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Books I've Read

Solid as a Rock: Fallschirmjager Regt 1
The Pig War and the Pelican Girls
The Roman Auxiliary Units of Britain
Light Panzers
The Life of Samuel H. Walker
The Tenacious Nurse Nichols
Che Guevara's Final Adventure: *LatAmerWar* 45
STUG III: East Front 1944 - *TankCraft* 44
VGC 2025 Guide to Video Games
Cormac Mac Art: Sign Moonbow (fantasy novel)
War Against Partisans: Operation Barbarossa
Fighting Ships US Navy 1883-2019: V4 P3 DDs
III Germanic SS Panzer-Korps: V2 1943-1945
Generals and Admirals of 3rd Reich: Vol 3
War of 1812: The Canadian Theater 1813
Into the Inferno: B-17 Gunner Over Europe

The Year That Made America: 1775-1776
German Way of War: Eastern Front 1944-5
The Forecast for D-Day: Weatherman
Hitler's Heroes During Stalingrad Advance
Leatherneck Warrior: Gen. Lemuel Shepherd
Five Flags: Warship That Reshaped The World
Korea: War Without End
Nashorn: East Front 1943-45 - *TankCraft* 45
DFS 230 Combat Glider: *Luftwaffe Eagles* 3
Serenity (sci-fi novel)
Red Army Self-Propelled Guns of WWII
Hitler's Housewives: WWII German Homefront
Assault from the Sky: USMC Heli Ops Vietnam
War of 1812: Chesapeake Campaign 1813-1814
Omaha Beach: D-Day June 6, 1944
The Panavia Tornado at Low-Level

Samurai vs. Samurai: *RUSE* Raid

by Russ Lockwood

Daimyo Russanaga eyed the village of SpeEdo just across his border with displeasure. It contained that troublesome Shinto priest preaching about peace, love, and understanding instead of obedience to daimyos. Russanaga edged his horse forward towards the gate. His pair of mounted bodyguards kept pace.

The sleepy village of SpeEdo. Temple at bottom left corner at end of Main Street. Barn in upper middle.

The place was nothing special. It looked like any other village with houses, samurai swimwear sewing barn, and a modest temple. Russanaga scowled. "That refugee priest from my territory needed reminding about what opinions he should spout. A border will not protect him from me."

Russanaga's spies told him it was held by a bunch of peasants supplemented by seven samurai. That didn't worry him. What worried him was the samurai reinforcements of Daimyo Renaudimoto who would hurry to meet any incursion. It had to be in and out. Grab the priest quick and get back across the border quicker.

Adding to Russanaga's worry was the presence of the Prince formerly known as a kanji symbol for music. You could tell he was a Prince because his horse sports a Purple Rein.

The Prince leads his bodyguards.

Defense

The temple and priest were at the far end of the village at the end of Main Street. Samurai and peasants guarded him.

Two units of arquebus-armed troops and a unit of peasants held the low-walled barn. In the hills by the watch tower, another group of ill-clad rabble waited.

They were generally clad in Blue.

Offense

Besides his own and Prince's small cavalry units, Russanaga counted on a unit of archers, one of arquebusiers, two ashigaru spear, and two of samurai. Plus, he could call on ninjas if needed. His troops were generally clad in Red.



The Battle

The defending arquebusiers shot first and put a bullet between the eyes of an ashigaru spearman. My spearmen charged the peasants.

Did I say peasants? No! It was a unit of elite warrior monks with special double melee powers. The ashigaru never stood a chance. Those who were not dead...fled.

Warrior monks rout my samurai in the woods and in turn are routed.



I wheeled my archers to face the other unit, which was indeed peasants. They took some scares, but otherwise were fine. I sent my samurai spearmen around a house. Seeing the hesitation of the enemy arquebusiers and peasant gunmen in reloading, I led my bodyguard down Main Street towards the prize.

I lead my bodyguard through the gate towards the temple at the end of the street.

On the right, my elite samurai Katana masters filtered into the woods, only to be met by a group of peasants.

Wait! No!

Did I say peasants? Oh, strangle me with my obi! It was another unit of elite warrior monks screaming into the attack. Like the other monks, they had double melee and strike first. Even samurai didn't stand a chance. What few remained fled.

Time for payback. I wheeled my arquebusier unit and fired on the warrior monks. It was a clean shot and took down half of the monks. The others fled for the hills and were never seen again in this battle.



RUSE Activation and Combat

A common card deck mixes cards enough for all units to activate, but the cards are not slugged to a particular unit. That means players decide which units activate when a card shows up. The first activation for a unit is automatic, but if you try to activate it again, you need to pass a die roll. If you try again, it's two die rolls. Nice decision point for gambling whether or not to activate a previously activated, but nicely positioned, unit. During our game, we both used this option for better and worse.

Troublesome priest guarded by two samurai and peasants.

Combat is a straight up roll of d6s for wounds and “scares” (shocks to morale) and then the straight up roll of d6s



for saves to both. In addition, some armor can prevent wounds against some weaponry. That's important since most soldiers are eliminated when they take one wound. Heroes (each of the seven samurai in this scenario) can take two wounds. They also get two attacks instead of one per activation.

Attacks occur with swiftness and small units and units that have taken losses get suppressed or rout faster than big, intact units. Makes sense.

Motocross faces down my entire samurai unit.

Back To The Battle

That still left the original enemy warrior monks and my second unit of ashigaru spear in front of them. I sent the ashigaru wide left. I looped samurai with spear to the right, using the houses as a screen before bursting upon the peasant gunmen. The slaughter was short and sweet. Only a single peasant fled.

One of the seven samurai, Motocross, drew his katana and raced to the attack. It was one on six, but the hero ignored the odds. Yet, the odds proved too much for him. Stabbed once deep enough to wound, he retreated.

My victorious samurai then saw the backs of the original enemy warrior monks and charged. Taken by surprise, the monks dropped their guns and used improvised weaponry. Despite their training, half were hacked down, but the other half knew no fear and stood their ground, tying up half my samurai spear in continuing combat.

Motocross looked at the odds -- only one on three now -- and charged. He hacked down one and then another. The melee continued.

That left my advance down main street in the middle. Renaudimoto waited until me and my bodyguard were isolated and then sent his cousin on his mother's side thrice removed, Quasimoto, to attack. It was an even fight. Alas, the goddess of fortune favored Quasimoto and my troop fled back the way it came.

Before I had a chance to compose my lads, Quasimoto charged anew. Once again, we were driven back, this time to the very gate itself.

Quasimoto keeps pushing me back.



A third time proved a charm for Quasimoto, slaying one of my lads and forcing us to flee again.

At that point, half my force had been slaughtered or routed. Seeing me leave convinced my remaining units to leave as well.

Thoughts

Oh boy, did the d6 dice hate me early on. When rolling high is good, you can only roll so many 1s and stick around. The dice rallied in the middle, but the damage was done -- and ongoing.

True, I had confused warrior monks (elite melee-trained) for peasants (poor)...twice. And I never brought my ninja unit into play because I was trying to strip away units from the defense before bringing in my own high-powered fellows.

Renaud's reinforcement cards and reinforcements came fast and furious so that my initial advantage evaporated.

But the main difference was in the number of activation cards. I had nine units (eight on table plus the off-table ninjas) and thus nine activation cards versus Renaud's six units plus seven hero samurai and thus 13 activation cards. In addition, three enemy reinforcement cards became another three activation cards for a total of 16 by mid-game.

Sixteen versus nine means an almost 2:1 advantage in randomly pulled cards. Since an activation card can activate any unit and already activated units can die roll to reactivate, I began learning that my troops had less opportunity to activate than the defenders.

Indeed, there was a real short turn when I couldn't do anything at all because the two jokers (end turn mechanic) showed up before one of my activation cards. It was a pretty cool surprise. It also made us contemplate the balance of cards within a deck as a way of offering an advantage to one side or the other.

Well, as for the game, I was the bad guys attacking the village defended by seven hero samurai...and was suitably sliced, diced, and chased off!

Another interesting game. Thanks, Renaud.



Some of my cards during the game.

Star Wars: Clone Wars Card Game

by Russ Lockwood

This card game uses the same mechanics as the *Star Wars* card game (see the 4/21/2025 AAR) except with Clone Wars graphics. All the greats are available in the deck: Anakin, Padme, Obi-Wan, Jar-Jar Binks -- OK, I'm not sure "great" would apply to Jar-Jar, but his card is in the deck.

By random roll, I was the Separatists, i.e. the sentient beings controlling the Droid Army. This game, I managed to buy some ships to protect my planet. They were blown up pretty quick.

In the flurry of card buys and plays, our bases fell until we had lost three each and had damage accruing on the last when Renaud's Republic force smashed the last of my bases for the win.

That's the second *Star Wars* Card Game that came out so close. Based on a universe of two games, it seems well balanced.

Nifty game.



Jake (left) and Pat move the Canadians against my German defense. Le Hamel center bottom. Rots across bridge to right.

Von Lockwood: Return to WWII Normandy

by Russ Lockwood

After the debacle at defending the town of Pepe Le Pew and Hill 13 (see the 3/3/2022 AAR) and the subsequent debacle at defending the town of Annabelle and Hill 14 (see the 4/4/2022 AAR), Major von Lockwood managed to evade Allied patrols and stumble his way back to German lines. With medical clearing his return to duty, orders came for him to report to General Burkhalter, in charge of personnel. Into the office Von Lockwood went.

The battlefield. Canadians coming from left.

“Von Lockwood reporting as ordered.”
He snapped off a salute in the process.

Seated behind the desk, Burkhalter
waved a tired salute. “Have a seat, Major.”

Von Lockwood sat at attention in the



padded chair. Two defeats in two spots filled the Major with anxiety.

A German Panther rolls towards Le Hamel. Image from web.

The General read through a folder. "Interesting combat record, Major. Two hill defenses, two retreats. Wounded. Captured. Escaped."

Von Lockwood said not a word. No question. No answer.

"Spirited defense at times, though. Made do with what you had against...British paratroopers. With tank support. Interesting." The General stopped reading. "You're experienced. Just what we need at the moment. Too many officer and NCO casualties. Would a new command interest you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good." Burkhalter flicked open another folder. This one with a black tab. "New regiment getting inserted into the line with one of its battalions plugging a gap. Trained to a certain extent. A bit hasty, to be sure. Still interested?"

"Certainly, sir." Sounds like another overmatched defense, von Lockwood thought, but such defeatism never crossed his lips.

"The bad news is that you cannot be a major and command this unit. The good news is that you've been promoted to Oberstleutnant to take command of this battalion. Congratulations, Lieutenant Colonel."

Von Lockwood hesitated a moment. "Thank you, sir."

Burkhalter reached into a desk drawer and withdrew rank insignia. "Here, the previous owner won't need these any more. Oh, it will take some time before your Wound Badge comes through."

"I understand, sir. Thank you, sir."

Burkhalter exhaled. He closed the folder and looked the new Oberstleutnant in the eye. "This new battalion. It's part of the 26th Panzergrenadier Regiment."

Von Lockwood searched his memory, but came up empty about the parent division. He shook his head in the negative.

Burkhalter tapped the folder with a finger. "That's the 26th SS Panzergrenadier Regiment of the 12SS Division."

Von Lockwood almost bolted out of the chair. He could not help the disdain that crept into his voice. "SS? SS?"

The battlefield. Canadians coming from left. Rots up top middle. Le Hamel just below with Panthers. Chateau to right at edge of table.

"I know. Can't be helped. Its Oberststurmbannfuhrer and Sturmbannfuhrer were just killed by Typhoon Jabos. The regimental command isn't in much better shape. Staff work is the



sloppiest you'll ever see. Most of the unit are teenagers. They need an experienced hand to hold the town of Rots along with Le Hamel and a Chateau complex."

"But, I'm Heer. No SS will take orders from me."

"Apparently, they are so desperate for experience, they will. At least until they can get one of their own into the slot," Burkhalter explained, passing a copy of a written order from I SS Corp to 12SS Division explaining the unprecedented move. "You don't have to join the SS. It's only a short term insurance policy in case the Canadians keep advancing. What could go wrong?"

The heart of the defense: Le Hamel.

What Indeed?

My pre-positioned force was only three infantry companies (three platoon stands plus a platoon HQ stand each) to defend two towns and the Chateau (town equivalent). The battalion mortar was already ensconced in the Chateau.

My big decision was where to put a 75mm AT gun platoon (one stand) and two Panther platoons (two stands). My goal was to hold two of the three.

Hedgerows cut the ground, so this would be close-in fighting. Lots of hedgerows cut up the open space to the West of a river that split Rots from Le Hamel. Plenty of bridges crossed the river.

The Chateau was behind both, so I elected to defend all three as already done with one infantry company each, and place the heart of the defense at Le Hamel. So, the AT gun went into one end of Le Hamel and a Panther platoon in the other end. The other Panther platoon was outside Le Hamel in an orchard. I had two batteries of 105mm artillery guns for support.

A Canadian soldier awaits the order to advance. Image from web.

Canadian Advance

The Canadians, as expected, swung to the west of Le Hamel with universal carriers and half track platoons towing AT guns. The infantry had to hoof it, but the hedgerows blocked line of sight for my defense. There was an awful lot of infantry.

British Royal Marine Commandoes headed down the road directly at Rots, supported by a Cromwell tank platoon. A company of Sherman tanks swung across the river and headed up the middle. There was an awful lot of infantry here, too.

Just as I expected, my call to the SS artillery went unanswered. At least the battalion mortar, called in by its own officers, rained destruction down on the universal carrier and AT gun.

The Allied advance continued. The SS artillery finally responded, sometimes with exceptional accuracy, often not, but as if the shells were nothing but duds.

Direct hit by the mortar on the Universal Carrier and gun.



Crunch Time in Rots

Commandoes and Canadians combined to try and rush the defense of Rots. The SS company defended the outskirts. I had my Battalion HQ platoon in the center of town up high in buildings.

The charge into Rots.

The first to die was the SS heavy weapons platoon, confronted by a Cromwell and multiple platoons. Yet defensive fire took out a couple Canadian platoons as well.

I am pleased to say that my HQ platoon, under my direction, proved quite deadly to Allied infantry in the open. Alas, I could not force any of the companies to break, for the casualties were evenly distributed among the Allied attackers.

One by one, the SS platoons fell until only my HQ platoon was left. It was time to leave. I led the few remaining troops in a retreat through the city blocks, hugged the treeline, and fled across the river to the Chateau.

Turn 7 and Canadians infiltrate the woods and Le Hamel (center). The SS hangs tough with Panther overwatch. Rots is on its own (upper right corner). The Chateau (bottom center) is safe for now.

Crunch Time in Le Hamel

Meanwhile, the SS company pulled back from hedgerow entrenchments into Le Hamel in the face of Sherman tanks, and one pesky Canadian recon platoon. Once we found the recon's position, we unleashed a fusillade of firepower. The recon platoon vaporized. My AT gun missed. The Panther spotted a Sherman Firefly at the Hedgerow and fired. A hit, but ill luck caused the Sherman to flee, not turn into a fireball. I pulled back the Panthers.

Alas, that brought Canadian artillery fire and they had three batteries, each twice as large as our own battery. While they did not kill much, they kept the troops' heads down.

All the while, the Shermans and infantry advanced. That's when the Shermans plowed through the hedgerow while a 6pdr AT gun platoon prolonged through the orchard.

Turn 8: Le Hamel captured.



All the SS infantry in Le Hamel were dead except one platoon that ran for its life. I moved up a Panther platoon into Le Hamel to contest ownership of the village.

