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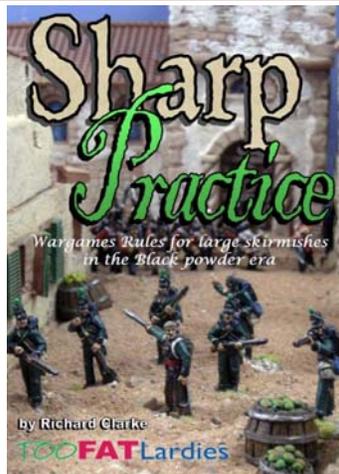
Sharpe Practice

Although our group plays a lot of Napoleonics, especially 15mm Age of Eagles plus a lot of boardgames, that still wasn't enough! We decided to have a go at Napoleonic skirmish combat, since there are many fans of the Sharpe series in our group and we've had fun with Old West, WW2, and Colonial era skirmish games.

We initially decided to do the project in 40mm, but then relented under the price, the selection options, and what to do about terrain. Realizing that we had a lot of terrain in 25mm that was suitable for the period, the new Old Glory 2nd Edition figs coming out, plus the new plastic boxed sets that were now available, we decided to go with 25mm.

The big question was what to do about rules. We had looked at quite a few, from 1:1 scale rules with each turn being a few seconds to TSATF variants, without finding anything suitable. Finally, after remembering that we liked I Ain't Been Shot, Mum! (IABSM) from Too Fat Lardies (TFL), we ordered those rules.

TFL is known throughout the gaming hobby for



several things, namely a prolific distributor of historical gaming rules and trying to put fun into gaming. They also have one of the most active Yahoo gaming groups as well, with quite a few members, files, and photos. One of the good things about TFL is that they offer their rules and supplements in PDF form that they email to you and printed versions.

When you get your rules the first thing you see is the color cover, which shows a group of the British 95th Rifles in a Peninsular village. It's a good cover and gives the sense that this is a skirmish game. Now if you're use to Flames of War, Warhammer Ancients Battles,

Blitzkrieg Commander, etc., then you're in for a surprise as there are no color pictures, glossy center pages showing beautifully painted figs and terrain, color diagrams, etc. . This is the just the rules in black and white text!

To our group at least, it appears as if the rules can be played in one of two ways. The first is strictly as a skirmish game, with groups of 10-12 figures led by a Big Man (the Big Man concept is central to the rules) fighting over the tabletop with each player commanding one or two groups. The second method is to organize your groups into companies, then into a battalion and fight it out in column, line, and square. This second method lets players experience what it would be like to command a battalion in line trying to storm a town or a regiment of cavalry charging across a field against cavalry, infantry, or artillery.

You can break down the companies into groups as well, so that adds another aspect of the rules. Essentially, your only limitations are how many figs you want to game with, how many (*cont. on p. 2*)

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Special points of interest:

- Review of the Sharp Practice rules and several battle reports using the system.
- Battle reports with Age of Reason and Warmaster Ancients.
- Several board game reviews.
- Regular features and an editorial on plastic figures.

Sharp Practice Review (cont. from Page 1)

players you have, and how many Big Man cards you want in the deck. More players could (and I stress could) bog the game down and the more cards you add the more chances there are of a player not being able to do much if the turn ends early. We finally settled on doing several companies of Russians and French with 20-24 figs in each company. That way each company could break down into two groups with one group being led by a junior officer and one by a NCO. Again, as with most of TFL's systems this one is highly flexible.

You can also add elements of role playing as each officer can be rated for their initiative, physical attributes, how they do with the ladies, and more. The charts are pretty funny to read and you could make some very interesting scenarios by personalizing the Big Men.

You have two decks of cards (sample cards are provided at the end of the rules) that control the actions of each game. The first deck has cards for each Big Man, Sentries, "picked men" such as snipers, and additional initiative point cards called Grasp the Nettle (yes, you will get an education in the English language with this game!). There are also one or two Tiffin cards (we highly suggest two!) inserted into the deck and when both are drawn it is the end of the turn. The second deck is the Bonus deck, which includes nationality cards such as Pas de Charge for the French, Vodka for the Russians, Siesta, Water, and a host of others that add flavor and chaos to the game.



Each turn begins with the draw of a card (Bonus cards are earned by random events, which occurs when more 1s than 6s are rolled for movement or combat) and then that card is acted upon. If a Big Man's card is drawn, then he can use his initiative points to move, fire, rally, perform actions, and several other options. Movement is random through the roll of dice, which again adds to the chaos. It sounds very simple, but when in the heat of combat each player has a large number of choices. Should you fall back, use your points to remove shock points, continue to reload and fire, and more. There simply aren't enough points to do everything that you want.

Firing is simple and fun to do, especially if you like rolling buckets of dice! You take the number of men firing, add modifiers (all in extra dice), and roll, with usually a 6 scoring a hit at long range and a 5 or 6 at short range. Then you roll a second D6 for each hit with a 1 or 2 being a near miss, 3 or 4 adds a shock point to the unit, and a 5 or a 6 is an outright kill. Shock points can pile up fast, which affects your shooting and melee and if they exceed the number of men in the group your troops "Lose their bottle" and flee! It's not uncommon to see a company of 24 men roll 20-30 D6s for a volley.

Melee is similar, with a lot of modifiers ending up in handfuls of dice getting rolled again. The one good thing is that melee is pretty decisive. The rules for cavalry and artillery work well, so all three combat arms can be inte-

grated into a scenario pretty easily.

Since it is similar to IABSM, it does use the system of blinds, where large cut outs represent hidden forces. Our group likes this rule and it is a simple, but effective way of doing hidden movement. Also, the rules that differentiate firing in line compared to skirmish formations are also done well. The same could be said about commanding large groups, musicians, naval landing parties, and more. Virtually any kind of skirmish action from the period can be portrayed with these rules.

Are there problems? Yes. The rules are very similar to TSATF, where most things are really "guidelines", so expect to see a lot of house rules crop up. Also, the cards provided are for the British and French, so if you have Austrians or Russians you need to make your own cards. There are files in the Yahoo group section for TFL where you can download counters suitable to record shock points, but you will need to make your own blinds and some other markers. I think TFL could do a lot of gamers a great service by creating card decks for each nationality and counters/markers for their games. Gamers would gladly pay for these things. Also, it would have been nice to have had some sample scenarios, especially for new gamers or gamers new to the period.

The one major problem with the rules is that when you decide to join up your groups, say in a battalion of 4-6 companies, there's not much for the other players to do since the Big Man with the highest initiative runs the battalion. The other Big Men can remove shock points, but have to wait until the groups break apart to function on their own. This could leave a lot of players in a large group game sitting around for a long time.

Overall, this set of rules is well worth the money. Most of the problems are easily resolved and the rules accomplish what they set out to do, namely provide a way for a lot of miniatures to reenact skirmish combat for this period. The card activation and buckets of dice combat may not be for every one, but our group has had a lot of fun with it.



10mm figures are both a blessing and a curse. On one hand they look great on the tabletop, with massed formations that in my opinion do the best job of recreating what battlefields actually looked like. On the other hand there are limits to the figure selection, they're sold in odd amounts, and some of the poses/strips are hard to base. This can be offset by some additional work and the fact that for the price you are getting a pretty good deal.

First, I use a combination of Old Glory, Magistar Militum, and GFI/Minifigs for my armies. So far I have Egyptians, Assyrians, Seleucids, and Indians, so that's a pretty good assortment to draw some lessons from. Hopefully, here are some tips to help you out.

Unit Sizes-Figure Options

I think that the 10mm infantry units looks best when the bases are packed, so I try to add on as many figs as the bases will take! For close order infantry that means 12 per base for most figures, although the OG Indians will fit 14 per base. My Seleucid phalangites are based 16 per base for units of 48. Yes, it's a lot of painting, but it looks good in the end! For light infantry I use 8-10 per base, skirmishers are 6 per base, light or skirmish cavalry 3 per base, and heavy cavalry are 4 per base.

Most of the OG, MM, and GFI packages don't include command figs, although most ranges offer command packs. However, the figure selections don't often match with helmets, shields, armor, etc., so you need to do some work. With a little time and patience you can make suitable command stands. I always try to have the center stand feature some kind of command, except with skirmishers. By cutting down a spear to look like a sword, chopping heads, adding a cross-piece and a square of paper to a spear to make it look like a standard, etc., you can make some good looking command figs. All it takes is a little work and imagination!

Basing

The main complaint about the OG infantry is that they are sold in strips of five and that they are hard to work with, which is nonsense. Yes, some poses are

virtually molded into each other, but it's 10mm scale and once they've been cut, based, and painted it will look great, especially with hundreds of figs surrounding them on the tabletop.

Wire cutters/snips will usually do the job or a large X-acto blade, but just cut off the extra figs that you need, trim the excess on the stand, then add them to the strip on the base. I usually glue either the front or back rank to the stand for painting purposes, then glue the remaining figs onto the stand once everything is painted. This way half the unit is already glued onto the bases and it makes it much easier for painting, plus it gives you a good idea where everything will fit and what you need to focus on for painting. For light cavalry and skirmishers I just glue all the figs onto the bases for painting.

Painting

First, I prime 95% of the 10mm ancients that I do with flat black spray paint, then when dry I run a 50/50 acrylic black paint/water mix over the figures to get any areas that the spray didn't cover. I will occasionally prime some figs white if they will be wearing bright colors or in the case of the Seleucid pikes they used white linen armor, so a white primer and light brown wash did the trick.

Second, painting figures in 10mm is a little different than in the larger scales. For one thing you are going for the massed effect, so trying to individualize each infantryman's scabbard is a tremendous waste of time! Dry brush the primary color all over the figure, which for example on my Indian infantry would be the color I use for Indian flesh. Then I add some black ink to give the flesh a darker color. If you were doing Vikings you might want to dry brush a silver/gunmetal first for the armor, then add a black ink wash afterwards. The idea is to get the big color out of the way, then add in the remaining details.

