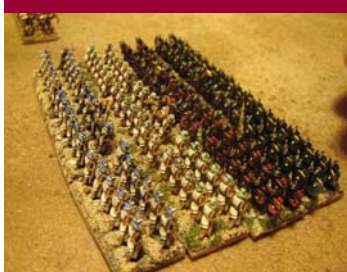


Warning Order



Command & Control: Is Realism Possible in Wargaming?

Most gamers have heard of The Charge of the Light Brigade, Frederick's turning movement at Leuthen, and Davout's rout of the Prussians at Jena-Auerstedt. However, probably few have read about the Mexican Army sitting still even when they were being outmaneuvered at Cerro Gordo, the debacle at Villers-Bocage in 1944, or the ill advised, impetuous charge of the Swiss pike at Bicocca. The common theme of all of these actions was the presence of or lack of command and control.

Now ask yourself, could any of these things happen during your gaming nights? The answer is probably not. As wargaming rules continue to trend towards playability versus realism, command and control is seen to be adding a layer of unwanted complexity. Two of the most popular historical wargaming rules sets, *Flames of War* and *Warhammer Ancients*, have no command and control system or so little it is usually ignored during play.

I've been in this hobby for a long time and I think that some of this is due to gamers wanting "absolute

control". They like to pretend like they're on Mount Olympus, issuing commands to the mortals below. There's no surprise flanking maneuvers to worry about, units do exactly as ordered, and the game comes down to attacks based upon points ratios to chance of success plus the roll of dice. I've been in games where there

or units don't react to threats quick enough because their orders don't allow them to.

To answer the question about whether or not command and control should be in wargames, you need to go back to the early days of the hobby and see how the rules we use have progressed.



are command and control rules and some gamers simply come unglued when their units can't move or a huge attack goes in piecemeal.

But that is exactly what has happened on battlefields throughout history. Attacks don't always go off as scheduled, reinforcements get lost on the wrong road and arrive hours late,

When I first got into the hobby in the mid-70's, there was WRG, Newbury, and several other rules sets for various periods. The big thing back then was written orders and depending upon the rules, this could be quite complex or very generic. This system introduced an element of command and control by
(*cont. on page 6*)

Inside this issue:

Treachery! A TSATF battle report	2
Memoirs of a Miniature and Board Wargamer	8
Blast From The Past	9
Interview with Ambush Blitz author Jerboa	10
Ambush Blitz review	13
Warmaster Ancients Battle Report	14
Board Game Reviews	17

Special points of interest:

- Review of *Ambush Blitz* and an interview with the author.
- TSATF battle report.
- Warmaster Ancients battle report.
- Book, movie, and board game reviews.
- Regular features such as *Blast From The Past* and more...

TSATF Scenario: Treachery!

Scenario Replay

Our group had not played The Sword and the Flame for quite some time, due to the fact that one of our members had to move away and he took about half of the group's figures with him! So after a long rebuilding process, we were finally able to do another game on the Northwest Frontier.

The year is 1898 and the tribes along the frontier are getting restless again. The local British commissioner and his wife have been invited for tea and to talk over the local tribe's grievances at the home of the local tribal leader. Taking a platoon of British infantry along for an escort, the group is fired upon when the Pathans spring their ambush too early. The commissioner, his wife, and the platoon of infantry get into the walled compound and barricade themselves in. At the fort the firing has been heard and the garrison is ordered to stand to. The second platoon of the company who was out on patrol near the river turns around and heads for the compound. Meanwhile, with the advantage of surprise now gone, the Pathans launch their assault.

After choosing sides both teams set up. While the British were very limited in their set up, the Pathans had several options. The Pathan leaders decided to launch a full scale attack on the compound in an effort to overwhelm the defenders, seize the commissioner and his

wife, then get them over the bridge where they would be held hostage. A second force would advance across the river and pin down the defenders in the fort while a third force would position itself in

and around the village to prevent reinforcements from reaching the defenders at the compound.

To win, both sides needed to get the commissioner and his wife either to safety in the fort or across the bridge to the tribe's territory to be used as bargaining chips in future negotiations. The British force had the advantage of firepower, but the Pathans were in a good

position and were able to make the British come to them for a change.

The first two units out of the fort were the two Indian infantry platoons. They quickly formed up and prepared to move against the village with a secondary objective of trying to provide support to the defenders in the compound. The British infantry platoon that was on patrol de-



British troops form a firing line to engage the Pathans emerging from the riverbed.

ployed into skirmish formation and began to move towards the sound of the guns. The Mgs and screw guns were deployed along the fort's towers to provide long range support.

The first Pathan tribe quickly surrounded the compound and launched a probing attack against one of the walls, which was defeated. The second Pathan force crossed the river and moved up towards the ridge near the fort while the third Pathan force waited patiently for the Indians to get a little closer to the village before they opened fire. The stage was set for a running battle that would see wild swings of fortune for both sides.

Imperial Forces Order of Battle

- (1) platoon of infantry at the compound.
- (1) platoon of infantry on patrol near the river.
- (2) platoons of British infantry at the fort.
- (2) platoons of the Rifle Brigade at the fort.
- (2) screw guns w/crew at the fort.
- (2) machine guns w/crew at the fort.



Pathans crossing the river in an effort to tie down the British in the fort.



A unit of Pathans in the village opened fire on the Indians that were deploying into formation outside of the fort. This triggered a heavy response from the artillery and machine guns in the fort that were covering that area, but in a theme that would be repeated often during this battle, they scored few hits. The remaining British infantry in the fort were now filing past the Indians towards the side that faced the ridge overlooking the river.

The Pathan force that had crossed the river now approached the ridge, wary of the firepower inside of the fort. One of the units tried to cross the bridge to intercept the British infantry platoon on patrol and in a rare showing of good die rolls, the artillery and machine guns in the fort virtually wiped it out in one turn.

The British infantry platoon that was on patrol continued to move in the direc-

tion of the compound. This worried the three Pathan units that were in the process of surrounding the compound, so one unit was turned around to meet this new threat.

As the two Indian infantry platoons neared the village, they were met by fire from the village and a charge from the brush/scrub behind the village. The charge was launched too early and was met by devastating fire from one of the Indian infantry platoons. The second Indian infantry platoon was now involved in a serious firefight with a Pathan unit deployed in the village. Both sides were taking hits, but so far they were both holding their ground. The second Indian infantry unit now moved to support the first in an attempt to take the village and secure that flank. Meanwhile, after the success of destroying the Pathan unit crossing the bridge, the artillery and machine guns went back to their bad die rolling and could not hit anything!

The pressure on the compound

was now pretty severe. Although a first and second attack were repulsed, the third actually saw Pathans get over the wall and kill several of the defenders. The British redeployed their remaining defenders while a fresh Pathan unit attacked the rear wall. This too was beaten off, but several more British lay dead or dying in the compound and the defenses were by now severely undermanned.

The two remaining Pathan units on the ridge decided that it was now or never. They launched a charge directly at the two British infantry units that had deployed into a line outside of the fort. Despite tremendous odds and taking numerous casualties, they hit both British platoons. The first melee was going well for the British, but then the Pathans started to roll good and it became an avalanche as British soldier after British soldier went down in hand to hand combat. By the end of the first melee the Pathan unit was destroyed, but the British platoon was reduced to eight effective soldiers. The second Pathan unit was also destroyed, but the second British infantry unit was now down to half strength. This seemingly suicidal charge crippled any chance of the British infantry from the fort being able to get to the compound or to provide effective support. The survivors redeployed near the fort walls to await the next attack.

Pathan Order of Battle

- Three units (60 figs) deployed near the village.
- Three units (60 figs) deployed on the opposite side of the river.
- Three units (60 figs) deployed off board near the compound.
- Units that routed off board or destroyed were able to return the following turn as fresh units, simulating a large number of clans hanging back off board waiting to join the fighting and plundering.



Savage fighting at the compound as the British defenders throw back the first assault.

TSATF Scenario: Treachery! (cont.)

Scenario Replay



The British platoon that was out on patrol moves towards the sound of the gunfire in an effort to reinforce the compound.

As the defenders in the compound continued to get whittled down with each attack, the British infantry platoon that was on patrol and was moving to help the defenders now took center stage. The platoon moved directly towards the compound on what at first appeared to be a suicide run. However, the Pathan unit that was trying to intercept them was destroyed on the bridge by long range fire, prompting the force that was attacking the compound to break off a unit to engage this new threat.

Not wanting to waste time with forming into a slow moving line, the British infantry advanced quickly in open order, only changing formation when a Pathan unit appeared to be closing. The first charge by the Pathans was defeated before they even got into melee and the survivors retreated before the British advance. Another Pathan unit that was behind the village now pressed forward with its own attack and braved the storm of bullets from the waiting British. After causing several casualties in hand to hand along with long range sniping, the British platoon was cut to 60% strength.

Still the British infantry platoon advanced, throwing a scare into the Pathans who were attacking the compound. The remnants of two Pathan units now took up positions and began firing on the platoon as it advanced. Finally, the British

platoon had taken too many casualties and was forced to retire.

Suddenly, all of the British platoons were below half strength and barely able to hold their positions. It would be left to the Indian platoons to attempt a relief operation.

The first Indian platoon had already repulsed a charge and a second charge that actually got into hand to hand combat. The second Indian platoon

charged into the village, attempting to use shock action to clear the village and a path to the compound. The first attack went well as the Indians won melee after melee. The first part of the village was cleared and another Pathan unit was left in ruins, streaming back towards the mountains. The Indian platoon continued the attack, moving among the village buildings and engaging in a series of melees.

