WFHGS

Warning Order

Issue #56

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Warning order

WFHGS

U-Boot: The Board Game

There have been computer aided or moderated games before in the hobby and I recall a myriad of articles back in the 80s and 90s which predicted that was the future of wargaming, especially for miniatures. That never happened for various reasons, but from time to time it still emerges, but never seems to gain traction. However, one recent board game may hold the key to what is needed to bring this to the forefront.

That game would be U-Boot: The Board Game from Phalanx Games. A massive package that gives 1-4 players the chance to take a WW2 German U-boat out on missions in the Atlantic Ocean. While there have been several WW2 submarine games, there certainly has never been anything quite like this before!

The box contains a lot of components that will take some explanation, which makes it hard to know where to begin. Booklets, cards, tokens, miniatures, and more fill the box, then on top of all that there is an almost 3 ft. long cardboard model of a submarine! This is the kind of box opening that can induce panic and anxiety. The strange shapes of the tokens, all the boards, the attack disk, maps, and more seem overwhelming at first. However, when you start going through the rules and some of the online videos, things start to make some sense.

As with most of my games I start by putting all of the cards into plastic sleeves and sorting them into the stacks for each player to use. Next up is printing any rulebook changes, player aids, etc., and then finally organizing all of the tokens once I know what they will be used for in the game. Finally, with games such as this, I've started to paint the game pieces, especially if it's a) going to be something that we'll play more than once, and b) it will enhance the game play.

For U-Boot, that mean assembling the submarine and painting the parts. I couldn't see any purpose in having to assemble the entire thing each time you play, so I glued everything into three huge pieces, plus the conning tower. That way, all I would need to do is assemble those pieces before each game, which would take about 60 seconds! I used a black Sharpie pen and gray paint to edge all of the cardboard pieces before assembly. This did take some time, but it looks s much better when finished!

Now it (cont. on p3)

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Special points of interest:

- *A complete relief of a siege campaign that can be used with any set of Ancients or Medieval rules.*
- *Two new Engagements scenarios.*
- *Battle reports for Warmaster Ancients, Age of Reason, BKC IV, and more.*
- *Reviews of two new board games.*

(cont. from p2) was on to the painting. There were several pieces that needed to be added to the conning tower, some large crew markers, then the 16 crew. While not the most challenging miniatures to paint, I thought it would look better than the colored plastic they were molded in. The company also has a resin kit with several other pieces, but after seeing the cost and realizing that it didn't

really matter for gameplay I decided not to order it. However, I did order the large play mat, which will help out players and it looks better with the sub on it.

At this point it was time to test out the game. Playing this solo, as I was to find out, is just about impossible! There is just too much going on and while you can pause the app, you will miss a lot of stuff. The optimum is four players, but two or three will work as well. Players take the role of Captain, First Officer, Navigator, or the Chief Engineer. The Captain, naturally,, gives orders, but he does have some crew that need to be placed on the sub. The First Officer manages the app (phone, iPad, or computer versions) and weapons, while the Navigator plots courses, runs tactical, and feeds the crew. Finally, the Chief Engineer handles depth and speed changes, repairs, and handles most of the major ship related crises that pop up.

The Captain gives orders, such as course changes, prepare the food, fix maintenance issues, etc., and moves a token on a track. This activates the various crew members on each watch. Each player has four crew members on each watch who can be activated three times per watch. Once you go beyond that, the captain

starts moving another token down the morale track, which is not good. This causes the Captain to draw cards, which cause more problems! Once a watch is finished, players flip over their watch board and adjust activation markers. If the Captain gives out too many orders on a watch, the moves the morale token as well on the track, forcing that player to draw more cards.

Now all of this is going on while the First Officer monitors the app. The app will call out things like the need to draw event cards, radio messages (the First Officer must use the day's Enigma codes to access them), change of missions, contacts, and more. All of these things can cause the Captain to need to issue orders that move the crew throughout the sub. Each crewman has a different shaped base and a different set of skills, so finding the right crewman and getting them into position is very challenging.

The Navigator, meanwhile, is calculating the course on the actual type of maps that U-boats used during the war and when a contact is announced, then need to use the attack wheel. This is a device that has several wheels on it for the U-boat's current course, contact bearing, and the contact's course. Once that is determined, the Navigator updates the tactical board for the captain. On top of that, the app will ask each night what the crew was fed each day. The number of meals and what was in them also adjusts the morale track, so this becomes a game within the game!

Now this is all being done in real time, but thankfully there is a pause button, which certainly helps when things get too crazy! This especially helps if you're the player who is the Chief Engineer. There are usually a number of things that require maintenance on the sub, plus your team handles the diving, speed changes, etc., plus you have to repair all of the battle damage! If there is a hull breach you

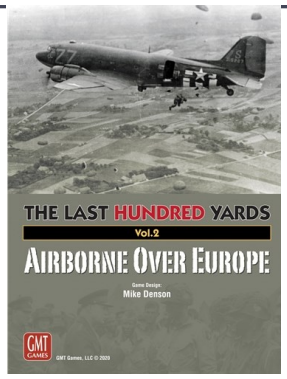
have 60 seconds to assemble the puzzle pieces of the sections where the breach is and if you can't finish that area is flooded!

Combine all of this into a real time game and you have some real chaos! Things start out nice and smooth, but then some things break down, there's a change of orders, trying to deal with contacts, getting into firing position, then escaping the escorts is nerve wracking to say the least. There are so many decisions, things to move, sounds, changes to the situation every minute or so that I can see where some players would get overwhelmed.

The app, however, does a great job of keeping you going, from maintenance reminders to watch changes. You can see the contacts, weather, etc., the torpedo info is loaded by the app (you just need to get within range and the right angle-not easy!), it tracks your position, handles radio messages, and more. You can also use time compression to move long distances or in between watches. In short, this thing works and really makes the game run. I will say, however, that even though you can play this game solitaire, it is almost impossible, even with the pause feature, but it will give you an idea about how things work.

With 2-4 players, however, this is a gaming experience that is not to be missed! There is the danger of nothing really happening on the mission, which then becomes an exercise in moving workers around a board. In my experience, however, that would be the outlier as the missions I have taken part in have been nothing short of chaos! Trying to move the crew around, take care of things breaking down, contacts, order changes, morale, etc., keep players on the edge of their seats at all times. Highly recommended.

GMT's The Last Hundred Yards Vol. 2: Airborne Over Europe

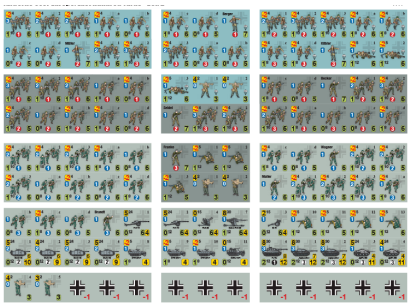


When The Last Hundred Yards came out, it took the board wargaming world by surprise. It was reviewed here in this magazine several issues ago and at that time, while it was pretty good, it was a hard game to judge. Certainly the concepts were radically different than other WW2 tactical games, plus the game had some mistakes with charts, scenarios, tables, etc., that caused some gamers to scrutinize the game a bit unfairly. However, to the credit of the designer and GMT Games, these issues were fixed and the game was successful.

Once things were straightened out, most gamers just knew that there would be supplements and sure enough, the first one is now here. Vol. 2: Airborne Over Europe is surprisingly not just a supplement to the first game, but it is a standalone game in its own right. This means that you don't need the first game to play this volume. GMT Games has been doing remarkable things in terms of components, so we'll now explore what's in the box.

There are four counter sheets, one with the U.S. forces and another with the Germans, plus two sheets of markers. The unit counters represent the squads, sections, weapons, and vehicles used in the scenarios. The artwork is OK, but is more functional than anything. There are quite a few map sheets that are very thin (GMT is promising to replace these with cardstock maps), but the artwork on these is pretty good. There are scenario cards, a turn/status display, rules, and a playbook. All in all, a pretty good package.

The first question I had was, "Where's the British?" Sure enough, the scenarios only cover the actions of the 82nd Airborne and the 101st on D-Day and during Operation Market Garden. Yes, this means at some point we'll probably get a British airborne supplement as well as a 101st at Bastogne one as well. For fans of the series/book Band of Brothers, there are several scenarios covering actions by Easy Company of the 101st.



The rules aren't difficult to get through, but if you're new to the series, it's going to take a few readings. The reason? The game system is so unorthodox (or clever) and chances are you've never played anything like this, so you need to process things by going over the system more thoroughly than your standard hex and counter game. Fortunately, the playbook goes over every type of combat, how to move, and includes a few sample turns, which is extremely helpful.

The scenarios are small actions and it's going to take some gamers time to adjust. These aren't your usual scenarios where you come onto the board, see where the enemy is, move things up slowly, pour on some suppressing fire, then move up for a final attack. Instead, you know where the objective is, you've moved into position, and now it's time for the final attack. This does take some getting used to and I found myself trying to coordinate firepower attacks to grind the enemy down, which is not going to work in this game.

Each platoon of 2-4 squads is activated, which means the units can move, shoot, recover, or assault. Once that platoon is finished, the other side can activate a platoon, then the side with initiative reacts again, and so on, until both sides are out of platoons and/or vehicles. This activate/react cycle is interesting in that there is no down time during the turn for either player. Also, firing is not completed until after everyone has activated, so units will carry around markers for everything that shot at them. Each weapon type, i.e., small arms, mortars (there's no artillery in the game), and anti-tank fire generates a marker in its distinct color that shows the final modifier to the die roll. It's not uncommon for a unit to move and get several markers on it.

For example, a German infantry unit fires at an American squad that is approaching. You take the German's firepower rating, modify it for range, cover, etc., then put a marker corresponding to the final number (positive or negative) on the target unit. Near the end of the turn you roll a D10 for each marker on a unit. If the roll with the modifier is higher than the unit's cohesion value it can be disrupted or loses a step. It's much simple than it sounds in practice and it will take some getting used to. However, after a few turns it gets much, much faster to resolve.

Anti-armor fire is similar, plus there are specific rules for armored vehicles that cover their movement as well as overruns. The introduction of armored vehicles in these point of attack scenarios creates some interesting tactical decisions and greatly enhances many of the scenarios. Armor is not present in every scenario, but it is a unique approach and I expect some armor heavy scenarios in future supplements.

Assaults are of course, the focal point of the game, so a lot of time is spent on explaining how they work. There are several tables that go over this, particularly the steps in completing an assault. Again, once you go through it a few times it gets much easier, but the first few will take some rules checking. They are decisive in nature and it will take practice to do them right if you are the attacker.

One of the unique elements in the game is the introduction of time in accordance with the victory conditions. Each turn take a number of minutes, which is rolled for at the end of the turn. If you take too long in the assault you will lose the scenario. This is an interesting part of the game and forces players to get into the action quickly.

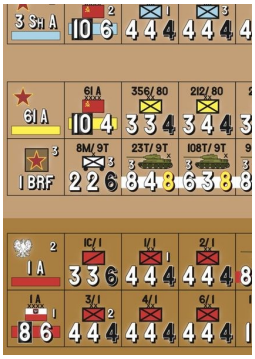
This volume has some fascinating scenarios in it and is a great complement to the original game. My only complaint is the number of markers that the game generates. Large hexes or smaller markers/larger unit counters would greatly help this in the future. The system works well and shows gamers the final parts of an attack or defense, but it will take some time to learn the system and figure out how things work. Recommended.

Over the last few years there have been several games added to what could be termed the "AVL" or A Victory Lost series. These games feature a chit pull mechanic, division and brigade sized units, step losses, basically the same rules, and one map. They are quick to set up, play quickly (well, except for the original AVL), and have high replay value due to the chit pull system. While the first games were from MMP, Revolution Games produced Poland Defiant, Across the Narva, and Konigsberg. Several of these originated with Three Crowns Games in Sweden and they have now produced a new game in the series.

There aren't a lot of games out there that cover German offensives in 1945. Stargard-Solstice was perhaps the last great German offensive on the Eastern Front that had several goals, most of which were beyond the capabilities of the forces that were available. The only reason it made any progress was that the Russian forces were really stretched at this point in the Pomerania region after their tremendously successful offensive. With Stargard-Solstice both sides will get the opportunity to launch offensives, making it an interesting campaign.

The components are where you really see the difference between Three Crowns and Revolution Games. The map, while certainly functional, is not quite as good as those put out by Revolution. The counters are the larger 9/16th variety, so no complaints there, but the font that is used is a bit unusual, as is the shadow on the numbers. There also aren't any tracks on the map for used activation chits, which was a handy feature on the maps by Revolution. Also, the decision to not include set up cards still baffles me for all of the games in this series. Fortunately, there's an enterprising gamer out there that produces them for free as they are a great help in setting up the games.

If you've played other games in the series, then you can literally just set up the counters and then check the special rules to begin play. If you've never tried one of these games the rules are pretty basic. IGOUGO, zones of control, combat with step losses/retreats, and then a reinforcement phase. You can get through the rules in probably 15 minutes and you only need to refer back to them for the random events and victory conditions. Once you get used to the chit pull system and the +2 for entering/leaving ZOCs, the turns can fly by pretty quickly.



During each turn the sides have a number of activations that they can perform according to the turn chart. On most turns the Germans get 4 or 5 activations, but there are usually more than that in the draw cup. When a chit is drawn, that formation is activated and every unit with command range of the HQ for that formation can move and fight. This certainly generates a lot of chaos and often you end up pulling a chit that you need at the end of the turn at the beginning instead!