Again, with the Indian infantry I would then paint their baggy shorts/pants white with a light brown wash, the spears brown, metal spear points, brownish-red

scabbards, then black line the figs (you can skip this extra detail) and while I'm using black paint the hair. Finally the white headband is added and the figs are done. The smaller items really fly by quickly and if you're doing Galatians or any similar army where soldiers wore different colors, try to hold your self to five or six colors. Then choose a color and on every 4th or 5th figure use that color for a shirt, pants, or shield. **REMEMBER**, you are going for mass effect, not trying to win a 28mm painting contest!



Finishing Touches

Once everything is painted I then glue all the figures to the bases. Next up is using an old paint brush to "paint" white glue all over the base, then dip it into fine sand. Once that dries I wash the base with a 50/50 brown ink/water mix, then dry brush it with a color similar to very light flesh/tan and while that is drying I paint the edges of the base. After that dries I use paint in selected spots and while the paint is still wet I dip the base into the flocking. It sounds like a lot of work, but it's only a few minutes spread over an hour in between each stage of drying. Finally, I use a coat of Testor's GlossCote followed by one or two coats of Testor's DullCote to seal the work.

This all sounds like a lot of work, but you will be surprised how quickly it goes and you can easily set yourself up to do a unit per week and in a few months have decent sized army!

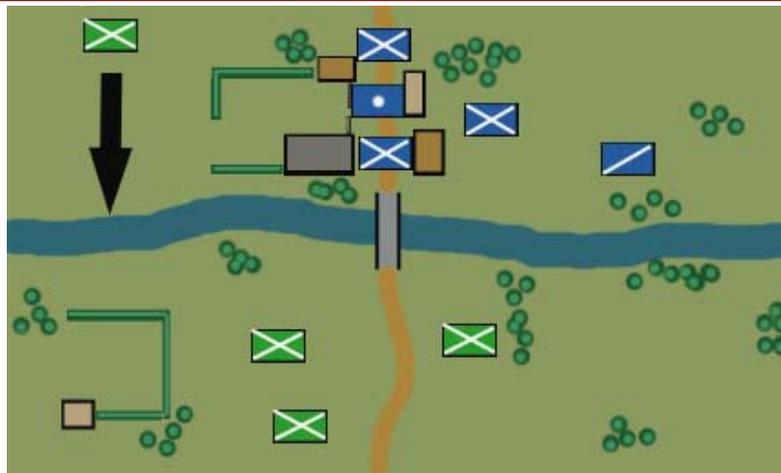
Seize The Bridge! A Sharp Practice Playtest

This was our first game of Sharp Practice, so we really had no idea what to expect, despite at least two of us having gone through the rules several times. The cards, counters, etc., were all set to go and a lot of time and effort had been put into the figures, so now it was time to see if all the effort had been worth it!

We had four companies of Russian infantry, each of 24 figs, with an officer and NCO for each company, plus one overall commander for a total of nine big men. The French had three infantry companies, each of 21 men, plus the usual officer and NCO for each company. The French also had a light artillery piece and a squadron of chasseurs with 12 men and an officer. After giving each side their starting bonus cards, explaining the rules, etc., we were ready to start.

The scenario was fairly simple in that both sides needed to hold the bridge. Both forces started off board, but the one wrinkle is that a Russian company was already on the French side of the board and was trying to get back by locating a ford. It's entry was random, so the remaining Russian players could not count on this unit in their plans.

With no one really knowing how to play or what would happen, we began the card draw at first just with the blinds until both sides had some units spotted. This



happened fairly quickly, although the blinds did a good job of simulating hidden movement without a lot of work. At this point more and more cards could be drawn and acted upon (if a lot of blinds are in play then they only move on a Blind card).

The French light cavalry made their way to the bank of the river, looking for a ford, but were unsuccessful. Two French companies deployed near the river as well, but without any enemies around (the Russians had bad movement die rolls) they were unsure as to what to do next. The French, were, however, trying to move up their artillery piece to control the exit from the bridge. The Russians, meanwhile, had moved their three companies near the river and were going to engage the French as soon as possible.

Just as the action was about to get

started, the fourth Russian company entered on the French side of the board. The French immediately turned their cavalry and an infantry company around and moved to intercept. This created a temporary traffic jam in the town as everyone tried to redeploy through the town.

A French company and a Russian company began an exchange of fire that was to last for

most of the game. On the Russian right another Russian infantry company broke into two groups and moved to skirmish with the French infantry company on the opposite side of the river. This didn't work out too well and the Russians took a beating until they withdrew to reform back into a company in a much safer area! Unfortunately, they began to reform right when the French cannon finally got deployed! A few shots added to the carnage and the Russian infantry company began to pile up shock points and casualties.

Seeing this the third Russian infantry company which was being held in reserve moved to take the bridge. They quickly moved to the bank of the river, then changed into column and began to move onto the bridge itself, all the time under fire by the artillery piece and a French infantry company on the Russian right.



Seize The Bridge! A Sharp Practice Playtest (cont.)



It looked for awhile that the Russian column would easily roll over the bridge, swamping the artillery piece and breaking the French defense in half. However, a really bad movement roll left the French a few inches short of their target! The French continued to pour fire into the mass on the bridge, adding a large number of shock points and several casualties. When the French company finally had its card drawn it had too many shock points, had lost momentum, and was repulsed.

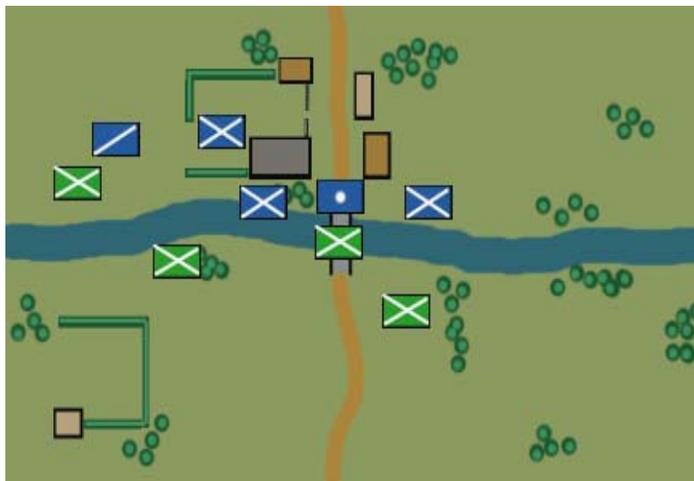
On the far Russian left the fourth Russian infantry company was in trouble. The French light cavalry squadron caught up to them and began shooting at them from the saddle in preparation for a charge. The Russian infantry formed a square as the French cavalry charged in. What followed was a bloody melee in which the French cavalry were repulsed, but the Russians had taken a beating,

namely because they were unable to reload in time to meet the charge. Now the third French infantry company deployed on their flank and opened a deadly fire into the Russian square. The Russians desperately tried to reform, but the large number of shock points forced them to rout and flee for the river.

The Russians were left with two infantry companies still in good order, who now tried to force the action by engaging the French forces on the opposite bank in firefights. Although they did some damage, it wasn't doing enough to force them to give up their positions. The French continued to consolidate their position and when one more Russian company "Lost their bottle" (the game's term for routing) it was determined that the Russians would have to fall back, leaving the bridge in the hands of the victorious French.

Once everyone got the hang of the game it moved along pretty quickly, even with six players and around 200 figs! The card deck caused a lot of chaos, with no one knowing when the turn would end or if they would get to do what they wanted each turn. The game does a good job of giving each player a large number of decisions each turn, especially when the firefights start. Should you fire, reload, remove shock points, close the range, etc., all need to be addressed each turn.

Overall, we were pretty pleased with our first try at the game. While we did have some questions and needed to come up with some house rules, there was nothing that was so serious that it prevented game play. There are endless possibilities with this type of a system and for the price we felt that it was a good bargain and will get played again soon.



Memoirs of a Miniature & Board Wargamer Pt. 11

Great Moments with TSATF

I've been playing The Sword and The Flame (TSATF) for almost three decades and while it probably isn't the most historically accurate game around, it has provided me with some great memories. I started out with a huge collection of 25mm forces for the Sudan, then moved into the Northwest Frontier. Along the way there have been numerous games, but what makes TSATF so great is the chance that some kind of spectacular "Hollywood" type moment will occur, and they usually do almost once a game!

One of the first memorable moments was during a convention game where there were seven players and about 500 figs on the table. A joint Anglo-Egyptian force had been ambushed by a large Dervish force and things were not going so well. In fact, after the first few turns the British were almost wiped out and a few Egyptian units were barely hanging on. The Egyptians counterattacked and the Egyptian officer shot and killed one of the Dervish unit commanders. The next turn the Egyptians were themselves attacked by more Dervishes and again the Egyptian commanding officer hit another Dervish commander. It had literally come down to the last turn of the game and the Egyptian officer had one shot left. The Egyptian platoon was down to less than half strength and was facing a fresh Dervish unit. The Egyptians fired, missing everything, all except the Egyptian officer. The final Dervish charge was stopped by the same Egyptian officer who had killed or wounded six Dervish commanders with six shots!

At that same convention there was another battle the next day. This time it was strictly an Anglo-Egyptian attack on a Dervish village. One of the players who had two units of Egyptians kept asking if he could form them up into a French type attack column with grenadiers on the right. As kindly as I could I tried to explain the different eras, no grenadiers, and those sort of formations don't do well in skirmish games. However, the guy kept insisting and started to get angry, which surprised both the other gamers and myself.