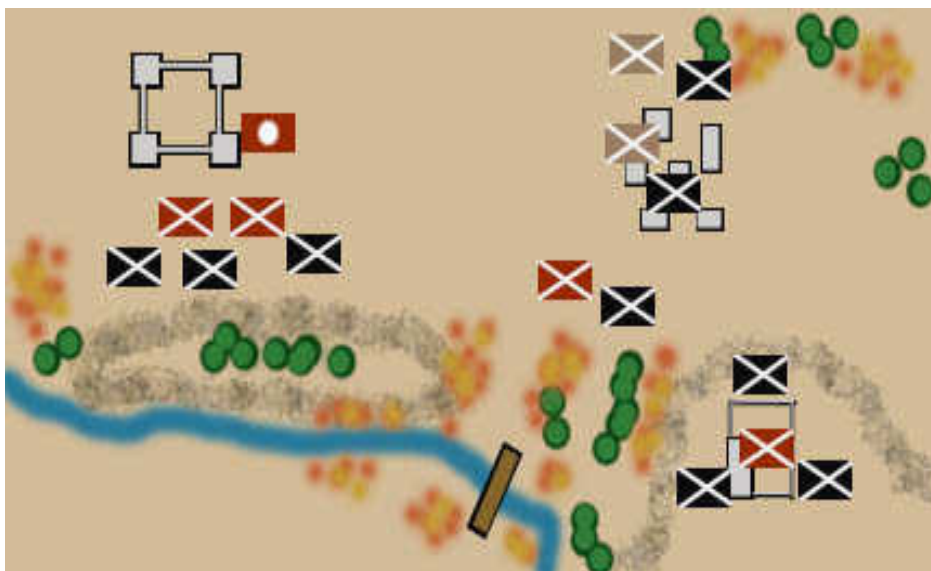
This time the melees did not go well for the Indian infantry. For awhile they held their own, but then a quick series of

reverses left them with only a few effectives still in the village. By the end of third round of melee the Indians were falling back to the fort.

The Pathans finally had more warriors inside the compound than British defenders. Fighting back to back, the British defenders held out for awhile, but then were overwhelmed as they fought to the last man. The commissioner and his wife were led out of the compound and back towards the bridge as hostages.

The lone Indian platoon that was still in good shape was too far out of position to do anything about it, even if they were to roll decent for movement. The remaining British infantry platoons that were now under strength were engaged in some long range firefights with the Pathans. The artillery was still providing support, but it was clearly not going to be enough. The machine guns had been brought out of the fort, but were going to be unable to bring effective fire on the party escorting the hostages.

After some half-hearted attempts to re-establish a blocking position and with no fresh units to go block the bridge, the British commanders tried to come up with an effective plan to prevent the Pathans from escaping with their prize. After a few minutes of debate the British side conceded as they simply did not have the strength to prevent the Pathans from fulfilling their victory conditions.



This was one of the best Sword and Flame games that we had played and that's saying quite a lot since we've been playing it for over 25 years! The game was close, both sides had a shot at winning, but there were several series of hand to hand combats that did not go the way the British had hoped. The inability of the British artillery to score any hits the first few turns, the Indians doing well in the attack on the village, then faltering, and the incredible Pathan attack on the two British infantry platoons outside that fort that wrecked them.

We did not have any cavalry painted up yet and I think that was one of deciding factors against the British. Colonial cavalry is essential for any kind of frontier action like this scenario as it can function both in the screening role and is useful for getting to any crisis quickly. With any luck we will have some cavalry actions ready for the next TSATF scenario.

As with many of these types of games, both sides played well enough to win. There were no serious errors on either side that were worth noting. All players were into the scenario, there was god cooperation, and no "wandering off" where sometimes players lose sight of the scenario objective and create objectives of their own!

A final note about the miniatures and terrain. The figures used were mainly Old Glory with a few Foundry thrown in. For the current price the Old Glory Pathans are tough to beat and look good painted up. The village buildings are from Monolith in their Middle Easter line. The compound is from Crescent Root Studio and is a beautiful piece of terrain. If you have not tried out anything from this company I strongly suggest that you do. They have a growing range of 15 and 25mm Middle Eastern buildings that are well worth the money. The fort is from the French Legion range by Old Glory from ages ago. It's lightweight, paints up fast, and looks good on the tabletop.

The Northwest Frontier offers colonial gamers a wide variety of troop type and scenario possibilities for the Colonial gamer.



The first Afghan tribe reaches the walls of the compound as the British deploy to meet the threat.



Pathans moving up under cover of the hill to pin down the British reinforcements emerging from the fort.

Command & Control (cont.)

having gamers write down objectives for various forces under their control. Units still did what they pretty much wanted as the orders were subject to much interpretation and arguments, particularly in Ancients games, broke out frequently.

The next development was the use of chits/counters to simulate orders. Two of the most popular gaming systems of all time, Johnny Reb and Command Decision, used this instead of written orders. This had a profound impact on the hobby as all of a sudden gamers had to guess what their opponent was going to do and there was an element of planning involved in giving your units a sequence of orders to carry out a task or seize a critical objective.

I think it was at this juncture in the history of the hobby where the “great divide” over command and control occurred. Up to this point most gamers took it for granted that you had to write orders, but not many people followed up on it. As long as the orders that were written were “in the spirit of the game” and didn’t seem too unrealistic (highly subjective!), then it was back to focusing on dozens of charts and tables for the combat. Now all of a sudden your orders mattered and there were serious consequences if you guessed wrong, thought about it too much, or were just a bad tactician. A lot of gamers didn’t like this....

So this is where, in the late 80’s-early 90’s, that historical gaming split into two different groups on the subject. There were those who wanted some element of command and control, while others just wanted to run their gaming units as they saw fit and command be damned!

Throughout the 90’s there seemed to be a kind of WW1 stalemate on the subject. Johnny Reb and Command Decision were still going strong, but rules like Empire and From Valmy to Waterloo still used a variation of the orders/orders writing for larger units. Innovations in this

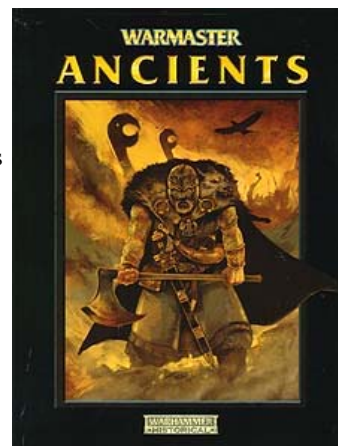
area were few and far between, but by the late 90’s something began to stir and the subject moved forward again.

Suddenly, you had three rules sets that used command and control systems other than the chit/counter and writing orders systems that had been prevalent for a long time. The rules sets were DBA, Piquet, and Fire & Fury. DBA, which is an ancients game with a dozen units a side, used a D6 to give command points which could be used to move units. While this was not novel, the sheer amount of gamers who played or tried this system quickly made it into one of the most popular ways to simulate command and control.

Piquet did the same for using card activation to simulate command problems. While card activation was not novel either, until this point it had not really been used to simulate events, movement, and a whole host of other items on the miniatures battlefield all at the same time. Until Flames of War came out this system used to spawn

some pretty nasty disagreements among gamers usually centered around how much chaos is too much?

Fire & Fury, and its Napoleonic cousin Age of Eagles that came out several years after, took a different approach. Here you used a series of charts to roll for each brigade and after applying various modifiers you ended up with a result that told you if your brigade could move its full movement, half, or had to sit there. Battles For Empire is another set of rules that uses this method for the Victorian Colonial era. It does a great job of simulating an attack by native forces as they are all moving at different speeds.



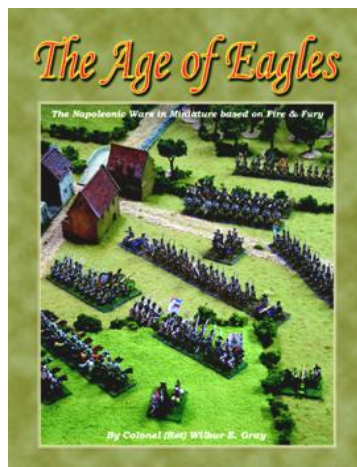
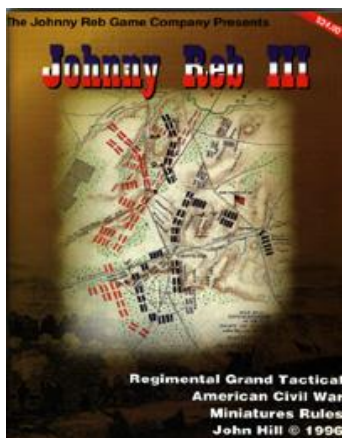
All three of these systems had supporters and detractors. The important thing here, though, was at least gamers were discussing the subject and how to effectively simulate command and control. While playability was important, back

then it was not the burning issue as it is now.

So we come to this decade and the command in gaming issue has once again been taken up with a new approach that first appeared in Warmaster Fantasy, but is now used in Warmaster Ancients and Blitzkrieg Commander, two very popular historical rules sets. Each commander is rated for command and you need to roll that on two dice to issue an order to a unit or a series of units. On the surface, not very novel, but when combined with the opportunity to issue multiple orders, the chance for a blunder, and the fact that if you fail a roll, that commander is done, it takes the issue to a whole new level.

Another recent approach was the system developed for Warmachine. In this fantasy miniatures game wargasters use their points to cast spells and order units to perform various functions. The system works well as it forces players to make tough decisions, which is what command is all about.