In terms of game play, this one is a bit unusual. The game begins with a massive German offensive with two heavily armored German formations trying to a) relieve two fortresses, and b) cut the Russian supply lines. The Germans only get three turns to do this as on Turn 4 chances are that the Defend The Reich event will be rolled (anything but a 1 on a D6) and most of the German armor is withdrawn. The Germans need to hit hard and fast, doing whatever damage they possibly can. If they relieve the fortresses the VP markers on those hexes is flipped over to show the lesser value for Russian capture. There are quite a few VP markers spread around the map and it's going to take a considerable effort by the Russians to even get more than half of them!

Once that event is played things turn around 180 degrees! The Germans are now on the defensive while more and more Russian armor starts to arrive. The Germans are continually trying to shift their lines around and plug gaps with the few mobile units that they have left. They are helped by the terrain and the limited number of bridges, which is often all that stands in the way of a major Russian breakthrough. While things often appear hopeless to the German side, the chit activation system, terrain, and time are on the German side. The Russians need to seize a number of VP markers in select cities across the board, which is not as easy as it looks!

This is a pretty interesting game, no matter how you look at it. The chit pull system causes a lot of chaos and can really frustrate the plans of both sides. With the random events and chit pull, this game has pretty good replay value and will more than likely go in different directions each time that you play. The few component issues that I had with the game aside, everything works as advertised and it is a good addition to the series. Hopefully, Three Crowns continues to add games to this series and that the maps, counters, etc., will continue to improve.

BKC IV Germans Rush to the Defense

Battle Report

After a trip to the early Eastern Front, the later Eastern Front, and then a battle against the Americans, it was time for another appearance by the late war British. We really like the 4th edition of the BKC rules, so when a battle is proposed for a gaming night it usually passes with no dissenting votes! The usual issue, however, was applied here and that is we don't decide until about 24-48 hours before the game, meaning there's not a lot of time spent on the scenario!

With that in mind, one was thrown together that worked out pretty well. A British combined arms group has seized a bridge and pushed out beyond the bridgehead. The bridge, however, has been heavily damaged by German air and artillery attacks, so it is impassable until repaired. The British have a ferry set up, but it can only put one vehicle across the river per turn. The British force on the other side of the river will need to hold its position until the bridge is repaired, then move out to seize their objectives. To win the game, the British would need to seize two of the three objectives.

There were four Shermans, a Firefly, a recon unit, and a company of mech infantry already across and dug in near a wooded area. Each turn the British would roll a D6 and once the running total reached 12 the bridge would be repaired. There were two companies of mech infantry, a battalion of Cromwells, the remaining Shermans from the battalion that had partially crossed over, and several Fireflys ready to cross once the bridge was repaired. The British also had three batteries of 105mm artillery off board.

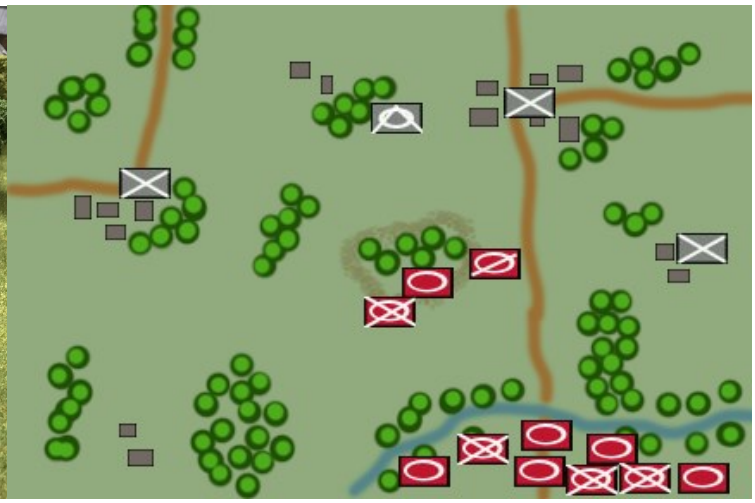
Meanwhile, the Germans were spread pretty thin across the defensive line. A company of Jgpz IVs and an understrength infantry battalion with one command unit was all that was on the board. A company of Panthers, a company of PZIVHs, a company of Stug IIIHs, and a slightly understrength battalion of panzergrenadiers were racing to the area along with some off board artillery. The Germans would need to roll to see if they appeared that turn and where they would show up at. This generated a lot of unpredictability and chaos for both sides, but in the end it worked out well for the game as both sides had to quickly adapt to an ever changing situation.

Both sides didn't do so great the first few turns! Some great artillery rolling by the Germans suppressed the British command on the other side of the river and the recon got knocked out as well. The Germans for their part lost some of the defenses to British gunnery as well. The British started crossing the light tank company while German reinforcements started arriving, but at locations across the board. While both sides desperately tried to come up with a plan, more forces for both sides continued to arrive.

While the battle continued to rage on in the center, with each side's artillery doing major damage to the other, the Germans started taking up more defensive positions and even thinking about a counterattack in some areas. The British were solely focused on getting the bridge repaired so that the armored forces could be unleashed. By the end of Turn 4 the Germans felt pretty good about most things while the British side was getting anxious as the bridge still wasn't fixed.

Finally on Turn 5 the bridge was repaired and it was off to the races for the British armor. A company of Shermans moved off to the left flank to support the light armor company who was taking fire from the Stugs that had recently arrived as well as the panzergrenadiers that had taken over the defense of the village on that side of the board. The remaining Shermans and Cromwells went over the bridge and to the right, where German armor was moving up into blocking positions.

This started a several turn armor engagement that saw both sides throw their available reserves into the fray. The Shermans and Cromwells tried moving through various gaps, but were met by fire from Panthers and Mk IVHs in a fairly close range engagement. Just when one side had the upper hand the other would score a ton of hits or (cont. on p7)



(cont. from p6) roll some great saving throws. After three turns most of the armor on that side of the battlefield was burning, but the British envelopment attack had been halted.

On the British left the light armor company, backed by Shermans, tried to move through the open areas and get to the objectives in that area. Critical command failures led to the commands sitting still for a few turns, which allowed the Germans to move armor and infantry up into defensive positions. There was still a chance at a British breakthrough, however, and the first exchange of fire was pretty favorable to the British.

Then the roof caved in! German fire from the panzergrenadiers 75mm AT gun and the Stugs forced the British to spread out and engage threats from multiple directions. The return fire caused some damage, but not enough. The German fire continued and the British had to respond by diverting more units to that side of the battle. These ran into a hail of fire as well and after a few turns there was not much left on that side of the battlefield for the British that wasn't burning.

This left the final attacks in the center, with the mech infantry backed by artillery and the remaining Shermans. There were several exchanges of fire and despite heavy casualties, the Germans were just able to hang on. The British players looked around for more reserves to move into the center, but there was nothing left. At this point everyone acknowledged that the British would need to pull back and defend the bridgehead with whatever assets they still have left.

Despite the quick set up and designing the scenario right when we got to our gaming place, things turned out pretty good! Due to COVID-19 we weren't really sure how many would be coming or if we would be playing at all, which makes planning a game almost impossible. Fortunately, it's hard to have a bad game of BKC-IV and with the die rolls for command, strange things can happen to even out the battle.

We are going to have to let everyone at some point start designing their own forces, which would allow players to take more artillery or even some airstrikes every now and then. Usually in the interest of time and keeping things simple, we usually go with a standard allotment of forces. We're also looking at some better ways to define hills and undulations better, which would avoid what appears to be flat battlefields in the images. More BKC-IV games are sure to follow.

WMA: Seleucids Try Something New

Battle Report

There have been quite a few Warmaster Ancients battle reports in these pages over the years and a good percentage of them have involved the Seleucids. The reason is that a) the army has close to 3,000 points, b) it's great for nights where we have 3-5 players, and c) it's simply a lot of fun to play! The incredible choice of units that are available really adds some character to the army, so you can have a pike heavy force, a force with a huge number of allied units, an army with a lot of skirmish units, or for those who like cavalry, you can load up on the heavily armed cavalry units as well.

One of the Seleucid's major opponents in our games are the Imperial Romans. Yes, it's the wrong era of Romans for fighting Seleucids, but then again WMA, like many ancients rules, allows armies from different time periods to face off against one another. The Legion special rule makes Imperial Romans difficult to fight, with the only saving grace is that there aren't a lot of them on the board! The Seleucids have had so-so success against this army, throwing elephants, light cavalry, a ton of heavy cavalry, etc., at them with various results.

For this game I decided to embark on an entirely different path. Despite all of the options available to me and all the units I've painted up, I went with an infantry heavy army to mix things up a bit. While the Romans went with their standard 2,000 point force with several legions backed up by some archers, auxiliaries, and a few cavalry units, the Seleucids went with this type of force:

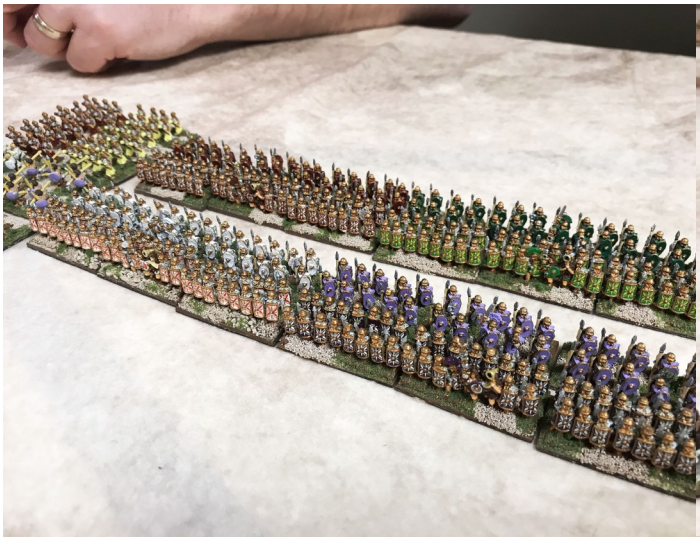
- 6 units of pike (two of Guard)
- 2 units Imitation Romans
- 2 units of Galatians
- 2 units of Thorakites
- 5 units of archers
- 2 units of skirmishers
- 2 units of light infantry
- 1 unit of artillery
- 1 unit of elephants
- 4 units of heavy cavalry (includes 1 unit of Guard and 1 of cataphracts)

This gave the Seleucids a break point of 12, which along with skirmish capable units meant that the Romans were going to need a lot of dead Seleucids to win!

In what was something of an anomaly, both sides had pretty good command rolls on the first turn! Both armies moved out from their starting positions and tried to get ready for the slugfest that was to come. Then the bad command plague hit the Seleucids where on turn 2 most commanders failed their command roll and the Romans moved closer with several of their units. However, they also had some issues with several of the big infantry brigades not being able to move.

Turn 3 saw the Romans just about win the game. One legion and its supporting unit moved an incredible 4 times! It slammed into the Seleucid artillery, which was quickly overrun after having only fired one shot, then crashed into a unit of archers that lost two stands in the melee. Another legion with supports moved 4 times as well, flanking one of the Seleucid pike blocks! Just three turns in and the Seleucids were in despair, but the one thing that saved them was that the pike block rolled just good enough to survive, including one series of rolls where they saved 7 of 9 hits! Right at that moment the Romans could see victory, but the Seleucids counterattacked and regained the initiative.

Both sides charged their cavalry into infantry blocks, doing incredible damage in the case of the Seleucids, while the Roman cavalry had their ups and downs. The Seleucids by this stage were doing more damage than they were receiving and the Roman units were getting slowly whittled down. By turn 5 the Seleucids started to take charge. (cont. on p9)



(cont. from p8) The Seleucids now pressed the attack, particularly in the center, where the Thorakites, pikes, and archers faced off against their Roman opponents. Both sides had some incredible combat rolls and some equally incredible saving throws, creating wild swings of fortune. The Seleucids were losing stands, but the Romans were losing units and by this time were nearing the danger point.

On the Seleucid left a wild battle between Seleucid cavalry, archers, and the Galatians against various Roman units went back and forth. Every time one or the other started to get an advantage, bad combat rolls would turn the momentum over to the other side. The Seleucids, however, were winning the battle of attrition and just needed to hold the flank a bit longer while the pike blocks did their damage.

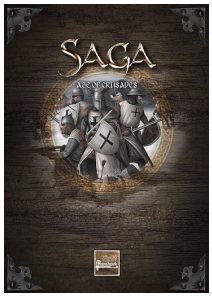
On the Seleucid right the terrain really hampered operations and both sides kept trying to gain the advantage, but were unable to. Again, the Seleucids were just mainly trying to hold the flank, which they did. There were some casualties on this side of the board, but nothing compared to the main event in the center. In fact, both sides spent most of the battle trying to figure out how to get their combat units into position!

This left the center to still be resolved. Legions and pike units charged and counter-charged, inflicting stand losses at every contact point. The problem for the Romans was that on at least two instances they rolled only a few hits, then the Seleucids had good saving rolls. The bigger issue is that with the new army choices, there were more infantry units to keep throwing at the Romans. While the Seleucids could afford the losses, once the front line Roman legions were destroyed, there wasn't a lot of combat power with the second line units, plus the special rules regarding the legions were then gone as well. After three turns of combat in the center, the Romans hit their break point and the Seleucids emerged victorious.

In the end, it's hard to say how effective the new Seleucid army list is. The lack of cavalry certainly produced stalemates on the flanks, where usually in our games the Seleucids triumph on the flanks, then it's a race to see if they can stop the legions from destroying the center. This time, however, there was a titanic struggle in the center where the Seleucids prevailed. Both sides had some amazing and some non-amazing die rolls, so it's hard to blame the dice. I'm sure the Romans will now re-tool their list for the upcoming rematch!