The tank shootout proved enlightening. The 6pdr had a flank shot that brewed up the Panther platoon in Le Hamel. The Shermans all shot at the hulks just to make sure. My two Panthers flamed two Shermans -- one in the hedgerow and one in Le Hamel. I also killed off an infantry.

My artillery suddenly figured out the real shells from the duds, learned how to tweak the settings, and pounded multiple infantry platoons into pulp. It was as if all my ill luck had reversed.

Panther counterattack and Sherman counter-counterattack.

Even the morale rolls went my way, or at least against the Allies' way. At one point, just about all Canadian infantry hit the dirt pinned. Moan the Allied players might, but I didn't want to hear of it. Awful rolls early were balanced by late excellent rolls, albeit the damage had long been done.

Alas, had good luck come earlier, a tighter game it would be. Instead, all my Le Hamel platoons except one, were dead, and the one stand fled for cover along with the surviving Panther platoon.

Turn 9. An AT gun and three Shermans destroy the Panther, but lose two Shermans in the process.

End of Game

And that's how it ended after nine full turns in three hours. The Allies had grabbed Rots and Le Hamel while I held the Chateau. Two outta three made the Allies the winner. I had an intact infantry company, the battalion mortar platoon, one Panther platoon, one fleeing infantry platoon from Le Hamel, and my Battalion HQ platoon. Of course, the SS blame me for the defeat and I soon found myself back at Heer personnel.

Thoughts

This seemed against the odds from the beginning. The Germans don't have enough infantry to reinforce anywhere. They can't strip one town to reinforce another because the Allies will simply keep the hedgerows in between and march into one town unopposed. The Panthers were the only reserve and they attracted artillery fire that kept at least one of them suppressed most of the time. The sheer volume of artillery fire against Le Hamel and Rots hurt the German defense, as it was supposed to do.

Had my artillery hit early like it did late, many a Canadian infantry company would be decimated before it could arrive at Le Hamel or Rots. Alas, such are the fortunes of war. The Canadian infantry arrived at full strength and only took losses and pinned results after the battle was decided.

Thanks, Marc, for hosting and all for gaming.

Rots falls, but Von Lockwood leads survivors away.





A US squad holes up in an abandoned Iraqi village.

Smallamo: Small Alamo in Iraq

by Russ Lockwood

A refinement of Renaud's *RUSE* rules brought me to an abandoned village in modern Iraq that Renaud called "Smallamo" -- as in Small Alamo. By random roll, I became the American squad with one Bradley isolated in an abandoned Iraqi village. An Iraqi platoon and two BMPs circled around the village.

My three fire teams occupied three of the four ruined buildings. The Bradley sat in the middle.

One Iraqi squad and one BMP sat on each side of the village.

Desperate defense.

From the West

"Death to the Great Satan," yelled the Iraqis, steeling themselves to attack the US troops dug into the ruins.

"Remember the Alamo!" yelled the US troops.

"You Yankee dog, that makes no sense!"



“Neither do you, but I'm not complaining!” Clever and rude is always a winning combination.

The Iraqi squad from the west crested the sandy hill and headed for the village. Its BMP swept around the hill and fired the first shot into the closest fire team. Much dust and explosions later, my fire team retreated to an adjacent room.

My Bradley Fighting Vehicle and fire team engaged the Iraqi troops on the hill. Many fell, some became fearful, and others grew even more determined to drive out the Yankees. An RPG pinged off the Bradley.

The BMP saw a second US fire team in an adjacent building and fired. This time, the fire was accurate and deadly. All four US troops were riddled into oblivion.

The Bradley had enough of that. It drove out of the village and fired into the flank of the BMP, brewing it up. US small arms fire slaughtered the remaining Iraqis. Half down, half to go.

Iraqi forces in the East prepare to assault the Small Alamo.

From the East

The other Iraqi BMP with part of the Iraqi platoon circled around the north side of the sandy hill. An attempt to enter the village was successful and a firefight developed that the US fire team lost.

At this point, the Bradley backed up, pivoted, and fired an Anti-Tank Guided Missile. The aim was true and the second BMP exploded. US firepower from the last fire team obliterated half the remaining Iraqis.

The Bradley harvests BMPs.

The remaining few soldiers of the Iraqi platoon circled around the south side of the hill. These soldiers dared not show their faces. They've already seen what US firepower can do.

Yet the Iraqis finally swallowed their fear and charged from behind the sand hill. The last US ground troops, on overwatch, emptied many magazines into the onrushing enemy. The few Iraqis who were not cut down fled into the desert. The Americans had held the village, albeit with significant losses.

The Scare Tweak

RUSE uses 50-50 rolls to see if hits translate into kills. It also uses 50-50 rolls to see if “scares” translate into morale loss and pinning or routing.

This tweaked process went smoothly. And indeed, mechanics wise, the 50-50 roll can be altered to represent better or worse troops. Of note, Kevlar armor let the US troops hang around longer than the armor-less Iraqis.

Thanks for the game. Not as one sided as I expected.





Fully engaged in the fjords. L to r: Steve, Garth, Umpire Bruce, John, Phil, and James.

Norway 1940: Slow German Progress

by Russ Lockwood

I joined this Norway 1940 double-blind wargame in progress, with the first two sessions finished (see the 4/21/2025 AAR). As per Bruce's previous double-blind games, maps with hidden counters create the suspense of calling out search locations like a game of *Midway*. When units are found, the combat action moves to the central tables -- half for open sea attacks and half representing the fjords and each one's associated town, fort, and airfields.



James, Garth, and Phil ponder searches.

Naval rules and units were *Axis & Allies* miniatures in 1/1800 scale. Most ground rules were loosely based on wargame *Norway 1940: The Kriegsmarine Strikes*. Special air and fortification rules were by Bruce.

I was assigned to the German side to join Steven and John. The British side remained Garth, Phil, and James.

Situation

At the end of two sessions, the situation was:

Trondheim, Kristiansand, and Stavenger: Germany captured the towns, airfields, and forts.

Bergen: Contested town. Fort and Bomeon airfield are still under Norwegian control.

Oslo: German attack repulsed and Norwegians control city, but both forts are German. Airbases are still Norwegian.

Narvik: German attack repulsed and Norwegians control the city. Bardofoss airfield is still Norwegian.

April 9, 1940

Special aide to Admiral Donitz, von Russ, entered the operations center to consult with von Steve and von John. Plans were already underway to reinforce Narvik with more troops and drop paratroopers on Oslo. Bergen appeared to be on its own. Cargo ships carrying follow-up ammunition chugged in the North Sea to the six ports.

Morning fog obscured the coasts and fjords, but search aircraft flew over the North Sea, searching for the British Royal Navy. Success!

The map as the Germans see it. Narvik is upper right corner. German airfields at bottom right corner.

HMS Renown Task Force

U-boat Flotilla IX, consisting of five Type II U-boats, found the battlecruiser *HMS Renown* with her six destroyer escort. As the submerged submarines maneuvered for an attack, six squadrons of HE-111 bombers roared in and dropped bombs. Admittedly, they had a small chance of

actually hitting, but attack they did. They all missed.

Yet a U-boat maneuvered in and loosed torpedoes. They all missed, too.

German Type II sub versus Renown Task Force.

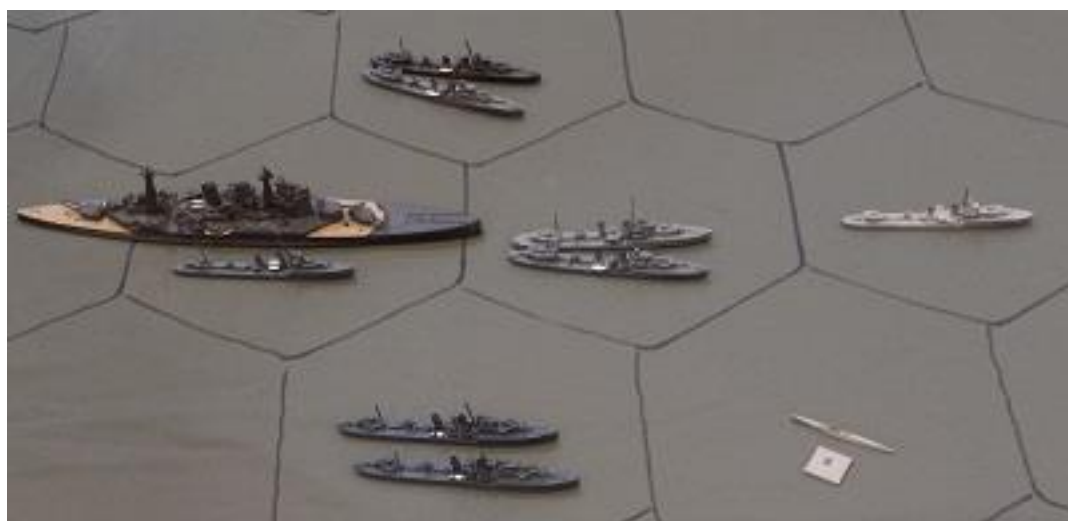
The British sent a pair of destroyers, *HMS Impulsive* and *HMS Icarus*, to investigate the source of the torpedoes. The sonar sailor on *HMS Impulsive* was the quicker and depth charges were dropped directly atop a sub. The U-boat sank.

Undeterred, the rest of the Wolfpack angled into the attack. One sub missed and escaped, but another was caught on the surface. Once again, the duo of *HMS Impulsive* and *HMS Icarus* sped towards the submarine and once again, *HMS Impulsive* was the quicker. The U-boat sank in a barrage of shells.

HMS Impulsive and *HMS Icarus* detected another submarine and amazingly, *HMS Impulsive* was on target with depth charges. As the U-boat sank, an unknown ensign stenciled outlines of U-boats on the bulkhead of the bridge. Three cheers well deserved!

ME-110s In For The Kill

A British Task Force of a couple of cruisers and a number of destroyers spotted a number of cargo ships steaming north. As they moved in to identify the Dutch-flagged ships, they came under attack by Luftwaffe HE-111s,



JU-88s, and ME-110s. AA fire was good, shooting down and driving away a couple of squadrons. The bombers were obviously shaken and missed, but the ME-110s bore in on the destroyers. As the last plane flew away, two destroyers had been shattered and slipped beneath the waves.

The cargo ships made good their escape in all the combat confusion.

The HE-111s provide a distraction for the cargo ships to escape.

British Revenge

The Royal Navy wasn't idle. Skuas and Swordfish aircraft found a suspicious group of "neutral" cargo ships near Bergen and heading

North. The neutrals were identified as German and the aircraft attacked. One cargo ship was sunk and one crippled in exchange for a Swordfish squadron shot down.

Furthermore, British bombers rained bombs on the German cargo and warships anchored at Bergen, sinking them all.

British bomb German ships.

German Attacks on Bergen, Oslo, and Narvik

Von Russ was given command of the three ground assaults after being assured that the initial German repulse was only due to incredibly bad luck. The Bergen attack failed (I had an 11 on 2d6 roll, where low was good) and the Narvik attack was a continued contested action (another high roll).

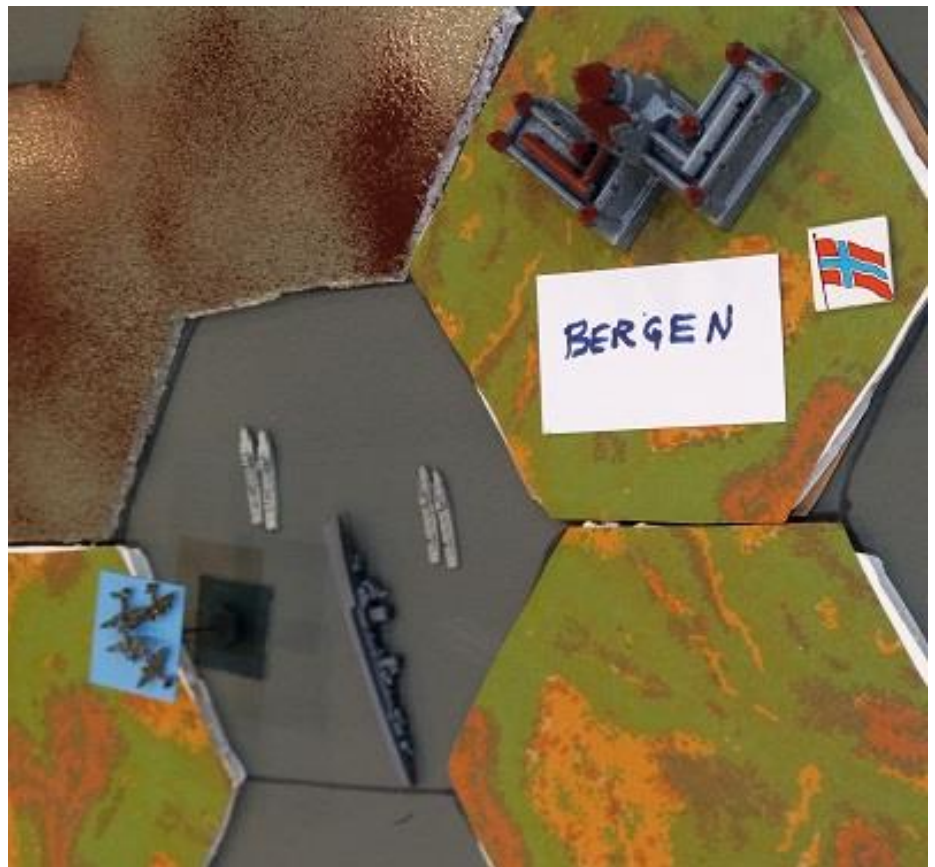
The JU-52s of the Oslo paratroop ran into a Norwegian airforce of Gloster Gladiators. Half the paratroopers never made it out of the aircraft. The other half dropped and proceeded to be shot out of the sky (roll of 12 on 2d6, where low was good).

Verdammt! At this point, von Steve and von John were wondering if von Russ was a British agent. Von Russ wondered the same thing, too.

The Day Rodney Went Crazy

The *HMS Rodney* and escorting destroyers were sighted by U-boat Flotilla V. This flotilla contained a mix of Type VII and Type IX submarines -- far more capable than the Type II "one shot and run" types.

With trepidation, von Russ rolled the dice. A torpedo hit on *HMS Rodney*! Von Russ rolled more dice. A torpedo hit on a destroyer. Sunk. And then another torpedo hit on a destroyer. Sunk. British chatter on an open



frequency bemoaned the good luck on the German side. Von Russ grabbed the microphone and replied in the clear that the current rolls made up for earlier bad die rolls.

The British fled, leaving the U-boat commanders wondering how to pick up the British survivors.

Two British DDs sink (left middle) as the wolfpack tries to run down the HMS Rodney, which has been hit (black marker) once. Photo by Bruce.

British Bomb Airfield

The Germans transferred bomber squadrons from Germany to captured Norwegian airfields. British bombers caught a couple squadrons on the tarmac and bombed two squadrons into oblivion. The Germans also declared an air emergency and brought in about 10 squadrons of bombers to try and maintain the balance of power.

And with that, the third session ended.

Thoughts

Kudos to Bruce for hitting on a playable double-blind system. Of course, it's easy for me to say that, I'm just a gamer. Bruce is doing all the work as umpire.

Every once in a while, we have to kriegspiel something, but I can also say that every time I play, I learn a new facet of creating a double-blind scenario. This time was running submarines.

The subs were placed in the hex grid, but the surface ships couldn't react until they ran into the hex or the subs fired (two-hex range) -- at which point the surface ships could move to the location of the firing hex (which still had the sub in it). The responding ships hunt for the sub (die rolls). Otherwise, surface ships zig-zag two hexes to the right or left followed by two hexes in the opposite direction.

Note that in the system, surface warships move two hexes and submarines on the surface move one hex. Submerged submarines have a 50-50 chance (die roll) of moving one hex.