There have been other rules sets that have had innovative command systems over the years. One of the best, if not the best, was The Complete Brigadier. Each player commanded a brigade of mixed units and you had to issue orders on a log. The interesting part here was that you generally had to issue them in a series as you couldn’t get to all the units personally each turn. When the



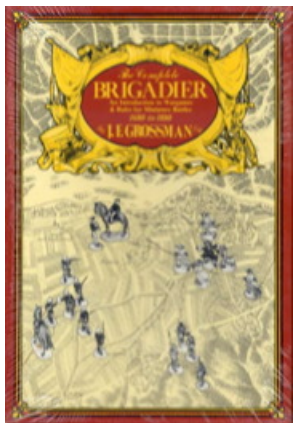
Command & Control (cont.)

shooting started the problems began. Officers were issuing new orders, you forgot about units still marching off away from combat, and more. It was a little more complex than the average set of rules and the combat system left a lot to be desired, but the command system was outstanding.

Other systems come at us from the world of board wargames. Many Napoleonic and ACW sets of rules use some kind of command system that could be applied to miniatures games. The Gamer's/MMP American Civil War Brigade series has an excellent command and control system where players write orders on slips of paper and they are logged. When they arrive at the intended commander there is a chart to check for acceptance or delay. A little work, but it does a good job of showing the problems of coordinating forces across a battlefield.

Many of you are now wondering why I did not include the command system that is prevalent in many sets of rules, namely keeping units within a certain distance of their officers or NCOs. In my thinking those aren't really command and control systems, but an artificial mechanism designed to keep a player's figures/vehicles from wandering too far away from each other. This mechanism gives the appearance of command & control, but there's no decision making involved and no chance of failure.

The rise of points driven miniatures wargames has had a huge influence on whether or not gamers use command and control. If you're into tournaments or not, the inclusion of a command and con-



trol system where something could go wrong, especially where each side is so evenly matched, is too horrifying to contemplate! Others simply don't like one more factor to consider when playing a game where they are thinking about weapon ranges, objectives, deployment, and more. Still others question the need for another layer of rules on top of everything else.

Now I can understand the necessity of not needing a command and control system for games like The Sword and the Flame, small scale 1:1 skirmishes in the French and Indian War, or Wild West shoot outs. But when you're playing a Napoleonic game with 500+ miniatures representing several corps, please don't try to tell me that command and control isn't necessary or it wasn't an important part of warfare in that era!

While there is no way of representing the stress, uncertainty, and chaos of the battlefield, adding command and control to any set of rules can at least add a degree of realism. Whether it is using written orders, dice that determine how many units move, chits with orders on them, or a series of charts and tables, there are numerous ways to add this element of warfare to your tabletop battles.

I've always found it interesting to watch gamers who have played skirmish games, fantasy, or sci-fi, when they first play a wargame that has command and control in it. Invariably, the first questions involve, "The units might not do what I want?", "I have to pre-plan my moves?", or "I could get flanked or cut off by issuing the wrong commands?"

Some will gravitate towards this type of game, but at least half won't play it again, usually because they can't make a decision or the uncertainty of each turn drives them crazy. For most of today's gamers who have grown up with moving units all over the tabletop with impunity, it can be a sobering experience.

I think a better way to introduce gam-

ers to command and control is to start them off with some of the simpler command systems such as Blitzkrieg Commander, Warmaster Ancients, or DBA. This is much better than taking a Flames of War gamer and introducing him to the command system of From Valmy to Waterloo! If they still have interest and would like to try different systems, then move forward by steadily adding layers of complexity.

For myself, I think that command and control in whatever form adds greatly to the game. You need to raise your level of decision making and you need to take into account the fact that things might not go as planned! Then, you need to have a backup plan in case things go really badly! The other part about playing in a game with command and control is being able to react to what your opponent(s) do or don't do. Opportunities may develop or you may need to stay flexible to counter a good move. This takes out the clock like element of some games where you know what they're going to do or what special rules they're going to use every game.

What will be the next trend in command and control for miniature wargames? I tend to think that most things are cyclic, meaning that what's old will be new again. I think that once the current trend of dumping a bunch of figs on the tabletop for a one hour game burns itself out, you may see a return to slightly more complex games again. I think that the day of the 10 hour Empire/Tractics/WRG 6th days are gone, but I think that gamers will start wanting a little more complexity and realism inserted into their games and that's where command and control mechanisms can have an impact.

Certainly in this age of eye candy and high production values some enterprising designer can come up with a new system or a way to retrofit existing games. For example, a supplement for Flames of War with command cards for officers would probably do extremely well as would a varying movement system for many other games.

Command and control is a vital part of the battlefield and gamers should try to experience this as often as possible.

Memoirs of a Miniatures & Board Wargamer Pt. 6

Campaigns Part One

At some point in every gamer's life-time you should try a campaign at least once. I've been involved in quite a number of them for better or worse, but usually they have been good gaming experiences. I think the best part of campaigns, particularly if they are done well, is the planning. In fact, I've found that the planning is probably the most exciting part of the campaign with the battles being almost secondary in nature. There is just no way to substitute that thrill of your side sitting around a map and trying to formulate a plan while trying to figure out what the opposition is going to do. In fact, if your gaming group is civil and gives everyone a chance to speak, you end up with an almost real life staff session with everyone giving their views to the commander, who then must make a choice.



"Back in the day", when complexity was the rule rather than playability, our gaming group did a lot of modern micro-armor gaming. We used several rules sets, including Combat Commander, WRG, Challenger, and Tacforce. One of our members worked in the G-2 section of a National Guard unit and got me a very nicely done map of a section of West Germany, which became the basis for my first campaign game.

Basically, the campaign was about a Soviet mechanized corps attempting to get past a U.S. defensive line that had several battalions and some armored cavalry. The campaign was pretty ambitious, but back in the 70s and 80s campaigns with a lot of paperwork were the norm, so nobody seemed to mind. There was a lot of excitement as each side made its initial deployment and first moves.

The campaign generated several interesting battles, including one in which the

Soviet commanders got a few regiments (yes, we had hundreds of vehicles on the board!) in a giant traffic jam, so the U.S. commander asked for release of theater nuclear weapons! The probability was something like rolling a 12 on two D6s, then rolling a 6 on a D6, followed by a 1 on a D20. Guess what? He rolled it and about two Soviet regiments went up in a tactical nuclear blast!

The Soviet commander on the spot was fired and from then on the new commander (an Air Force EOD guy) ran their side with an iron fist. Tactics changed and the Soviets achieved their objectives. All in all, an enjoyable campaign.

My second attempt at a campaign was during the heyday of Starfleet Battles. One of our group set up a huge hex map of the Star Trek known space and we used the campaign rules in one of the hundreds of supplements that the game had. There were several players and the game included production, repairs, etc... Again, there was great excitement when we started and the first few battles were very critical. About halfway through the campaign it got bogged down. The reason is that there were so many ships by that time that it simply became WW1 trench warfare in space!

So far, I had learned a few valuable lessons about campaigns. Number one was that they were a lot of work to set up, especially for the referee. Number two was that the excitement of the deployment and first few turns is hard to keep up through the entire campaign. Number three was that campaigns create very interesting battles that your gaming group would never regularly game.

Another early campaign involved more hypothetical NATO vs. Warsaw Pact warfare, which was pretty prevalent



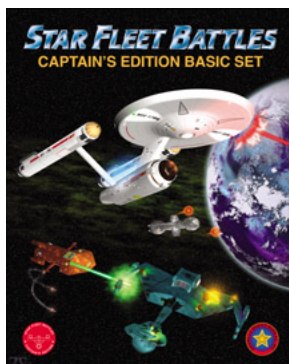
in the 70s and early 80s of the gaming hobby. In this campaign two U.S. carrier battle-groups were trying to intercept a large Soviet task

force with troops moving down the Russian Pacific coastline.

This was probably the most complex campaign I ever played in. Keeping track of air groups, CAP, submarine escorts, and patrol aircraft taxed all of us. After a week of campaign time we were beat. The good thing about this and the other campaigns and something that stuck with me is that there is a tremendous feeling of not knowing what is out there. To me this is one of the most exciting reasons for playing a campaign, but for others it can be a horrifying experience because most gamers want to be "in the know" and don't like unpleasant surprises. I think that it forces you to look at your options more carefully and your decisions in a campaign can have serious consequences in game terms.

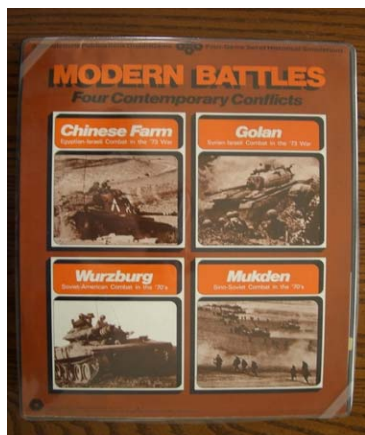
Naturally, when gamers talk about campaigns the one subject that comes up is why they rarely if ever get finished. I've played in about twenty campaigns and only two have actually gone the distance. I think the reasons for this are varied and there's quite a few of them. First, when one side starts losing, especially if there are some major disasters at the start, the losing side loses interest quickly. Then, gamers being gamers, everyone starts to wander off on new periods or a new figure range comes out and everyone moves towards that. Also, for some gamers it's hard to play the same period over and over again for a long period of time.

I think that campaigns were played a lot more in the 70s and 80s than they are today. For one thing, everyone seems to be in a hurry these days and can't spend more than a few hours a week on the hobby, so getting into campaigns is difficult to say the least. But this section on campaigns is just getting started.....



Blast From The Past Pt. 5

When I first got into the hobby it was primarily in board games with some miniatures gaming every so often. During that time the one constant in the universe was that Simulation Publications Inc, or SPI, would pump out an incredible amount of wargames.