Now usually the other club members

and myself try to give hints about tactics, the era, weapons, etc., to gamers who have never played colonials and most gamers are usually pretty receptive. Not this guy. At the point of basically telling us to shut up, he formed both Egyptian platoons into attack columns, choosing certain figures to be the "grenadiers" formed up on the right of the attack column. They charged in, got surrounded and cut to pieces. The guy exploded and stormed off, complaining about the rules, the game, and that attack columns always work!

When the TSATF event deck came out I added it to our games as a little more chaos never hurt anyone! In one game an event card listed a wildfire as having started and it was pretty good sized, but the starting location wasn't near any of the action. I can't remember the type of dice I was rolling as the umpire, but basically the fire moved in an 11 o'clock position a random number of inches and it was checked each turn.

One of the Imperial players who had a platoon of Sikhs had decided to come out of a fort and get into the action. He quickly formed them up and moved them out to try to flank some Pathans. Well the next turn the fire moved in the same 11 o'clock direction. Thinking that there was no way it would continue to move towards him the Sikhs continued their maneuver. During the next turn it moved in the same 11 o'clock direction. Thinking that there was no way in the world it would move in the same direction four turns in a row, the Sikh commander stood still during the turn with the logic that the fire would move in any direction but 11 o'clock. Well, it did move towards 11 o'clock for the fourth time in a row, overrunning the Sikh platoon and caused 12 out of 20 casualties!

In another game the British were perfectly safe in a fort and village, but the British side decided to go out searching for Dervishes and naturally got more than they bargained for! I stated that the Der-



vishes had several barrels of gunpowder, satchel charges, etc., and if successfully placed they would need to still roll a 12 on two D6 to breach the fort walls. My intention was to try to explain that it was impossible to breach the fort and that they should ambush the British another way. I did jokingly say that if they took the fort it was an automatic victory.

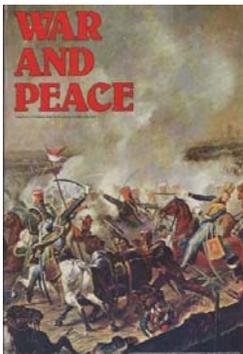
Naturally, gamers being gamers, the fort became THE objective! When most of the British and Egyptians marched out of the fort half of the Dervishes pinned them down and then the other HALF of the army went for the fort! We had some barrels to mark which units had the explosives and the Dervishes were taking murderous fire approaching the fort from the platoon of Highlanders, a gatling gun, and a nine pounder from inside the fort. One Dervish cavalry unit got cut down to just three men, but passed all of their morale checks. They moved to the fort wall, placed the charge, and promptly rolled a 12!

The remaining Dervishes on that side of the table rose up and poured into the fort, creating the other legendary event in this game. The Highlanders went down fighting, except for the Highlander sergeant who went down in gaming history. Defending a stairway inside of the fort he killed seven Dervishes and ran off eight more before the final five got him! It was the last Dervish unit and if it had been defeated they would have lost the game!

TSATF is fun because crazy things happen and when they don't, players almost feel cheated! It's the kind of game that no one should take seriously and it makes a good break between more rules intensive games. The ability to make up rules, use event cards, random movement, and the wild swings of fortune are what has kept me playing this game for almost 30 years. If you have not tried TSATF or any kind of colonial game I strongly suggest it. You don't need a lot of figs to get started and it will provide you with fond memories!

Blast From The Past Pt.10: War & Peace Gets New Life

Hailed as the Napoleonic version of Third Reich, Avalon Hill's War & Peace still garners a very large and loyal following. I don't know if it's the current economic crisis, nervousness about the cost of today's games, or just a willingness to explore older games, but games such as War & Peace are making a slight comeback.



Some of this is due to new counters, variants, updated rules, Vassal modules, or other grass roots efforts to breathe new life into older games. I myself have been going back to some of these oldies and playing a few here and there solitaire, which has made me remember that these games are still enjoyable.

What made me bring out War & Peace is as I was going through a Geek List on Boardgame Geek I noticed in a comment to check out the new 3rd edition rules. I followed the link and saw that someone had taken all of the errata, variants, designer notes from The General, revised the naval rules, and compiled everything into a single rulebook. I immediately downloaded the rules, then went home and read them through.

I had not played War & Peace in twenty years, so I got the game out and began to clip the counters (something I do with every game now-easier to handle the pieces) in anticipation of playing this classic once again.

First, a quick overview of the game and its components. It is definitely from the '80s, but surprisingly the game com-



ponents, especially the map, are not that bad. In fact, the map is still pretty good and very functional for the game. The rules and charts, likewise, are well done and work well with the game. The glaring problem are the counters. While the colors and symbols for the combat forces are average, but usable, the information and leader counters are in size 2 font, making them almost impossible to read without a magnifying glass!

The game is meant to simulate the large campaigns of the Napoleonic period, with each strength point representing several thousand men, named leaders, and rules regarding sieges, attrition, alliances, and optional rules for the combat system (a tactical matrix which I prefer). Each turn is one month and most scenarios are only a few turns long. One good thing is that the game has a high replay value as there are quite a few scenarios plus a grand campaign covering 1805-1815 which would take a serious amount of time.

So I went through the new rules, chose the 1812 invasion of Russia (I'm painting Russians so it was an obvious choice!). Set up wasn't too much of a problem except for the tiny, tiny, tiny lettering on the leaders and information counters! The first thing that you think is that this is going to be a cakewalk for the French. You have a lot of leaders, plenty of infantry and cavalry, plus the Russians aren't in the best of positions.

Well, appearances can be deceiving. For one thing, the attrition rules can be particularly nasty, especially when moving in Russian territory. Slowly and surely, you begin to lose more forces to attrition than you do to combat. The game system handles this pretty well and it gives the gamer something that they rarely have to worry about in most games. Then there is the

vast distances that have to be covered, lack of supply sources (most combat forces will be halved after you get past Smolensk), and trying to get reinforcements anywhere near the front lines is almost an impossible task.

Overall, the scenario went pretty well and I started reading up on the new naval rules in anticipation of trying the grand campaign. I could see, however, that it will take quite some time to play that through, so the game would need to be left up for a few weeks as it covers the years 1805-1815. I went through the optional rules (I really like the optional combat system) and the designer notes at the end that were taken from the various General issues over the years. My first impression is that this new version of the rules has pretty much cleaned up the system.



What is really needed is to have the counters overhauled. When you see counters from GMT, Avalanche Press, and COA, they are tiny works of art and something like this for the older games would be well received. I would gladly pay \$10-15 dollars for some new and improved counters. Yes, someone won't get rich doing this, but the gaming community would be very appreciative.

Overall, this new edition of the rules breathes some life into this classic game. The map is still not that bad and the game subject itself is rare enough that gamers should give this a try. The wide variety of scenarios are a blessing in that you can try one of these to see if you like the system before tackling the grand campaign which does take time and effort.

Romans vs. Seleucids

As you may have guessed by now if you're a regular reader of this magazine, we like Warmaster Ancients! The game not only plays well, but it looks good on the tabletop and gives you a good impression of a massive ancients battle. Our group now has seven armies for these



rules for some of the other players and setting up the units, we were ready to begin.

The Romans went with a lot of legions as the main striking power in the center, along with light cavalry for the flanks. The Romans also deployed two units of bolt throwers and several units of archers to screen the legions. Most of the legions were backed up by auxiliary infantry, making them very tough in melee.

I was the Seleucid commander and went with a mix of different troop types (one of the advantages of the Seleucids is that there are a LOT of choices for army composition).

The pikes along with the imitation legions would be in the center, while skirmishers, archers, and light infantry screened the advance. Light cavalry, a unit of elephants, and some Thorakites would provide some punch on one of the flanks, while the guard cavalry, camels, and Galatians would protect the other flank.

It was fairly obvious to both sides that the Seleucids, with their advantage in

WMA Battle Report

heavy cavalry, would try to smash the Roman flanks and keep the screening units busy enough to get the pike phalanxes into charge range. The Romans would be happy with anything close to a draw on their flanks so that the legions could close and finish the deal.

The game started out rather slowly, with both sides missing some command rolls. On the second and third turn the Seleucid guard cavalry and the lights galloped out ahead on that flank and prepared for action. The Roman light cavalry ran out to meet them, but more command roll failures left them all alone on that flank. The guard cavalry charged in, wiping out one Roman cavalry unit and then forcing another back. Another Se-

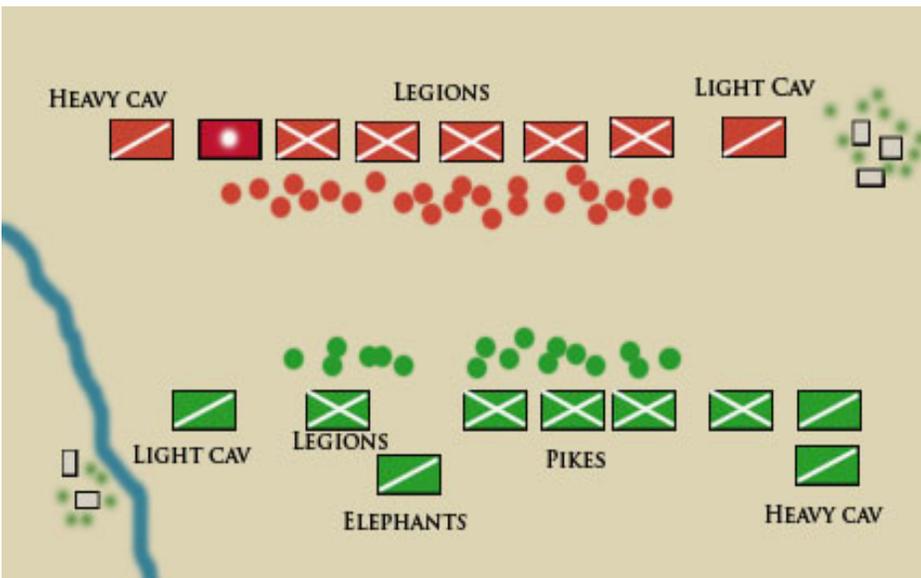


leucid cavalry unit charged, routed its enemy, then crashed into a Roman unit of bolt throwers, eliminating it. So the first round of the battle definitely went to the Seleucids, who were now sitting squarely on the Roman left.