I suppose you can always plot the submerged subs and plot ASDIC searches, but that would slow down the game quite a bit. Thus, Bruce hits the sweet spot between hiding, seeking, and showing.

Thanks, Bruce for umpiring and the friends and foes alike for the game.

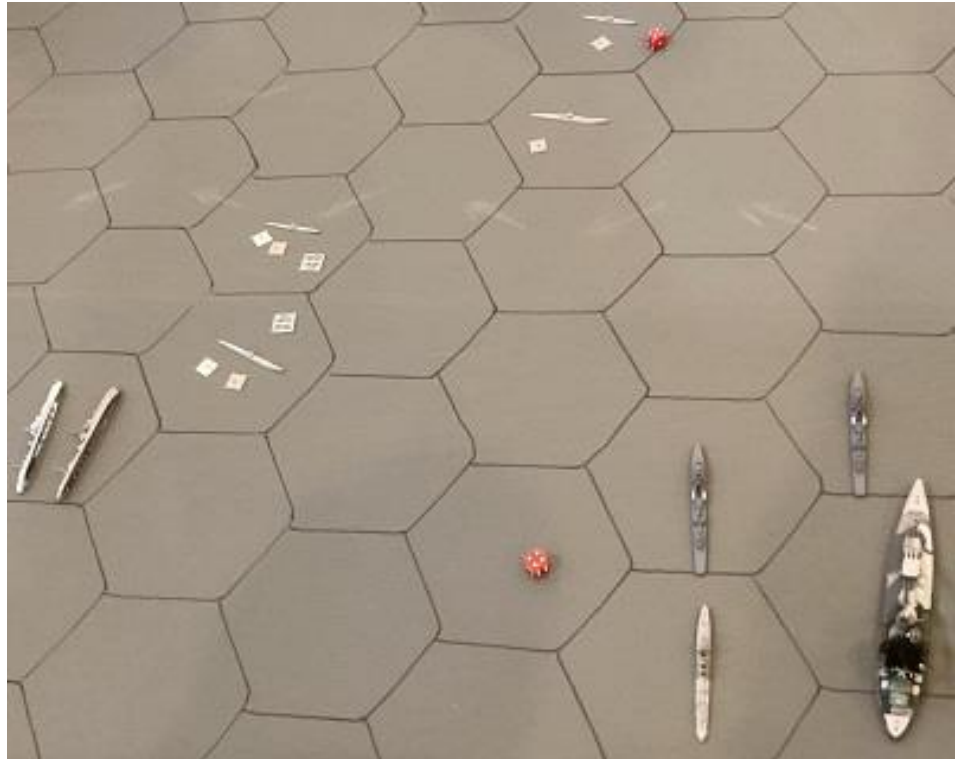
Norway 1940: The Battle Continues

by Umpire Bruce

We picked up with Turn 10, Morning, April 9th.

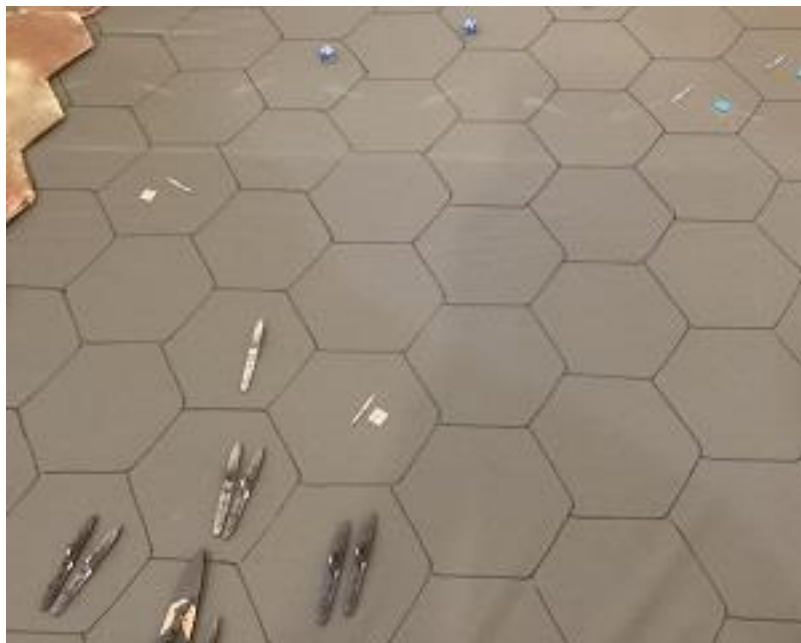
At sunrise on 9 April 1940 there was a light breeze over the North Sea, resulting in fog on the coast and fjords of Norway.

Three RN task forces were spotted off the Norwegian coast NW of Bergen. Five Type II U-boats of Flotilla IX attacked *HMS Renown* and her two destroyer (DD) flotillas. Simultaneously, six HE 111 Squadrons bore in on *Renown*. One squadron aborted while *HMS Renown* easily maneuvered to avoid the high-level bombings of the other five. *U-7* fired a spread at *HMS Renown* but missed. *HMS Impulsive* and *Icarus* were sent to the source of the torpedo tracks. *U-7* was picked up on ASDIC, attacked and sunk by *HMS Impulsive*.



Another Type II boat fired at *HMS Renown* and missed, subsequently slinking away. *U-10* was spotted on the surface on the starboard bow and sunk by *HMS Impulsiv*'s gunfire. As the force continued, the dynamic duo of *Impulsive* and *Icarus* detected *U-19* beneath the surface. *HMS Impulsive* chalked up her hat trick with depth charges.

Start of the U-Boat attack on the HMS Renown.
Photo by Bruce.



At Narvik, German battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* arrived and disembarked more mountain troops under Gen Deitl. Combat raged with another attempt at capture to be made next turn.

The RAF and FAA conducted attacks on Sola Airfield and Bergen. Two Wellington squadrons found Sola unoccupied, so they took their bombs home. Skuas from Hatston and Swordfish from *HMS Furious* combined with Hampdens and Blenheims to wipe out the Kriegsmarine at Bergen and in Bergenfjord, sinking one torpedo boat, four S boats and two VP boats. There were no aircraft losses. The stranded German troops surrendered to the Norwegian 9th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Division, ending the fighting there.

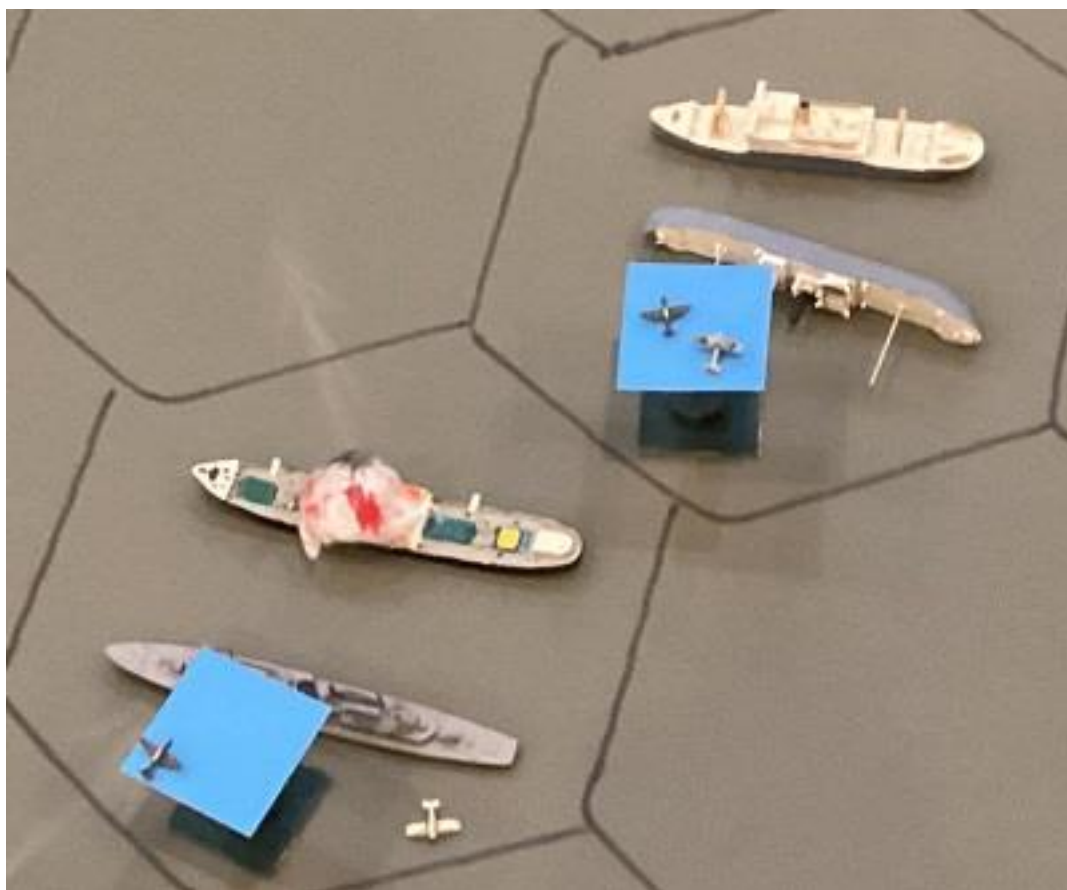
At Oslo, the drone of JU52 transport aircraft filled the air and was met by the lone Norwegian squadron of Gladiators over Fornebu Airfield. The first Fallshirmjaeger assault was repulsed with heavy losses. The second drop succeeded in capturing the airfield. The paratroopers of the 1st Battalion, 1st FJ Regiment then formed up and attacked towards the capital. The Norwegian Royal Guards Battalion stood firm, then surrounded and eliminated the invaders. The airfield was then recaptured.

Around noon a suspicious group of cargo ships with a German tender, identified as *Karl Peters*, was spotted 100 NM west of Bergen headed north. The FAA struck with Skuas and Swordfish. They sank one cargo ship and crippled another while losing a swordfish squadron.

Skuas and Swordfish sink a cargo ship.

Air Emergency

The Joint German Command of Kriegsmarine, Luftwaffe, and Heer declared an air emergency, meaning that some air assets previously earmarked for ground support would be available for anti-shipping. This increased Luftwaffe strength and captured airbase capacity. In response RAF Hampdens and Blenheims



attacked Sola Airfield and caught some Luftwaffe units on the ground that had just staged in. After flying through the light AA, they destroyed a squadron each of JU87s and JU88s for no loss.

Light cruisers *HMS Manchester* and *HMS Southampton* with four destroyers (DDs) of the 5th Flotilla moved to investigate a group of suspicious cargo ships off Bergen. While trying to identify the three ships as friend or foe, they were jumped by Luftwaffe HE 111s, JU88s, and ME110s. *HMS Manchester* shot down a squadron of Heinkels while the other aborted. JU88s pressed the attack but failed to hit. Meanwhile, four squadrons of ME110s strafed and sank *HMS Venomous* and *HMS Vanessa*. The three false-flag ships sneaked past during the action.

HMS Rodney with escorting DDs was patrolling off the coast between Bergen and Trondheim when ambushed by U-boat Flotilla V. A very long-range torpedo spread fired by Type IX *U-37* succeeded in a hit on Rodney, causing only one hull damage because of her waterline armor belt. DDs *Eskimo* and *Punjabi* were sent to investigate. Upon arrival the pair of DDs were unable to detect any U-boats. *U-37* struck again, sinking *HMS Punjabi*, while Kapitän-Leutnant Prien, of Scapa Flow fame, in *U-47* sent *HMS Eskimo* to the bottom.

Destroyers race to locate and sink the U-Boat that put a hit (black marker) on HMS Rodney. Photo by Bruce.



Realizing that these were not little Type II boats that he was facing, Admiral Forbes in Rodney decided to move away, eventually leaving behind the four Type VIIIs and two Type IXs of U-Boat Flotilla V.

Just after noon, Narvik fell to the 3rd Mountain Division after a nine-hour firefight.

Points

At the conclusion of Session 3 (Turn 11), the points stand at:

Allies: 271 Points

Losses: 3 light cruisers, 1 Training ship/minelayer, 2 torpedo boats, 4 U boats, 1 destroyer, 4 VP boats, 4 minesweepers, 2 motor minesweepers, 6 S boats, 1 Cargo Ship, 1 Stuka Squadron, 1 HE 111 Squadron, 1 Ju88 Squadron: 188 Points

Norwegian Objectives: 81 Points (Oslo and Bergen)

Luftwaffe Emergency Declaration (2 Points per turn until rescinded): 2 Points

Germans: 166 Points

Losses: 2 light cruisers, 9 destroyers, 3 submarines, 1 Swordfish Squadron: 115 Points

Norwegian Objectives: 48 Points (Kristiansand, Stavenger, Trondheim, Narvik)

Stealth Cargo Arrivals: 3 Points

Norway 1940: Special Rules

by Bruce

Airbase Attacks

Each side may have a maximum of four air units per hex per wave.

CAP fights attackers and then AA fires at surviving attackers.
Surviving attacker air units bomb the airbase.
Each hit on an airbase results in loss of one random air unit on the ground.

Air Attacks on Ships in Port

No limit on the number of ships in a port hex.
Each side may have a maximum of four air units per hex per wave.
CAP fights attackers and then ship AA fires at surviving attackers.
Surviving attacker air units bomb the ships. Ship Armor and Vital Armor values are halved, round up.

Surface Attacks on Ships in Port

No limit on the number of ships in a port hex.
Attacking ships enter fjord and move as per surface battle rules.
Air attacks, if any, occur for both sides.
Attacking ships continue moving towards port.
Combat, if any, between attacking ships and defensive forts
Surviving attacker ships conduct combat actions against ships in port. Ship Armor and Vital Armor values are halved, round up.

Captured Air Bases

On the map, one counter equals two squadrons.
Air units performing a transfer move never attack on the turn of transfer. Furthermore, the counter is considered on the ground if the Airbase is attacked by enemy forces.
Starting Turn 10 (April 9), The Luftwaffe can transfer one counter (two squadrons) into Aalborg (Denmark) and one counter (two squadrons) into Kjevik (Norway). Both have a capacity of one counter. In addition, the Luftwaffe can transfer up to three counters (six squadrons) into Sola (Norway), which has capacity of three counters.
Sola Airbase is on the coast and may be bombarded by naval forces of either side.
Vaernes (Norway) Airbase airfield may not be used until after the snow is cleared from runways and tarmac. Clearing takes two day turns, so starting Turn 12, the Luftwaffe may transfer 1 air counter into Vaernes.
The Allies may aerial bomb German-held airbases and ships in ports beginning on Turn 10. Neutral ships in the same hex as Allied air and naval units may be challenged beginning Turn 10. The Allies may enter Norwegian waters beginning Turn 11.
Stay tuned for more of the excellent Norway double-blind wargame!



Win some, lose some. Image from web.

Up Front: One From The Vault

by Russ Lockwood

Dan pulled out an old Avalon Hill game, *Up Front*, that used cards to represent two WWII patrols. By random die roll, I became the Germans and Dan the Soviets.

Each card represents one soldier and you can split your squad up into as many as four teams that advance or retreat on a simple ladder of spaces. Different cards represent terrain and other cards are drawn to perform combat.

I elected to split my 10-soldier squad into two five-soldier sub units and advanced them on Ladder A and Ladder B. Dan split his 12-soldier squad into three four-man subunits and advance them on Ladders A, B, and C.

Each soldier card has a firepower number based on the range from the enemy on the same ladder. You can shoot to an adjacent ladder with a 1 range penalty. Firing cards have a circled number that shows the minimum number of firepower points needed by a sub-unit in order to fire. The higher the firepower number, the more the results are going to hurt the enemy -- mostly.