One of the innovations that SPI gave us in those days was the “quad” game. This was four folio sized games in one of the standard SPI flat boxes. Each of the games featured a small map, usually around 17 x 22 inches, 120-200 counters, a series rule book and an exclusive rule book for each particular game.

At the time the components were cutting edge, but pale in comparison to today's highly polished board wargames. The maps had only a few colors, the counters were the standard NATO symbols with little information on them and rulebooks looked like a technical manual. However, for the time they were adequate and no one was complaining too much.

One of the really good features of the quad games was that once you knew the standard or series rules, it was just a question of reading each game's exclusive rules. This made it pretty easy to try all the games in the quad pretty quickly. Not only that, but some of the quads were also in a series, so when you bought say for example, Modern Battles II, you could open a game and get into it within a few minutes.

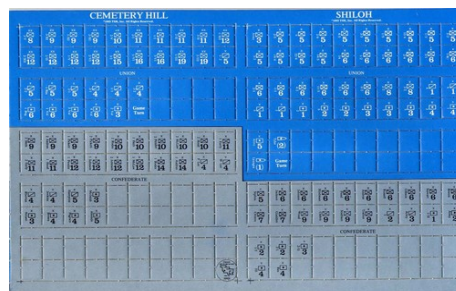
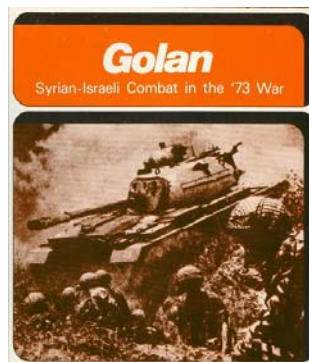


Now, one of the bad things about the quads was that back in the SPI glory days when they were pumping out games as fast as they could, not all of the games in a quad were good. It was almost as if for a few of them they were added on at the end just so they could get to the four game requirement! Also, some of the games either didn't seem right in terms of scale or they had so many exclusive rules that it almost seemed as if you were playing some other game series.

The quad games covered virtually all of military history, from sieges in the Middle Ages to hypothetical NATO vs. Warsaw Pact confrontations. From out of all of these games (and there were quite a few) came a few gems that I will discuss here further. Hopefully some of these will get re-worked under decision games and re-released, ala Drive on Stalingrad and Napoleon's Last Battles.

One of the best games that came out of quad was the Arnhem game. The game starts out with the airborne troops having already landed and they get the first turn, which gives them a good opportunity to seize the bridges. The Germans then begin to get heavy reinforcements and this is where you can see the problems that the Allies had. The road leading to Arnhem is just too long and there simply aren't enough troops to secure it and prevent the Germans from cutting the road in several places. A good, quick game about Operation market Garden.

A good one from the Modern Battles series was Golan. Here, a massive Syrian attack goes in against the dozen or so Israeli units stationed on the Golan Heights. The first several turns are pretty nerve-wracking for the Israeli player as the Israelis attempt to block the road exits leading to the heart of Israel. Once the armor reserves move up the Israeli forces can go on the counterattack.



A good game that only goes wrong during the end game. This is where if the Israelis held on at the beginning they go on a killing spree at the end which isn't too much fun for the Syrian player!

One of the best quads was Napoleon's Last Battles. This featured all of the famous battles from the Hundred Days that culminated in Waterloo. Each game was pretty interesting and very different from all of the others. The mandatory attack rules did a good job of portraying operational level combat from that era and the end result was pretty satisfying. Decision Games upgraded the game several years ago including some new campaign rules which tied all four games together.

There were many other good games from the Blue & Gray quads, the Pacific quad, and the earlier Napoleonic battles. The great thing is that you did usually get one great game in each quad and some average games, but they were all from the same theme and getting into the games was easy.

Today, the quad game has been replaced by larger boxed games with more components. An example of this would be GMT's Gringo, which would have made a great quad back in the SPI days. In Gringo you get a series rules booklet, and a scenario guide with specific rules for each battle. There is a separate map and counters for each game, so there is definitely a quad type feel to the game. The only thing missing is the old SPI counter tray disguised as a box! Will the quads ever come back? Probably not. But I still cherish the games that I own from them and I will keep playing them.

Interview with Ambush Blitz Author Jerboa

I received a copy of Ambush Blitz (reviewed after this interview) and was intrigued by the rules. I contacted the author and he was kind enough to give this interview with his thoughts on the rules and wargaming in general.

1) How did you get started in the hobby?

Well as a young kid, even before I knew wargaming existed, my favourites were Timpo Toys miniatures, mostly Knights and Western. With those I imagined my first battles, full plots, without rules but with lots of action! Later as a school boy I 'discovered' the Airfix HO miniatures and was immediately hooked. The battles involved larger bodies of troops: I remember playing the Soviet versus Marines boxes, without having a clue that they were allies, not enemies - yet.

As time went by we made up the first tank rules, where tanks alternately 'fired' a number of cm equal to the gun calibre.

The first real wargame I came across was Napoleonic wargaming by Charles Grant, I was maybe 14. It was a revelation to 'discover' dice as a wargaming tool. After that it was the age for WWII rules, also by Grant, and then house rules, together with a long time gaming friend - Jose Ventura. It all started because he wanted his Germans to use the Strumgewehr!

In summary, maybe I cannot say I was a wargamer since I was born, but the tendency was conspicuously seen thereafter.

2) What are your favorite periods and why?

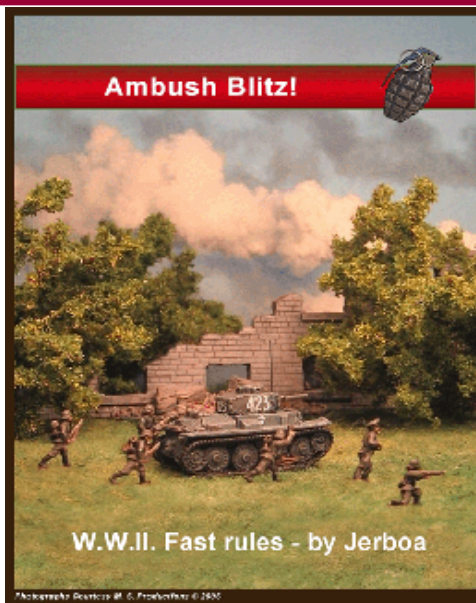
My favourite periods are ancients and WWII.

Ancients because I've always felt intrigued by ancient history and artefacts, since high school.

And recently I've discovered that understanding a little of ancient military history allows me to better comprehend contemporary and seemingly unrelated appalling events.

WWII is an old passion, boosted by the old BBC series "World in Flames", that I eagerly watched in my early youth. Those epic B&W images, which still reflect as silver sparks in my imagination, have influenced my perception of The War, as no other later source could.

I'm also slightly interested in WWI dog-



fight.

3) With all of the WW2 rules out there currently, why did you decide to publish Ambush Blitz?

Because we wanted rules to play WWII.

The options we had were either outdated, unsound, lengthy/unplayable or were offered in a commercial bundle I'm absolutely not interested in.

First by 1988 Ambush Guerrilla had been published online. I believe that this was one of the first modern games that broke with the I-Go-You-Go routine and probably the first game where the non active player could fire back - the simultaneous firefight concept. Therefore games that hang with the old alternate turn routines just feel outdated to my core gaming group.

Other options proved unsound, as requiring bookkeeping: like keeping track of 'fatigue', 'damage points' and similar; while overall not providing a satisfactory feel for WWII.

Besides this time I did not want a skirmish (we have our own rules for that - unpublished) I wanted a strategy feeling, as WWII was a large affair.

I'm also very strict about what wargaming rules should be to qualify as proper rules, such as those that I would play, or discuss. This may be an old fashioned view, but for me wargaming rules

must be complete, technically sound and preferably independent from the miniatures makers' commercial strategy. Rule writing is technical stuff, fairly complex. It should not be influenced by factors external to the game, like selling schedules, miniature series that are going on to sale next, unit's composition for maximum profitability, etc.

Finally one of the key points about WWII is the very fast technological evolution seen over the period it lasted: roughly from the biplane up to the fighter jet. Therefore I wanted a set that could be used from 1939 to 1945, generic enough but fully integrated and capable of transmitting the clash of the continuing evolution into the gaming table. All of this without artificial boundaries or time 'resets'.

So basically Ambush Blitz was borne because I wanted to play a few WWII combined arms battles.

From born to published it was a crazy jump: the enthusiasm of friends and an irresistible driving force, the raw will to share some of our joy with fellow gamers.

4) What was your design philosophy for the rules?

I have extremely strict design criteria, though these are quite varied accordingly with the objective and period. Yet all of my larger projects share common features:

- the player should play the role of the General or higher commander in the table - his responsible decisions must not to be taken over by the "system";
- the rules should promote historical tactics, yet remain as universal and neutral as possible;



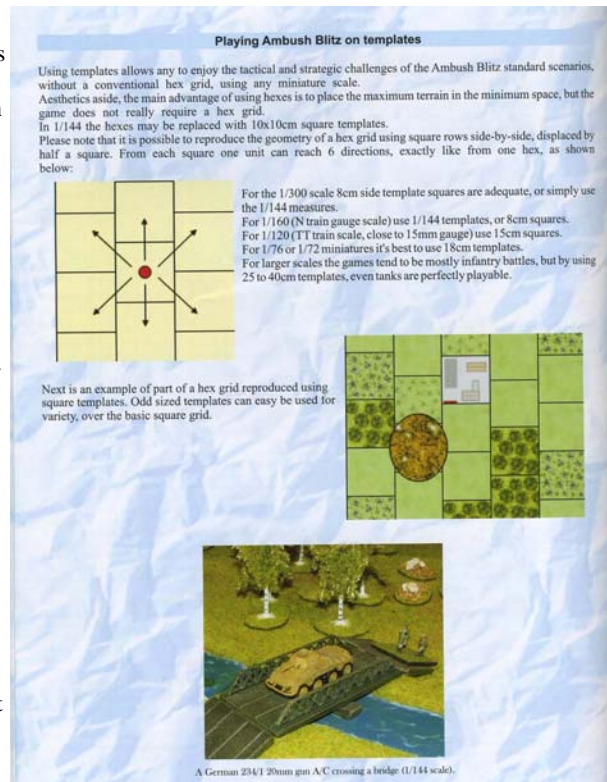
Interview with Ambush Blitz Author Jerboa (cont.)