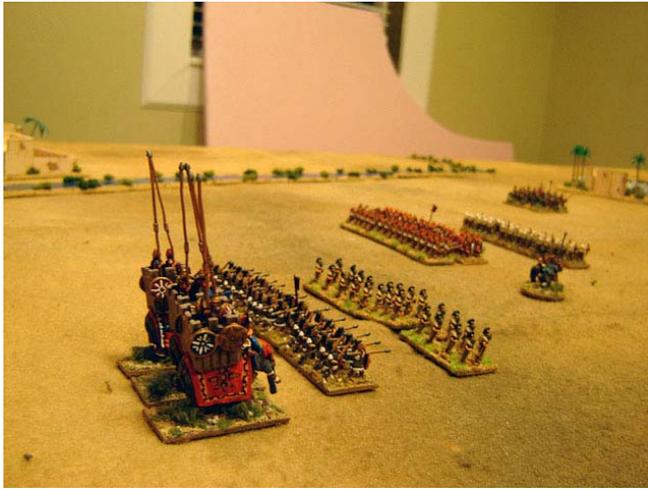
On the Roman right the situation wasn't much better. The Seleucid cataphracts quickly dispatched the Roman cavalry, but they were in turn pushed back by the second unit of Roman bolt throwers and some archers. The Seleucid cavalry continued to reform and charge with some success, in fact knocking out the second unit of bolt throwers, but again missile fire drove them back with heavy casualties. By the end of the fourth turn the Roman right flank was a no man's land with no unit venturing forth as they had all taken serious casualties. It was now time for the center to get into the game.

rules and are working on more, so expect to see more battle reports using WMA in the future.

Gary and I finally got our Romans and Seleucids up to 2,000 points each, so we decided to do a massive battle during one of our regular Friday night game sessions. After painting six pike units where I use 48 figs per unit I had just about had enough of painting pikes! It is worth it in the end and hopefully the pictures do the pike units justice. After going over the



Romans vs. Seleucids (cont.)



With their flanks in tatters the Romans decided now that it was the time to advance and do their damage in the center. However, things did not get off to the greatest start as their command rolls failed on turns four and five. By this time the Seleucids had moved up and launched a charge with the elephants and Thorakites. The Thorakites did some damage, but were defeated by a legion, but the elephants did quite a bit of damage before they, too, were eliminated.

The archers of both sides then got into a long distance shooting match along with each sides' skirmishers pressing the action. After a few turns of this the light and missile troops were seriously depleted and withdrew, setting the stage for the heavyweights.

By the end of turn 5 the Romans were in real trouble as they were nearing their break point. The Seleucids merely had to

keep advancing and by just doing damage to the Roman legions they should break a few more units to ensure victory. But then things went bad for the Seleucids. It started with a decision not to charge in right away with some of the pikes, then going in with a piecemeal attack. The initial pike units were successful, but then the legions began to grind them down.

When the legions counterattacked they did so with unrelenting fury, crushing one pike unit after another. The Seleucid dice, which had been kind up to this point, now utterly failed them. The legions continued to advance, attacking everything in sight and pushing back the Seleucid center. By the end of Turn 6 (we were going for a 7 turn game that was determined by die roll at the start) the Romans had made a comeback, but both sides were now just one unit away from their breakpoint and losing the game.

The Seleucid side of Turn 7 started out good, with the pike units pushing back the legions and they could sense victory. However, one pursuit combat ended in a tie and then another pike unit rolled mis-

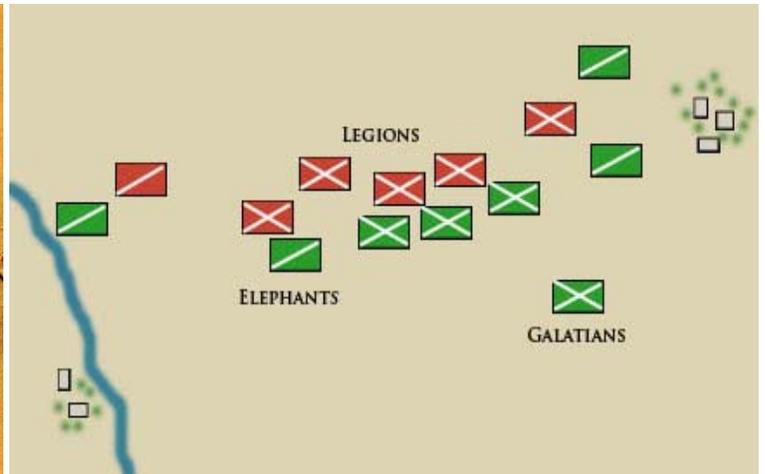
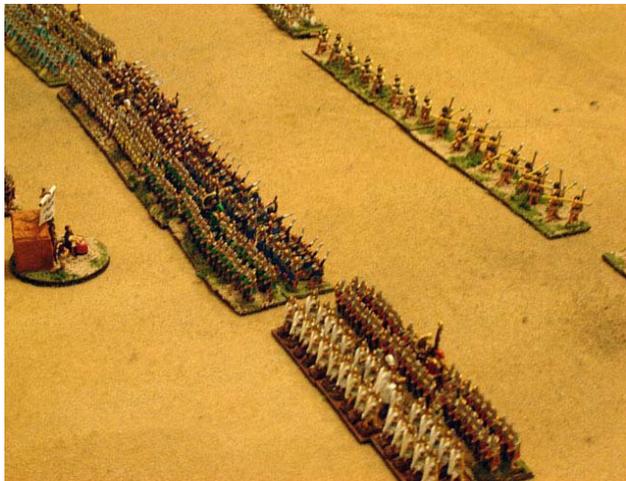
WMA Battle Report

erably and was pushed back. This was the opening the Romans had been waiting for and they attacked with the last few legions, finishing off one of the pike units and ending the game as a Roman victory.

This battle highlighted everything that is good about the WMA system. Exciting combat, command rolls failing at the worst times, the advantages of different units, and the importance of keeping reserves. The game played to a conclusion in four hours, which given the number of units on the board is pretty good. While the pike units are tough, the legions backed by auxiliary infantry in support can be a tough nut to crack, giv-



ing them some serious staying power in melee. This was offset by the massive advantage the Seleucids have in heavy cavalry. Overall, this was a fun and exciting battle that went down to the last turn. Now it's on to painting Indians to fight the Seleucids!



French vs. Prussians

AOR Battle Report

It seems that when we can't decide what to do (seems strange when we have the rules, figures, and terrain for 30+ periods!) we always turn back to Age of Reason and the Seven years War. There is something about the period, whether it is seeing long lines of infantry, massive cavalry battles, or just the color and pageantry of the era that keeps us coming back.

Well, this battle was no exception. We basically had each side choose twelve units of infantry, some light troops, two brigades of cavalry, and several artillery batteries. Both sides then drew up their deployments on a piece of paper, then set the actual units out.

The objectives were quite simple, with the bridge on the Prussian right, the hill in the center, and the village on the right worth withdrawal points. The Prussians decided to hold on the left with their cavalry force, then drive in the center to seize the hill and the village on the right. The French decided to seize the bridge and the village on their left, all the while delaying in the center. Both sides had good plans, so with everything ready the game began.

Both sides struggled out of the gate with traffic jams (we were playing on a 6x4 this time, rather than our usual 8x6), so the deployments were a little out of sync. The Prussian and Austrian cavalry moved out quickly, however, and were getting ready for the main event near the



forest on the Prussian left. The following turn both sides charged and the French came out the worst for it, with two units of cavalry wrecked, but the Prussians were caught out in a bad position and had to withdraw in the face of French infantry and artillery.

The French, however, did sneak an infantry unit and an artillery battery to the bridge and were in a good position to defend against any Prussian attack. The remaining French infantry, however, did not want to go too much further into the area as the remaining Prussian horse was sitting there, ready to charge.

In the center both sides advanced against the hill, with the Prussians reaching it first. The French had moved part of an infantry brigade to cover the hill and now it began a series of firefights with the Prussians. So far, the French had

done well by seizing one of the objectives and at least holding their own everywhere else. The French cavalry were reforming and things were looking pretty good for the French side at this point.

On the Prussian left a brigade of Prussian infantry moved quickly to the village, reaching it just before a French brigade did. The Prussians deployed a number of heavy guns to shield the village from any attack coming in from the center. The first few salvos scored several kills on the French,

and delayed their supporting attack. Both sides were now deploying into line near the village with both their infantry and artillery, getting set for a major battle.

Near the bridge, both sides continued to probe, with the French artillery scoring some success against the Prussian cavalry, but the Prussian cavalry defeating another sortie by the French cavalry. The Prussians were unable to follow up their success as the French infantry were blocking any chance to advance and the artillery near the bridge was in a good position to get some flank shots.

At the halfway point (6 turns) it was a draw, with the French holding onto two objectives and barely ahead in the casualty race. The French were in a good position, but their center might become a problem, which is what happened.





The fight on the Prussian right quickly became more intense. The Prussians and French fought over the outskirts of the village, with both sides charging, then countercharging in an effort to gain the upper hand. Meanwhile, the Prussian artillery continued to decimate the French infantry who were trying to give support near the village.