Two images showing the aggressiveness of the Romans during the first few turns-going all out to hit the Seleucids first.

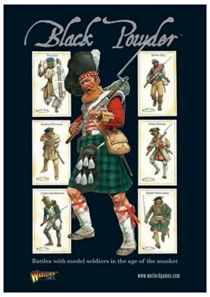
Number of Figures Needed-No Middle Ground? Editorial



There have been a number of threads recently in various forums that caused me to raise an eyebrow and think about some things for a while. The topics were in the vein of looking for what would be termed "operational" level rules for various periods based upon the number of figures needed. About 90% of the answers were either that you needed around 20-30 for a game or that you needed 250-500! Those are some fairly large ranges with not much in between.

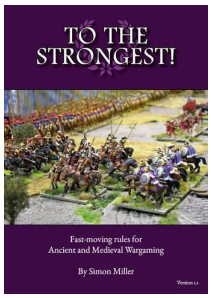
So, how did we get to this point where either you play skirmish or army level games? Back in the day, operational level rules would have been Johnny Reb (OK, maybe "grand tactical"), Command Decision, etc., where either one figure equals twenty real men or one vehicle equals one platoon. While our gaming groups plays Blitzkrieg Commander at that scale, rather large games of The Sword and the Flame (skirmish level, but with 200+ figs), along with other operational level rules, we seem to be the exception rather than the rule!

How did this come about and is it a problem or just part of the every changing wargame cycle? For much of the 70s and 80s, army level games was where it was at. Huge WRG ancients armies, Command Decision or Challenger slugfests, massive Empire III games, etc., were featured on tabletops across the planet. Most hobby magazines featured battle reports on these games along with amazing images designed to get you to purchase even more figs to build even larger armies! Skirmish games were reported on, but they were definitely in the minority.



In the 90s that slowly began to change and it certainly accelerated in the early 21st century. Today, just going by most forums, hobby news, etc., you would think everyone plays nothing but skirmish games! In fact, I've seen a few threads where gamers have asked if anyone plays large miniatures games any more, which they certainly still do. There are several Facebook groups that feature massive Hail Caesar, Battles For Empire, To The Strongest, etc., that have games with hundreds of figures per side. However, the fact the question got asked at all is interesting by itself.

Whatever happened to the Seven Years War games where two brigades per side plus some cavalry and artillery squared off against each other? ACW battles with a few regiments holding a vital bridge or pass? These are games with maybe 100-150 figures per side and easily attainable by today's gaming standards. I have no doubt that they are still occurring...somewhere. The fact is that you don't hear much about operational level games much any more.



Somewhere along the way, especially in the last decade or so, skirmish games have grown enormously. From the Osprey rules such as Ronin and The Men Who Would be Kings to Kickstarter boxed sets with miniatures included, skirmish gaming has become an entire hobby just by itself. Every period imaginable is now covered, from science fiction to Stone Age tribes with a set of rules and matching figures.

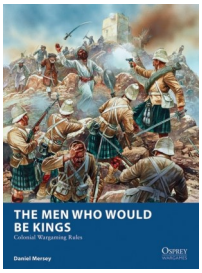
It's easy to see why it grew. You only need 10-20 figures per side, the rules are usually simple, not too much terrain, and games can be finished in under two hours. This fits perfectly with today's society where it seems most gamers have limited hobby time. It also allows gamers to dabble in multiple periods as the cost per army (or per force) is relatively small. On top of that, a large number of game companies have seen the success of this genre and are producing things for it as fast as they can. If you doubt that's the case, one only has to look at the Saga franchise which started out as a set of rules, but then has grown into boxed sets, figure packs, multiple supplements, and now even into the fantasy arena!

It's also easier to pull gamers away from the sci-fi games they're use to and get them involved into historical skirmish gaming. Again, small number of figs, limited painting, you can get into the rules easily, and the whole thing is wrapped up in 1-2 hours. It's much, much harder to get a WH40K player to commit to paint 350 Gauls for a Hail Caesar army! This has been and will probably continue to be a huge selling point for skirmish gaming.

On the other hand, although fewer in number, are those gamers who want to fight big battles. A 500 fig Roman army is just what the doctor ordered and that is the goal of most of the gamers surrounding them. They usually aren't interested in skirmish gaming (well, unless someone else does the work!) and operational level just isn't big enough. Ordering, painting, and gaming with large forces is the main goal. Now you would think that this "70s" type attitude would have vanished in the modern gaming hobby, but you would be wrong. There is a quite large segment of gamers who want to do large games with a ton of figures.

So why aren't there more operational level games? There really aren't any "gaming statistics" readily available, but from anecdotal evidence, looking at various forums, etc., you can see that operational level gaming is in a somewhat murky middle between skirmish and army level gaming. I'm not sure where to classify Flames of War as I've seen some pretty small games and then others with hundreds of figs on the tabletop. It's almost as if there's an artificial limitation on what kind of gamer you will be. Less than 50 figs needed-skirmish gamer. More than 250 figs needed-army level gamer. Anything in between is rarely discussed.

Can we get back to where operational level gaming used to be, which for a long, long time was the forefront of the hobby? I'm not sure any more. Both factions have dug in and show little movement towards the middle ground. It's not really a war and there aren't any losers as after all, it's just gamers doing what they want to do. With the time crunch in society, I would look for skirmish gaming getting even more popular in the next several years. Meanwhile, those gamers who love armies will still be promoting their games. This means that when someone asks how many figs are needed for a set of rules, the answers will still be 20-30, or 250-500!

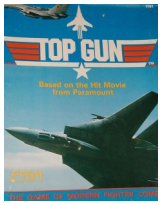


Memoirs of a Miniatures and Board Wargamer Pt. 43

Some Interesting Gaming Ideas

Over the years, I've seen a lot of interesting ideas that have emerged in the gaming hobby, ranging from new systems, unusual miniature scales, ways to make terrain, and so on. Some of these stick and create a trend while others vanish fairly quickly. Here's a few from "back in the day".

The Top Gun board game



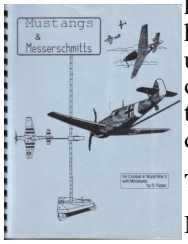
It's hard to describe the excitement when the original Top Gun movie came out, but many gamers, including me, went looking for modern jet combat games! This game caused a brief stir in the hobby when it came out, with it's cool box cover and plastic aircraft. Unfortunately, the game got old fast and wasn't very accurate, so it was quickly forgotten as everyone went to look for some other game on the subject.

FASA's Start Trek combat games

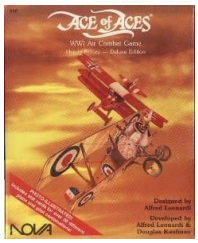
When Star Trek II and then Star Trek III came out, the Star Trek franchise was on top of the world. While the gaming hobby certainly had Starfleet Battles, many gamers were looking for something beyond that. Enter FASA, who briefly had the game rights to Star Trek. Besides creating a mass of products for their RPG game, they brought out several "combat simulators" for Star Trek ship to ship combat. They weren't terrible, but after a few plays everyone went back to Starfleet Battles!

Mustangs & Messerschmitts

Miniatures based air combat has always been tricky, but back in the late 70s and the early 80s one of the "go to" sets of rules was Mustangs & Messerschmitts. Using 1/72nd aircraft models, a rolling contraption with flight sticks, and some fairly complex rules, you could have some serious WW2 air battles. There was an investment in time making the aircraft, the flight stands, reading the rules, etc., but it was a unique experience. The main issues were that you needed a garage or large open area to play the game, which was not always readily available. The other issue was that it had the habit of attracting the wrong kind of gamer; i.e., those who would do anything for a kill. The rolling flight stands didn't help any either as movement got "fudged" quite often. After a few bad experiences our group dropped the game.



Ace of Aces

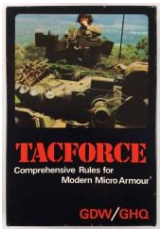


Probably one of the most memorable and innovative games to come out in the history of the hobby. Ace of Aces used two almost identical books to simulate air combat. Each player would call out their maneuver according to a page number, then through a series of flipping pages you would end up with a final page number that had a view of your opponent. Very clever and a lot of fun, plus you could use multiple books to have 2 on 2 or even 3 on 3 engagements. However, we got burned out on it by probably playing too many games too fast and it got to the point where you would memorize the pages that were good/bad for your aircraft. The game and it's follow up books, including a fantasy fighting series, vanished from our regular rotation within less than two years.

James Bond RPG

We were all big role-paying fans back in the day and besides D&D we would play Gamma World, Runequest, Tunnels & Trolls, Merc, and a lot more. During the 70s and 80s the James Bond franchise was huge, so when Victory Games put out their James Bond 007 RPG series, we jumped on board. While the components were top notch and there were some interesting ideas, the series had two big problems. First, when you have a group of 6-8 players it didn't scale up well. Second, by the mid 80s everyone was burned out on RPG games and this one sadly ended up in the pile of games never to be played again.

Tacforce

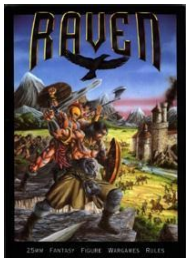


Modern micro-armor was all the rage in the early and mid 80s, at least for our gaming group. All of a sudden GDW, the maker of Traveler and a bunch of well respected games puts out a set of rules for modern armor. Our sense of joy only increased when you opened the box and saw all of the colored cards, the booklets, etc., and you knew that this was the grail that you had been looking for. However, as with most GDW games and rules, it was very procedural, there were only cards for the Russians and U.S., and turns seemed to go on forever. We played two games of it and moved on!

TFT Solo Adventures

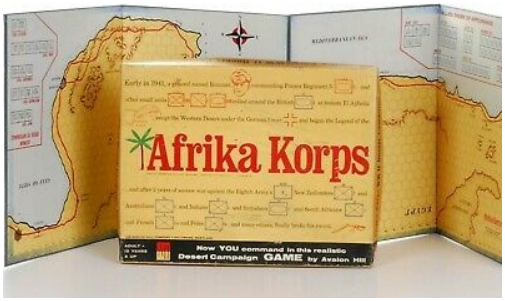
The one major problem with the RPGs of the day were that you needed several players. While Melee and Wizard, two micro-games from Metagaming had been popular for quite some time, they were pretty much seen as combat games and The Fantasy Trip RPG system was not as popular as many others. Metagaming, however, then released a series of solitaire adventures over the year that were not only challenging, but fun to play. The innovative paragraph style booklets were cheap and gave one hours of gaming fun. Even today, there are new versions of Melee, Wizard, and Death Test 1/2 with more on the way to go along with the main TFT system.

There was a point in time where many gamers, feeling dissatisfied with Warhammer Fantasy, went looking for something else for using their fantasy armies. That was when Raven came along, with a slick book that for about a year got everyone back into fantasy. I can remember playing this at a convention in the early 90s and there were quite a few interested gamers who were planning on building armies for it. But then you actually played the game! After just one play you could see that there were holes in the rules, some game system issues, and within two years it had passed out of sight.



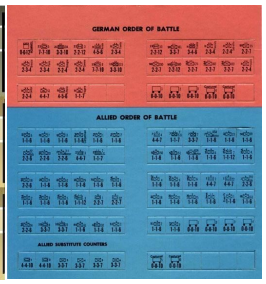
Modern publishing means that anyone's ideas can be turned into reality now, so I expect no shortage of rules, board games, etc., in the future. Whether any of them will be any good is the question...

Blast From The Past Pt. 42: Upgrading AH's Afrika Korps



One of the most famous Avalon Hill games form the beginning of the hobby is Afrika Korps. Along with D-Day, Battle of the Bulge, Tactics II, and several others, these games formed the core for what would be an ever expanding hobby. Afrika Korps first came out in 1964 and is still played today, some 56 years later, which is pretty good for any wargame!

When you first open the box you get a pretty good sized folding map board, depicting the area where WW2's North African campaign took place. There was a sheet of pink (Axis) and blue (Allies) counters, a set of rules, a small playbook, and some cards with the starting OBs and CRT. By today's standards they're not bad (well, the counters aren't great) and the game is pretty playable right out of the box.



The game is fairly simple, but there were some holes in the rules and you can sit there at times wondering if you're playing things correctly! Over the years, Avalon Hill would issue clarifications in their magazine, The General, and you could always send them questions through the mail. Over the last 54 years the rules have become pretty solidified and with resources such as CSW and BGG, you can get most of your questions answered pretty quickly.

Although the game has a lot of turns, it goes by pretty fast. The reason is that there aren't a lot of units on the board! With most of the action taking place along the coastal road, most of the turns are taken up by counting how far the units can move. The combat system is pretty basic, there's no air or naval units, and no step reduction. However, even though this is one of the first wargames, the game play is not too bad and there's a reason why so many articles were written about strategy over the years.

All that being said, can this game be brought into line with many of the more modern games that are being produced by GMT, MMP, Compass, and many others, with their beautiful maps, rules, and counters? The answer is: sort of. There are all kinds of files, home-made maps, etc., that are available for free and some of these files will take some effort to produce and there will be a cost associated with it.

The easiest thing to start with is to print off and bind the 3rd edition rules. There aren't too many pages and at least you get a set of rules that should leave very few, if any questions for when you prepare to play the game. There is also a new terrain effects card and CRT, which will replace the old one. You can also find many of the articles from The General as well through various sites that can be printed and added to the game.