You can throw terrain cards on your own troops or on enemy troops. Most terrain is beneficial, but some is not. You can either accept the terrain and move in, or elect to maneuver around the terrain by spending movement cards.

My starting Group A. In a Stream.

The Germans can only play one card per subunit on a ladder and then discard one card. Then you draw your hand back up to five cards. The Soviets can dump their entire hand and draw four (not five) new cards. Dan made use of that often during the game. The Germans, that's me, suffered from inadequate card draws and was mostly stuck with the hand. I often played cards just to get them out of my hand and cycle through the deck faster.

When you fire, you draw a new card and cross index the results with the figure order. If the results are higher than the Pin number, then the soldier is pinned. If higher than the kill number, then the soldier card is eliminated from play. Pinned soldiers have a rout number and a kill number.

When half you starting soldiers are routed or dead, the game ends and the opponent wins the game.

Early in the game. My two groups advance along A and B tracks

The Patrol

It's hard to track card play unless you write down every card drawn and played, but suffice it to say that long-range fire sometimes got lucky, but short-range fire was lethal. My guns were awfully silent after the first couple shots because I'd pick up high firepower cards that needed my soldiers to get in close. Alas, Dan tossed a Stream terrain on my most advanced subunit. That halted LMG firepower just as I was getting close.

Ladder B Soviets came real close and unloaded on my



subunit in B. Down many of them went into pinned status. The next fire blew many of them away. It wasn't even close. I believe I may have eliminated one soldier from Dan while I lost six.

Dan played Up Front quite well. I apparently was playing Up The Front...Image from web.

Thoughts

It has a lot of portability going for it compared to a skirmish miniature game like *Chain of Command*. Half a kitchen table is more than enough room.

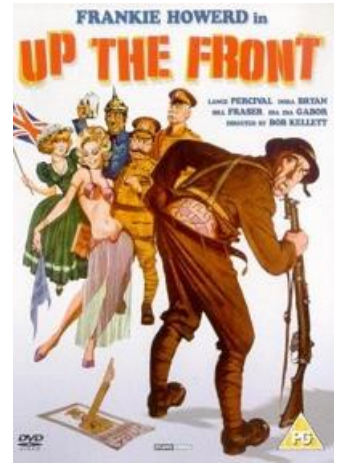
That said, I must have had the most firing-averse soldaten ever -- I had a sequence of firing cards requiring 14, 15, 16, 17, and even 18 firepower points to use. I finally managed one shot with 13 that didn't do as much as I thought it would. Otherwise, "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes" became "Don't fire until you can see the pinks of their uvulas."

Dan's use of a Stream right as I was making progress was brilliant. Given the number of times he folded his hand for four new cards, Stream really foiled my advance.

As the game went on, it soon became clear that my card draws needed more help than I got. I went down shooting, but the Soviets dismantled the German patrol. They shot Fritz!

For me, *Up Front* won't displace *Chain of Command*, but it was interesting to try. The card play was quick enough and deadly enough to keep you guessing. And *Up Front* is certainly a lot more portable than miniatures.

Thanks for the game.



Battle of Bicocca 1522: SPI Oldie

by Daniel

In honor of HMGS setting aside a ballroom for the SPI Forever event... -RL

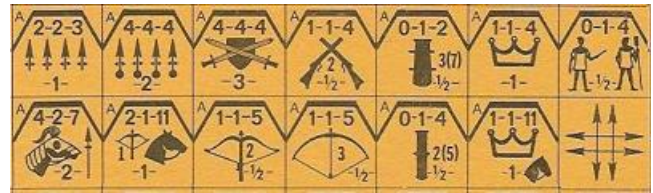
Russ agreed to try an old game I've had but seldom played: *The Renaissance of Infantry (RoI)* originally published with *Strategy & Tactics* issue # 22. This was the first of five SPI games that spanned from 3000 BC to 1550 (or up to 1700 if you include *Musket & Pike*): *Renaissance of Infantry* (S&T 22), *Centurion* (S&T 25), *Phalanx*, *Dark Ages*, and *Armageddon* (S&T 34). I had the original version with the larger 5/8-inch counters (which are friendlier to us maturing wargamers).

These were re-designed and released as *PRESTAGS* (Pre-Seventeenth Century Tactical Game System): *Chariot*, *Spartan*, *Legion*, *Viking*, and *Yeoman*.

The start of the game. My French at bottom.



I did a bit of a “bait and switch” once I started re-acquainting myself with the original rules. It was clear that as each game was published, the rules evolved – and I remembered why I liked the *PRESTAGS* series when it came out: The rules were significantly clearer and simpler and applied across all five games in the series. So, the day before we met, I sent him the PRESTAG rules and said we would use these instead – but I would use the original *Renaissance of Infantry (RoI)* counters, map, scenario and combat tables.



After looking through the scenarios, I chose Bicocca, April 27, 1522. There was a greater variety of units on both sides and the forces were roughly equal. I also had an article from MOVES magazine that showed an historical deployment, which allowed me to set-up this game before Russ arrived and we could just dive right into it.

We reviewed the PRESTAG rules and I pointed out some differences in the units from RoI and PRESTAGS: The arquebus and crossbow units only have a range of 2 in RoI while in PRESTAGS they can have a range of 3 or 4. The Leader units are also different: In RoI, they give a die shift, while in PRESTAGS, they could give a melee factor bonus.

Sequence of Play

Disruption Recovery Phase (Disruption results from Side A's turn are removed)

Side A: Fire Phase

Side A: Movement (Side B may Defensive Fire against an adjacent moving enemy)

Side A: Melee

Disruption Recovery Phase (Disruption results from Side B's turn are removed)

Side B: Fire Phase

Side B: Movement (Side A may Defensive Fire against an adjacent moving enemy)

Side B: Melee

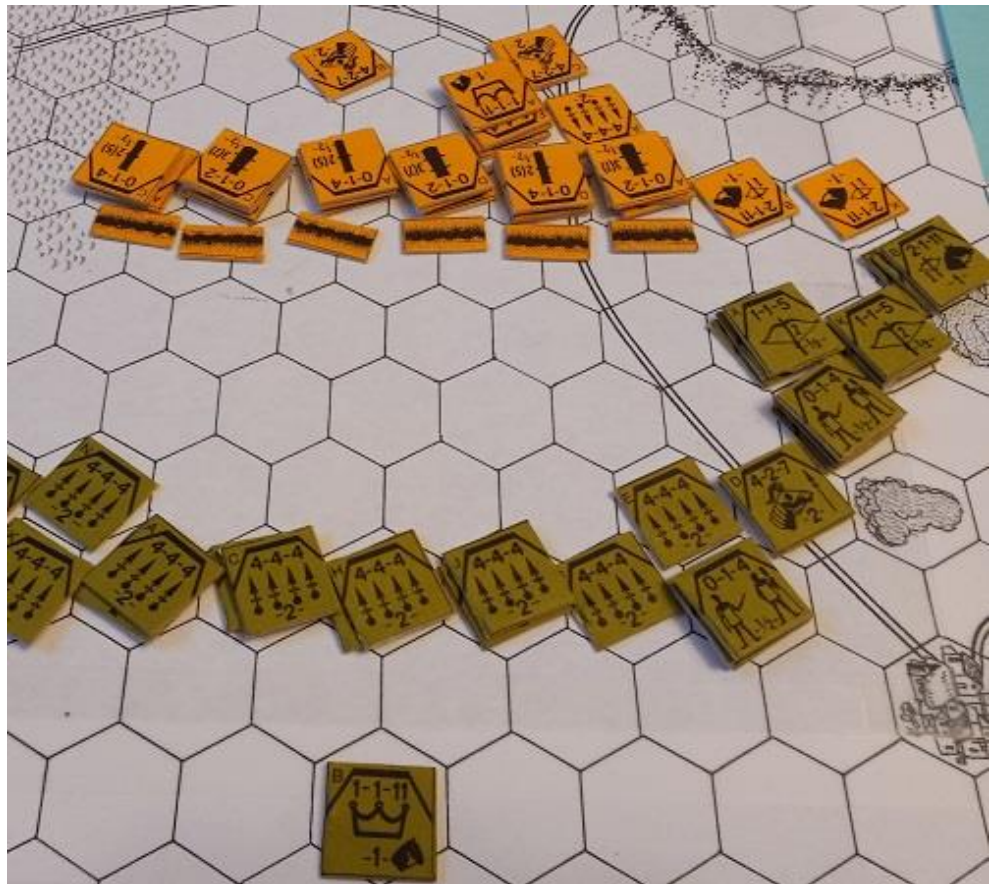
You cannot fire the same unit in consecutive fire phases (so if you did defensive fire, those units can't fire during their next fire phase). Units in “contact” (involved in melee) also cannot fire.

We use “D” results in my color during my half of the turn (including enemy defensive fire), and “D” results in Russ' color during his half of the turn to keep track of which “D” results are removed during the Disruption Recovery Phase.

The Combat Tables have no adverse effect on the attacker. Results are Disruption (D) or Elimination (E) (PRESTAGS has some changes to the tables and include a ½ E result).

There are no “retreat” results.

There are no real “morale” rules, other than “Panic Level” for the entire army, but once that's reached, the game is over anyway.



My French advance – before we figured out command and control limitations.

Let's Get This Party Started

Russ had the French and the burden of attack. He had to basically take the Spanish position, which had some entrench positions. Nestled between a swamp and some woods, there were limited options to flank the entrenchments, which Russ attempted to do.

Mid Turn 3. Understanding D results within the turn sequence.



The French start out of range, so no shooting was possible on the first turn. He moved up his artillery, using the road as best he could. Preceding the artillery, the fastest troops (light Cavalry and crossbowmen) were rushed ahead to start threatening the Spanish left flank. The foot advanced, but were lagging behind. The Spanish light cavalry stationed on the left were clearly outnumbered, but survived the initial attacks.

Russ asked about Leaders after moving, which I then realized was very restrictive: In *RoI*, you can only move units with or adjacent to the Leader (and we each only had one). Mounted units are exempted in some scenarios. *PRESTAGS* Leaders could have a command radius of two hexes (which we adopted), but I allowed a full move for the French on turn 1. Units outside command could move up to half their movement allowance. The Spanish opening fire was unexpectedly effective, scoring several disruptions along the French line (effectively paralyzing those units for one turn). The Spanish reacted strongly to this initial threat, attacking the French light cavalry with the reserve spearmen and swordsmen and getting a very lucky combat roll of '1' which was the only roll resulting in Elimination. Spanish cavalry attempted to run down the French crossbowmen, surviving defensive fire, and disrupting the crossbowmen.

What Is This Mess I've Gotten Myself Into? Russ starts the second turn. The French continued their advance and continued to work on the Spanish left flank.

Spanish artillery continued to disrupt some French formations, but not quite as effective as Turn 1, but some French artillery were disrupted. The Spanish counter-attacks were starting to win the contest on their left.

French artillery are unlimbered, but have very limited visibility. The entrenchments double the "Fire Protection Strength" of the terrain for being shot at, and double the melee defense strength. The French make contact. Defensive fire disrupts some French units, but those that are intact disrupt some Spanish in the entrenchments.

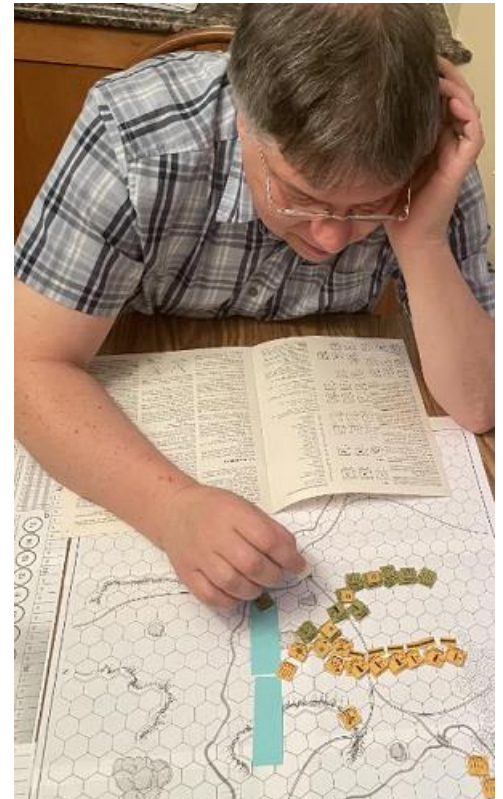
Spanish guns are mostly silent, either because they fired defensively or are in contact. Spanish militia start to arrive (6 x 2-2-3 units). Several French crossbowmen units are eliminated by the Spanish swordsmen and cavalry.

Russ sees that the flank attack has failed and the frontal assault will be a stalemate, so he concedes the game at this point.

History: April 27, 1522

The Battle of Bicocca was fought during the Italian War of 1521–26. A combined French and Venetian force under Odet de Foix, Vicomte de Lautrec, was decisively defeated by an Imperial–Spanish and Papal army under the overall command of Prospero Colonna.

Having been driven from Milan by an Imperial advance in late 1521, Lautrec had regrouped, attempting to strike at Colonna's lines of communication. When the Swiss mercenaries in French service did not receive their pay, however, they demanded an immediate battle, and Lautrec was forced to attack Colonna's fortified position in the park of the



Arcimboldi Villa Bicocca, north of Milan. The Swiss pikemen advanced over open fields under heavy artillery fire to assault the enemy positions, but were halted at a sunken road backed by earthworks.

Having suffered massive casualties from the fire of Imperial-Spanish arquebusiers, the Swiss retreated. Meanwhile, an attempt by French cavalry to flank Colonna's position proved equally ineffective. The Swiss, unwilling to fight further, marched off to their cantons a few days later, and Lautrec retreated into Venetian territory with the remnants of his army.

Could This Have Been Different?

Russ effectively re-enacted the historical battle. Had we fought this again, I'm sure he would have re-deployed his pikemen across his entire front before advancing, so more infantry could be focused on the Spanish flanks. The Spanish militia would have arrived by the time the French perfected their deployment and started their attack in earnest, which could help shore up the flanks or replace some of the spearmen in the entrenchments to allow more spearmen to reinforce each flank. While I feel this would help the French prosecute the battle more in their favor, the Spanish still have significant advantages that make this a very tough battle for the French to win.

I recall a miniatures game of this battle about 10+ years ago. The same French disaster resulted, primarily by imposing a scenario rule that forced the Swiss pikemen to take the shortest path to engage the enemy, and since they started in front of the Spanish entrenchments, they were doomed to suffer the same fate.

PRESTAGS Anyone?

Should Russ give another go at *PRESTAGS*, I'll stick with using all components from the same game and start with an introductory game of using the same army composition on each side and fight it out, exercising the rules and combat charts to see if the *PRESTAGS* mechanics survive the test of time. Russ and I are very familiar with miniatures systems for the ancient period as well as some other games on the same subject (such as *The Great Battles of History* series by GMT).

Battle of Bicocca 1522: The French View

by Russ Lockwood

Dan pulled out an oldie 1970s-era SPI hex-based wargame: *Renaissance of Infantry* and set up the Battle of Bicocca. This Igo-Ugo game was subsequently revised and reissued as *Yeoman*, as part of the five-game *Prestags* set.

We did have a bit of brain fog in the first couple turns untangling the two sets of rules, in some cases using *Yeoman* rules and in other cases *RoI*. We eventually sorted it all out by the third turn. Hey, I have enough problems remembering what I had for breakfast.

If you must know, it was a bagel with coffee.