In the middle the Prussians had reached the slightly elevated hill first and tried to quickly establish a defense. The French redirected an infantry brigade to retake the hill and both sides got into the action very quickly. The battle started off with a series of firefights and artillery exchanges. The French then launched a bayonet attack with their grenadiers, which initially defeated a Prussian battalion, but they were stopped by a unit in reserve and driven back. A second attack now went in all along the hill, but the

Prussians stood firm, with both sides taking horrific casualties. In the end the Prussians were left standing while the French pulled back to regroup.

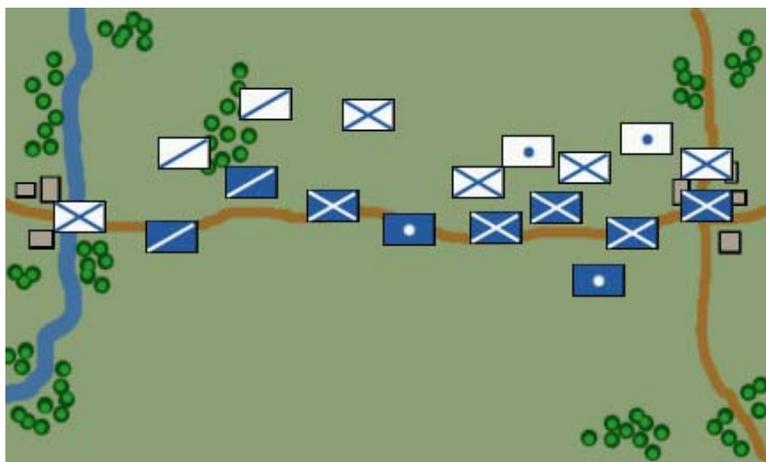
This was the signal for the Prussians to press their advantage and the cavalry returned to the fight. With the village on the Prussian right now secure and with the stalemate on the left, the center would be the path to victory. The Prussians reorganized their forces while the French tried to cobble together some kind of defense in the center.

The Prussian artillery pounded the French infantry from the hill and infantry battalions moved to the attack. The Prussian cavalry moved to threaten the center and the French had no reserves from which to plug the gap. There were still a few turns of frantic fighting around the village and near the hill, but the end was

in sight. By turn 10 the writing was on the wall and on turn 11 the French hit their 25% limit and had to make a withdrawal check, which with the modifiers they had meant it would have been a miracle if they had passed it! They didn't and the game ended with the French army withdrawing and a Prussian victory.

Once again, we had another great game of AOR. This was despite the fact that we didn't put a lot of effort into the scenario design by just throwing out some terrain and giving each side a number of SPs to choose their army with. Quick, simple, and effective.

I think it does, however, help that all of us have played a large number of games with these rules. You see very few, if any mistakes on the tabletop, which I think accounts for many of our games coming down to the last turn!



With much fanfare the various 25mm plastic boxed sets have burst onto the historical miniatures gaming scene.

Wargames Factory, Warlord, Perry, and Victrix have all released sets ranging from Romans to ACW. Even before the boxed sets came out TMP



was full of threads about how the figs were sculpted, what ranges would be coming out, the number of new projects that would be started, and anyone even questioning the viability of plastics was labeled as a heretic and should be burned at the stake!

Well now that the initial euphoria has died down it's time to take a look at what has come out, what effect it's had on the hobby, and where this is going. Now personally I'm neither for or against plastics. I just see the advent of plastic miniatures as just another option, but I did review the Wargames Factory British for the Zulu War and I have been keeping close tabs on the developments in this area.

I think the first thing that stands out is despite what some gamers dreamed and hoped for, plastics are going to be supplements to metal miniatures and vice versa. Any dream of having boxed sets with everything you could possibly ask for in a period have been dashed against the rocks. The reason is mainly basic economics. Creating a box of Egyptian cuirassier for the Sudan period when there was only one unit of them and few gamers are interested is counter productive and would result in a huge loss for the manufacturers. The boxed sets so far have been established periods with troop types where gamers need quantity such as ECW infantry, ACW infantry, basic Romans, and so on. This is the big advantage of plastics, namely using the boxed sets to build up the core of an army.

Second, the detail is not the same as metal miniatures and in some cases plastic figs can be harder to paint than their metal counterparts. Some of the belts, scabbards, cuffs, etc., have a tendency to blend in with the rest of the figure, mean-

ing the figure painter has to sometimes guess where the lines begin and end. Again, this isn't a major problem as most of these figs will be used as the 2nd, 3rd, or rear ranks of units. This is not to say that the

sculpting is bad, as many of the figures, particularly the heads, are well done.

Third, the assembly and available poses haven't pleased everyone, so this may be a factor in repeat sales. I've built quite a few models and the old GW boxed space marines, so I knew what to expect and had no problems. However, some gamers had expected the figs to be already built and were disappointed when they had to assemble them! Also, with some of the sets the arms, heads, etc., have limited use, so you will end up with a lot of figures looking the same. Again, I expected this, but it seems to have caught some gamers off guard.

Fourth, and this goes along somewhat with the first point, is that you will need metal figures for officers, generals, sergeants, the front rank of a unit, etc., as the boxed sets don't have everything that you need. Yes, the 25mm boxed sets have some of the same problems as the 20mm sets do, namely the selection at times of what comes in the box raises a lot of questions about how things are decided upon!

Now one of the side effects of the new plastic boxed sets have been ongoing discussions about why there can't be 15mm, 10mm, and 6mm plastic boxed sets. Time and time again, there have been some really good answers to these questions regarding costs, selection, market share for them, etc., but these are conveniently ignored! Supporters of plastics think that everything should be in plastic and that it will change the face of gaming forever. Anyone who says otherwise is surely a heretic and is therefore wrong. Actually, it's just a fact that while 28mm plastic sets are a good idea, smaller scales just aren't very cost effective compared to metal miniatures.

Finally, we come to the great debate about plastic boxed sets. The question is, "Have plastic boxed sets opened the hobby to more historical gamers, enabled gamers to get into more periods, or are they just substituting for metal figure sales?" This can be a very touchy subject, as the supporters of plastics have an almost religious zealousness about them lately and detractors seem to get their kicks from pointing out their shortcomings.

I visit a lot of blogs, web sites, forums, etc., plus guys in my group buy a lot of stuff, so I feel that I'm in touch with the hobby (although after some of my editorials the readers may feel otherwise!). I just haven't seen a lot of plastics painted, especially for how many sets have supposedly sold. The ones I have seen painted seem to be more in groups of 3 or 4 (looks to me like gamers trying them out) rather than complete units or armies. Guys in my group bought a ton of boxed sets, but even then I've seen very few actually finished.

As to what causes this, there could be many explanations. Some gamers don't like the assembly, maybe they painted a few and didn't like the result, maybe some found that metal is still the best way to go, and I could go on. I liken it to when I get an idea for a 1/72nd/20mm project every other year when I'm in a model shop, buy some boxes of plastic figs, take them home and immediately get started only to put it away once another project with metal figs comes along!

The other thing I wonder about is whether sales of plastic sets are supplementing or replacing sales of metal figures. If a gamer has \$50 is he or she buying three boxes of plastic figs or several blisters of metal figs? Or are they buying three boxes of plastic figs, then dropping an additional \$50 on metal figs? Answers seem to be all over the place on this one, but with the economy as it is right now it can't be good for either side.

Either way, plastics are here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future. What their overall impact will be, however, remains to be seen.

Hill A.F.B. Airshow

The last air show in the SLC area here at Hill AFB had to be cancelled, so when it returned this year the USAF decided to go all out. This was great if you are an aviation enthusiast as I am! The air show was held over two days in June, with the gates opening at 9am and exhibitions/ flights going all the way to 5pm on both days.

The static displays were pretty impressive, especially with a B-1, a B-52, and an E-3 AWACs in attendance. Everyone was allowed to walk through the AWACs which was pretty incredible, especially when you see all of the stations for various duties, plus the crew was on hand to answer questions. They also had a KC-135 and a C-17 open for display.

If you were into modern jets then there were several F-16s, F-15s, an EA-

6B Prowler, an A-10, plus several smaller jets. For WW2 fans they had an Avenger, a beautiful P-51, plus several Russian and Chinese aircraft. There were also several helicopters, including an AH-64 Apache and a heavily armed CSAR Blackhawk. Overall, it was a good mix of aircraft that was great for fans of all eras.

Naturally, there were several flying displays by stunt teams, which are always impressive, especially when they stall and dive back towards the earth! There was a hypothetical dogfight between a T-2 Buckeye on a recon run over Cuba and a Mig-17 which was great to watch. A legacy flight with an F-4, F-16, P-51, and a F-22 Raptor plus a similar flight with a C-130, F-16, and A-10 (these aircraft are refurbished at Hill AFB).

The most impressive aerial demonstration was surprisingly by the C-17 Globemaster cargo aircraft! This pilot thought he was in a fighter and some of the turns that it could do were pretty amazing. The aircraft also demonstrated a short landing for combat zones, reversed itself, then took off again, which was incredible to watch.

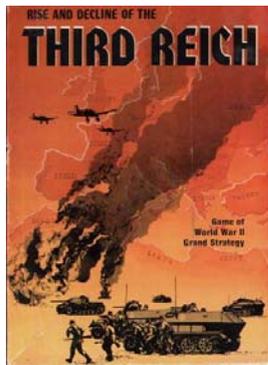
The Viper East team showed up and did a F-16 demo and the Navy sent a F-18 to do a demo as well, which really gets the crowd going as it is usually their first exposure to modern combat jets where the sound arrives after the jet goes by! The show wrapped up with another amazing performance by the USAF Thunderbirds. A great day if you were into aircraft and I'm already looking forward to the next show in two years!