- the rules should aim at a strategic scope, where the quality of play is related to the number of options allowed to the individual decision maker;
- the same rules should not artificially restrict the decision span, preventing creative alternatives, while not losing verisimilitude;
- luck – or probability weighting – should remain an accepted and integral part of the game, in order to negate predicted outcomes;
- the rules should favour playing skills, in spite the luck factor;
- bookkeeping - if any - should be restricted to an absolute minimum;
- no written orders;
- players should have access to simple calculating algorithms that completely dispense with chart consultation after some experience.

For Ambush Blitz the objective was a fast unpretentious game that still retained the full flavour of WWII battles. A satisfying game that could be tailored to any size without special rules and that could still be completed within the average practical club (very short) playing time.

In fact ABlitz is so light that it can be taken just as a side project, to be played along as you develop a more complex and time consuming project.

But having a simple objective does not automatically tell you what the straightest path to accomplishment is. Building a sim-



ple set of rules requires a fair amount of investigation, which will sometimes be only subtlety apparent on the final product.

In the middle development I was severe in dropping non essential elements, like rigid organizations and the points system. The game flew more natural as scenario driven and by focusing on the spearhead units, those that made the difference on those critical days. The technical data related to the equipment was also reduced to a minimum, but that minimum left hopefully still retains the main elements which - again- did make a difference.

The key factor, the end point, is the delicate balance between playability and verisimilitude.

This is a difficult balance to reach and **That** is the game. Anything affecting this balance will destroy the emotional and physical experience of that we call wargaming.

5) How do you feel about the never ending debate in the gaming world about playability vs. realism?

I thought that that discussion had been exhausted in the 80's.

Realism is meaningless in game terms. If you have a 'realistic' approach to events, in the limit you are doing nothing more than recreating those events. Therefore if your 'realistic' simulation is correct than you should arrive at a 'real' outcome: the same as had been seen in the original event. This contradicts the logic of gaming itself, where both players aim at a fair fight with an uncertain outcome.

Ultimate realism is a copy of reality, a re-enactment, not a game.

Reality is many folds more complex than the largest rule book that was ever produced: I see no fundament to claims about that that ruleset being more realistic than other.

Each wargamer is an individual and through the game he undergoes a subjective experience that may get him close to his own perception of the reality. In fact only close to what he perceives that the

reality about a particular event was. This subjectivity has many implications.

The first is that no game will ever appeal to all gamers, because each individual experiences 'reality' in a slightly different way.

The second is that each wargamer is potentially a rules writer: when he has the knowledge he will feel the necessity to express himself through his own model, driven by his unique perception of reality (in this case of an historical event).

The third is that when someone states that "a certain ruleset is more realistic than other" that can be - more often than not - simply decoded as: "I like this better than that"; it will bear no other real significance.

Now your objective should be other rather than 'realism': to build a model composed of a number of procedures - rules - that somehow 'feel' like they could have happened, that can transport you within the historical framework where the action had developed. That's verisimilitude, our only true and dear aim.

But I will not run away from the question: in a debate about 'playability vs realism' I will stand where playability is.

6) Are there any plans for supplements,



Interview with Ambush Blitz Author Jerboa (cont.)

scenarios, or more material for Ambush Blitz?

The idea behind Ambush Blitz was to provide a ruleset as complete as possible, 1939 to 1945.

Yet the project is not closed, the rules release might have just been a first step.

Since the release many support files have been made public into the rules site and many more are planned:

- special artillery counters: mostly because with indirect fire each battery is locked to target hex, that should be remembered;
- more data cards;
- more equipment data, including all WWII weapons that actually saw action;
- more beginner aids;
- painting guides;
- more scenarios.

Scenarios are now the most important aspect of the game. But I'm very demanding about scenario quality and investigation standards. In this period we are spoiled for information, sometimes we even have access to both side accounts, the only way to establish a fair knowledge on what really had happened. But it is often not easy to scale down that information to game terms. When I have enough quality scenarios available for a particular front (like desert 1942 or NW Europe 1944); or a campaign (like Barbarossa 1941 or Kursk 1943); a scenario book might be released.

I also dream with an expanded set of special counters, standard and artillery.

But it is my compromise to provide the full rules in the rules book, only to be tuned as required by specific scenarios. It is out of question to replace the main rules by information provided elsewhere.

The core rules are proving very solid; any significant development will only take place in a second edition, if we ever reach that somewhat ambitious stage!

It is also planned that most support files will be provided free, as they are now.

Like my other running projects, this is a

venture from a player to other players, a player's driven project. The future of Ambush Blitz is within your hands.

7) Are you working on any future projects?

Well, it's a lot of work and not lacking projects!

The ancients and medieval set, Arcane Warfare, is splitting into two, the classical ruleset and a much lighter version, to be called Arcane Battle Composer (ABC), all to be freely downloaded from my site.

The continuing work on ancient army lists is extremely demanding and currently looking as a lifetime endeavour.

I've several times been enticed by friends to work on a proper playable Napoleonic set. I've laid down a few principles that I hoped someone else would pursue, but without my direct involvement the project stalled. I cannot honestly see when the time will come for me to lead the project into a fruit-

ful end.

I have some clear ideas on what the original Ambush-Guerilla rules should evolve into, but again the current running projects take all of my free time.

My generic skirmish for large figures (3 to 10 a side) has been completed, enjoyed some success with players, but I have no plan to write the full rules for the moment.

All of this has been taken just as a hobby; from where I stand I see no perspective of making real money out of wargaming. In fact I'll be happy only to recover the book investment back.

This means that in my rules writing playability, or design quality, takes precedence over any commercial considerations, hopefully for your pleasure.

Good gaming all,

J

14. Special Characteristics

CB: Cumbersome
Cumbersome TDG units cannot move unless towed and unlimber as double **idle** (☹☹). This will include most heavy ART and those TDG with very elaborate mounts, difficult to deploy.

ES: Extended Speed
Vehicles with high top speed and a reputation for reliable mechanics can move one extra hex when marching.

LF: Limited anti-infantry Firepower
Minus 1 FP when targeting an INF or TDG unit.

LS: Limited Speed
The vehicle can only march for one hex.

LT: Limited Traverse gun
Applies to hull mounted, fixed turrets and most FDG. The gun has a limited arc of fire. If mounted on a vehicle the gun FP is halved (round up) when the unit moves 1 hex. The gun may not fire after moving 2 or more hexes.


UR: Unreliable
Vintage or otherwise mechanically unreliable vehicles must take a DR before moving. The march DRv is minus 1.

WD: water wading vehicle
Amphibious vehicles, that can be true swimmers or just water proof vehicles. The players/scenarios should set which water hexes can be crossed by each type.

FR; FL; RR; RL: eccentric fire zones
Eccentric fire zones may be front right (FR), front left (FL), rear right (RR) and rear left (RL). Rear eccentric fire zones were exceedingly rare in WW2, but did occur. With these guns the FP is halved (round up) when the unit moves 1 hex. The gun may not fire after moving 2 or more hexes. The fire zone includes the hexes directly to the front, adjacent hexes and those far hexes of the same side, within range.

Eccentric FR.
This is an example of a FR medium gun firing within 5 hexes. All shaded hexes are within the vehicle range.

Eccentric FL.
This is an example of a FL medium gun. All shaded hexes are within the vehicle range.



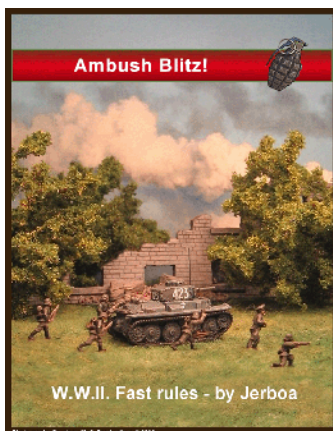
Ambush Blitz is a most interesting set of WW2 rules. Over the last five years we've seen dozens of new rules sets for this period released, including Flames of War, Blitzkrieg Commander, and many more. So how does Ambush Blitz differ and should you buy these rules to add to your collection?

First, the rules are professionally published with color covers and pictures, which is always a big plus in my book. The actual rules only take up around 20 pages with the rest of the book devoted to scenarios and optional rules. Now there is some new terminology that you may have to get used to, such as Off-Grid Indirect Fire, MST (Manufactured Structures, i.e., houses), etc., and some common terms like indirect fire is referred to as "curved fire". So with that aside the rule book is laid out well and it won't take long for experienced gamers to get the hang of it.

Now the system was designed for 1/144th scale models and a tabletop that either uses hexes as terrain or some sort of mat that has a hex grid overlaid on it. Fortunately I had a hex mat for my air combat games with big 5" hexes that worked well and you can safely use any scale figures for the game, so my Blitzkrieg Commander forces did double duty here. The author has recently released a document that addresses other alternatives to the hex grid system and no doubt enterprising gamers can find their own alternatives.