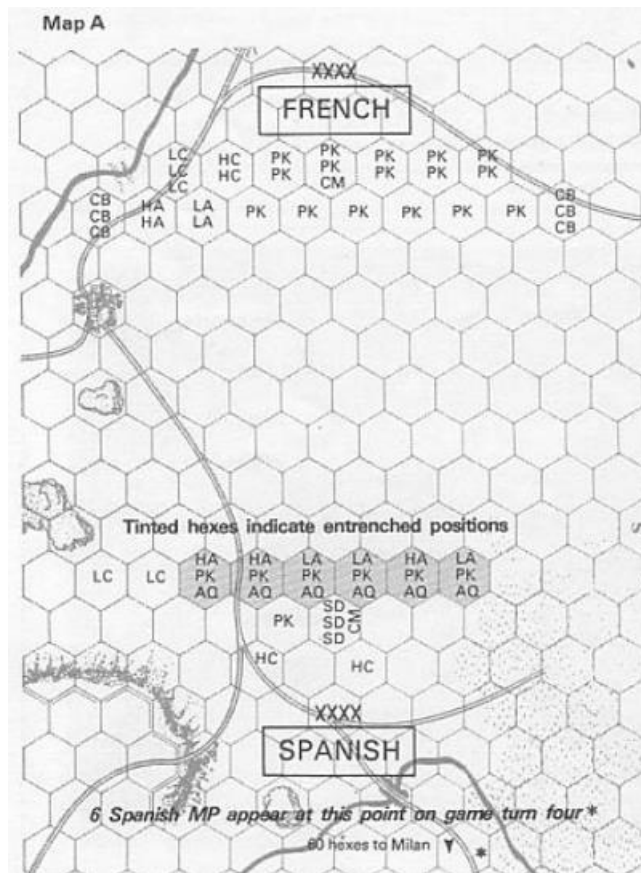
Aw, c'mon. How am I supposed to remember--
Sesame.

Definitely a sesame bagel.

Anyway, as the French, I tried to push the right flank where the entrenchments were not. The command radius, which allows for full movement, is only two hexes and I only had one commander. What we finally figured out by turn three was that out of command units could move half. Units that had been disrupted can't move or fight at all.

Sure enough, Dan's unbelievable Spanish die rolling had his cannon hit 1-in-6 and 2-in-6 shots four out of his first five shots.

Set up for the game from the Spanish viewpoint.



The smart move for me would be to turn tail and run. Granted, the die rolling odds evened out as the game progressed.

Instead, I tried to push the right flank, only to be stymied by Dan's shuffling troops.

I finally got enough to melee the entrenched troops and Dan's cannons and arquebusiers missed. Aha! His one unit is disrupted.

Alas, at the end of his turn, the disruption disappears.

It dawned on me that the best odds I can ever achieve are 2:1 and there's not even a chance of eliminating any unit. On turn 5, after a pair of my attacks disrupted two units and I can't touch the Spanish, and my right flank is being chewed up, I toss in the towel. As Dan pointed out, I needed more coordination between my artillery getting lucky enough to disrupt and my infantry following up to double disrupt (and hence eliminate) units in an entrenched hex. Those are really low odds die rolls.

Better I send the pike to the right and take my chances in the narrow three-hex flank.

The left flank is nothing but swamp (one unit per hex instead of three per hex elsewhere) and the Spanish gain reinforcements to fill in.

So, tough scenario for the French, but interesting to pull out an oldie.

MLB Showdown: Baseball Card Game

by Daniel

Russ specially requested *MLB Showdown* baseball card game -- in my opinion, the best baseball sports game Wizards of the Coast produced and arguably the best ever made. It's a favorite among my games and I have eight teams that players constructed for a league we played with equivalent salaries (card points).

I use a common deck, as opposed to separate decks, and have also put together 10 Offense and 10 Defense "Manager's Options" that are always available to play by discarding a Strategy card from your hand to allow players more control and use of their Strategy cards.

Russ choose "the green one" at random, which was Mike S's Oakland A's. I typically pick the Orioles, but today I choose Mike M's Detroit Tigers in remembrance (sadly, Mike M passed in 2015).

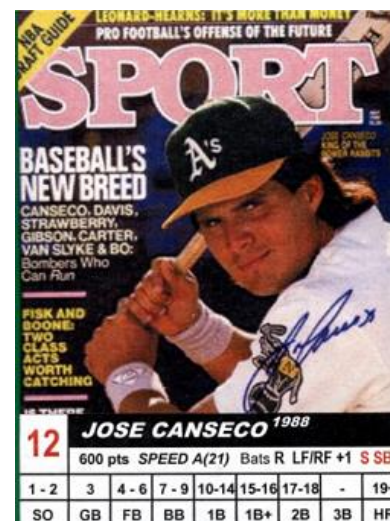
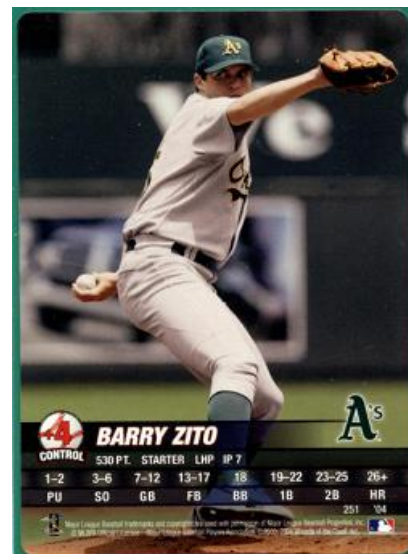
Pitcher cards. The +5/+4 are added to a d20 roll to try and beat the batter number: 12 on Canseco's batter's card. Note the different results based on pitcher vs. batter cards: PopUp, StrikeOut, GroundBall out, FlyBall out, BaseonBalls (walk), 1B single hit, 2B double, 3B triple, HR HomeRun.

Today's starting pitchers would be Barry Zito for the A's and Mark "the Bird" Fidrych for the Tigers. Big name players in the A's line-up included Ricky Henderson, Reggie Jackson, Eric Chavez, and Jose Canseco. The Tiger's line-up included Miguel Cabrera, Alan Trammell, Magglio Ordonez, and Gary Sheffield.

What Strike Zone?

The Tigers jumped to an early lead, scoring one run in the first inning and three more by the top of the 3rd inning. Russ "walked out to the mound" to bad-mouth Barry Zito at his disappointing performance so far – and Barry (or more appropriately, the dice) responded.

Jose Canseco became the A's MVP as he consistently drove in runs while



Barry suppressed the Tigers through the 6th inning, bringing the score 5 to 4 in favor of the A's. Rollie Fingers came in to work the 7th and 8th innings, holding the Tigers to one run as Gary Sheffield doubled to bring Magglio Ordonez home to tie the game at 5 to 5.

Four of the manager cards.

Octavio Dotal entered the 8th inning to replace Fidrych, striking out the first two batters, but Miguel Tejada managed to get a walk and Canseco again came up big with a double to send Miguel Tejada home before Dotal could get the 3rd out.

Huston Street entered the 9th to close out the game with a 1-run lead. The Tigers chipped away at him, getting runners on 1st and 3rd with one out. Enter Kirk Gibson, who hits a ground ball and beats the double play attempt, tying the game. Torii Hunter strikes out to end the inning.

Octavio Dotal comes back to keep the A's off the bases, and does so 1-2-3, so now we go to extra innings. Billy Koch does a fine job holding the Tigers to no runs. Zack Miner comes in to return the favor to the A's. After 10 innings, it's 6 to 6.

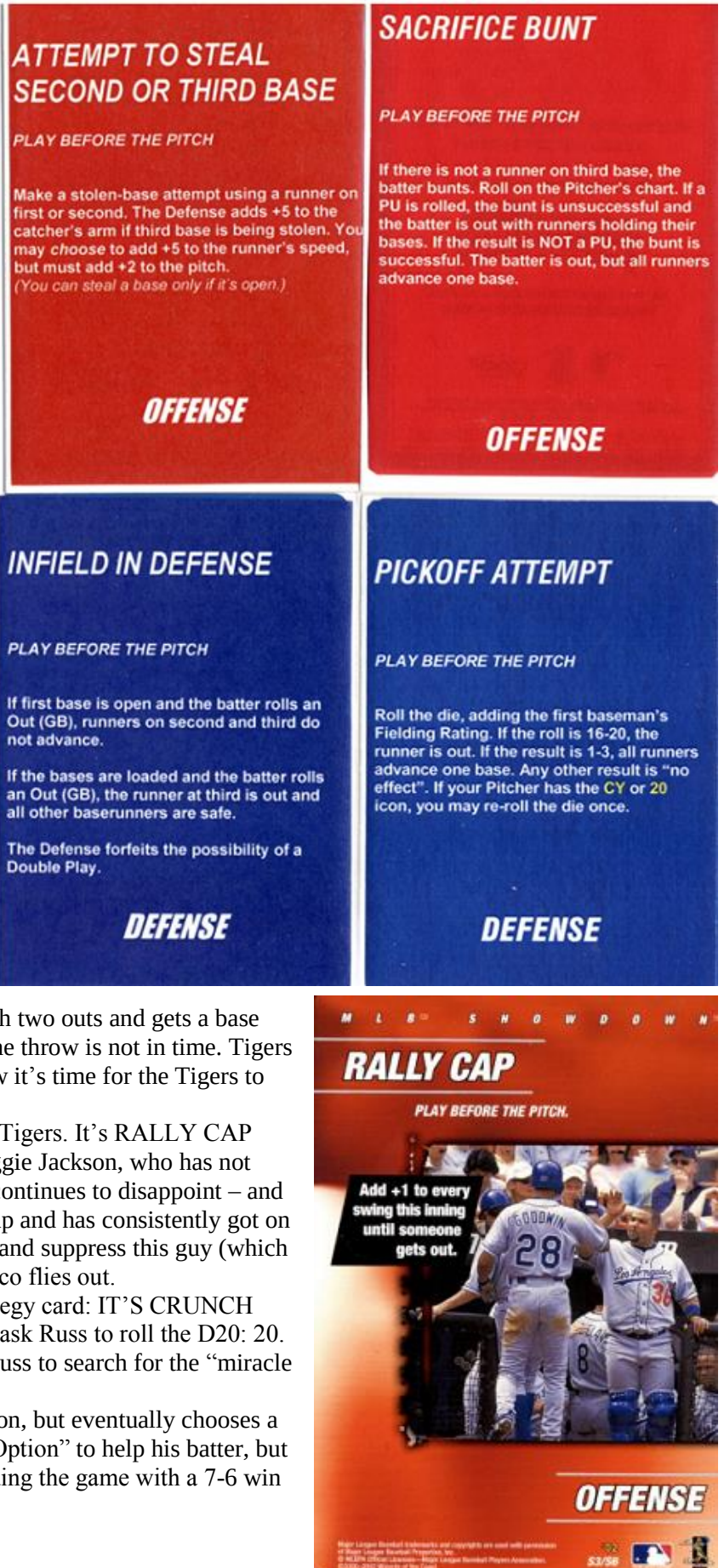
Bill Koch comes back for the 11th inning. He starts off fine with an early out but walks one and gives up a single. Alan Trammell digs in to try and get the winning hit, but flies out. Gary Sheffield is next and with two outs and gets a base hit. The runners at second goes for home and the throw is not in time. Tigers take the lead 7 to 6. The 3rd out comes and now it's time for the Tigers to see if they can close this game.

Juan Acevedo takes the mound for the Tigers. It's RALLY CAP time for Russ. Miguel Tejada gets on base. Reggie Jackson, who has not earned the nickname "Mr. October" all game, continues to disappoint – and the RALLY CAP goes away. Jose Canseco is up and has consistently got on base each time. I play two strategy cards to try and suppress this guy (which hasn't worked previously), and this time Canseco flies out.

Russ then plays a very interesting Strategy card: IT'S CRUNCH TIME. We're playing off a common deck, so I ask Russ to roll the D20: 20. I count off the top 20 cards and hand them to Russ to search for the "miracle card" (see below).

Russ is "underwhelmed" by the selection, but eventually chooses a card. He discards a card to play a "Manager's Option" to help his batter, but the Pitch and Swing rolls don't go his way, ending the game with a 7-6 win for the Tigers after 11 innings.

Rally Cap card.



Play Ball: MLB Baseball Cards

by Russ Lockwood

As it's baseball season, we pulled out the MLB card game, an interesting mix of cards and dice. Randomly, I was the Oakland Athletics and Dan pulled the Detroit Tigers.

Each card has a player photo, position, some ratings, and a batting chart. The pitchers, relievers, and closers use a pitching chart.

Basically, the pitcher rolls a d20 and adds his pitching bonus. This total is compared to the batter's batting stat. If higher, the batter rolls a d20 versus the pitcher's chart. If the total is equal or lower than the batter's batting stat, the batter's d20 roll is compared to the batter's chart. Naturally, rolling on the pitcher's card favors the defense. Rolling on the batter's card favors the offense.

In addition, players hold cards that offer all sorts of baseball ploys -- infield shifts, chin music, and so on for die modifiers -- as well as unusual occurrences on specific results -- runners don't advance on a sacrifice bunt, homers become doubles, etc. It's all quite well put together.

Besides the official cards, Dan has made a number of cards of famous players prior to trades, back from the grave, and so on. He managed to crack the historical statistics code for creating the charts to make up the cards. Perfectly seamless mechanics.

Just to warn you. I'm not a baseball fan. I tend to play the players I've heard of, and for the A's, that was a distinct minority.

Throw Out The First Pitch

Play proceeded easily as Dan jumped out to a 1-0 lead, and then a flurry more runs and I was behind 4-0.

Barry in trouble early.

My pitcher, Barry Zito, was being hammered out there. So I walked out to the mound and gave him a good manager pep talk.

"How ya feelin'?" I asked.

"I'm good," Zito replied.

"Good? Good? Zito, you're stinkin' up the joint. Your name should be Ziti because all you got is a noodle arm!" I took the ball out of his mitt and then replaced it in his mitt. "So start pitchin' in the majors or start packin' for the minors."

Zito immediately showed a renewed interest in pitching. It helped immeasurably that I switched d20s. Everyone knows some dice are just bad. And good. And ugly. Right? Right!

My bats came alive, too. I tied up the score and pushed in another run for a 5-4 lead. A couple innings later, it was Dan 6-5. It would have been another run, but my outfield gunned down his runner turning third and heading for home. An inning later, I tied it up.

Russ searches for a miracle card. Photo by Dan.

The game went into extra innings. In the top of the 11th, Dan pushed a run across and went up 7-6. In the bottom of the 11th, I used every trick (card) I could find in my hand. I had a man on second, but the card selection was not exactly exciting for me. But you play what you can get.

Alas, my last man flied out, stranded the runner, and the game ended. The game turned out far closer than I expected after being down 4-0. Yep, close.

Not being into baseball, I do like the system. Simple to understand and play. Cards offer variety to mimic manager stratagems. Games are generally close, but the d20 offers considerable depth as results are modified by the cards -- which are driven by stats. All told, a very clever design.

Thanks for the games, Dan.





My right flank at start. My ships head around an asteroid field.

Red Alert: Red Shirts to the Front!

by Russ Lockwood

Last space game we played, my *Hyperspace Hack* (see the 4/21/2025 AAR), inspired Renaud to put on a game of *Red Alert*.

Renaud set up a Red Alert game.

Red Alert, a space version of *Command and Colors* (*C&C*), is played out on a hex grid divided into three sections -- left, right, and center -- with cards determining the number of units activated in a section. Some cards activate only one section, others two, and others all three. Special cards provide even more varied activation functions.

In addition, Combat Cards modify the combats by adding or subtracting dice or offering other advantages or disadvantages.

Finally, gold stars are the currency of the game. Most Combat Cards require the spending of gold star tokens. Firing back also costs gold stars. I'm not sure what the stars actually represent, but space manna is space manna.