One of the most popular wargames ever has to be Avalon Hill's Third Reich. This was one of the first "grand strategic" wargames to come out and it was a very good game. I can remember playing numerous games of it through the 80s and I still cherish the copy I have. Avalon Hill tried to take the game further with Advanced Third Reich, which added considerable complexity to the system. After Avalon Hill's demise GMT came out with A World At War, which was supposed to be the Holy Grail of the Third Reich system. It is said that the GMT version is a way of life as you really need to give up all other games just to play this one! After going through the incredibly large rulebook and sequence of play that must take five to six hours per turn, I was convinced that it was for the hardest of hard core gamers!

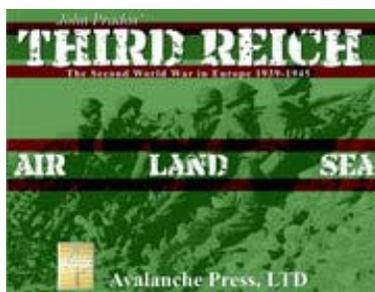
Avalanche Press then came out with their version, entitled John Prados' Third Reich. Although this game has been out awhile, I recently got the latest versions with the new 3rd Edition rules and thought I would review the system. This review will cover the basic game, Great Pacific War, the Player's Guide, Rumors of War, plus some of the variants from the Avalanche Press site.

First, the newest version comes in the green box shown above. You get three full color mapboards, 800+ counters, plenty of player aids, plus a rulebook,



scenario book, and more. The box is certainly packed with stuff and the components are high quality, with the artwork being a huge improvement over the old AH game, especially the counters.

For the size and scope of the game, the rules are actually pretty easy to get into. The basic movement, combat, and economic systems are easy to grasp, but the large number of special rules covering events, weather, countries, etc., will take a few plays to get used to. Each turn is three months, with the economic system kicking in once a year, generating what are called BRPs, or Basic Resource Points. BRPs are the backbone of the system, paying for everything ranging from armor upgrades, new units,



offensives, combat results, declarations of war, and more. This will give each player a large number of decisions about how to pursue the war in terms of what units to buy, going with a naval or ground strategy, and when to pursue large scale combat operations.

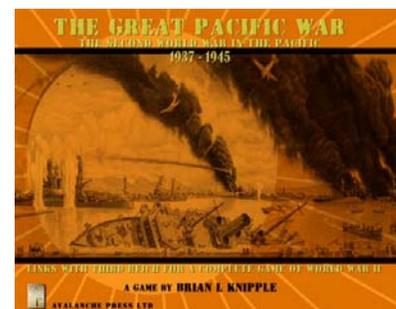
Combat is handled with the Avalanche Press standard "bucket of dice" system where certain units need a number (usually a 5 or 6) to score a hit with the number of dice being rolled equal to the strength of the unit. The results are in terms of hits that can be offset by retreats, spending BRPs, or exchanging counters for smaller units. This is the part of the game that takes the most grief on many forums and reviews, but personally I haven't seen too many problems with it and the die rolls do seem to balance out throughout the game.

Each game turn there are a large number of choices to be made by each player, including buying offensive chits, placing units to contest sea zones, strategic warfare, invasions, transporting troops, politics, and more. This by itself would almost seem

to suggest that no two games will be the same, but add in the event chits and some of the variants and you can create some pretty interesting situations!

The Great Pacific War is the follow on to Third Reich and applies the same system to the Pacific theater. You get three maps, several hundred counters, a rule book, plus a book detailing all of the event chits. Again, a lot of stuff for the money and if you've played Third Reich you can get right into this game. My only complaint with the components is the weird map layout which almost requires you to have a large space to play the game.

Naturally, as one would suspect, there are a LOT of ship counters in this game as most of the action will evolve around the control of the sea zones. China is also represented here with the two Chinese factions fighting the Japanese and adding



even more strategies for both players about what to do on this part of the map.

Game play is very similar to Third Reich except that in Europe the naval action is almost a sideshow compared to the Pacific. Most of the game is spent with naval action, transferring troops, invasions, and how best to manage your BRPs over the course of the campaign.

Also, as in Third Reich there are a lot of scenarios, including two that start before 1940, giving almost endless variations and a lot of replay value. The rules also include a section on how to combine the two games, which would really be a monster game. Overall, both of the boxed sets are good value for the money, especially when on Ebay you can now get them for around \$30 each, which is a pretty good deal considering how much stuff comes in each box.





So, you've played both games and are looking for new variations or in the interest of completeness you just want everything for Third Reich. Well, there's more stuff than just the basic games!

First, the Avalanche Press site has a lot of material for Third Reich/Great Pacific War. There are counters and variants for leaders, upgrading the forces of various nations, optional rules, and a lot more. The counters are well done and this can add even more variations to the game.

The next item is the Third Reich/ Great Pacific War Player's Guide. This booklet also contains a counter sheet with new event chits, updates to Turkish and Spanish forces, jets, plus assorted odds and ends. The big thing in this guide is the section on jets, which really upgrades the section in the original game. Now several countries have the chance to start building jets when their event chit is drawn, which makes for a more interesting game.

There is also a 1946 scenario, postulating an attempt by the U.S. and Patton to go after the Russians right after the war. England and the rest of Europe try to sit this out, but can be brought in through the use of political shits. This

also adds in the Israelis, Syrians, and is a very interesting scenario. The guide also includes other scenarios that postulate different years for starting the war, giving gamers the chance to try several of the great "what if" possibilities.

The rest of the book is taken up by player guides for the various countries, laying out in detail possible strategies to win the game. These sections are great learning tools, especially if you have no idea how to play England in 1940 and '41, or the best use for U.S. forces once they come into the war. I'm not sure I agree with everything written, but it's some good food for thought and definitely worth reading.

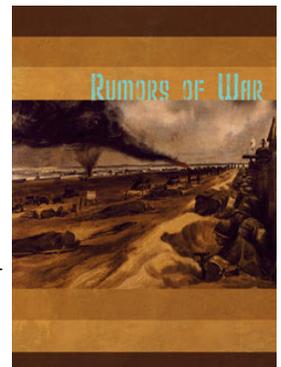
The next item is the deluxe maps for Third Reich. If you've played the game then you know that the hexes are just too small! It's not a problem in some areas, but when you're involved on the Eastern front with masses of counters, it can get pretty annoying trying to move the stacks without knocking over others. This expands the maps in Third Reich to two 22 x 34 inch maps, making the space almost double the originals and leaving plenty of room for those massive offensives!

Now here's something I don't understand, however. Why no deluxe maps for Great Pacific War? You would think that it might be a good idea, if for nothing else than the sake of completeness to make the extra maps that enables the series to be joined together. Also, it might solve the layout problem of the Pacific maps and it would go along with the extra map in Rumors of War which was done in the deluxe format. The first printing of deluxe maps sold out, so obviously games like them and would probably pay for a Pacific set. I know I would!

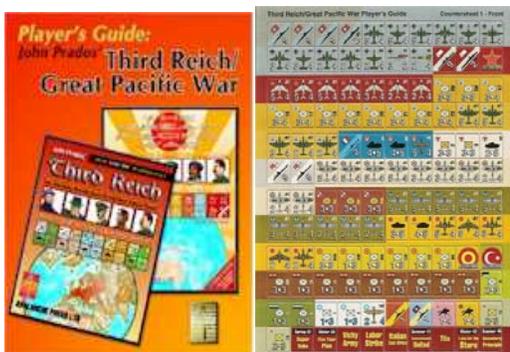
Finally, there is Rumors of War, which is yet another supplement for both games. This one adds more counters, a small add-on piece for the Deluxe Maps that extends the eastern playing area, and more analysis for Third Reich players. The positive thing is that both of the supplements have some useful information in them, the extra counters are useful, and for the price you really can't complain for the game play value.



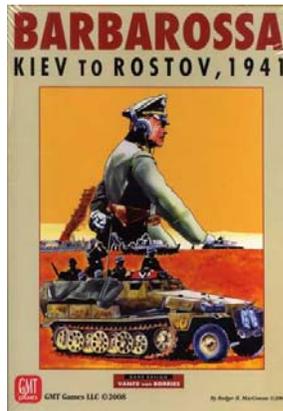
Added together it is a quite impressive package, enabling the gamer to full explore a global war set in the WW2 era. You'll notice I mentioned "set in" as with the many variations, scenarios, campaigns, extra counters, etc., you can begin the war in the early 30s and continue past the actual end of 1945! If you use all of the games and variants, it is possible that you may not have two similar games in quite a few plays. I think that this is what gives the Third Reich system it's greatest strength, namely that there are so many options and scenarios that it will keep gamers from being bored with the system, plus keep them coming back to try different variations.



I've noticed recently a huge surge in interest in this game, especially with many online stores, Ebay stores, etc., selling the games at a great price, which is getting more gamers into the series. The Third Reich Deluxe map set is currently out of print at this time and they used to be everywhere! Obviously gamers are giving this series a try and there is a lot of value for the money. The system also plays great solitaire or with group play, although the grand campaign could take a long time, but the smaller scenarios play pretty quickly.



I had heard a lot of good things about GMT's East Front series of games and had noticed that on Ebay a few of them, most notably Army Group Center and Typhoon go for huge amounts of cash. I love the East Front, so I decided to pick up the newest game in the series, Barbarossa: Kiev to Rostov.



This is the fifth game in the series, but all of the games are stand alone simulations or they can be linked together for massive games. The series portrays the entire Eastern Front during the opening of Operation Barbarossa from June to December of 1941. The scale is five miles per hex and two days per turn, with most Russian units being divisions, but the Axis forces include brigades, regiments, and some special battalion sized units. Aircraft counters represent around 40 aircraft.

GMT definitely packs a lot into the box! You get four 22 x 34 maps, 1100+ counters, a rule book, a playbook, and several full color sets of charts and tables. There is also an 8 x 11 double-sided map for use with the two training scenarios. The maps are arranged in a quite clever way, so that some of them can be used with the smaller, one or two map scenarios with the set up info printed on the map, but when combined for the campaign game these parts of the map are covered up by the overlap. As can be seen with the maps, rules, etc., everything in this series has been well thought out.