In many ways this game is similar to Blitzkrieg Commander in that command and control lies at the heart of the system. Along with the command system is an activation system that has units in either the Ready, Done, Idle, Watch, or Pinned states. HQ units then use orders to activate units in the Ready or Watch states. While this seems simple at first, the many states of units and the rules for those states will take a few turns to get the hang of how the system works.

The combat system is quick and brutal, so if you're looking for a game where



things will be killed off fast and lots of destruction, then this is the system for you. The combat system covers fire-fights, units that are stacked in the same hex, saves, and more. Once you get the command system figured out the combat system will be pretty easy to use.

So the basic command, movement, and combat rules take up

only about 11 pages and if you include the section on indirect fire, then 13 pages with plenty of pictures and diagrams is all that you will need to read. In today's age of gaming where playability is king and reading rules is frowned upon, this set fits the bill nicely.

What I do like about this is that the author did not try to overwhelm the gamer, particularly if they are new to WW2 gaming with fifty pages of rules, charts, and diagrams that they need to learn before they set a vehicle out on the tabletop. The added complexity comes in the way of several pages of optional rules

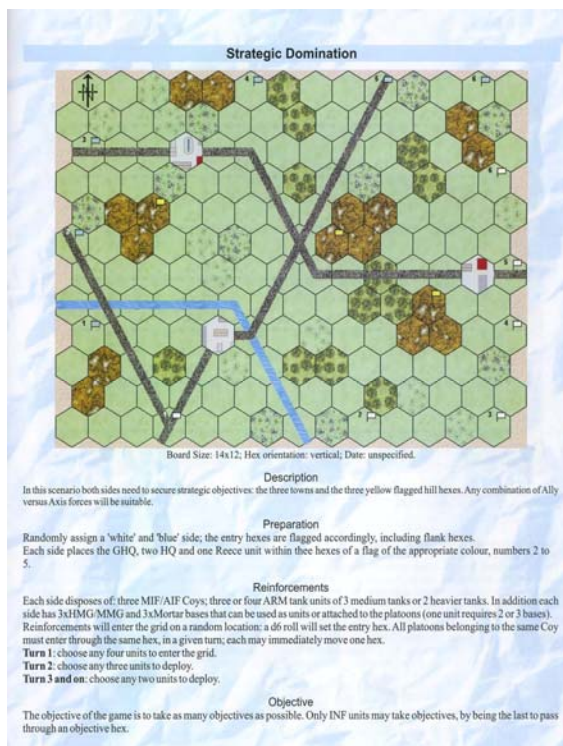
which include merging units, combined arms modifiers, suppressive fire, hull down, and more. There is also a section on engineers and air support, so gamers should be able to fight almost any action of WW2 with the existing rules.

There are 13 scenarios presented like the one in the picture below with a color map, set up info and special rules. Again, this is a strong point of the rules and the scenarios could be used for other games. The scenarios cover the bocage fighting in Normandy, the invasion of France in 1940, and lots of East Front scenarios, which are always favorites for most WW2 gamers.

The final section is taken up by army lists, of which there are six that cover the major combatants of WW2, including the Japanese. While no means as comprehensive as some other lists, they do give the gamer more than enough to work with.

Now this is not to say that the rules are not without problems. The language barrier definitely shows itself in the rules with some sentences needing to be read a few times, unfamiliar terms, and you can easily tell that this work was translated into English. If there is ever a new version or if a PDF version is released some of this needs to be worked on.

If you're like me and collect rules, then there are some good ideas here and well done scenarios are always welcome. After going through this system and trying out the various mechanics I'm not sure where it fits in with the rest of today's WW2 sets of rules. More involved than Flames of War, a focus on command and control similar to Blitzkrieg Commander, but not as comprehensive as say Command Decision. I applaud the author for getting his ideas out there in the gaming community and making a fine first effort by going for the professionally produced rules book. I think that this set of rules and how it plays will appeal to gamers looking for something more than Flames of War, but who don't want to take the plunge into Face of Battle.



Assyrians vs. Egyptians

Warmaster Ancients Battle Report

I had been painting up Egyptian and Assyrian armies for Ancient Warmaster for almost two years, so I was excited when there was an opening on one of our group game nights to try the system out. Our group had at one time several Warmaster Fantasy armies and we also play Blitzkrieg Commander, so most everyone was familiar with the command system and how it works. After explaining the differences between the fantasy and the ancients versions (and there are a few) we were ready to try it out.

Both sides had exactly 1420 points, which is all that I had painted! For the Egyptians this meant six units of chariots, a lot of infantry and archers, several units of skirmishers, and four units of Sherden and Philistines as mercenaries.

The Assyrians had two units of heavy chariots, two units of cavalry, several units of archers and infantry, plus a few skirmishers. The Assyrians, with their heavier armor and higher unit costs had less units than the Egyptians, but what they lacked in numbers was more than made up by armor saves and striking power with the chariot units.

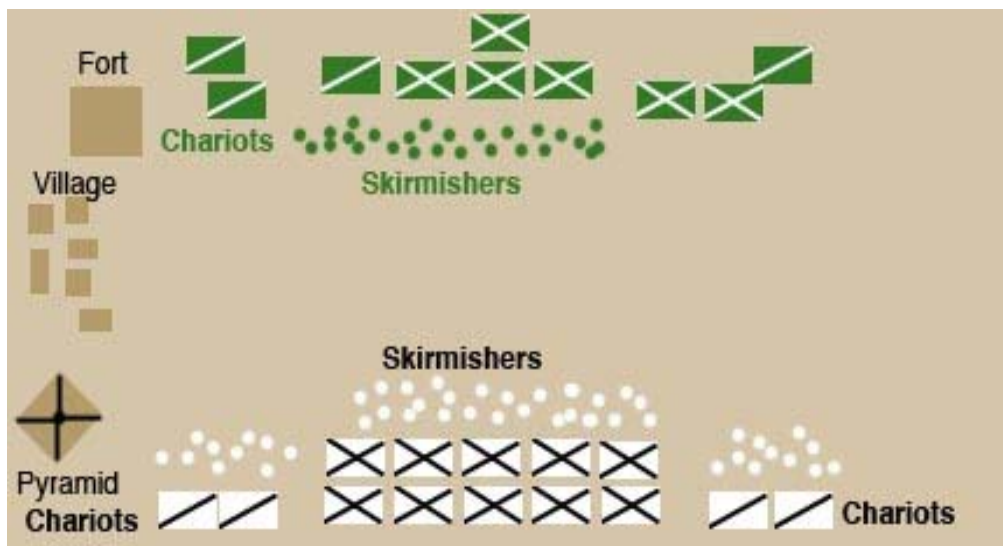
During set up the Assyrians opted for a strike at the Egyptian left, positioning the chariots and cavalry on that flank,



with the heavy infantry and archers in the middle. The Assyrian left had a unit of cavalry, some skirmishers, and the unarmored infantry and archers.

Meanwhile, the Egyptians countered with several units of chariots on both

flanks, the infantry and archers in the center, with the entire line covered by several units of skirmishers. After finishing deployment and answering a few more questions about units and the command rules, we were ready to try our first game of Warmaster Ancients.



The Battle Begins

The Assyrians started off well, being able to move most of their units, but the Egyptian turn resulted in only three out of about 25 units actually moving! This was a trend that continued into the second and third turn as well. The Assyrian chariots had been distracted by the Egyptian skirmishers



and spent a lot of time chasing them down, which gave the Egyptians a chance to deploy to meet the threat. By turn 4 the Assyrians had advanced their entire battle line and were dangerously

close to the Egyptian starting area!

Then a good series of die rolls for the Egyptians got their units out into the middle of the battlefield, ready to come into close combat with the Assyrians. By turn five it was only a matter of who would start the festivities as both sides had plenty of units within charge range of each other. It would be the Egyptians who got the battle moving forward.

Assyrians vs. Egyptians (cont.) Warmaster Ancients Battle Report

The Egyptians attacked the Assyrian left flank with vigor, driving back the Assyrian cavalry and skirmishers, plus pushing up some archers to stall the Assyrian advance on that side. On the Assyrian right the heavy chariots were finally getting into some close combat, but although they had some success, they were getting whittled down slowly by the numerous Egyptian archers.

It was in the middle where the most fierce combat occurred. Both sides committed infantry, archers, cavalry, and



chariots in a series of charges that left both sides crippled. The Assyrians with their armor saves were taking a fearful toll on the unarmored Egyptian infantry, but for every Egyptian unit that was defeated another fresh one took its

place!

By turn seven the Assyrians were consolidating their lines in preparation for a new attack while the Egyptians were hastily trying to reorganize themselves after the turn five and six combat left their army scattered across the board.

Again, the main combat occurred in the exact center where the remaining skirmishers and archers from both sides concentrated. By this time the Assyrian heavy chariots had either been destroyed or driven off, so the remaining Egyptian chariots had little to worry about on the Egyptian left and they began to move towards the center.

Turn seven saw several exchanges of archery fire and an advance by more Assyrian infantry that charged into several Egyptian infantry units. By this time many units were below half strength and giving successful commands was becoming difficult at best. The Assyrian left, which was still more or less intact, refused to move during the two turns that their presence was greatly needed.



Finale & Summary

On turn eight both sides only needed to lose one more unit and they would have to withdraw. The Assyrians chose a lone Egyptian infantry unit and attacked, but rolled badly. The subsequent Egyptian counterattack and pursuit killed off the Assyrian unit and they reached their break point which ended the game in a very close Egyptian victory.

The system played well and fast,

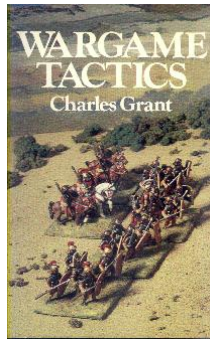
even with the large number of units on the tabletop. Two of the players had never played ancients before and like the game. Certainly the bad command rolls at the start hurt the Egyptians, but their large numbers of units compensated for it at the end



as the Assyrians got too spread out by advancing too fast!