The Ships and Dice

Basically, I saw five spaceship types: Flagship, Battleship, Cruiser, Destroyer, and Fighter. The last four types come in Regular and “Heavy.” Don’t get excited, Heavies use the exact same model as Regulars, only Regular units use three ships in a hex and Heavy units have four ships in a hex. They fire the same, but the extra ship means the Heavy unit can take one extra damage before being eliminated. Hence, they stick around longer.

The center.

For combat, each type rolls a number of custom d6s based on range.

Three sides of the six-sided dice use colored icons to indicate what type of unit gets hit. Another side is an explosion, which generates a hit if the specific colored icon for the target ship is rolled as well. One other side is a gold star. The last side is a “Red Alert” icon that pushes back the targeted unit two hexes for each icon. However, the payment of two gold stars cancels one Red Alert.

The hex map can include asteroids and planets and such. We played with asteroids, which make you roll a die if you enter. If you roll that unit’s specific colored icon, you lose one ship. On the other hand, enemy ships firing into such a hex lose one attack die.

There’s a bit more to it than this, but it’s enough to give you the gist of how the game works.



The Downside

My complaint with all these section type of card activation games, stretching back to playtesting the Ancients version with Richard Borg at a long-ago Origins, is that you have simultaneous movement with sequential mechanics.

Back then, I was Alexander the Great at the Granicus. As per history, I sent the commander and his Companion cavalry straight at the Persian general...only I ran out of activation cards in his section. Had plenty for other sections, just not that particular one. Alex was surrounded and killed.

We reset, because I may have had just plain bad card draws. So, I tried the same thing and suffered the same fate. In the decades that followed, this mechanic never failed to be frustrating.

Considering that this is a sci-fi setting with FTL drives (including the destroyer tactic of warp charge) and equivalent communications, lack of movement makes even less sense. But that’s me.

By the way, this shortcoming can be mitigated by activation cards specifying number of units, not units within a specific section. Sure, it’s more I-go-U-go, but at least you pick which section can activate and go. I suppose it’s like rolling for pips in *DBA* and numerous variants.

Apologies to all the *Commands and Colors* fans out there, and I know you are legion, but I find a space battle with *C&C* cardplay ‘ahistorical.’

I’d rather play *Pig Pile*!

What?

OK, I’ve never actually played that Borg design, but it sold over 50,000 copies of the game, so it must be good...

Of note, Borg ran a *C&C* multiplayer game at a Historicon where the C-in-C drew many cards and assigned specific cards to specific players. That seems much better, although again, some deck draws are better than others.

The Upside

I like the grandeur of *Red Alert*: Big hex map and big models. I also like the idea that a destroyed battleship unit creates a debris field (like an asteroid field). Nice touch, that.

The gold star currency is a clever mechanic, even if I can't figure out what gold stars represent. Commander attention span? Extra energy generation? I'm still going with space manna.

The right flank. Each circular debris field is a battleship squadron that went boom.

The Game

I led off with a strong right section attack. Why? Because I mostly had right section cards. On occasion, I had multiple section cards, but I had a right wing preponderance of cards. Until I didn't.

Then I had left section cards. Only my left section suffered grievous losses. I was barely holding on, hiding in the asteroid fields.

The center was so-so for both of us. We were responding to the flanks and Renaud played his Combat cards rather well. He had a big gold star cost Parasite card that ate all but two of my gold star hoard. I was gold star poor after that. That's when you realize just how integral gold stars are to card play.

Dice being dice, we bashed each other's fleets back and forth. Battleship debris fields popped up. Fighters raced forward, fired, and then back. Somehow, ships larger than destroyers got warp charge. I couldn't move much because the cards didn't let me.

In the end game, Renaud pulled ahead. Just as I was most vulnerable, he dropped a card that allowed him to pay gold stars to fire extra dice. Uh-oh. What is it? Boom. Boom. Out go the lights.

Well played.

If I had a card that allowed me to move, I would've ordered a retreat. Instead, I surrendered.

Good sci-fi version of C&C.



Milito: Ancients Card Game

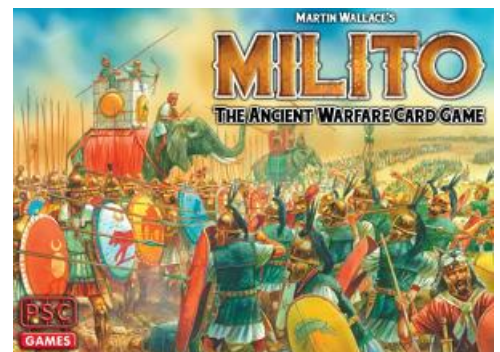
by Russ Lockwood

'Twas Imperial Romans versus Caledonians (proto-Scots) in this card game. By random roll, I was the Romans. The box actually contains six armies: Roman Empire, Roman Republic, Caledonians, Carthaginians, Alexandrian Macedonian, and Achaemenid Persian. The decks contain units (cards) specific to that army. Shuffle them up, lay them on a five-wide by three deep grid, and start the battle.

The middle line contains random terrain cards. In our case, it was three Plains in the middle, a Hill on my right flank, and Rough on my left flank. The latter two provided combat factor benefits to the side that controlled (captured) it.

One five-wide grid line for each side is the deployment spaces for units cards. Two cards maximum per space and they must be the same unit unless a card has a special linking icon.

A unit card contains combat factors for attack and defense, a speed factor, whether you have to spend an extra card or two to deploy, and some with that linking icon.



One side lays down as many cards as it has or wants and declares attacks -- one space worth of attacking combat factors versus the opposing space of defending combat factors. "Flanking" support adds 2 to the attacking combat factors. A Leader adds the combat factors on the card. If you don't have a leader in your hand, you may draw the top card of your deck sight unseen and if it is a leader, the combat factor is applied. If not a leader, no effect.

High combat factor defeats the lesser combat factor, captures the terrain, and eliminates the losing cards from the game. The defender has the option to withdraw and place his cards in the discard pile to recycle instead of the eliminated pile. Ties remove all cards to the discard pile. At the end of your turn, draw three cards (later four). Capture three terrains out of five for the win.

If you've played any sort of card game, you'll pick it up fairly quickly. We consulted the rules a couple of times and shifted a few results on the fly as we read more about the special abilities on some cards. Yes, there's a wee bit more to it than that, but otherwise, easy-peasy.

Card Me!

The Caledonians (Renaud) went first and placed down cards. My Romans went next and placed fewer cards because my legionnaire (heavy infantry) cards required I discard an extra card to deploy one card. I quickly understood the value of flanking support -- Renaud started to roll up my line.

Mid game. My Romans deploy more of their forces.

I also quickly understood the downside of expending twice as many cards as the Caledonians to deploy a card -- my hand was chronically empty. Still, I managed to hang on, thanks in part to special abilities of the leaders. In one unexpected combat, I had no leaders in my hand, so I drew a card from my deck. To make it more dramatic, it was the last card of my deck. I would need to reshuffle. Lo and behold, it was a leader -- indeed, my best leader -- and allowed me to win the combat and immediately control the terrain.

It was a turning point in the battle. Well, at least in my head. One reshuffle of my discard pile later, and I came rarin' with new cards and fresh draws of leaders. I was able to win a combat, use flanking support for the next one, and sometimes even used flanking support for a third combat. In a couple hands, I flipped three terrain to my control and held them for the win.

The game took under an hour even with rules reading and consulting. As the deck is fixed, you don't have to worry about decks stacked with rare, super rare, ultra rare, and ludicrously rare cards. Luck of the draw, skill of deploying the right card in the right space, and deciding when to play a leader makes the game entertaining.



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First attacks.

C3i Gettysburg 2018: Mini Game

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud brought over a small map, minimal counter, clever little game *Gettysburg* that had come in *C3i* magazine.

The 11x17-inch map placed a hex grid over what looks like a 19th-century map of the battlefield. Roads and ridges were the only terrain of note. Roads doubled movement and ridges added +2 to the combat factors of the defender. No stacking, the units were worth zero to two combat factors, and an attacker received a +1 combat factor if three units attacked one defending unit -- although the attacker only counted one counter's worth of combat factors. Each side fielded a dozen infantry counters.

Renaud is all smiles before the first die roll.

Artillery use consisted of a number of firings. I recall the Union had 14 and the Confederates 11. In addition, there was a bit of a bluff to it. Each combat, both players hid or did not hide an artillery counter in their hand. Both players reveal simultaneously. If one has an artillery counter and the other doesn't, the player with the counter gets a +2 to the attack or defense. If neither shows a counter, no artillery is used. If both show a counter, then it's a d6 dice off to see who gets the +2 in the combat. When a player shows a counter, whether or not he gets the +2, one is subtracted from the number of firings.

As you can tell, when the biggest unit is worth 2 combat factors, gaining the +2 artillery makes a difference.

Roll a d6, add the combat factors and compare -- high total is the winner of the attack and the loser either retreats three hexes, becomes "blown" (temporarily removed from the map to return two turns later), or outright eliminated.



Movement

Movement is a bit different. Zones of Influence (two hexes from an enemy unit) stop march movement (4 MPs for infantry) and flip to deployed status (1 MP). Zones of Control (adjacent hexes) stop movement per usual, but the ZOCs (not ZoIs) are semi-sticky. You can “retreat” three hexes at the start of the turn and flip back to March mode (4 MPs).

Middle of Turn 3.



Of course, that applies to both sides -- units that are no longer in ZoC or ZoI are flipped to March status.

Turn 5. Hood repulsed.

As there are no Lines of Supply or Lines of Communication, you troops can wander all over the board subject to the HQ Command Range (6 hexes for Meade and 8 for R. E. Lee) until locked in a ZoC*. I use an asterisk in that statement -- once one side ends all movement, the other side rolls a die and adds the number of counters in March status to the total. That is the number of movement segments that side may use.



This is a clever mechanic to allow wide-ranging maneuvers and counter-maneuvers, but places a finite limit on movement. In our game, I constantly looked for the open flank to hook around with one unit while pinning with another. Most times, I had enough segments to do what I want. Sometimes, I ran out of segments to do all of what I wanted to do. I could do most, but not all.

The Battle

Confederate Heth came on and ran into Buford. As more units arrived on turn 2, lines took shape. I made the first attack with Rhodes (1 star equals 1 combat factor) versus Slocum (zero stars). So it was 1 to nuthin'. We both

decided to toss in artillery, but I won the dice off, so I added +2 to my total. Now it was my 3 to Renaud's zero. The die roll went my way and Slocum became blown -- out for two turns.

By Turn 3, my rebels were in a lovely battle line pushing through Gettysburg with Johnson, who had a toehold in The Fishhook. Buford still held the hill, aided by Berdan's Sharpshooters, which was not a full unit, but did control the hex it was in -- although a Rebel unit could hop on it.

By turn 5, I still had not shoved Buford and Berdan off the ridge, but, I managed to pop Early through the Fishhook. We had both lost two units, but I had a great attack against Sykes and the cavalry under Pleasanton. My own Pender and McLaws were in likewise trouble.

As attacks are alternated, the order in which you select an attack is often important. Kudos to that decision-making process, too. Pender and Sykes both were eliminated. Pleasanton and McLaws both survived. Still tied in losses, with one turn remaining.

Oh, yeah. Union wins ties at the end of the game.

On the last turn, Turn 6, I locked up all of Renaud's units and still had two of mine to march around. I also had a decent roll for sufficient march segments. All I had to do was pick my spots.

Beginning of Turn 6.

I finally got the tie breaking attack to eliminate one more Union unit. At which point, Renaud popped some desperation attacks that didn't work and his dead piled up. Granted, they were low odds attacks, but as we wargamers know, the last turn is no turn to leave a chance of winning on the table.



Thoughts

In the opening rounds, my artillery rolls were spectacular -- I won every dice off for the first three turns, which helped the Rebel cause quite a bit. The last three turns were more of a Union lean, although I won a couple rolls here and there. I ran out of artillery points first, so Renaud had his pick of +2 to his last few attacks.

We also realized the importance of placing HQs for maximum command range. When there's only a couple units, it doesn't matter much. As units arrive, it becomes very important. Both of us realized that sometimes our placements were a bit restrictive.

All in all, this 2018 game shows that good designs can be packed into small formats. We joked that the fewer the counters in March status, the longer it took us to move them. Funny, but it sure seemed we hemmed and hawed over the last couple counters each turn. We completed the six turns in three hours, although some of that was spent looking up rules. It was pretty clean.

Nice, cool scrappy game. Thanks.

Star Wars Duels: It's Shootin' Time

by Russ Lockwood

We had a little time left, so Renaud pulled out *Star Wars Duels*, a card-driven skirmish game. The figures are from a different *Star Wars* game and custom painted.

At start. Imperials to left.

By random roll, I was the Rebels with Luke and Leia in one team and Han and Chewbacca in the other. Renaud had the dark side with the Emperor and two red guards in one team and Darth Vader and two stormtroopers in the other team.

Hmmm. Six on four.

We met on the mining station. I guess Darth and friends were trying to flash freeze Luke into a carbonite sculpture. The play area was a grid of squares.

Shooty vs Whacky

Luke had a light saber for adjacent melee combat, while my other three characters had blasters of one sort or another. The Emperor and Darth were melee specialists and the other four had blasters.

Mid Turn 3: Imperial minions gone.

Cards were slugged to the individual teams and provided attack and defense numbers, whether for shooting or melee. If attack card was more than defense, that many hits were applied to the target. Characters tracked hits.

Shooting was directly down a row, column, or diagonal. Yeah, not very realistic, but it gave meaning to maneuvering.

Movement was via a special d6 die roll. Two sides allowed movement of all your characters a certain number of spaces. The other four sides of the die allowed one character to move a certain number of spaces.

After movement, you had two actions: draw a card and/or play a card. Some cards offered special actions – Darth's "Choke" was a favorite for the dark side while move Luke and draw two cards was a light side favorite.



Battle For Bespin

I figured out quick that four shooters and two big melee lads against my three shooters and one melee lad would be a recipe for becoming an Emperor's wall hanging. I needed to even the odds and quick. Fortunately, storm troopers only took four hits and the red guards only five.

I mowed down the stormtroopers and red guards, often with one attack. I don't know if I drew great cards or average cards, but I had enough of a mix to take those four enemy shooters out.

Luke was getting beat up, as was Leia. All of a sudden, Chewie was being chewed up, or at least all choked up.

Then I played keepaway as much as possible. Although it's about a 50-50 roll for enough movement for melee contact from anywhere on the board, I avoided attacks while pinging Darth and the Emperor with long-range fire.

The Emperor sucked up enough laser fire to fall first, leaving Darth versus all four of my characters. But they suffered damage, too, and one by one, Darth took 'em out. Chewie went down first. Then Leia was strangled. The light saber took out Han.

That left Luke versus Darth.

Buzz buzz. Kzz! Buzz. Zkkzt! Buzz. Buzz buzz. Kkkkrzk! With a final mighty swing of the light saber, the last character fell.

Luke stood over Darth, looked him in the eye, and taunted, "Hey, Mr. Potatoface, I liked mom best."

I had won by the barest of margins.

While not the most sophisticated game, based on a universe of one game, the six on four set up was well balanced. And I got to say "Zkkzt!" during the game.



Guadalcanal: Axis & Allies Boardgame

by Russ Lockwood

I split the shrinkwrap on *Guadalcanal: Axis & Allies*, which probably should have been called *Solomons: Axis & Allies*, but marketing probably figured Guadalcanal was better known. I had played this pre-pandemic, so that's at least six years ago, and probably more likely 10 years ago. I remembered it as a good variation of original A&A, which is why I bought the game.