For counters you have a few options. First, there are several versions available for free on BGG. You will need to print, mount, and cut them, which can be time consuming. There is also a version from a seller (Louis XIV) on Ebay that are die cut and work well as seen in the image below. The colors really stand out on the yellow map board. However, the counters for these old Avalon Hill games can run you anywhere from $20-35 a set plus shipping from Canada. However, there's no printing, gluing, cutting, etc., so depending upon your viewpoint they may be a good investment.

I tried both ways; ordering the new counters for the original game and doing the counters myself for the Operation Compass variant, even though there are new counters available for those as well. The blue and yellow counters from an old issue of the Avalon Hill General took some time to mount, cut, clip, etc., and they don't look great. I probably should have just ordered the other set from the same Ebay seller!

The Operation Compass variant is almost a completely new game that can be used with the Afrika Korps map. The game is 10 turns long, adds in air and a few naval units, plus things like Italian fortified camps and the LRDG. The additional rules are only a few pages and there is a full color OB for the set up and reinforcements. This will give you two ways to play the game for very little effort. As stated above you can print new maps as well, but that expense and/or time will depend on how far you want to go to upgrade the original game.

So the question comes down to is the effort really worth it. Should you buy the game ($25-40 will get you one in good condition), spend $30-60) on new counter sheets, print off the latest rules/charts, etc., just to play a game that's over 50 years old? That's a good question! If you're an Avalon Hill fan, a person who needs every option, a collector, or want to simply upgrade an older game, then yes, it probably is. If you're just starting out there's probably better WW2 North Africa games out there that don't need an upgrade right out of the box. For those of us who still believe that there is value in these old games, it's worth the money.

Engagements 39: Breakout

Situation: Red has launched a surprise offensive, catching Blue off guard. However, Red needs to quickly get through this area of rough terrain and break out into the open country beyond. If Blue can hold back Red's breakout attempt, reinforcements can arrive that will bottle up Red in this area for quite some time.

Period: Designed primarily for the Modern/WW2 era, but could work with other periods with some adjustments.

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

Terrain Notes: The water obstacle is fairly deep and can only be crossed at the bridges, which Blue still controls. The hills are gently sloped and are not a serious obstacle, but do give a height advantage. *The woods are extremely dense and are only passable by infantry.*

Scale: Can be used with any rules and any scale.

Red Forces: Red's forces consist of the units that enter the East edge of the board on Turn 1.

Enter Turn 1:

1 recon unit

4 units of armor

4 units of mech infantry

6 units of infantry

1 commando unit (special rules)

2 batteries of medium artillery (off board)

Set Up: Red's starting forces can be deployed in any formation and enter at the two Red arrows on the South part of the map. Red can also construct a pontoon bridge anywhere along the river that can cross two units per turn. Red can deploy forces ready to cross the pontoon bridge on turn 1.

Red Orders: Get as many units as possible off the board edges at R1 and/or R2.

Blue Forces: Blue is garrisoning this area with a few units, thinking the action has shifted to other areas. They can, however, call upon additional forces to reinforce this area.

1 unit of armor

3 units of infantry

1 unit of AT guns/ATGMs

1 unit of medium mortars

1 battery of medium artillery (off board)

Blue Reinforcements:

Roll 1D6 to see where the unit(s) arrive, using the R1-R6 entry points to correspond to the die roll.

Turn 2-1 unit of mech infantry

Turn 3-1 unit of armor

Turn 4-1 unit of mech infantry and 1 battery of medium artillery (off board)

Turn 6-1 unit of infantry and 1 unit of armor.

Blue Orders: Block any attempt by Red to exit units at A and B. Use your mobile units to intercept Red's main line of advance.

Blue Set Up: Blue must set up all of their units north of the blue line on the map. The three infantry units may start entrenched, with foxholes/trenches, and mines to their front.

Game Length: 12 turns

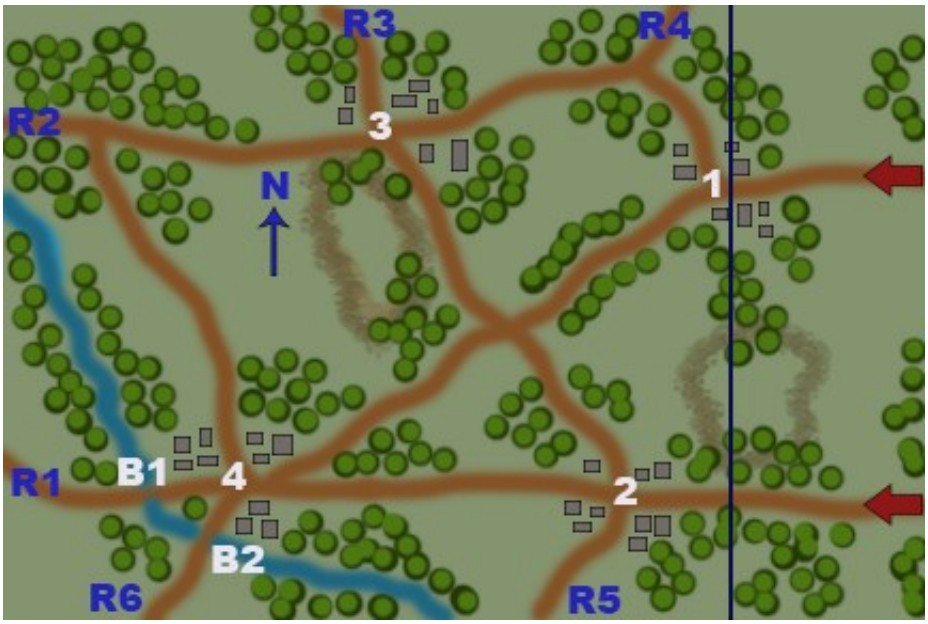
Special Rules: As stated in the Terrain Notes, the woods are dense and only passable by infantry. This means that vehicles are restricted to the roads and other open areas of the board. The bridges at B1 and B2 are wired for demolition, but can only be blown when Red forces get within 6" of either bridge. Roll 1D6 and on anything but a 6 the bridge is destroyed. Red's commando unit is placed after Blue sets up their defense. The commando unit can be placed at any of the four towns OR can attempt to seize the bridges. If they attempt to seize the bridges, roll 1D6 for each bridge on a 1-3 the bridge is seized and on a 4-6 it is blown and destroyed.

Victory Conditions: Red need to get at least 4 units (or the equivalent of 4 units) off the board at A or B to achieve a marginal victory. 6 units or more is a major victory.

Variants: Lengthening the board, spreading out the reinforcements, and giving Red more objectives would be a good start for a larger game, especially with 3-8 players. If playing the modern era, there would be a need to adjust for airmobile troops and attack helicopters, which could change the game dramatically.

Airstrikes, weather, and extensive entrenchments (anti-tank ditches, concrete bunkers, etc.) could also be added without too much difficulty. An opening bombardment and airstrikes might give Red some openings for their advance.

A variant that may take some time during play would be to add engineering units, particularly to Red. They could clear minefields, repair bridges, and help with attacks on towns where needed. The victory conditions could also be changed to seizing towns, hills, and crossroads, which would prevent Blue from garrisoning the back portion of the map.



Engagements 40: River Barrier

Situation: Winter is almost here and Blue is abandoning their campaign against Red to go back to winter quarters. The army and its baggage is meandering its way out of Red's territory and is almost to safety across the border. Red, seeing an opportunity to inflict one last defeat upon Blue, mobilizes a force and is racing parallel with Blue's forces. The only barrier is a quite wide river.

Period: Designed primarily for the Ancient, Medieval, or Renaissance periods, but could be used with the Horse & Musket period with some modifications for the increased firepower/range.

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

Terrain Notes: The river is fast running, but not that deep. Cavalry can ford the river at any place, but the movement penalties should be that they can't cross the river in one turn. Light cavalry or infantry skirmishers can search for a crossing for non-cavalry units. Each searching unit can roll once per turn and on a 5 or a 6 they find a crossing. For infantry the fordable areas should be treated as rough terrain. Each crossing is only wide enough for one unit in column. The hills are gently sloped and the wooded areas should be treated as light woods for this scenario.

Scale: Can be used with any rules and any scale.

Red Forces: Red's forces consist of the following:

Enter Turn 1:

2 units of light cavalry

2 units of medium cavalry

2 units of heavy cavalry

2 units of skirmishers

8 units of infantry

3 units of medium artillery (Medieval & Renaissance)

Set Up: Red's starting forces enter the road marked with the red arrow in column (or if skirmishers-in any skirmish formation allowed).

Red Orders: Cross the river and try to block Blue's force from entering the town and then exiting the board using the road. Find suitable crossings for the infantry to join the battle as soon as possible.

Blue Forces: Blue is marching down the road towards the town and then to the road exit. Blue's forces consist of the following:

2 units of light cavalry

3 units of heavy cavalry

6 units of infantry

2 units of skirmishers

2 batteries of heavy artillery (Medieval and Renaissance)

Baggage Train (see Special Rules)

Blue Orders: Move as quickly as possible to secure the entrance to the town and hold back Red's forces while the baggage train attempts to get off the board at the road exit.

Set Up: All of Blue's forces enter in column (or if skirmishers-in any skirmish formation allowed) on the road marked with the blue arrow.

Game Length: 15 turns

Special Rules: See the Terrain Notes for the rules regarding crossing the river.

The Baggage Train should consist of various wagons, carts, pack animals, etc., that move no more than 6 inches per turn, even along the road.

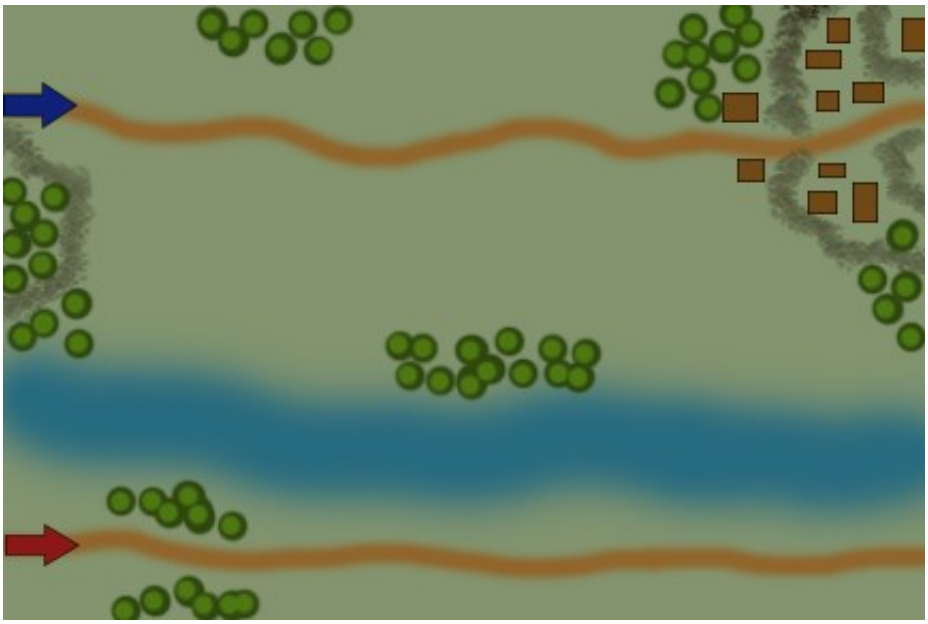
Victory Conditions: Blue must get the baggage train and at least half the combat units off the board by going through the town and exiting the board by using the road. Any other result is a victory for Red.

Variants: The first option would be to increase the size of the board and double the forces involved, which would make for a pretty good sized group game. You could also experiment with the composition of the forces and the length of the game, depending upon how far units move in your rules.

Victory could also be determined by assigning a points value to each piece of the baggage train, then either Blue has to exit so many points or Red has to capture/destroy that number of points to win.

Horse & Musket forces could be used, but the increased firepower range could make it almost impossible for Red to get across the river with enough force to challenge Blue unless Red is given additional units.

Recommended: Each side must split their army into three parts; an advance guard, the main body, then the reserve/rear guard. The main body must be at least 40% of the total unit strength and the advance guard no more than 30%. Each side assigns units to each force before the game begins. All of the units of the advance guard must come on first before any unit of the main body can enter the board and likewise for the reserve/rear guard. This will make players give strong consideration to which units should enter the board first and once set in motion each side will be unable to randomly grab units and have them come on when they want.



Finding Ways to Play in Lockdown by Rob Coleman

We recently moved to a different town, and in the new house I had to cut my gaming table down a little. That made Ronin a great choice to play with the kids after Christmas when the dust of the move and the holidays had settled down. Given our previous scenario together had also involved kidnapping Lord Otomo's daughter (I borrowed elements from the last 'Ronin' game with our group) I thought I would use scenario 2 from Dark Day of the Destructo Ray by Wiley Games (well worth the price of admission for the pdf). Like the last club game, I modified the scenario to fit my table and feudal Japan. Since I had captured Otomo's daughter last time as the Sohei, my daughter's female Sohei could act as an allied convent for this mission. My son could thus play Shimazu, and I could run my Otomo clan minis. It was a little tricky sorting out a 3 man scenario, but in the end each faction would start in a funneled area on one side of the table with random searches and the main objective in the middle. That balanced out any positional differences very nicely, and generally contributed to a fairly close game in the end.

Scenario:

After 'liberating' Lord Otomo's daughter, a meeting in a remote village has been setup with the Imperial Emissary who will broker a deal with the foreign devils for gunpowder and firearms. Otomo, Shimazu, and Buddhists have descended on the village. The Buddhists have a suite of forged documents and Otomo's daughter in tow, while the two rival clans have broken their alliance in an attempt to gain the upper hand in Kyushu. All players are out for themselves. The Imperial envoy starts in the garden and the woods are impassible for this game (the open air garden in the middle left of the photo). There are no alliances this time, Kyushu's future may be at stake.