Overall, this is a great system and fun to play. Already I am going to expand both armies to 2,000 points for a future slugfest.

There was a time in the hobby where some gamers were larger than life. Every magazine and catalog mentioned them by name, gamers who didn't even play any of the periods written about by some of these authors knew who they were, and their opinion was held in high regard, even if you didn't always agree with them.



web sites, forums, online chat, cell phones, RSS feeds, and the list could go on forever. As an example, up until the 90's, around 80 million people got their daily news from the major networks. Today, the number is around 20 million and dropping daily. Why? The proliferation of web news site, RSS feeds, and 24/7 cable channels means that you don't have to wait until the evening to get your daily dose of news.

The first group of these would include legendary gamers and hobby contributors like Donald Featherstone, Charles Grant, Tony Bath, and Phil Barker. In the 80's and 90's others such as Scotty Bowden, Frank Chadwick, Stuart Asquith, and more produced rules, books, and wargaming articles in many publications. You may not have played ACW or board games, but you knew who John Hill was. Same goes for Larry Brom in regards to colonial gaming, Jim Dunnigan for board wargames, or Gary Gygax for fantasy.

Now compare this situation to today's wargaming hobby. I think you would be hard pressed to find one or two gamers out of ten who could name anyone involved with Flames of War, which is one of the most popular gaming systems today. On many gaming threads you'll see someone praising the genius of some sculptor or rules author and get zero responses, probably because no one outside of a handful of people have ever heard of them.

So, why is this happening? And, is it good or bad for the hobby?

Actually, this has been coming down the pike for a long time, but it is only just now reaching our small hobby world of wargaming. Fewer and fewer people can name their politicians, most have never heard of 90% of today's music groups, and the television networks are losing viewers right and left, so obviously something is going on here.

As I work in a university this subject gets debated fairly often. The most plausible explanation is that there is just too much "stuff" out there. By "stuff" I mean podcasts, satellite or cable TV channels, radio stations and programs,

Well, the same thing that is happening to the news area is also happening to the entertainment industry, software, education, book publishing, and yes, even with hobbies. The proliferation of rules, figure manufacturers, terrain makers, paints, reference material, etc..., has experienced an incredible growth. Back in the 70s and 80s there was no way that a gamer could conceive the incredible number of historical periods and figures that are available today.

There was a time when the WRG 7th edition Ancients came out and there was Phil Barker, defending the rules in the pages of The Courier. Even though I had not played ancients in years I followed the debate and so did most of the wargaming world. Why? Because he was an important figure in the hobby and his debates contained valuable information and insight into the period and rules writing. Today, when Col. Bill Gray, author of Age of Eagles, and one of the most knowledgeable people on the planet about the Napoleonic period, defends a rule on historical grounds, maybe a couple of hundred gamers will notice. Why? Because there's another hundred sets of Napoleonic rules with their own supporting Yahoo Groups, loyal fans and supporters who think that their rules system or author is the guiding light on the subject and everything outside of that is rubbish.

What is happening is that there are so many products and

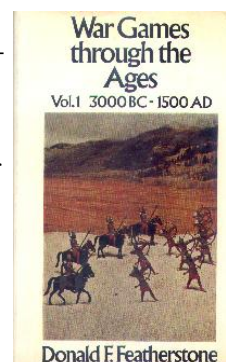
diverse opinions, not to mention outlets for voicing one's thoughts, that the hobby has fractured into seemingly thousands of tiny groups. Each of these groups has their own agendas, their own heroes, their experts, and very few, if any, are interested in the views and opinions of others, especially if they conflict with their own viewpoints.

On one hand this is good as it shows the remarkable strength of the hobby. That a new set of rules can be published or made available online, then a Yahoo group is formed and fans talk about it is good in that interest is created, rules and

figures are sold, and maybe the hobby expands a little. At the same time it's bad as there are thousands of gamers who could be missing out on valuable information, discussions, and don't have time to join any of the 50+ WW2 Yahoo groups to learn about armored warfare on the Italian Front.

The big question remains about where is all of this going? Personally, I think that the era of big names in the gaming industry is over and same goes with authors like Stephen King, Tom Clancy, and more. Don't get me wrong, there will still be successful gaming systems, rules, and developments, but most gamers will never know the person that created them. Game companies and rules authors are going to start targeting very selective audiences, so only those people who own the rules will get the inside scoop, the author's design philosophy, or views of history. There will be no willingness to go read someone else's rules because all of your time and energy will be spent reading about this one system on the Yahoo group, blog, forums, etc..., so you won't have any time to try out anything else or read differing opinions.

When everyone has a blog, who is going to read your blog? When there's 1,000 sets of Napoleonic rules, who wants yours? The age of giants is coming to an end, even in the hobby world, and that is a shame.

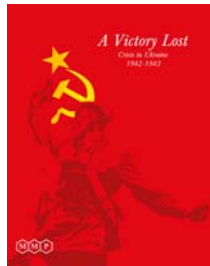


A Victory Lost by MMP

Every so often a game comes along that does live up to the hype. A Victory Lost by MMP does just that, especially after all the praise it received on several game sites. The game is moderately priced at around \$40 and for that you get a map, counters, illustrated rule-book, and a reference card.

The counters are functional and you do get a set of armor/mech counters with armor silhouettes if you want to replace the standard NATO style counters. The map is simply beautiful and the rulebook is in full color with several examples of play. Set up is easy with color coded counters and map positions, so experienced gamers should get into this pretty quickly as the rules are only a few pages.

The situation looks dire for the Germans and their allies at the start. The



offensive to save Stalingrad has stopped and a massive Russian counterattack begins the game. The system uses a series of activation chits that allows HQ units to activate combat units in range of them. This is simple, works well, and there is definitely some strategy in placing and using them. The big problem? You can't pick all of the HQs that you have to activate each turn!

Naturally, this creates an entire series of desperate situations for both players as the Germans need to get out of the trap and the Russians need breakthroughs. The first part of the game sees an ocean of red sweep along the lines while the Germans fall back, trading space for time. The Russians continue the onslaught while the German reinforcements begin to arrive. Manstein shows up and the Germans begin to activate more commands each turn.

By mid game the Russians are bearing down on the victory locations and

the Germans are assembling mobile forces for a counterattack. The final few turns will see the panzers going on the offensive to cut off Russian drives while the Russians try to hold onto their gains.

Overall, this is an excellent game, which is surprising because nothing here is really ground breaking or new. It is simply just a system that works and produces a pretty tense and interesting game. My only complaint is that the combat table isn't bloody enough and there should have been attack counters for the Stavka chit to help you track activated units, but these are very small problems in an otherwise outstanding game.



Game Review

Winged Horse by Decision Games



Games on the Vietnam War, especially good ones, are pretty hard to find. When I first saw this game I wasn't too impressed, especially for the time frame covered,

but as I began to read some of the reviews it started to sound more and more interesting, so I bought a copy.

The map covers all of South Vietnam and some of the border areas surrounding it. The map and the counters are functional, but probably won't win any awards for outstanding graphics. Once you set the map up you can start seeing why standard strategies didn't really apply in this war as the NVA and VC virtually had the country surrounded.

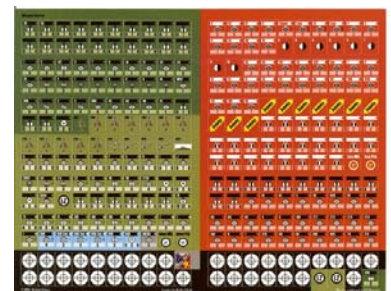
The game covers the 1965 or the early war period of the Vietnam conflict. The U.S. and ARVN have a lot of firepower and can strike quickly all over the country. They can usually defeat any NVA or VC force militarily, but herein lies the most interesting part of the game.

Both sides score military points for seizing territory, killing units, etc..., but both sides can also score political points. The NVA/VC player can score points by occupying towns, forcing the U.S. player to chase him into "sanctuaries" like Cambodia, etc... Basically, the U.S. side is trying to defeat the NVA/VC militarily (not too hard) and politically (very tough), so this is not your standard wargame.

What makes things harder is that the NVA/VC player has dummies and you aren't ever sure where the next offensive is going to occur. South Vietnam is a large country with long borders and it

doesn't help that the NVA/VC have bases already in some of the U.S. player's operational areas!

Overall, this is one of the most interesting and unusual games I've played in a long time. For the NVA/VC player deception is the order of the day while scoring as many political points as possible. For the U.S. player you spend the game chasing an elusive enemy and trying to bring your firepower to bear while guessing where the next offensive will come from. For the \$25 or so asking price this is well worth the money.



Miniatures Campaigns Using Board Games

A question that often comes up is “How can I use a board war game as the basis for a miniatures campaign?”. As I already discussed campaigns earlier in this issue and how much fun they can be, this is a good question. The answer will depend upon how much time you really want to spend on a campaign.

There are thousands of board wargames, but probably only 10% of them would be considered suitable to convert into a miniatures campaign. Why? Well, most board wargames either are at a scale that will not translate easily into miniatures, are too tactical in nature, or have so many pieces (so called “monster games”) that it’s not practical to even start a campaign. The trick is finding the era and the game that’s right for your gaming group and the type of campaign that you wish to represent.

For this, strategic board wargames are probably the best. A game where the board is broken into areas, such as Columbia’s block games (Hammer of the Scots and Crusader Rex are two examples) will simplify movement and paperwork for a miniatures campaign, plus they have the “fog of war” already built into the game with their hidden blocks. Depending upon the amount of miniatures that you or your group has, they can be scaled to fit the strength of the blocks. For example, a strength three block of English knights in Crusader Rex might be 300 points in Warmaster Ancients or 3,000 points in Warhammer Ancient Battles.