Turn 2: Renaud pushed the left and right flanks. My IJN fleet gathers. Both of us have built airfields.

This two-player game focuses on the WWII Solomon Islands, with the US already in possession of half of Guadalcanal and ready to conquer the rest of the six-island chain with powerful naval and air forces. The Japanese have weak garrisons on all islands but equally powerful naval and air forces.



Now, for those of us who have read about the Solomons campaigns, you must understand that A&A makes some concessions to playability and often ignores reality. For example, in the game, Japanese bombers at Rabaul can't bomb the US's Henderson Field on Guadalcanal Island because of range limitations.

I reinforce New Georgia to fend off the US invasion.

To reach Henderson, the Japanese need to build an airfield halfway down the chain. Likewise, US B-17 bombers can't reach Japanese airfields around Rabaul for the same reason. You don't even want to know about the range of fighters.

Also, in a departure from original A&A and ignoring the benefits of dug-in troops, defending infantry do not have an advantage over attacking infantry. They both hit on the same die rolls.

Mid Turn 4. Note the US sub and my aircraft carrier in bottom right corner.

Combat in general is different. An enclosed cardboard "Battle Box" holds 12 dice. You shake it up and place it on the table, then pull out a small drawer that lines up the dice with unit type. All 1s and 2s are hits and you check the unit type to see what was hit. If a hit is scored

against a unit not in the actual battle, the hit is applied to the first unit listed in the box lineup that is at the battle. In other words, the box order determines what unit type gets hit and you never lose a hit, you just reassign it.

Note that if a single type is in an area, then all hits will apply against that type. We had an on-again/off-again relationship with that rule.

Anyway, Renaud was the US and I was the Japanese.



The Battle

The US immediately destroyed the Japanese troops on Guadalcanal and captured the supplies, which were used to help build an airfield on Guadalcanal. An attack on the Japanese-held island of New Georgia was repelled thanks to significant reinforcements of troops and “fighters” (which we interpret as single-engine aircraft that includes Vals, Kates, Zeros, Avengers, TBFs, etc.). A US invasion of Malaita was successful, with an airfield quickly built.

The last battle. US sub sinks my battleship (lower right). My air and sub attack the US main fleet. I counter-invade Santa Isabel Island.



Ships collected into main fleets, with both pushing into The Slot. Air attacks against the fleets were repulsed with heavy loss.

Victory Points evenly increased because the US and Japan built airfields (VP generators) at the same rate. The player who gets to 15 VPs win. Not sure about ties on the same turn.

Japan had a slight advantage in build points (holding more islands), but that decreased as the game went on.

The Turning Point: Subs

Renaud had sent single subs into my areas. Subs have a special movement attack in which they can specify the target. Naturally, subs pick either carriers or battleships.

Lo and behold, one of his subs damaged my aircraft carrier -- and the CV was immediately teleported back to base for repairs. No sooner did I repair it and send it back out the next turn that the same sub torpedoed it again and sent it back to base for repairs. Deja vu!

On the other hand, when we did use the all hits apply rule to a central sub, it missed and was sunk.

In any case, the game came down to Santa Isabel island. The US was on one side of the island and Japan on the other. I had a weak garrison being reinforced while Renaud was invading with a goodly-sized group of Marines.

End game positions.



He sent a sub into the midst of my fleet and targeted the battleship. Sure enough, he not only hit, but sunk the battleship -- worth 1 VP! Egads! He was ahead...

My sub did nothing.

As sub attacks are part of movement, and ships move before aircraft, I diverted my air that would have supported my ground attack on Santa Isabel to hit the US fleet.

Alas, in combat, my planes failed to sink an aircraft carrier (worth 1 VP), but Renaud captured the island and built an airfield. The US won 16 points to 14.

It was a good close game! The five turns took 3.5 hours (including looking up some rules).

Thoughts

Renaud noted that the game mechanics and the game were better than expected. I thought they were as good as I had remembered.

A couple conundrums: A battleship's special ability is to ignore the first hit it receives. A submarine's special ability is to pick its target and roll 1d6 for combat during the movement phase, with results immediately applied.

So, which special ability takes precedence? We think the sub's special ability takes precedence and that's how we played it.

As for the "Never Lose a Hit" rule, we had a hard time applying that to submarines. The Battle Box line has submarines hit on the sixth die -- that makes sense to us. Yet the Never Lose a Hit rule means any hit will destroy a sub alone in an area. Although we wobbled all over the place on that, we think that rule applies to subs as well. I think it's a case of two WWII buffs thinking too hard in trying to apply history to the game.

Finally, I believe I screwed up with destroyers. I said they could only transport one infantry, but it's one of any ground unit (infantry, artillery, AA, or supply -- no armor in this game).

On the plus side, everything else we seem to have played correctly. Nice twist at the end with his sub and a desperate, all eyes on the dice, last turn battle to decide the fate of the Solomons. Great game.

Fighters in the Pacific: *Diceless Hex Air Wargame*

by Russ Lockwood

Dice. Cards. Chits. There are all sorts of randomizing mechanics in a wargame. *Fighters in the Pacific* uses none of them except in one specific instance: Damage control.

That's right. You have a plane in your firing arc and you automatically hit. Huh. How does that work?

Inspired by our A&A *Guadalcanal* game, Renaud pulled out *Fighters in the Pacific*, a hex-based wargame of WWII aerial combat in the Pacific Theater. It is not complicated to learn -- far simpler than *Dauntless*, which is the only other WWII PTO hex-based air wargame I've played. By random pull, I was the Japanese and Renaud the US.

Initial set up of the Damage Control scenario.

I had 15 "level" bombers (Vals and Kates) escorted by four Zeros. Renaud had six Wildcats, three destroyers, and the *USS Hornet* aircraft carrier. I had to bomb the carrier. Simple. About the same complexity as *Midway* and less than *Flattop*.

Not so fast, Yamamoto.

Planes can be at high level or low level. AA can hit either height. Planes need to be at low level to bomb.

My bombers move two hexes and had to move straight ahead for two hexes in order to drop a bomb on a ship.



Since the ships move every turn and can pivot, this is not as simple as it sounds. In fact, it's deucedly difficult.

You'd think a 150-200mph plane should be able to correct a bit versus a 30-knot ship, but the ships seem to be able to turn faster than the aircraft. Technically, the plane turns faster, but when you need a full two-hex move straight ahead, good luck on that. You need multiple planes coming in from multiple angles.

It looks so organized...

US planes take two hits to destroy. All Zeros take only one hit from any source. Japanese bombers take two hits to destroy with the caveat that hits from air-to-air combat trigger the "Flammable" trait that adds an extra hit. So, hit the bombers with one hit and the flammable puts on the second one. Only AA needs two hits to down a Japanese bomber.



Game the First

In the first game, I really didn't have much of an idea how planes operated. The Wildcats slashed in and out and IJN planes fell like raindrops during a hurricane.

Turn 4 scrum. Fewer Japanese planes. Brownish smoke markers indicate one hit. Circular explosion markers are high-altitude AA barrages. Circular target markers indicate completed activations. Counters on blue background are at low-level; white background means high-level.

You couldn't enter a hex containing another aircraft at the same height. I was climbing and diving to avoid friend and enemy alike. I literally would have been better off to kamikaze the Wildcats.

You see, one rule was that planes had to fly at top speed all the time. All I needed to do was reduce speed (hexes) to fire, but since I couldn't, I overshot, I under-turned, and I only put one hit on one destroyer. It was the Marianas Turkey Shoot all over again.

And three more Wildcats launched from the *USS Hornet* at the end of turn 5 and another three Wildcats at the end of turn 8.

On Turn 9, I could see that I had failed completely. I had shot down one or maybe two. I had lost 14 or 15. So, I committed cardboard seppuku and we started again.



Game the Second

This time, I dove all the bombers down to low level and kept the Zeros at high level. I also kept the Zeros in back of the bombers, not in front.

You see, I started to realize that much of this game had little to do with WWII tactics.

Movement is by air group -- defined as planes in adjacent hexes at the same height level pointing in the same direction. You move, you shoot/bomb -- Igo-Ugo by group.

When the Wildcats came in this time, I glommed up the area to force evasions. Then, After the Wildcats moved, I went after them with the bombers. That's right, the bombers.

Game 2, Turn 4. See how many IJN aircraft are still in play and more US planes have been hit?

And let me tell you, since you fire only at the end of your movement, trying to position a plane so the rear gun fires is difficult. Then you use the Zeros onesy-twosy to put the second hit on a Wildcat.

You see, the rear gun on the bomber is completely useless as a defensive weapon in our introductory games. Maybe there's an advanced or optional rule that allows the gun to fire when approached by an enemy fighter.

Anyway, this plan worked better than my first fumbling attempt. Wildcats fell at almost the same rate as Japanese planes. By the beginning of Turn 9, Renaud had shot down 12 and I had shot down 8.

One reason was my increased use of the Zero's "Agile" characteristic, which is a free 60-degree hex turn at the end of the move. The bombers force a hit and/or a Dodge and the Zeros swoop in. Not exactly WWII tactics, but it works in the boardgame.

Oh, I still lost as we traded planes during the last turn, and I had come nowhere near putting a hit on the carrier, but I did better.

Turn 9. Still got IJN planes!

Thoughts

With no random firing mechanic, the IJN planes were mostly either intact or flaming wrecks. No defensive fire meant impunity for US attacks. That also meant awkwardly maneuvering the IJN bombers to bring the rear gun to bear during its movement. Then, and only then, did I bring in the Zeros to put a second hit on a Wildcat. No shooting while moving, either.

The fantastic mechanic of the game is the activate movement by air group. As the dogfight heats up, the planes scatter, making for great scrums as alternate activations force decisions about which air group to activate. I imagine that European dogfights with aircraft that aren't shot out of the sky with one hit would make for even better swirling fights.

One thing we had to remember was the Dodge response to fire. If a plane has not been activated and it was fired upon, it must Dodge away one (legal movement) hex. If it is still in the firing arc of the enemy, too bad, it gets hit.

As for the ships, they maneuver like whirling dervishes, shifting hexes like a JetSki. The hex grid is to "blame" here as in the way it shifts ships.

The CV USS *Hornet* is three hexes in length. You move it forward one hex and then swing the ship by the stern -- so the stern stays in the hex and the bow shifts two hexes left or right. Setting up attack runs is quite difficult.

Physically, the game is quite good. Mechanics wise, the diceless system works fine, although lack of defensive fire or fire while moving is just odd.

Ship AA is also a bit odd. Renaud used the destroyers like self-propelled AA guns. He moved and sought out my planes with wild-eyed fervor. And it worked, too.

On the plus side, we played two nine-turn games in about four and a half hours. And that included some flip-through-the-rules time.

I like it enough to say: We'll have to play again and switch sides. Thanks for the games.



NEWS

AWI Tours: Princeton Battlefield

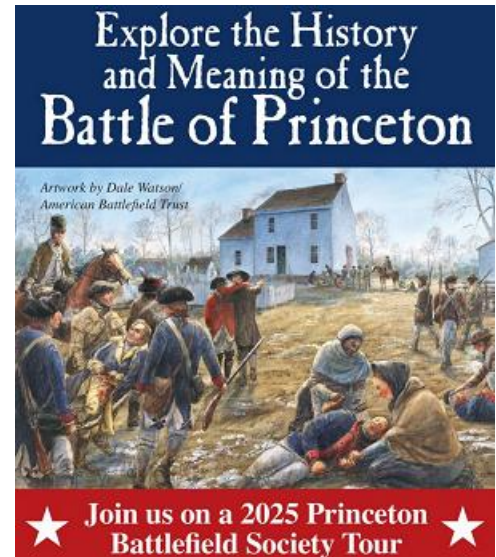
by Russ Lockwood

The Princeton Battlefield Society (PBS) will hold guided battlefield tours and special presentations. Led by expert historical interpreters, PBS battlefield tours include an in-depth walk through the historic Thomas Clarke House and an immersive look at the pivotal Battle of Princeton.

Special Presentations with author and historian Larry Kidder are: June 15 – Life on the Clarke Farm: The Civilian Experience During British Occupation; July 27 – The Road to Battle: Military Actions Leading to Princeton; and September 28 – The People Behind the Battle: Personal Stories of War and Resilience.

Reservations required. Tours begin at 1:00 pm on the following dates: June 1, July 13, August 10 and 24, September 14, and October 12 and 26. Cost: \$10 per person per event, but active military and children under 13 years old are free.

Registration at <https://pbs1777.org/battlefield-tours/>



Mons Graupius Gaming Video: Kansas State

by Russ Lockwood



A small group of Kansas State University professors and students -- all new to miniatures gaming -- refight the Battle of Mons Graupius pitting the Caldonians (proto-Scots) against the Romans. It was played with 6mm Irregular troops on a two-foot by two-foot board using *Junior General* Ancients rules. The goal was to investigate how such visual materials could be used in education. HMGS-NG did part of the sponsoring.

The 10-minute YouTube video covers the basics. The link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRjfmZC-r4I>

Old School Tactical Wargame: 2nd Edition

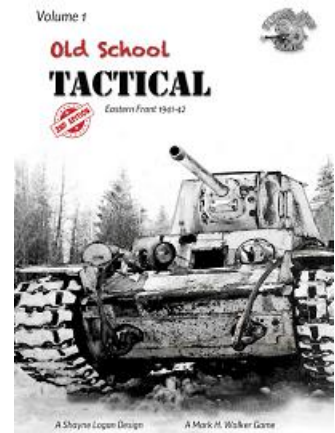
by Russ Lockwood

Flying Pig Games announced that the first game in its *Old School Tactical* series, covering small unit engagements on the Eastern Front during 1941-42, received a second edition.

The boxed version includes: 4 sheets of unit, weapon, vehicle, and condition counters; 2 large 30x41-inch mounted game maps, hexes are 1 inch, depicting both summer and winter Russian terrain; 26 luck cards, such as Shell Shocked, Evasive Maneuvers, Field Repair, and Tank Hunters; 55 unit-data cards; 27 scenarios, including two brand new scenarios; color rule book; and dice. Cost: \$140.

More info:

<https://flyingpiggames.com/shop/ols/products/old-school-tactical-v1-2ed>



CPG: Prepping 3D Figures for Printing

by Russ Lockwood

Chris Parker Games offers an 8 minute video on how he preps his 3D resin printer for printing figures. This presupposes that you have the 3D files and have set up the program to work with a 3D printer.

You Tube Video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZ9QkXy-eo4>



ATO Bonus Offer: Get 1 Over on Steve

by Russ Lockwood

Against the Odds (ATO) magazine is about halfway through its five-year retirement plan. As publisher Steve Rawling knows, well, there's more to retiring the business gently than just not answering the phone or e-mails.

Contracts need to be fulfilled, vendors paid off, and a home for the inventory found.

To meet this last concern, starting now until *ATO*'s final day of operation, they are offering the special "Get 1 Over" offer. When you purchase one of the Pick 3 (magazine issues with a game inside) or Big Pick 2 (*Annual* or *Campaign Study* issues with games inside) packages, you can select one additional regular ziplock magazine issue for free! So the offers become PICK 4 and BIG PICK 2 + 1 issue.

Some rules, of course. Any previous orders are excluded. You can't pick an issue that is out of print, in Pre-order, in Endangered Species status, or the Expanded version of the issue. You will also need to enter the promo code GET1 in the promo code field and hit "Apply."

More info about Pick 3 or Big Pick 2:

<https://www.atomagazine.com/Results.cfm?category=10>

Full Disclosure: I'm the Staff Developer for ATO magazine.