Terrain:

A 4ft x 4ft table; the four corners should be filled with trees or blocked out to render them impassable. The village runs from one side to the other. Shimazu and Otomo clans start on opposite sides of the town, within 6" of their table edge. Rice paddies or similar fields extend to one of the open sides. The Sohei start within 6" of the table edge in the rice paddies with Otomo's daughter (who has no combat values for this scenario). Each of the buildings can be searched, if desired as seen below.

Scoring:

Deal out 8 cards: A, K, Q, J, 10, 9, 8, 7 to each of the buildings in the village (or a corresponding number based on your buildings). A model may spend their entire turn searching a building (i.e. they must start in base contact with the building and be unengaged, enemy models in contact with building count as engaged as if they were in btb contact. No searching while the foe is also intent on ransacking the place). The A, K, Q, J score points as followed:

A: Koban: The emissary has a large amount of koban that could be useful stored in this building. Score 2 VP for finding the Koban and perhaps you can keep your men fed this season.

K: Itinerary papers: This building contains the paperwork for the emissary's mission. Included are safe conduct passes throughout Kyushu. This would enable unfettered access for spies and assassins. This is worth 3 VP

Q: Supplies: Weapons, food, gun powder… the emissary is traveling with a small stockpile off goods which can be used to equip your followers. 2 VP for finding the supplies

J: Assassin: A ninja has been stalking the emissary, the model who discovers it may attempt to sway the ninja into supporting your faction for this scenario. Roll 2d6 and add them together, the searching model must score a 9+ (models with Commander may reroll once at their discretion) to convince the ninja to join with them. If the model fails, the ninja flees believing capture is imminent. If successful use the following profile:

Ninja: Rank: 3 Fight: 3 Initiative: 3 CP: 3 Shoot: 2 Armor: none Weapons: Shuriken, Katana, Attributes: Acrobatic, Kenjutsu

Emissary: Any model can convince the emissary to join them on a roll of 9+ (models with Commander may reroll once at their discretion, Otomo's daughter adds +1 to any roll). The Buddhists have the right paperwork, or one of the clans has convinced the emissary of danger. Failure means an unengaged model can try again next turn. Once converted the emissary joins the controlling player's team. Use the following Profile:

Emissary: Rank: 3 Fight: 3 Initiative: 3 Initiative: 3 Shoot: 2 Armor: none Weapons: Katana, Wakizashi Attributes: Niten, Yadome

At the end of the game the emissary is worth 5 VP to the controlling player

Otomo's daughter can be captured by either the Otomo or Shimazu clans. To do this they must be the only model in btb contact with her model at the end of a turn. Otomo's daughter is worth 1 VP if captured by either clan, but otherwise provides no VP for the Sohei.

All enemy models killed count as 1 VP, heads may be taken for an additional 1 VP per head.

The faction with the most VP is the winner. The game ends after 10 turns or if one side gets the emissary off the board. (cont. on p17)

Finding Ways to Play in Lockdown (cont.) by Rob Coleman

(cont. from p16) The armies:

I took some photos of the factions today. My kids each painted their own armies (my daughter received hers for Christmas a few years back, and my son received his for his birthday. If you have kids, be supportive in whatever they do or choose, it helps immensely in fostering an enjoyment of the hobby) and the Otomo clan are mine (the leader of each of theirs is one I painted up for them).

First up the NPCs (Ninja, Emissary, and Otomo's daughter)

My son's Bushi (his favorite color is green, and Shimazu seemed like a great choice as they were historical rivals of the Otomo clan, his head honcho is by me):

My daughter's Onna-bugeisha (Hers are female Sohei, so for this scenario an allied nunnery. We researched Warrior nuns of Japan, and I had her color up several pictures of a female samurai to find a color scheme she liked before painting):

Lastly, some of my clan Otomo:

Ronin is a great game for kids, simple with a nice mix of easy addition and subtraction. When painting with your kids, be happy with whatever they produce as it will encourage their interest in gaming. It also helped my daughter to research a little on Onna-bugeisha and to color in some black and white pictures (thanks Google) to decide on a color scheme. My son, who loves to craft, knew what he wanted from the start. Someday I'm sure they'll want to revisit their figures, but for now they work and help keep them interested in playing.

The game:

Word had reached my lord that the traitorous Buddhists had brokered a meeting with an emissary to the throne. It was said they were looking to negotiate the sale of gaijin made teppos and powder to support their revolution. When they heard of the imperial tour of Kyushu, they saw a chance to make contact with the foreigners, and so bypass normal trade routes.

Initially the Shimazu seemed willing to maintain our fragile alliance, but our spy in their camp revealed their plan to cut Lord Otomo out of the deal by ambushing the Sohei and forging the alliance themselves. I have always said bushi speak too freely before a girl when seeking her affection. She has more than earned her payment.

My lord snuck into the camp jump before dawn, coming from the east. We knew the emissary would be meditating in the village garden shortly after daybreak. This would afford us the optimal chance to reclaim what was ours and possibly seek vengeance upon the heathens and dog faced Shimazu.

Bold as brass the Shimazu strode in from the West, while the Buddhists surreptitiously snuck in across the rice paddies. Each group slowly searching the village for any worthwhile goods or supplies. Initial attempts met with no success on this front, while our archer and the Shimazu traded fire down the street. The exchange went poorly for the hapless Shimazu, who's jingasa saved him from the first arrow (my son rolled double 1s, while I stunned him in the first exchange, to then miss me again as I caused a light wound). Undeterred, the two drew again, and this time the honorable Otomo clan scored first blood with an arrow protruding from the Shimazu bowman's thigh.

The searches, meanwhile, were turning up unlucky for everyone. Cries of disgust could be heard across the morning air as would-be brigands and loyal ashigaru turned out hovels and shops finding nothing but useless junk. Finally, one of our samurai found an interesting scenario upon encountering an old man who pulled a sword on him (despite having commander, I rolled back to back 4s). Backed into a corner the loyal retainer tried to reason with the old man to no avail. Whereupon the 'old man' dropped a smoke capsule and scampered up and out through a window high on the roofline. It seems someone had not wanted the emissary to meet with anyone in Kyushu, but who? (cont. on p18)

Finding Ways to Play in Lockdown (cont.) by Rob Coleman

(cont. from p17) Near the middle of the village, the Sohei were surprised by a lone Shimazu spearman. Fearing he would give away the position of the Lady Otomo, they had no choice but to engage, while nearer to us two of our men and our Captain found two Sohei flanking around the village headman's house.

Without hesitation the two ashigaru rushed the initiate in the open where their superior numbers overwhelmed the more skilled foe, spearing her through the heart before taking her head (my daughter successfully parried the first attack, missed hers, and took a grievous wound. In the following round, wounded and weakened the two ashigaru finished her off and beheaded the figure…no time for nicety here…).

The archery duel continued, with a second arrow striking the Shimazu fool in the arm. By now any sane man would have run for cover, or perhaps he was loyal to a fault. This proved enough of a distraction for the Shimazu captain to reach the park and convince the emissary his life was in danger.

Our captain, fresh from his victory over one of the female Sohei, turned towards their lieutenant, who had also been attempting to sneak past the village headman's house. Barking a swift order, he and a loyal retainer pinned her against the wall while the other retainer was sent into the town square to chase the emissary, who was now fleeing back towards the traitorous dog Shimazu lines.

To delay the Sohei who had already reached the square, one of the Shimazu Samurai rushed out to block the senior Sohei while their archer traded fire with a Sohei archeress who had….Otomo's (cont. on p19) (cont.

Finding Ways to Play in Lockdown (cont.) by Rob Coleman

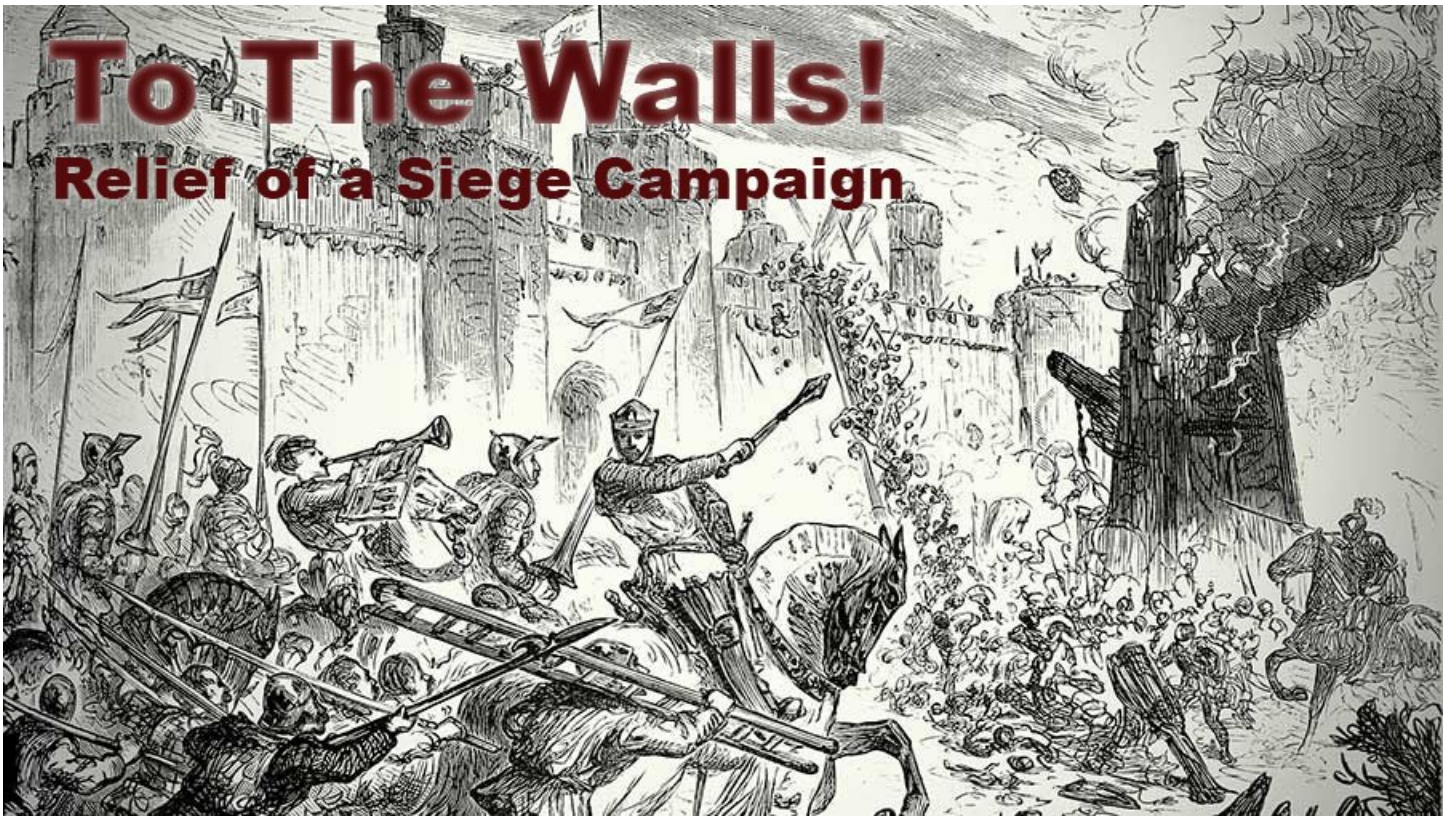
from p18) Daughter in tow! Our archer tried to wound the fleeing emissary but missed! Cursing his warped arrows, he vowed to have stern words with the fletcher at our barracks. The heavily wounded Shimazu archer, however, fired true putting a shaft deep into the bosom of the Sohei archeress. Alas her return shot struck him in the eye, and he collapsed dead to the ground.

The initial combat with the Shimazu and senior Sohei saw the Sohei draw blood first, nearly severing the samurai's left arm. Luckily, this slowed his speed enough so that the heavy nodachi merely dazed her instead of slicing her belly open. Our captain, meanwhile, was landing a flurry of blows, and on a return strike he neatly stabbed the lieutenant in the heart, garnering another heathen's head to adorn our spears. Truly we were blessed, as one by one faith shielded us from harm but smote our foes most terribly.

In the end the Shimazu captain darted from a back alley to cover the Emissary's escape. His blood curdling battle cry completely unnerved the hapless girl and in an open strike he neatly severed her head and sent it flopping down the street (my daughter rolled a 1 on defense to my son's 11 or 12, which made my daughter say 'ewwww' and then chuckle at my over the top narrative). Depleted and weary, the Sohei withdrew leaving us short on the needed trade contact but having reclaimed the Lord Otomo's daughter. I can only hope that assuages his anger at our failure to secure the trade agreement. At least the Buddhists will be unable to forge any documents now.

Overall, the kids had a blast and the game was close. My son won with 9 points to my 8 and my daughter's 6. My daughter won a previous game, so this worked out well. They enjoyed themselves and want to play again. So a successful lockdown gaming enterprise with ones I hope to enjoy the hobby with for years to come.

For the next time we will combine my Shimazu and my son's forces to build out a small garrison. Then my daughter and I will play ninjas trying to kill the emissary. I will be using Fistful of Lead rather than Ronin for it. The modifiers help with being able to do math fast, but I could see them occasionally get a zoned look at having to constantly perform such actions. The combat pool mechanism is still fun and one of the strong points of Ronin. It requires some planning to use effectively, and makes for some nice, cinematic, moments during gameplay. I also like the unknown of the card activation at keeping engagement higher. Lastly, have premade cards/sheets. Make sure the abilities are written out on them. This makes it MUCH faster during gameplay. Definitely one to remember when making up FFoL cards (i.e. instead of just writing Killer, also write out what Killer does).