I've played a lot of East Front games over the past 30 years, from strategic (Third Reich) to tactical (Combat Commander and ASL), but this is the first game where I really begin to see just how massive the Barbarossa campaign truly was. The four maps laid out are pretty impressive and when you realize that this is just the bottom half of Army Group South's drive into Russia, you really begin to see the massive challenges that both sides had to operate in this theater.

The rules are laid out very well,

with the sequence of play explained in general terms, then a more detailed outline is at the back of the book. It is interesting that the Germans follow a standard pattern, but the Russians must use their motorized movement first, then combat, then everything else moves. A novel concept to simulate the poor coordination of Russian forces at this stage of the war. Further rules cover supply (probably the most important part of the game), combat, airpower, weather (another huge factor), and more. Now there is a lot here, but it makes sense and although you may need to refer back to it now and again, it's a good system.

Combat can be quite involved, with airpower (including air combat and AA fire), artillery, and the defender can react with armor if it is close enough to the battle area. Russian HQs have limitations in what they can coordinate and they can issue additional orders for no retreat or to retreat further. Units take step losses and/or retreats, so the casualties will begin to pile up after awhile. How you attack, what units should support, should armor react to that hex, and more are all tough decisions that will need to be made each turn, especially during large combat operations with many units.

Here is where you begin to see the detail, which is present everywhere, even in small things. Combined arms, armor step losses, the presence of NKVD units, and more all give combat a detailed treatment. Add on to that the many variations of replacements, mobile supply units, supply bases, railroad transport, etc., and



you begin to see that there is a lot here to keep track of! Decisions will need to be made in regards to operational pauses for supplies to build up, which units should get replacements, should the panzers keep rolling forward while the infantry lags behind, how to defend river lines during fronts and snow turns, problems with mud, and so many more that it's impossible to list.

What gives the game good value is that there are several scenarios included, from the two training scenarios with only 10-20 units a side to the full blown campaign with all four maps and hundreds of units. Not only that, if you own Army Group South then you can join that game as some replacement counters are provided to bring that game up to date with the latest rules. Then, when Crimea (game #6 in the series) comes out hopefully later this year you can add that one on and simulate the entire drive of Army Group South!

This game is not for the casual gamer. The large amounts of special rules, two page sequence of play, plus the supply and replacement rules which are far more important than most wargames, can be a challenge and probably isn't for everyone. The components are top notch, the rule and play books are well done, and there has definitely been some long range planning in the series.

However, if you really want to learn something about Barbarossa, then this is the series for you. The wide expanses, critical cities and bridges, extreme weather, and massive supply problems all combine to make for a very interesting Eastern Front experience. Now if only the Crimea would come out and the revamped Army Group Center/Typhoon set!

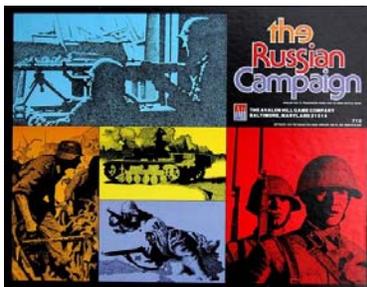
Barbarossa: Re-Creating the German Advance? Game Analysis

One of the more interesting discussions in gaming is the German invasion of Russia, specifically the initial part of the invasion to where it historically stalled in December of 1941. Could the Germans have taken Moscow in '41? Should they have fallen back to renew the offensive in the Spring? How did the Russians let so many men get surrounded and captured? These are just some of the questions that game designers have struggled with over the years when creating games on this fascinating topic.

Tactical level games such as ASL, Combat Commander, Panzer Grenadier, and many more don't answer these kinds of operational level questions. The state of the Red Army, the panzer drives, and giant encirclements are left for their bigger cousins. Games like *The Russian Campaign*, *Third Reich*, *War Without Mercy*, the *Europa* series, *Defiant Russia*, and many others have attempted to answer these questions over the years.

First, what do these games have in common? Most notably there is some sort of surprise rule for the first turn or two. This gives the Germans a good jump on trying to recreate the massive breakthroughs and how out of position most of the Russian army was. Then there is the invariable "panzers run wild" part of the game where the Germans rip gaping holes along the front and gobble up isolated Russian units. This is then followed by the inevitable mud, frost, and snow that delays the Germans just short of their objectives. What follows next is a Russian counterattack, then the German spring offensive, then stalemate, then the Russians slowly grinding down the Germans all the way back to Berlin.

You'll notice in the above paragraphs that there is no mention of huge encirclements such as what happened in the Kiev pocket or along the frontier during the early months of Operation Bar-



barossa. Yet this is one of the defining features of the 1941 campaign in Russia. Scores and scores of Russians were captured along with thousands of tanks, vehicles, and guns. It also had an effect on German strategy, since

Hitler was obsessed with capturing Russian soldiers and creating pockets. So why doesn't this translate well onto the tabletop?

The most obvious answer is that most Russian players aren't going to be as obliging as their historical counterparts! With a godlike view of the map, most Russian players are smart enough to start pulling back as fast as they can, build new defense lines, and use some units as speed bumps to slow down the German advance. Most games help the Russians with this by providing rules mechanisms whereby the Russians only have to hold for so long before the vast resources of Mother Russia are mobilized and weather begins to play its part.

There seems to be two design philosophies here when dealing with Barbarossa. The first is to hamstring the Russians as they were historically. Rules mandating counterattacks, no movement of reserves, air units caught on the ground, etc., all attempt to recreate the initial German surprise and shock. Now this may be a realistic attempt to portray the situation, but Russian players usually complain aloud. Cries of forcing them to sit there and take it from the Germans, their maneuver is constrained, they can't run as fast as they can back towards Moscow, and more can be heard throughout the gaming hobby! Their reasoning is why should they have to be bludgeoned to death by having to do what the Russians historically tried.

The second method is to give the Germans some surprise effects, limit the Russian response (but not

too much), and balance the game with just enough Russian reinforcements, supply rules, etc., so that the Russians have a fighting chance. Now you hear the German players wailing aloud about how unhistorical this is. The Germans created huge encirclements and they should be given the chance as well. With this second method they argue, the game turns into long lines gradually moving about the map with limited or no breakthroughs. So, who's right?



The answer is both of them are. I have played *Russian Campaign* about 50 times, *War Without Mercy* a half dozen, numerous games of *Third Reich*, a dozen games of *Defiant Russia*, *Axis & Allies*, *Trial of Strength*, and plenty of others on the subject. Each one tried their best to do the impossible; i.e., how to simulate the German advance.

Now many of the games listed above are good games. They do a pretty good job of simulating Operation Barbarossa and many of the games I've played have ended with historical results. The Germans stopped in front of Moscow and Leningrad, trying to hang on near Rostov, and everywhere the effects of weather and lengthy supply lines are beginning to be felt. It's getting there that is the problem most gamers argue and I would have to agree at times. Game designers have a tough job with this subject and we do have to realize that it is a game after all.

For myself, I will keep buying East Front games and learning more about this campaign. There are several new games coming out on the subject in the near future and maybe some of them will have a new or different approach. In the meantime, I will refuel the panzers, wait for the infantry to catch up, then push on for one final drive to take Moscow!



Sharp Practice Scenario: Spy Hunt

This is a scenario designed for Sharp Practice, but could be used with any Napoleonic skirmish rules. Two sheets of cards have been provided with the scenario to be used with the game. Simply use the system in Sharp Practice for randomly determining officer's attributes and fill out the cards. This will add an additional random factor to the scenario, especially if you let the players randomly choose their officers and NCOs for each unit!

Background: It is the spring of 1813 and French forces are on the move in some areas, but falling back in others. A French spy in a local village which is currently garrisoned by the Russians has vital information on Russian deployments. The spy is unable to move out of the village as various Russian units are searching for the spy.

French Objectives: Move into the village, search every building and find the spy, then get the spy off board back down the road from the French entry point.

Russian Objectives: Defeat any French attempt to seize the village until the spy can be located.

French Forces: One infantry company with a Colonel and NCO. The Colonel is under specific orders to find the spy (the

colonel and major in the second company know who it is on sight). A second infantry company with a major and NCO in support of the colonel's company. Two additional infantry companies with one officer and one NCO each. These companies have no idea why they are here other than they are to support the colonel's mission. One squadron of light cavalry with one officer.

Russian Forces: One infantry company with one officer and one NCO split into two groups foraging in the area (Russian village garrison). One infantry company with one colonel and one NCO under direct orders to find the French spy. A second infantry company with one officer and one NCO in support of the colonel's mission. A second garrison infantry company split into two groups that will randomly enter the board, also with one officer and one NCO. A squadron of light cavalry or Cossacks with one officer, also out foraging.

Setup: Place the two Russian foraging groups as indicated on the map. The two groups from the second company will enter the board randomly. Roll 1D6 for each every turn until they arrive. On a 1 or a 2 they arrive on the first turn, 3 or 4 on the second turn, and on a 5 or a 6 they arrive on the third turn. Randomly deter-

mine which side road that they enter from. The Cossacks enter the same way as the second foraging company, but they may also arrive at the Russian entry point plus the side roads. The two Russian infantry companies enter at the green arrow on turn 1. All of the French forces enter at the blue arrow on turn 1.

The scenario umpire/referee should randomly determine where the spy starts.

Special Rules: The villagers are terrified of both the Russians and French, so all doors are locked and both sides will need to break in as described in the rules. It costs one action dice to search a small building and two action dice to search a large building.

