles of Alexander*
- *The Three Days of Gettysburg* (\$59) Latest American Civil War system from Rich Berg

### IN THE PIPELINE

- *Glory* (December/\$36) Simple American Civil War battle system
- *Invasion: Norway* (December/\$36) Uses *Britain Stands Alone* system
- *Samurai* (January/\$45) *SPQR* goes to Japan

## Games USA

### IN THE PIPELINE

- *Eylau* (January/\$35) Third in the *Eagles of the Empire* series

## Moments in History

### IN THE PIPELINE

- *Fields of Glory* (January/\$35) Battles of Malplaquet and Ourdenarde, using the *A Famous Victory* system
- *Tank Commander: Eastern Front* (March/??) Tactical World War II warfare card game

## Omega Games

### IN THE PIPELINE

- *1864: Year of Decision* (February/\$35) Innovative American Civil War campaign game
- *War Plan Orange* (March/\$30) 1932 Variant for *Carrier War*

## Pacific Rim Publishing

### JUST OUT

- *Chosin* (\$30) by Ted Carlson - battalion/company level

- *Black Day of the German Army* (\$12) By Ulrich Blennmann

### IN THE PIPELINE

- *The Road to Berlin* (January/\$75) By Joseph Youst - 1,400 counters / four maps

## Simulations Workshop

### JUST OUT

- *Mad Monks and Relics* (\$20) Uses cards and counters

### IN THE PIPELINE

- *Totensonntag: The Battle for Sidi Rezegh* (January/\$16)

## Spearhead Games

### IN THE PIPELINE

- *Kiev '43* (December/\$35) by Jack Radey

## Terran Games

### IN THE PIPELINE

- *Bastogne or Bust* (December/\$32.50) Upgrade of the original game

## XTR/Command

### JUST OUT

- #34: *Death & Destruction / Gazala*
- #35: *Mason-Dixon / Balkan Hell*
- #36: *SS Panzer - Battle of Prochorovka*
- #37: *Mukden / Guderian's Gambit*

## 3W/Keith Poulter Games

### JUST OUT

- *To the Far Shore* (\$40) Normandy invasion