If you’re into naval battles then the Second world War at Sea or Great War at Sea series from Avalanche Press might be the answer to your prayers. Each game comes with an operational map and a tactical map. Since



you’re using miniatures rules the tactical map is not needed, but the operational maps are fantastic for naval campaigns. Each one is arranged in an offset grid which would be ideal for maneuvering forces for battles and makes keeping track of the forces involved easy for the referee/umpire.

If you’re into complexity, then 1807: The Eagles Turn East from Clash of Arms would be a good campaign system. This campaign uses leaders on the maps, but the strength of their commands is unknown, making it a great way to simulate the fog of war. There are rules for stragglers, hospitals, foraging, and many other aspects of a campaign that gamers rarely think about. My big pet peeve with this game series was the combat system, but with miniatures rules you can easily replace that, making this board game an ideal example for Napoleonic campaigns.

Another good Napoleonic campaign for miniatures would be the OSG/Avalon Hill Napoleon at Bay game. This covers the 1814 campaign and the amount of territory that it covers is truly staggering, especially considering the size of the forces for the campaign. I think that players would find it very challenging trying to come up with strategies for that kind of a game. For myself, however, this kind of campaign really gets me going. I’ve always thought the most fun part of doing a campaign is the planning and trying to guess where the enemy is. Well, in this game setting it’s like looking for a needle in a haystack! Both sides’ forces could be anywhere and finding them will be difficult.

What kind of board game you choose is also based upon

the level of game that your group regularly plays. If you do regiment level ACW, then taking a scenario from The Gamers/MMP Seven Pines would do nicely. However, if your group plays Fire & Fury then it would be just as easy to just play the entire board game as a miniatures battle, since they’re at the same scale.

Of course the only setback to this line of thinking is that some of these games can run you upwards of \$75 and how many times are you going to use them?

If you’re only planning to use them once, then maybe a cheaper and more beneficial alternative is to look at DTP games.

DTP stands for Desktop Publishing and this has been a growing trend in the board wargame community. There are

several companies that are putting out some high quality products on some unusual battles. The great thing for gamers looking for campaign materials is that these games are usually small, are generally around \$15-20, and are great subjects for short campaigns.



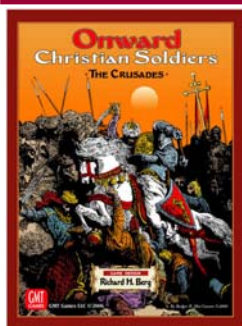
An example of this is Togoland 1914 by Khyber Pass Games. This covers the French and British drive to knock out the most powerful radio transmitter

in Africa during the First World War. The game has a small map, under 40 units, and would be ideal for generating interesting miniatures battles if your group is into that period.

Obviously there are more than enough board games that can function as the basis for a miniatures campaign. Choosing the right scale, size of forces, and length of the campaign is up to you.

Onward Christian Soldiers by GMT

Game Review



To say that Richard Berg designs a lot of games would be a mild understatement. With Onward Christian Soldiers Berg tries to apply card driven mechanics and a chit activation system into the same game dealing with the First through the Third Crusades.

For a \$70 game you do get some quality components. There is a beautiful map of the Middle East, two card decks, and over 500 counters for all of the factions. You also get a rulebook for the seven player, 10-12 hour First Crusades game, a second rule book for the Second (two player-two hours) and Third Crusade (two player-five hours), plus a quick start guide with two small scenarios. In other words, there's a lot of stuff in the box.

The first thing that you notice when you start to read the rules is that this game isn't for those looking for a quick game on the Cru-

sades. There are sections covering movement attrition, siege attrition, fleets, leaders, and a complex treatment of cities and castles. The rules are well written, but there are many different rules for the various Crusades, which can cause a little bit of confusion as you try to remember the special rules for the different periods.

Trying to get seven players together for a two day, twelve hour game of the First Crusade might prove difficult, but I did try out the smaller scenarios for this

review. First, the situation is extremely fluid and some players might have problems getting adjusted to this type of game. There are so many options, avenues of attack, towns, cities, etc..., that coming up with a good strategy will take many games.

The combat system is far more detailed than you would



think, with modifiers for leadership, army size, tables for formation and effects, terrain modifiers, and more, which can produce some unpredictable results. Couple this with siege combat, which again gives you a lot of options, and getting

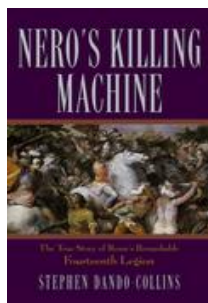
things just right with your forces is going to take some practice.

So, is the game worth \$70, reading the different rule books, and spending the effort to learn the game system? I think if you are really interested in this period then the answer is yes. If you only have a passing interest then my advice would be to play Crusader Rex instead. There is a level of detail here that is not for everyone. I think that the Second and Third Crusades games will get the most play as they are much shorter in duration, but then you can't use the beautiful card decks that are only for the First Crusade. However, getting 5-7 players for that game is going to be tough. The game systems does an outstanding job of portraying the combat, factions, and armies of the time, but not many gamers are going to want to put this much effort into it.



Nero's Killing Machine

Book Review



Part of a series on the Roman legions, this book by Stephen Dando-Collins concerns itself with the history and exploits of the Fourteenth Legion.

The 14th did not get off to a good start during Caesar's Gaul campaigns and for years it was referred to as an unlucky unit as disaster seemed to follow its every step. You do learn of the campaigns in Germany along the Rhine, the legion's time in Africa and Spain, then to its assignment in Britain.

While in Britain the 14th really made its mark upon history, playing the central role in the defeat of the largest army that the tribes of Britain ever assembled. Outnumbered 23:1, the 14th cut through the enemy army and forced them to withdraw in panic. From that point forward the 14th was regarded as the rock stars of their day.

I thought that the battles and military operations were described well and I learned a great deal about this period that I did not know before. The details about the uniforms, armaments, auxiliaries, and enlistment periods were interesting. I also thought the author did a good job of portraying the mindset of the common

legionnaire.

The one thing that drove me crazy was the lack of maps and the never ending political battles which influenced the legion and military operations. It can get so confusing at times as to who is on who's side that a flow chart is needed!

Overall, this is an interesting book that focused on Roman military operations across several centuries. Although the politics at times can be confusing to say the least, the military operations and the vast number of opponents that the 14th fought is fascinating. A good read for those interested in the actions of specific legions.



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Can someone tell me what it is about the NATO vs. Warsaw Pact theme that game designers keep going back to? I got my start in gaming during that era and I can remember some good times playing micro-armor battles, the Victory Games Fleet series, monster games of GDW's Third World War, and hundreds of Harpoon scenarios. It was fun to discuss the strategy, the equipment, and possible outcomes because so much was unknown at that time and it was a very real possibility. But guess what? IT DIDN'T HAPPEN! Now, however, games like Harpoon: High Tide, S&T's Group of Central Forces Germany, and many forthcoming and proposed titles continue to revisit this subject. There are also numerous threads on TMP about gaming it with miniatures using various rules sets. Why? With what we know now, the Warsaw Pact would not have fared too well and it never happened, so I'm unsure about what the point is. I can see wanting to game a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, Syria vs. Israel in a Golan Heights rematch, or other hypothetical conflicts, but going back in time for this seems odd. Is it for old times sake? Does it bring back good memories of long lost gaming periods? To me it's kind of like gaming a 1920s Japan vs. U.S. war, the 1946 stuff that's out there now, or a Russian invasion of Afghanistan during the British Victorian era. These things might provide an interesting one time game, but to devote a lot of resources and time to them seems odd. However, my views won't stop anyone from trying these periods. I'm already looking forward to the next thread on TMP titled, "How can I use my Zulus and Zeppelins in Boxer Rebellion games?"

Letters From Iwo Jima



I finally had a chance to see this well acclaimed film and I was hoping that it would be better than *Flags of Our Fathers*. While only part of *Flags* was actually about what happened on Iwo Jima, *Letters*

takes place entirely on the island.

Famous Japanese actor Ken Watanabe plays General Kuribayashi, who arrives shortly before the American invasion. Upon arriving he instantly sees that the current defense plan has no chance and he reorganizes the defenses. It is at this point that you see the main problems with the Japanese armed forces at this point in WW2. There are too many commanders who each have their own objective and teamwork essentially doesn't exist. There

is no air support as all the planes get withdrawn to the home islands and the fleet has been defeated.

The story does an excellent job of portraying the average Japanese soldier and the island defenses. You can almost sense the frustration as one by one, Kuribayashi's commanders ruin his battle plan by not following orders and going off on their own. Through a series of flashbacks you get to learn more about some of the soldiers before they arrived on Iwo Jima and of their commander's time spent in America.

The battle scenes are also well done and you do get the feeling of inevitability in the film. By the size of the American fleet off of the island and the endless stream of troops arriving on the beach it is obvious that it was only a question of time before

the Japanese were overwhelmed. At first the defense causes horrific casualties on the American forces, but the desire to be killed in battle, suicidal charges, and mass suicide soon weaken the defenses.

The movie is beautifully executed with outstanding acting. I thought that the suicide by hand grenade scene in the caves was tough to watch, but overall, it had a feel very similar to the German film *Downfall*. There's almost a gruesome fascination about watching the demise of a country at the end of a war and you find yourself glued to the screen watching the events unfold. Although much of the



conversation is fictionalized, from my reading the events portrayed in the movie seem to have a high degree of accuracy. Highly recommended.