Variations: Feel free to add additional buildings or terrain for the scenario. You could also adjust the forces and/or add additional missions for some of the smaller groups. Having the spy move around each turn or in a random direction would increase the uncertainty as to the exact location of the spy. In this scenario we'll assume that both sides' officers know who the spy is, but you could add an aspect of role-playing where the villagers would need to be questioned and a die roll made to determine if the spy is found out by either side.



Scenario Notes

Our group uses 20-24 figures per company and 12 mounted figures per squadron for our games, so the order of battle for the scenario reflects this. Only the two colonels knew what they were after and they used their other forces to support their mission, which added some fun to the scenario.

We ran this as a four player scenario with the overall commanding officer also being the commanding officer of a company, but players should feel free to add extra officers or NCOs as needed. We also had players randomly draw the officer and NCO cards for each unit, which added some much needed variation to the game.

Sharp Practice Scenario: Spy Hunt (cont.)

	Big Man #		Big Man #		Big Man #
Rank:		Rank:		Rank:	
Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:
Status:		Status:		Status:	
Physique:		Physique:		Physique:	
Looks:		Looks:		Looks:	
Popularity:		Popularity:		Popularity:	
Breeding:		Breeding:		Breeding:	
Swords:		Swords:		Swords:	
Horse:		Horse:		Horse:	
Personality:		Personality:		Personality:	
	Big Man #		Big Man #		Big Man #
Rank:		Rank:		Rank:	
Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:
Status:		Status:		Status:	
Physique:		Physique:		Physique:	
Looks:		Looks:		Looks:	
Popularity:		Popularity:		Popularity:	
Breeding:		Breeding:		Breeding:	
Swords:		Swords:		Swords:	
Horse:		Horse:		Horse:	
Personality:		Personality:		Personality:	
	Big Man #		Big Man #		Big Man #
Rank:		Rank:		Rank:	
Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:
Status:		Status:		Status:	
Physique:		Physique:		Physique:	
Looks:		Looks:		Looks:	
Popularity:		Popularity:		Popularity:	
Breeding:		Breeding:		Breeding:	
Swords:		Swords:		Swords:	
Horse:		Horse:		Horse:	
Personality:		Personality:		Personality:	

Sharp Practice Scenario: Spy Hunt (cont.)

	Big Man #		Big Man #		Big Man #
	Rank:		Rank:		Rank:
Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:
Status:		Status:		Status:	
Physique:		Physique:		Physique:	
Looks:		Looks:		Looks:	
Popularity:		Popularity:		Popularity:	
Breeding:		Breeding:		Breeding:	
Swords:		Swords:		Swords:	
Horse:		Horse:		Horse:	
Personality:		Personality:		Personality:	
	Big Man #		Big Man #		Big Man #
	Rank:		Rank:		Rank:
Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:
Status:		Status:		Status:	
Physique:		Physique:		Physique:	
Looks:		Looks:		Looks:	
Popularity:		Popularity:		Popularity:	
Breeding:		Breeding:		Breeding:	
Swords:		Swords:		Swords:	
Horse:		Horse:		Horse:	
Personality:		Personality:		Personality:	
	Big Man #		Big Man #		Big Man #
	Rank:		Rank:		Rank:
Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:	Initiative:	Influence:
Status:		Status:		Status:	
Physique:		Physique:		Physique:	
Looks:		Looks:		Looks:	
Popularity:		Popularity:		Popularity:	
Breeding:		Breeding:		Breeding:	
Swords:		Swords:		Swords:	
Horse:		Horse:		Horse:	
Personality:		Personality:		Personality:	

Sharp Practice Scenario Replay: Spy Hunt



Both sides deployed as described in the scenario set up. One of the foraging Russian groups saw the mass of French piling down the road at them and took up a defensive position in the village center until help could arrive. That wasn't long in coming as both other foraging groups entered on turn 1 and began moving towards the village.

The French had awful movement rolls, especially the colonel's force, while the Russians moved much quicker and began breaking in doors and searching the buildings on the outskirts of the village. One of the Russian foraging groups tried to flank the French, but was turned back by musket fire.

By this time both sides had everything on the board and began to have a series of firefights around the village. The second French player had no idea what was going on, other than the French colonel ordering them to take up certain positions, which was what the Russian colonel was doing with the other Russian groups outside of his own! Basically,



you had two very determined companies on both sides searching everywhere for the spy and two companies plus cavalry unsure about what they should do other than slug it out with their enemy!

The main French force now broke into the church and spent a turn searching it, while outside the battle raged all over the village. A unit of French infantry had pinned down a Russian group behind the hedges, but couldn't make any headway due to shock points. In the center both sides decided to form up into company formations to increase their shooting potential, so the next few turns were spent getting ready for the big battle.

A French company charged the Russian company holding the center of the village and drove it back, inflicting several casualties and shock points. They in turn, were struck by a Russian infantry company that was on a blind the previous turn, which came as a surprise for the French. After two rounds of melee the French were forced to give ground in the village center. Both sides had lost quite a few dead, plus the shock points were beginning to pile up and a few officers/NCOs had to be replaced because of casualties.

Both sides tried flanking efforts, but to no avail. Each time a force advanced it was met by musket fire and forced back. Then the other side would try to advance and get driven back in turn. The French were trying to move forward, but the bad movement rolls continued and they were losing the race to search the few remaining buildings.

By this point in the game about half of the buildings had been searched and still no spy had been found. Each building had a separate slip of paper that was handed to the player that searched it which said if the spy was there or not. Both sides still had fresh forces, but the village and surrounding terrain was making it difficult to

deploy.

Finally, a French group burst into a two story inn and began to search the first floor. On the same turn a Russian group led by the colonel broke in on the opposite side and a melee ensued. This hand to hand combat went four turns with the French side eventually worn down and driven out, but they cut the Russian group down in half as well. The Russians searched the upper floor and found the spy. With no fresh French forces near the inn, it was deemed that the Russians would get the spy of the board with no resistance (probably for some interrogation then an execution!) and with the game.



A hard fought battle that was quite different from the previous two games that we had done with these rules. Because of the village the companies had to be broken down into groups to maneuver, which really changed the game. It also resulted in far more hand to hand combat than we had seen before. As noted in the variations for the scenario, you could easily add a lot more to the scenario such as different forces, have the spy randomly move, and more.

We also discovered that we had been doing a few things wrong with the rules, most notably the entire action dice/initiatives section where we finally put our heads together and figured out exactly what you could and couldn't do each turn. This radically changed the game and turns went by much quicker! Overall, it's a fun system that works well with small forces or with 100+ figs per side for group games.



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Meets every other Friday night in the SLC, Utah area. We currently play AOR, AOD, AOE, BKC, WMA, Phantoms, Mustangs, Sharpe Practice, This Very Ground, Wild West, and too many other periods and scales to list here!

If you have any comments, ideas, suggestions, or wish to send me an article, you can contact me at:
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Well, one more issue closer to #25, which is kind of a goal I set for myself a few years ago. When I first started this publication as a way for our group to create something for the gaming community the internet was still in its infancy; there were no blogs, podcasts, and few magazines. Now with the explosion of growth in what I term “gaming information”, I’m not sure where this publication fits in anymore. While it’s fun to get your ideas out into the hobby mainstream and show off what you and your club are doing, it does take a lot of work. With so many web sites, forums, blogs, etc., you begin wondering if anyone has time anymore to look at this kind of publication. I know that at least for myself I’m not visiting as many sites, blogs, and forums as I used to. There are only so many hours in the day and even for a small hobby I think we are reaching the point of information overload. Some gamers have been asking why no one reads their blogs and the answer should be as plain as day, but they don’t see it. Their audience is too busy reading posts on forums, creating their own blogs, and visiting other sites to have time to read yet another blog! Where this is all going is anyone’s guess, but at some point there’s going to be a “weeding out” phase in the hobby where many of the info/media entities on the margins are going to close down or cease. Already some of the guys in my group are withdrawing from some Yahoo Groups, forums, etc., citing the time problem. For myself I’m just concentrating on getting #25 done and out there so I can at least say that I reached my goal of publishing 25 issues! After that it’s anyone’s guess where this goes!

Battles With The Gringos

I’ve reviewed GMT’s Gringo before and the GBACW system created by Richard Berg before. This is one of my favorite systems for wargames and it works well, especially for this period of history. Gringo was pretty successful as a game, namely because the battles were small, interesting, and they serve as a great introduction to the GBACW system.

Battles With the Gringos is a supplement that comes in a large zip lock bag. There are two maps, a sheet of counters, and a scenario book along with a terrain effects card. The maps and counters are of the same high quality present in other games of the series. There are new rules for skirmishers and the rest of the scenario book gives the set up for the various scenarios, plus additional rules and options.



The battles are Palo Alto, Resaca de Palma, Contreras, and Pueblo, which offer a wide variety for gamers interested in this period. The first two were the opening battles in the Mexican-American War, but are two entirely different scenarios. Palo Alto is a straight up fight, with both sides deployed in a linear array, with the larger Mexican army being inferior in terms of quality compared to the smaller U.S. army.

The second battle took place on the following day with almost the exact same forces, but on a battlefield completely the opposite of Palo Alto. This presents different challenges for both sides and is an interesting battle.

Game Review

The good thing about a supplement such as this is you get four battles, different maps and GMT does a great job of supplying you with a new set of counters for each battle! This means that you don’t need to go hunting for units that were present at another battle in the series, which really speeds set up time. Also, the games in this supplement are small affairs compared to major battles in the ACW, so you can set the game up and get the scenario done in 2-3 hours.

Finally, this is a great way to learn the GBACW system that GMT and Richard Berg has created. The battles are small, they don’t use the full command and control rules, and the unit density is small enough that you can spend time learning the movement and combat systems. This is an ideal way to learn the system before you try Three Days of Gettysburg or Red Badge of Courage. As for myself, these battles will tide me over until the next release, Dead of Winter comes out this year!