Relief of a Siege Engagements Campaign

One of the more interesting elements of warfare is the relief of a siege, yet it is one that is hardly ever tried by miniatures gamers. Many have played siege battles or maybe scenarios where one side or the other is trying to raise the siege by fighting on the way to the siege itself, but these types of games are far and few between.

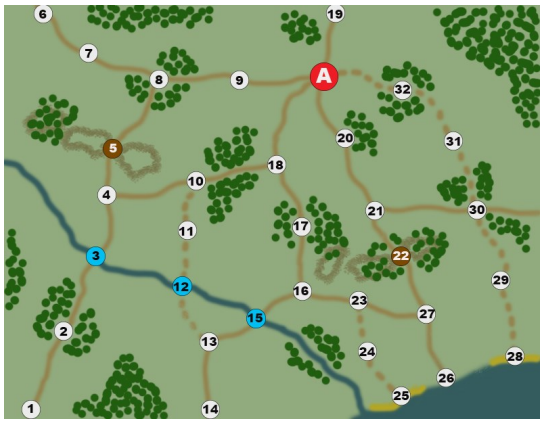
To The Walls is a short campaign system where one side is under siege by much larger forces. A relief effort is under way, but will have to get to the siege without being intercepted and defeated along the way. The relieving side must move their forces quickly, avoid the enemy concentrating against them, and then pushing on to relieve their comrades who are under siege. The besieging side, however, needs to find the relieving force, maintain pressure on the besieged force, then prevent any reinforcements coming to their aid.

The idea here of course as is with most campaigns is to generate interesting battles. By interesting, that means unequal forces, non-standard terrain, and the results of one battle may greatly influence others. Both sides have some interesting challenges in terms of strategy. Should the relieving force be split, then join at a certain point? Is it better to go the long route and avoid detection for as long as possible? For the besieger, do you just wait in the center to meet the enemy for the final battle or should you split your force to go find the enemy forces, then delay them for as long as possible.

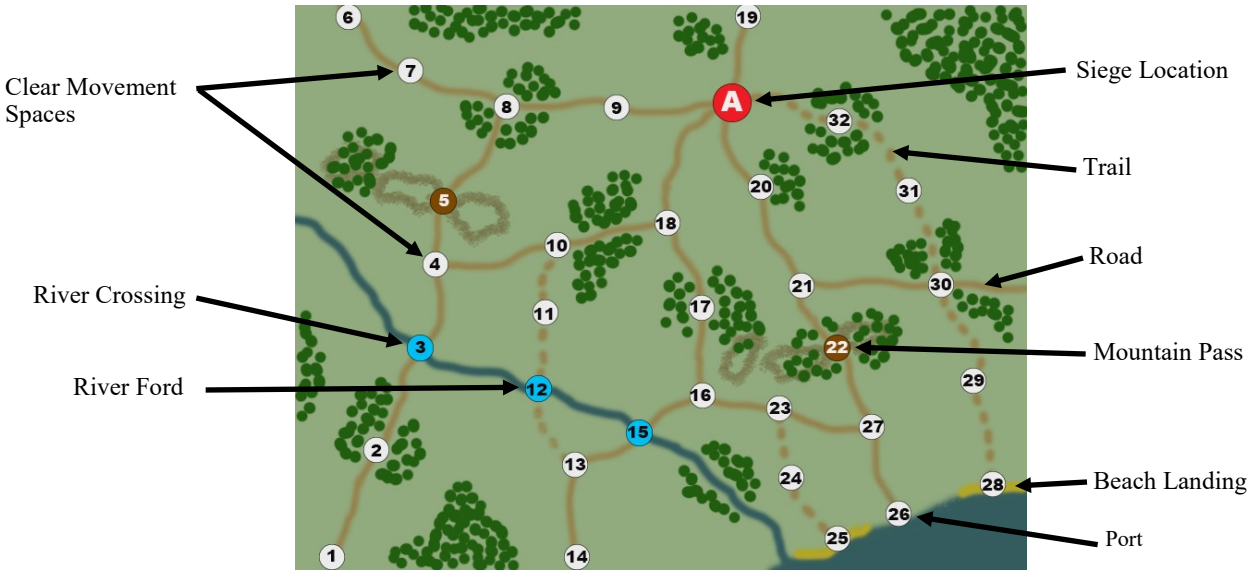
The campaign also uses a simple dummy system to deceive the opposing side, providing some uncertainty for both sides without resorting to use hidden movement (although that is still an option). There are several ways to limit intelligence and handle movement, so the players can determine which system will work best for their campaign. The besiegers also have an artillery train that will arrive at some point and that will greatly tip the balance of power towards the besieging force.

While the campaign would probably work best for the ancient or medieval periods, it could be adapted to the Renaissance or other horse & musket eras. The points structure can be adapted to many systems as long as there is some way to match the force ratios given at the start. For Hail Caesar a 500 point force for a battle would be pretty good sized and could be run by a few players. However, for Warmaster Ancients 500 points is hardly anything, so you would need to have both sides change their ratio, i.e., maybe multiply by 3 giving a force of 1500 points.

There are several optional rules that can be added to the campaign as well. Players are of course free to modify the map, change the forces, add their own optional rules, etc. The idea here is to provide a unique and interesting campaign that is fun for all involved.



The Map



Force Markers-Used to show the location of each side's forces on the campaign map.

Turn Marker

Activation Markers-Each time one of these is drawn from a cup, that force can move on the campaign map.

Siege Status-placed on the Siege track to mark progress of the siege.

Prepare For Play & Force Selection

Players will need to decide which set of rules to use and a points value for their armies. The forces should be about equal, but players may decide to alter the force ratios to compensate for player experience or situations. Basically, Red will have a small force that is besieged, then relieving forces that will arrive on the first turn. Blue has several forces besieging red at A and is awaiting a siege train to arrive and finish the job. Blue needs to either defeat Red's relieving forces OR hold them back long enough for the siege to be completed.

The availability of figures/units will drive the size of the campaign. Players can always scale down or scale up the number of points during battles to match what they currently have available. Points based forces are probably easier to track, but unit rosters could also be used.

Either cut out and mount the markers provided, or simply laminate copies of the map and use a dry erase marker to show where each force is. The Siege marker is placed at the lowest space (far left) on the Siege Track and the Turn marker is placed in the '1' space.

Blue then divides their available units into forces and places all of those at A on the map. Those force markers which do not have an actual force assigned to them can still act as dummy forces. *For example, Blue has 8,000 points (using Warmaster Ancients). 1,500 points will be in A as the besieging force, 2,500 in B, 2,000 in C, and 2,000 in D. E and F will still be on the map, but will be used as dummy forces to confuse the Red side.*

Red then divides their points into forces as well. The force at A which is being besieged, should be around 500 points if using Hail Ceasar or maybe 1,000 points if using Warmaster Ancients. Feel free, however, to adjust the point totals to reflect what you have available. Red then divides the remaining points into Forces that will enter the map on Turn 1. The other force markers that do not have actual forces assigned to them will be used as dummy forces.

Put all of the activation chits for all forces into a cup and Turn 1 now begins.

To The Walls!

Sequence of Play

Each turn, both sides follow a strict sequence of play listed below.

1. **Roll For Random Events**
2. **Activation Phase**-Chits are pulled one at a time and that force is activated for movement.
3. **Combat Phase**-At any location on the map where both sides have forces there is a battle.
4. **Siege Status Phase**
5. **End of the Turn**-All activation chits are returned to the draw pool.

Random Events Phase

At the start of each turn a player rolls 2D6 for a random event.

Die Roll	Event
2	Sally! Red successfully sallies forth and disrupts Blue's siege. Move the Siege Track marker one space to the left.
3	One additional cavalry unit joins any Blue force.
4	Bad weather. All forces can only move one space this turn.
5	No event
6	One additional infantry unit joins any Blue force.
7	No event
8	One additional infantry unit joins any Red force.
9	No Event
10	Siege Train breaks down. The Siege Train cannot move or participate in a siege this turn.
11	One additional cavalry unit joins any Red force
12	Night attack! Blue successfully takes part of Red's fortress defenses. Move the Siege Track marker one space to the right.

Activation Phase

During the Activation Phase players will pull the activation chits for each force currently on the map. When the activation chit for a force is pulled, that force can immediately move on the map. Once all activation chits have been drawn, play proceeds to the Combat Phase.

One activation chit is assigned to each force on the map, using the corresponding letters on the force and activation chits. A force that has no units assigned to it is termed a 'dummy' force. Dummy forces will move on the map exactly like real forces until encountered by an enemy force marker on the map.

When an activation chit is drawn for a force, that force can move on the map. Movement is always optional and when the activation chit of a force is drawn, that side can simply pass and move on to the next activation chit.

Movement

When a force's activation chit is pulled from the draw pool, that force can now move on the map. Each force has two (2) movement points (MPs) available to it, whether it is a real or dummy force. Each movement space on the map costs a certain number of MPs to move to that space. The movement costs are as follows:

Movement Space	MP cost
Clear along a Road	1
Clear along a Track	1/2*
River Crossing	1
River Ford	2
Mountain Pass	2

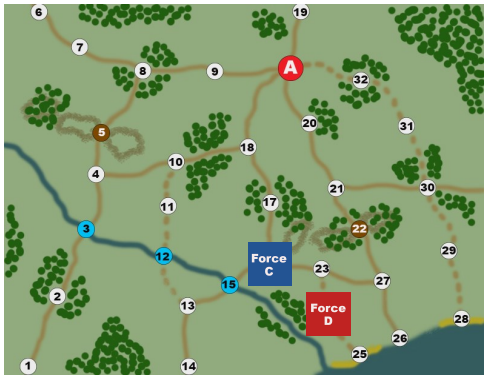
**When moving along a track roll 1D6 after moving to the first space and on a 5 or 6 the force can move an additional space.*

Fords and Mountain Pass spaces can obviously only be moved into by moving to the adjacent space and waiting until the next turn.

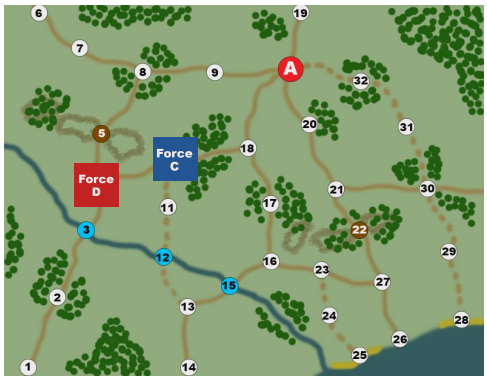
When a force moves into a space containing an actual enemy force, all movement for the activated force stops for the turn. If it is a dummy force, then that dummy force and its associated activation chit are removed from the game. The activated force can then continue its movement if it still has any remaining MPs.

If an activated force moves into a space where there is a real enemy force present and that force has not been activated for movement in that turn, that force can attempt to move out of that space when its activation chit is drawn. Roll 1D6 and on a 5 or 6 that force can move out of the space.

When Red's forces initially move onto the map, they can only enter at 1, 14, 25, 26, or 28. When entering a 1 or 14 those spaces do cost 1 PM each to move into. If a Red force enters at 26 (the port) it may immediately move one space to 27. However, this must be a real force and the actual strength must be revealed to the Blue side (spies in the port). If Red lands forces at 25 or 28 (beach landings), those forces remain at those spaces for the remainder of the turn, but can move freely on the next turn.



The activation chit for Red's Force D is drawn, so that force can now move. It moves along the track to 23 and rolls 1D6 to attempt to move further. The roll is a 5, which lets it move to 16 where it encounters Blue's Force C.



Red's Force D has been activated. It can move to 5 and stop as that is 2MPs for the mountain pass. Instead it moves to 10 where it encounters Blue's Force C. Force C is a dummy force, so Red continues its move and ends at 18.

Combat

Once all activation chits have been drawn for the turn, play proceeds to the Combat Phase. At all locations on the map where there are forces of both sides, a battle takes place using the miniatures you have at your disposal.

Retreat Before Battle

Once there are forces in the same movement space, both sides announce the size of their forces. The side who was in the space first decides if they wish to stay and fight. If not, they may attempt to retreat back to the space from which they entered the current space that has the enemy force. If they decide to stay and fight, the other side now gets to decide if they will stay or retreat.

Retreating is not automatic. The side who wishes to retreat before a battle rolls 1D6 and needs a 4, 5 or a 6 to withdraw. If that side has the larger force add +1 and if that side has the smaller force, add –1 to the die roll.

There are a number of ways to set up the battle and both sides should agree on a method before the campaign begins for consistency.

1. Designate a third party or one person on each side to set up the terrain for the battle.
2. Make a series of battle maps (the Age of Reason rules had a set where you rolled D100 to select one) before the campaign begins, then select one for the battle.
3. Roll for the terrain at each battle location.

The only mandatory requirements for the battles are as follows:

- Battles fought at A should include part(s) of a fortress under siege.
- River crossing spaces should feature a river as part of the terrain.
- The main road or track should be represented on the board.
- Mountain passes should feature narrow and/or constricted terrain.

Random Terrain

When choosing option #3, both sides write down a number between 0 and 10. Add both numbers then divide by 2 to get the number of rolls on the terrain table. Each side alternates rolling and placing the terrain, beginning with the defending side.

Die Roll	Terrain
2	24” ridge
3	12” stream (fordable)
4	Village
5	Farm
6	12” of forest/woods
7	Small hill
8	12” of forest/woods
9	12” of rough ground
10	Village
11	Walled farm field
12	Pond/Marsh area

The defender then selects the side of the board that they wish to set up on and their forces can be place up to halfway on the board. The attacker will then set up within one foot of their side of the board, then the battle begins. Game length is according to the rules that you are using (most rules have a withdrawal mechanism, break point, morale failure, etc. that ends the game) or it can be predetermined before the battle by both sides.

Pursuit, Retreat, & Permanent Losses

When the battle is over the loser will need to retreat out of that movement space to an adjacent space. If the attacker lost the battle, they must retreat back to the space from which they entered the space where the battle was located. *Ex. Red moved from 11 to 10 and there is a battle at 10. Red loses the battle and must retreat back to 11.* If the defender loses the battle, that force must move to an empty movement space adjacent to where the battle just occurred. If they are unable to do so (no movement spaces available or they are occupied by enemy forces) the retreating force is destroyed.

The winning force may elect to pursue the defeated force to inflict additional casualties. Roll 1D6 and apply the following, using the amount of cavalry that each side had at the end the battle to determine the modifiers. The number to the left of the result is for the pursuing force and the number to the right is for the retreating force. +1 to the roll if the pursuing force has more cavalry and –1 if the retreating force has more cavalry.

Die Roll	Pursuit Outcome
1	0/10
2	0/0
3	10/20
4	0/10
5	0/20
6	0/30

Once pursuit has ended for the battle, roll 1D6 to determine the permanent losses for both sides.

Die Roll	Winner %/Loser %
1	60/40
2	60/50
3	50/50
4	40/50
5	30/60
6	20/70

Siege Status & The Siege Train

During the Siege Status Phase of the turn, Blue checks to see how the siege is progressing. Blue rolls 2D6 on the Siege Table and implements the result on the Siege Track. This track shows the current state of the siege. When the marker gets all the way to the right side of the track, Blue wins the campaign. There are modifiers to the die roll listed on the table. As the siege progresses there are additional modifiers printed on the track that get added to Blue’s die roll.

Blue must keep at least the equivalent in points to Red’s force at A to maintain the siege. If Blue cannot at least match the points total Blue does not roll on the Siege Table for that turn.

The siege train enters on Turn 6 at movement space 6. The train has 2MPs per turn and if uninterrupted, should reach the siege by Turn 8. The siege train provides an additional modifier to Blue’s die roll each turn.

Winning the Campaign

If the Siege Status marker ever reaches the far right side of the track (Fortress is Taken) then the campaign has ended with Blue the winner. If Red can reach the siege at A and push back Blue’s forces from that location, the siege has ended and Red is declared the winning side.

Campaign Map

Game Markers

Force A	Force B	Force C	Force D	Force E	Force F	Turn
Force A Activation	Force B Activation	Force C Activation	Force D Activation	Force E Activation	Force F Activation	Siege Status
Force A	Force B	Force C	Force D	Force E	Force F	Siege Train
Force A Activation	Force B Activation	Force C Activation	Force D Activation	Force E Activation	Force F Activation	Siege Train Activation

Sequence of Play

Each turn, both sides follow a strict sequence of play listed below.

1. **Roll For Random Events**
2. **Activation Phase**-Chits are pulled one at a time and that force is activated for movement.
3. **Combat Phase**-At any location on the map where both sides have forces there is a battle.
4. **Siege Status Phase**
5. **End of the Turn**-All activation chits are returned to the draw pool.

Game Tracks & Tables

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
					Siege Train				

Turn Track

Siege Begins	Siege Lines Expand	Siege Lines Move Closer	Defenses Weaken	Outer Walls Breached +1	Breaches Expand +1	Defenders Fall Back +1	Inner Walls Taken +2	Final Assault +2	Fortress Is Taken!

Siege Track

Siege Track Modifiers

- Besieging force > 1.5 x besieged force -1
- Besieging force 3x size of besieged force +1
- Siege Track modifier +1/+2
- Siege Train on Turns 8 and 9 +1
- Siege Train on Turn 10 +2

Add these modifiers to the 2D6 roll each turn on the Siege Table.

Siege Table (2D6)

Die Roll	Event	Track +/-
2	Red sallies and destroys siege lines.	-2
3	Red throws back an assault	-1
4	Weather delays siege	-1
5	No change	
6	No change	
7	No change	
8	Effective archery	+1
9	Defeat a sally attempt	+1
10	Additional firing positions built	+1
11	Fortress suffers fire damage	+1
12	Food shortages and desertions	+2

Random Events Table (2D6)

Die Roll	Event
2	Sally! Red successfully sallies forth and disrupts Blue's siege. Move the Siege Track marker one space to the left.
3	One additional cavalry unit joins any Blue force.
4	Bad weather. All forces can only move one space this turn.
5	No event
6	One additional infantry unit joins any Blue force.
7	No event
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9	No Event
10	Siege Train breaks down. The Siege Train cannot move or participate in a siege this turn.
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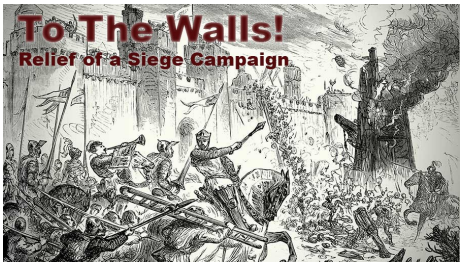
To The Walls! Optional Rules



To The Walls is a bare bones type campaign designed to provide some interesting battles without a lot of effort in terms of campaign planning, supplies, tracking replacements, etc. For those who would like to add some more complexity, here are a few ideas.

Supply

Make a Supply Depot marker for both sides. Blue needs to place it somewhere near the siege at A while Red will need to place it at one of the movement spaces where Red's forces entered. At the end of each turn all forces must be able to trace a clear movement path, free of any enemy forces, back to the supply depot to be considered in supply for the next turn. Any force that is out of supply gets only 1MP for the next turn when activated and if out of supply for two or more consecutive turns it will not be able to be activated.

Permanent Losses

Many gamers may not like the results on the permanent losses table, so they are free to change them to reflect their style of play. Another alternative is to just use the losses that occurred during the battle, which would certainly speed up the campaign. If you do go that route it might be necessary to add some kind of replacement/reinforcement system to prevent both sides from running out of troops!

Battle Maps

Instead of using the random terrain system or having someone create the tabletop, set up a system of game maps. Before the campaign begins, create a series of tabletop maps and then when there is a battle, randomly select one to be used. Also, keep track of which space had that map so if there is a second battle in that same space the tabletop remains the same.

Leaders

Allow each side to have leaders of varying abilities that are assigned to each force. There could be a randomly generated skill such as +1 for siege combat, +1 for movement, etc. At the end of each battle simply roll 2D6 for each leader involved and on a 12 they are eliminated. A replacement could then be rolled up or added to that force. Many Napoleonic and ACW board games have leader counters and rules than could be ported over to this system.

Siege Battles

Many Ancients and Medieval miniatures rules have a siege system, which could replace the rolls made on the Siege Track. At the end of each turn the siege could be fought out using miniatures, which would be more interesting, especially if the gamers have the extra troops and siege equipment.

The other option here is to map out a fortress and then use counters, markers, dice, etc., for the defenders and attackers. Design some simple rules that would allow the attackers to take over sections of the fortress and for counterattacks. This would give both sides a good graphical representation of how the siege is progressing.

Replacements

Allow both sides to receive replacements during the campaign, representing recruits, late arriving reinforcements, forced conscription, etc. Each turn the sides could roll dice to determine how many points/replacements they would receive, depending upon what miniatures rules you are using for the siege. If you have the time and don't mind a bit more complexity you could create "march regiments" where a counter represents several replacement points, which then has to march to the force where it will be added to that force. Each side could add a Reinforcements activation counter to the draw pool or simply have them move at the end of the turn.

Scouts & Reconnaissance

To increase the hidden aspect of both side's forces, add a number of scouting units to each side at the start of the campaign. For example, make three to four counters along with an activation marker for each. During the turn they will move exactly like other forces. When a scouting force encounters a real force, roll on the following table to determine a result:

Die Roll	Result
1	Unknown Strength
2	Small/Medium/Large
3	Within 25% of Force Strength
4	Within 10% of Force Strength
5	Exact Force Strength
6	Exact Force Strength & Scouts Delay Movement for 1 Turn

The results are basically learning what the strength of the enemy force is. For each scouting force that encounters a real enemy force (not the enemy's Scouts) roll 1D6 after learning the enemy's strength and on a 6 that scouting force is eliminated. If two opposing scouting force encounter each other, on a 5 or 6 the enemy force is eliminated.

Designer's Notes

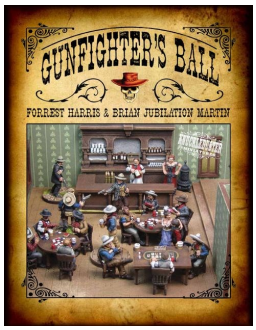
This is definitely a bare bones type campaign system, so players should feel free to modify things as they see fit. Without knowing how large a gaming group is, what miniatures they have, the terrain available, etc., it's pretty hard to design something without forcing gamers to go buy more things just to play the campaign! Also, there are so many Ancients and Medieval rules now that designing a campaign for one specific system is a bit counterproductive.

The relief of a siege is an interesting part of military history, but one that is rarely gamed out on the tabletop, so this campaign system is an attempt to rectify that. For the sieging force, how much strength to leave at the siege while the rest of the army marches off to delay the rescuers is a big challenge. For the relieving army, getting to the siege with as much of your original force is also a huge challenge.

As always, the goal of any campaign system should be to produce interesting battles that you would ordinarily not see on your standard gaming night. Delaying actions, suicidal charges, saving a force for the next day's battle, etc., are all things that are usually encountered in a campaign. Much of the fun of campaigns is the planning session, which in some cases can take up much of a gaming night!

If there's enough interest I could certainly apply this system to the Colonial period.

Gunfighter's Ball: First Try — Quick Review & Battle Report



Most of us in the gaming group have been gaming for several decades now and one of the periods that is fun, but hard to get a grip on is the Western gunfight. Rules have ranged from variants of The Sword and the Flame with a cast of thousands to Avalon Hill's Gunslinger, where virtually each few seconds is recreated and a short gunfight can take quite some time. We've tried The Rules With No Name, Phoenix Command (pretty complex), Boot Hill (TSR), rules out of wargaming magazines, and others.

Some of these we liked and some received only one play and that was it. They've ranged from the complex to mind numbingly simple and from counting every bullet to what looked like ACW battles on the board. As you can clearly see from the images we have a complete

Western town (there's about another dozen buildings not shown here) and about 50 figures painted up. One of our members had Gunfighter's Ball from Knuckleduster, a gaming company that puts out Western era figures, rules, and terrain. When he offered to run a game everyone jumped at the chance.

Knuckleduster sells a hardbound version of Gunfighter's Ball (around $40), which is all you need. However, they also have character cards, dice, a variety of card decks for game effects, and more. Yes, you can spend quite a bit just to get started and they do offer a boxed set of around $145, which gets you the rules, accessories, some buildings, and miniatures. This is a great way to get into the period or the rules if you're interested.

The game is pretty scalable, so you can have any number of players with each one running a few characters. The characters have cards which detail their advantages, weapons & ammo (conveniently on the back of card and designed for dry erase markers), and how many activation cards they get. Each player also gets 6 white poker chips and 3 red ones, which are used for wounds. Once you've used up the white chips and are down to the red ones your character is in serious trouble!

The game set up and play is relatively simple. Each character can have one to three cards in the activation deck, depending upon how good they are. When a card is drawn, that character can perform two actions, which include movement, aiming, shooting 1-3 rounds, reloading, etc. You can also forego a future activation card to "quickdraw" an opponent who surprises you by firing a hasty shot. The system works well, there's not much down time between activations, and there is a lot of room for customization.

Firing is also easily handled. While in some games it can be quite the chore, figuring out endless modifiers for each round, here it is all on one easy to use chart. Select the gun type, the range, then go down the list of modifiers to get a percentage that you must roll less than on a D100. Multiple shots knock the percentages down on the second and third shots, so while your first shot might be 50%, the second will be 40% and third $30%. Simple, easy to use, and it makes shooting pretty fun during the game.

Once you hit someone there are two options. The first is to roll a D100 again and see where it hit and how much damage it did. The second is to use one of the specialized card decks, which we found to be particularly nasty in the one game we tried it! Most results cause 1D3 or 1D3 + 3 poker chips (wounds), so a character might take a few shots before they're out of the game. You also have to keep track of your ammo and the last thing you want to have happen is to be in the midst of a firefight and have to reload!

We played two games of which the first was a three sided affair, while the other was a two sided one, with each side having two players. Each player had 2-3 characters and the games went surprisingly fast. The first game was definitely a learning experience as everyone tried out the movement system, how far things could fire, what happens when you get wounded, and so on. The game was over in about an hour, so you can play multi-

ple games of this on an average game night. The second game involved Pinkerton agents, Mexican banditos, outlaws, and even two female characters in a two sided shootout. This time the lessons learned from the first game were applied, which didn't seem to stop the chaos and the bloodshed!

We were able to finish two games in roughly 2 1/2 hours and that was with some rules explanation at the start of the first game. Overall, this is a pretty fun system and is great for those game nights where you don't have anything planned. Just choose a scenario from the rules, hand out characters, and start the action! Knuckleduster has a massive range of figures to go with the rules, so you can do shootouts, ambushes, raids, stagecoach heists, and more. Fast playing and a lot of fun. Highly recommended.

Age of Reason: French Cavalry Wins The Day

Battle Report

Even though Warfare in the Age of Reason is now in its 3rd edition, some of the group still prefer the 2nd edition for various reasons. Mainly, we had the modifiers memorized, so shooting and melee go pretty quickly each turn! We had not done a smaller battle in quite some time, not to mention that the French had not seen the table in about 10 years!

We set up the terrain in a fairly generic setting, with a good sized village in the center that would serve as the main objective for both sides. There was a bit of forest here and there, but no real obstacles in the way of streams, hills, etc. This would be a straightforward battle with nothing really preventing each side from coming to grips with the other.

The forces were pretty standard on both sides, with each having two cavalry and two infantry brigades. The infantry brigades had four line infantry (grade 2) and one grenadier unit (grade 3). The cavalry brigades favored the Prussians, as one brigade had a unit of cuirassiers and another had a unit of hussars (grade 3). With four cavalry units to three for the French, the Prussians would have a little superiority in that area. The Prussians had two heavy and three medium artillery batteries, while the French had one heavy, two medium, and two light batteries.

Because of the army lists and percentages, the Prussians had slight advantages in cavalry and artillery. Rather than simply adjust some things to make it as even as possible, we decided to just push forward and see what would happen! In retrospect, the French were closer to the village and terrain cover, so things actually worked out pretty good.

As is usual in Seven Years War battles, the cavalry seem to get involved pretty early. On the Prussian left there was no enemy cavalry, so the Prussians thought this would be a good chance to catch the French infantry and artillery while they were deploying, which almost worked. The French, however, formed square and fired, then withstood the charge, inflicting severe casualties on the Prussian dragoons and forcing them to retire back.

On the Prussian right the French dragoons defeated the Prussian dragoons, who in turn were hit by the Prussian cuirassier that drove them from the field. The Prussian cuirassier, however, had to chase them clear to the other end of the board, taking them out of the game for several turns. The Prussian dragoons, although down a few figures, reformed and moved to threaten the French flank, forcing some of the infantry there into square.

Now came one of the decisive acts in the battle. The other French cavalry brigade (the one with two units), surprisingly moved down the center road, withstood some artillery fire, then launched a series of charges into the Prussian infantry brigade on that side of the field. The Prussian infantry brigade had spread out with the idea of holding on that flank while the other brigade won the battle on the opposite side. The first Prussian infantry unit failed to go into square and was disordered. They were simply overrun and destroyed during the pursuit.

The other infantry unit decided to not take the 50/50 chance of changing into square and fired on the second cavalry

unit, doing considerable damage. However, in the melee they were defeated, pursued, and wiped out. All of a sudden there was a huge hole in the Prussian lines! The only saving grace for the Prussians was that both French cavalry units were down to 50%. One routed off the board when fired on by artillery and the second was chased down (cont. on p29)

(cont. from p28) by a Prussian dragoon unit on the other side of the board who just recovered from its charge on a French square.

On the Prussian left there were a series of artillery exchanges and firefights that hurt the French forces, but the Prussians weren't going anywhere quickly over there. Both sides were siphoning off forces for the struggle to come in the large village at the center of the board. Both sides controlled one side of the village and now moved in another unit. In AOR it's pretty hard to do any damage in towns, which is why Seven Years War forces usually avoided them!

On the Prussian right there were some back and forth assaults that exhausted both sides. Each side would advance, get met by artillery and small arms fire, then fall back. When the other side pressed their advantage they were pushed back as well. Although the Prussian cavalry was victorious on this side of the field, there weren't a lot of good options for attacking. The Prussian cuirassiers almost pursued off the board, so it was going to take them a turn or two to get moved into a threatening position.

Seeing this, the French pulled back all infantry and artillery to defend the main road. They also started moving more units towards the central village for the final showdown. The Prussians were in no shape to pursue on the right flank and were still dealing with the remaining French units on the Prussian left. By this time both sides were over 30% casualties, had lost some officers, captured a flag or two, and lost a battery here and there, which meant withdrawal checks. These were passed the first few times, setting the stage for the final attack.

The French attacked in the village. Despite the low chances of attacking, going up against the building modifiers, taking fire at close range, etc., they succeeded in all phases! The French infantry unit passed their checks, crashed into the Prussian infantry opposite them and then defeated them in melee, causing a rout. They then flanked the other Prussian unit who routed out of the village as well. The Prussians need to pass the withdrawal check by rolling under 12 with 4D6 and failed. The French won the game!

A really fun AOR game, showing that smaller scenarios are still worthwhile and tactically challenging. Even with set up and take down the entire affair was probably just under 4 1/2 hours and was well worth our time.

Earlier in this issue there was a WMA battle with two familiar opponents on our tabletop; the Romans and the Seleucids. The Seleucids had tried a new 2,000 point army list featuring some heavier armored units and a lower break point, which proved to be highly successful. But was that a fluke or the result of some hot dice? As part of our plan to try to do a WMA battle then learn how to play GMT's Wild Blue Yonder on the same night, we decided to run the same armies one more time. Little did we know that what we thought would be a small, quick battle turned into a four hour slugfest!

As we've mentioned many times in these pages, the Romans seem to have standard 1500, 2000, and 2500 point forces. Naturally, these feature hard hitting legions, auxiliaries, archers, some skirmish units, then just enough cavalry to tie up the other sides flank attacks. If not the most exciting army in the lists it certainly is efficient and has won many, many times over the years.

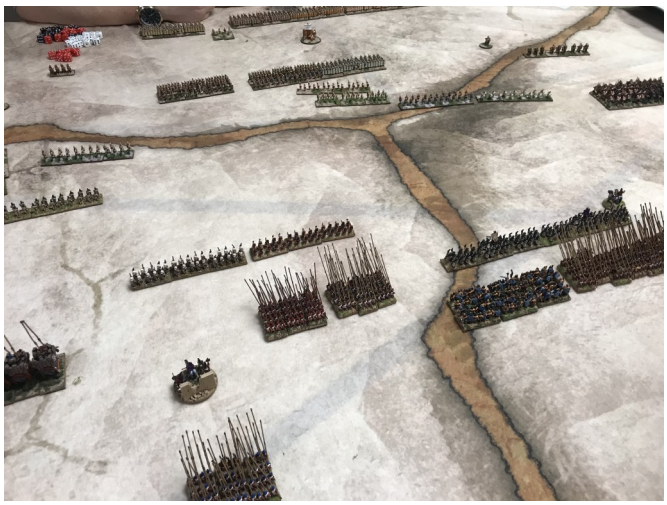
The Seleucids, however, can pull from a rather large and unusual army list. In an effort to make things interesting, they usually include camel troops, elephants, Thorakites, pike units, light cavalry, etc., that forms a colorful and unpredictable army with a high break point. However, in this and the last battle, the Seleucids went with a smaller force, but one that was a bit more heavily armored and packs a serious punch.

The backbone of this 2,000 point force is of course the six pike units. They are joined by two units of Guard heavy cavalry, one more unit of heavy cavalry, and a unit of cataphracts. There are Galatians, Imitation Legions, and Thorakites to back up the pike units, all who have armor saves and who can stand up to the legions. However, with a smaller break point they need to do their damage quickly before attrition grinds them down. The first test was pretty successful, so now we would see if those results could be replicated.

Both sides had pretty good starts, but on turn 2 the command problems for both the Seleucid left and the Roman rear started to have problems that would continue for quite some time. Both sides moved out in anticipation of early combat, so they each positioned their forces to get in at least one charge as well as trying to knock out the other sides skirmishers.

Here is where the Romans did very well at the start of the game. Their skirmishers easily dispatched the two units of Seleucid skirmishers, then had great rolls when going up against some of the Seleucid cavalry on the flank. By turn 3 there were two Seleucid units heavily damaged for little in return. Things were looking up for the Romans, but there was one small problem that was to plague them all night long.

The issue is that in Warmaster Ancients when you destroy a non-skirmishing unit it counts as a break point. If you only destroy two of the three stands it only counts as one half of a break point. When a side hits its break point limit (12 for the Romans and 11 for the Seleucids) it loses the battle. The Romans simply could not kill off entire units. There were several seriously damaged Seleucid units out there, but the Romans weren't able to furnish the killing blow on many of them.



The Seleucid Guard cavalry then came to the rescue, launching multiple charges side by side (this inflicts an unbelievable 30 D6s!) which simply obliterated opposing units and they made most of their saves as well. The center was rapidly becoming an archery contest and meanwhile, units on both sides that had been immobile due to bad command rolls for several turns in a row, finally joined the battle.

At this point it came down to the legion and pike units, who crashed into not only each other, but several of the allied formations. There was no real crushing success for either side across the width of the center, but rather a few local victories and defeats here and there. By turn 7 both sides had suffered plenty of casualties, but the Romans were trailing in break points, 8 to 4. The Romans at this point went all in and now it became a war of attrition. There were a few final cavalry charges, the elephants got into the action, and there were some desperate pike vs. legion battles. In the end, however, the Romans broke, losing 12 to 9.

Usually, including set up, we can get through a 2,000 points per side battle in just under three hours. Not so with this one, which went almost a full four hours! Many failed command rolls, massive battles, etc., made this a long playing slugfest. The Seleucid heavy list is now 2-0, so my guess is that the Romans are going to counter this with a few changes next time. Meanwhile, we have plans to see if this new list can stand up to the hordes that the Indians can mass!

Six more images showing the slugfest between the Seleucids and the Romans. The inability of both sides to get their heavy infantry to charge at the right time made this a long, protracted affair that turned into a battle of attrition. In the end the Seleucids were victorious as they had a number of units that were damaged, but the Romans were unable to finish them off.

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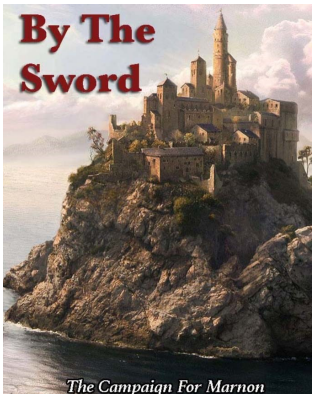
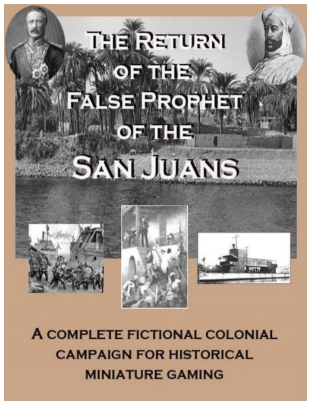
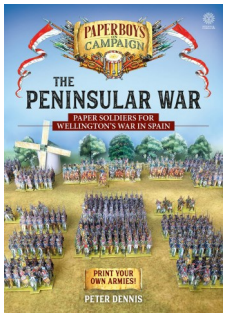


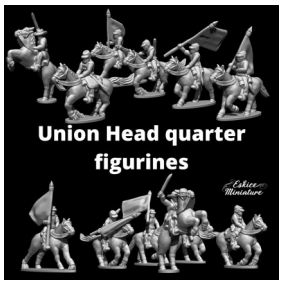


Be sure to check out our various campaigns for rules such as WMA, TSATF, and BFE II on our web site.



Two things that are rapidly changing the hobby are 3D printing and paper soldiers. Both are interesting developments and cannot help but have an impact on the hobby, but whether it is big or small remains to be decided. 3D printing has been around for a few years now,, but it's only recently that a large number of Kickstarter projects, companies offering 3D files, etc., have emerged onto the scene in greater numbers. While the first examples were crude to say the least, as time has passed and the printers are getting better, so has the quality of the miniatures. Today you can get large numbers of files to print all scales of buildings for almost any period and the actual availability of figures is growing as well. Many Kickstarters are offering files for entire armies in all scales and either as single figures or in strips of various sizes. Some are pretty good while others simply don't look right, but it's up to each gamer to decide what they want in the end.

While printer prices have dropped and the material is relatively cheap, I often wonder why some gamers are printing off everything in sight. Is it because they can? Is it to send miniature manufacturers a message or challenge? I once calculated a Kickstarter project that was offering some pretty average 15mm plastic STL files and determined that you could get more Blue Moon 15mm ACW figures for the same price and of better quality. However, the Kickstarter had hit its goal, so obviously there were some gamers who wanted it that way. I've printed several 3D buildings and while passable, they were not as good as their metal, wood, or resin counterparts sold by gaming companies. Now this may change in the future and maybe it's just the challenge or the dream of being able to print several thousand figures at home. My feeling is at this time the cost of the printer, the files, and the time spent printing and cleaning up the figs just isn't cost effective for what you get compared to the offerings by figure manufacturers. Again, this may change in the future and the next wave of printers may create incredible miniatures quickly and for very low cost, but we'll see. The interesting thing is that no matter how many hundreds or thousands of figs you print, you still need to paint them and that seems to still be the biggest obstacle of all!



For those who hate painting, however, paper soldiers are really taking off. They've been with us for awhile, but the recent offerings are appearing more and more in various forums and gaming sites, so obviously it's growing. If you want to dabble in a period, but aren't sure about dropping several hundred dollars on figs, books, paint, etc., this is a low cost alternative. While they in no way look as good as painted armies on the tabletop, for many gamers this will fit the bill. They fit nicely with the current hobby trends, namely getting a game to the tabletop as quickly as possible and cycling through games as fast as one can.