ATO issue 62, *Strike of the Heron* (the initial 1942 northern prong drive to Stalingrad) was mailed out by May 8, although it could take up to a month to reach subscribers. The 2023 *Annual: La Bataille de Kulm* -- including 1815 *La Vendee* variant and 1814 *End of Empire* mini-game -- is now in pre-order.

All things *ATO* magazine: www.atomagazine.com



Wharf Rat Games:

Bulge and WWI

by Russ Lockwood

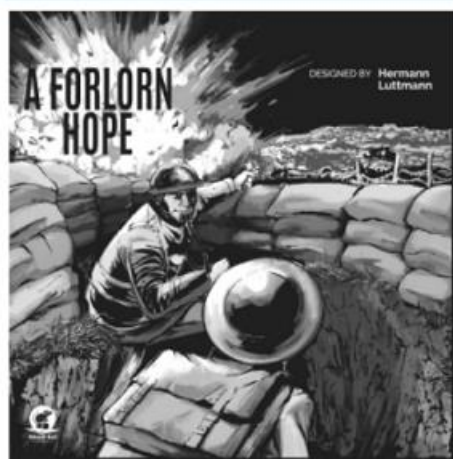
Wharf Rat Games announced it acquired the rights to release *Urgent Commands: The Battle of the Bulge* designed by Wes Crawford. This is billed as an operational wargame using "simultaneous movement." It will be released via crowdfunding in 2026.

WRG also released final artwork for its upcoming WWI game *A Forlorn Hope*.

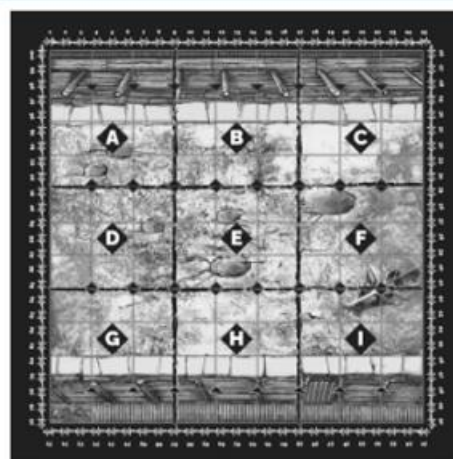
Info:

<https://wharfratgames.com>

A FORLORN HOPE - FINAL ARTWORK



Front Cover



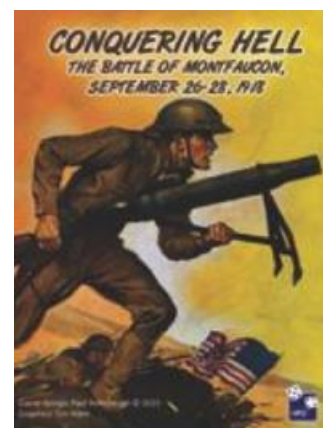
Main Map

New Wargame: Montfaucon 1918

by Russ Lockwood

High Flying Dice Games has released *Conquering Hell: The Battle of Montfaucon, September 26-28, 1918* -- a moderate complexity wargame of the battle for the heights of Montfaucon during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. The heights at Montfaucon dominated this sector of the German defenses, and taking them were crucial to the American Meuse-Argonne offensive that sought to breakthrough once and for the enemy's Hindenburg Line.

The US artillery conducted a three-hour saturation bombardment that exceeded in ordinance weight all of that fired by both sides in the American's Civil



War. Much was at stake militarily and politically for this American-led offensive, as any post-war leverage would be measured in the blood and treasure spent on this battlefield.

Each turn represents six hours. Units represent companies and regiments. Corps and Army level artillery units represent about 100 heavy artillery pieces. Each hex is approximately a half mile across.



Contains: Two 11x17-inch maps, three pages of players' aid charts and tables, 170 single-sided units, and eight pages of rules. Players will need to supply a six-sided die. Cost: \$22.95 plus shipping and state sales tax. *Conquering Hell* is the sister game to *The Yanks Are Here!*

Info: <https://www.hfdgames.com/CH.html>

American Revolution Riflemen: Zoom

by Russ Lockwood

The Washington Crossing American Revolution Round Table will meet virtually on Monday, June 9th from 7:30pm to 9:00pm, via Zoom. There is no charge to attend.

The topic will be: The Riflemen. Historian John Weaver will speak about the role played by riflemen during the Revolutionary War. The rifle companies were the first soldiers officially authorized by Congress. Their distinctive weapons, dress and modes of fighting marked them as uniquely American.

To receive a link for this upcoming meeting, please send an email to: wcroundtable@gmail.com

AWI Research Prize: Middlebrook, NJ

by Russ Lockwood

The Middlebrook Symposium Committee, which has already presented three symposia on the Continental Army's encampment and cantonment in the Central New Jersey area during the spring 1777 and winter 1778-79, will sponsor a fourth Symposium on Saturday, March 21, 2026. As part of the process, the Heritage Trail Association in collaboration with the sites of the Middlebrook Consortium is offering a \$5,000 prize for original research. The prize is funded by the Heritage Trail, the Friends of Jacobus Vanderveer House, and anonymous donors.

Entries will be accepted from now through December 31, 2025 and will be judged by professional scholars of the American Revolution. The winner will be invited to present a summary of his/her research at the fourth symposium.

The Criteria: Original research based on primary resources regarding the 1777 Encampment or the 1778-79 Cantonment in Middlebrook, NJ or another aspect of the war in Somerset County, NJ, including, but not limited to, archaeology, geography, and archival research.

Format: 8.5x11-inch double-spaced, 1-inch margins, and 12-point font in Word or PDF format via e-mail.

The winner will be notified by February 15, 2026 and asked to provide a hard copy of the manuscript and to allow their work to be included in any Symposium proceedings subsequently published by HTA. Non-winning entries will remain the sole property of the submitter.

Info: Linda Barth via e-mail: barthlinda123@aol.com

Caveat: The judges reserve the right to not award any prizes.





John (far left) with the grown-up gamers. Below right: Game in progress.

HMGS Next Gen: Expanding Gaming

by John Spiess

AWI For The Grown-Ups

Since our Next Gen events at the Darien Library have been successful, the director asked if we could run a program for adults as well. So we took a break from Next Gen last night and ran the American Revolution Battle of Ridgefield for adult library patrons. The one exception was Andrew, who was given permission by the library to participate since he's very involved with running an after school WWII gaming club in Greenwich with Next Gen.

For a first time event, the director was very happy with 13 people showing up. Once again, like in Somers, we had a walk-in who thought it was going to be a movie. He stayed, had a great time, and took all the information we had for Historicon. We also had a woman attend who was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

End game.

As always, this scenario is very popular in CT. We had four British players who had at least some gaming experience. We put the newbies on the Continental side, since they pretty much just had to defend the barricade and the flanks behind some fences.

HMGS board member Frank Luberti showed up and helped



out promoting HMGS and Historicon for 2 hours while I ran the game. Retiring board member Jim Stanton also showed up, taking some great photos as well as helping out the defenders with questions and tactics.

Everyone picked up the rules right away and had fun with all the British charges against the barricade. Of the attendees, three were already signed up for Historicon, but another five will now probably make the trip. Unlike Next Gen kids, these people can drive.

My favorite part of the night was at the end when the library director (Joanne, who also played) commented that next time we should have “post-game cocktails.” Jim Stanton asked if that was allowed. The look on the directors face was just priceless. “I’m the Director.”

Harfleur Renaissance Siege: Ridgefield, CT

The Ridgefield (CT) Library ran a Renaissance Fair that included events and demonstrations of leather stamping, archery, a bard, people showing the different types of weapons and armor of the period, and HMGS-NG castle siege game.

Since there were other events going on, I broke up the Siege of Harfleur castle game into several smaller games with one or two kids facing off against each other. This way, a lot more kids could play, and everyone moved at their own pace. One funny part came when the librarians announced a break so everyone could watch two knights bash each other with maces and shield.

When the fight was over, pretty much everyone ran over and wanted to play the castle game. We finished up, and I pulled out Jim Stanton’s Joust setup so we could get more people involved. I handed out lots of Historicon and HMGS flyers, and it looks like some people already plan on attending. From the reception I had, the Renaissance Fair was a good place for future outreach.

Castle Siege game.



100YW Sea Battle: Rye, NY

We played a medieval cog sea battle from the Hundred Year’s War. It was good practice for me to run this game since I will be hosting it in several sessions all day on Friday at Historicon as part of the convention kids program.

You might notice one of the kids holding a phone in several of the photos. Normally, phones are not allowed in any games, but one of our regulars was on vacation in England and didn’t want to miss the game. So his friends zoomed him in and he played one of the ships by phone. It was actually pretty funny hearing him on the phone when his ship was boarded.

The cog models are from John Manning’s collection that he had not painted. The Connecticut crew spent a few days assembling and painting them just for these games.



100YW Sea Battle: US Navy Cadets

We revisited the 100 Years War naval battle with the Dealey Division of US Navy Cadets in Stamford, CT. This was our second event with them, and it looks like we will now be a regular part of the annual schedule.

John Manning was a great help, giving the historical background of the engagement before the game, as well as the outcome summary at the end.



Once again, the senior cadets took on roles of fleet commanders and everyone had a ship to maneuver. Lots of boarding actions. Jumping over to an enemy ship wearing heavy armor with an ocean beneath you. What could go wrong?

Oh my. Some assembly required. Ah, but here be the skilled cogs in the machine.

Boudicca's Revolt in New Canaan: CT

We played a game of Boudicca's revolt in Britain against Rome. We had some new players, so of course we gave the role of Queen Boudicca to Sidney. She did pretty well as the Brit commander.

Boudicca and her Celts against the Romans.

The Romans are always tough and built up a gigantic lead in victory points. However, the Brits hung in and actually came within a die roll of winning the game. Great ending.

More HMGS NG Photos:

Renaissance Fair.



Sea Cadets.



Cogs in action at Rye.





Ice ice A-Team: Clockwise from left bottom corner: Ed, Fred, Chris, Dylan, Connor, Steve (cap), John, and the back of GM Sean.

Return of Tazan Rell: *D&D* Continues

by Russ Lockwood

I walked the city of Sheffield. The new HQ of the A-Team was under full construction and the staff and guards received training. The city drew new citizens from the surrounding lands due to oddly cold and snowy conditions. I worried about the city's vulnerability -- past A-Team expeditions tamped down the evil lurking about, but the walls had yet to be fully repaired. Still, every day brought progress.

A contingent of bugbears, hobgoblins, and goblins arrived as new citizens, which displeased me. Scurg the bugbear cleric was a gallant and valued comrade, so I didn't mind him and his brethren, but the goblin and kin were another story entirely. I had run across them before. Well, maybe not these specific goblins, but goblins in general. It took most of my willpower not to loose some shafts at the little buggers.

Now the city had a pack of them. Sure, they kept mostly outside the walls, fixing up some estate or another, patrolling here and there, but sooner or later, I thought, they'll stab us in the back. Of that, I knew for sure.

I stopped to consider the mercenary guards hired by Balien. The Iron Wolves Company should offset the goblins. Hopefully.

I headed for a shop fellow adventurers told me about. Magic items abounded within, thanks to an adventuring group cashing out their acquisitions.

A weapons shop. Image from web.



I opened the door to the jingle of a little bell. "Welcome to The Little Shop of Big Wonders," said the thin, dark-haired human behind the counter. Nicely dressed, I observed. Obviously enough coin to buy magic items. And likely more selling them. "I am Axom, proprietor."

"Morning, Axom. I'm Tazan Rell."

"I thought so. I've seen you helping the city rebuild. I am honored," Axom said with a slight nod of his head. "Come to buy or sell or just browse?"

"Buy, if I heard correctly about a special bow you may have for sale."

"Yes, indeed. I put it aside specifically for you. Just the thing for a renowned archer. Excuse me." Axom disappeared behind a curtain.

I found those lines smooth. This guy's a salesman.

Axom reappeared a moment later. He set a longbow on the counter and passed his hand under the counter. A flicker of light told me a magic shield had been deactivated.

“Go ahead. Give Skybreaker a heft.”

I lifted the bow and settled into a firing stance. I twisted about into various positions. It felt light and agile and rather at home in my hands. I examined it further and spotted a telltale icon. “Here, I believe.”

I tapped and a bowstring materialized. I drew an arrow from my quiver and nocked it, again twisting, turning, kneeling, and bending to get the feel of it. Light and responsive. “Very nice.”

Axom grinned. “It was only used by a little old elf lady on special holidays.”

“Of course it was. What are you asking?”

“A mere 40,000 gold pieces.”

“For that I’d want a young saucy elf maiden to go with it. I’ll give you 15,000.” I flashed my own smile.

“While I certainly appreciate all you do to defend and rebuild the city, my poor old indigent aunt, lame in one leg and deaf in one ear, needs funds for immediate surgery to save her one good eye. 35,000 at least.”

I raised an eyebrow. “This bow’s magic aura must be tugging at my sympathy, else I would never offer 20,000 in cold hard gold coin for a marginal upgrade to my combat tool kit.”

“Marginal? Oh, woe is me that I am not deaf and must hear such sacrilege,” Axom wailed. “This is the legendary Skybreaker, known for being the bow that shot the arrow that sliced an apple perched atop a young elf-lad’s head at 1,000 paces. Yet I see you are an archer of consummate skill who will come to appreciate such ethereal craftsmanship, so I will let it go for only 30,000.”

“An apple? Such piffle. At that range I already shot an arrow that split my previous arrow. Why, hard bargain that it is, I could buy a grand castle and fiefdom for the 25,000 gold pieces I’m offering for the bow.”

Axom looked perplexed. Or maybe concerned that I had not met his high price and might walk away. He smiled a smile of a sale. “I can see you possess a discerning eye for magical excellence. I would split the difference, but am feeling in awe of your past good deeds and would not think of charging 27,500 gold, but will haggle against myself and settle for 27,000.”

We eyed each other for a moment. I nodded and knocked the counter once. “Done and done.” I clasped Axom’s hand in agreement and wrote out a chit for the amount.

“It’s a pleasure doing business with you, Tazan Rell,” he said. “Anything else, perhaps?”

“No, but accept my appreciation at being able to discover such a bow, Axom.” I deactivated the string and stowed the bow inside my quiver next to my original magic bow. With a nod, I departed to prepare for another adventure.

Back to the Dragon Lair

Thanks to Cristof’s increasing dexterity with teleport spells, a single step shortened the once arduous trek southward. A mountain confronted me. I was thankful for bringing cold-weather clothing.

Snow in the tropics? Glaciers in the foothills? A dragon’s boast to shuffle in a new ice age? Preposterous, but apparently a bit too real to let lie. If the Sheffield area was to prosper, we needed to whack this white ice dragon harboring delusions of grandeur.

The party had barely escaped its last effort, he mused, but while a few wizards took their leave, the A-Team now contained two fighters: me, for what that was worth, and Sarge the barbarian, which was worth quite a lot.

In addition, Balien the half-elf fighter-mage, Rufus the cleric, Cristof the wizard, the mysterious magic-wielder Hammer, Gavriel the wizard, and Scurg the bugbear cleric made up the rest of the party. We plowed through the snow until reaching a rock-strewn ice field.

Ambush!

The howling of dire wolves echoed among the boulders. I put my back to one of the larger outcroppings. The rest of the A-Team formed a circle, each looking to find the enemy first. I pulled SkyBreaker from my quiver and activated the rune that brought up the magic bowstring. I



nocked one arrow, held a second, and waited.

Hammer ran forward and climbed atop a boulder. He did not have long to wait for such singular attention. A young ice dragon popped up from the ice field and began a personal battle with Hammer.

Ice Dragon jr vs Hammer and his force wall.

Meanwhile, goblins joined the dire wolves in attacking the rest of the party. Sarge the barbarian made quick work of one wolf and the rest of us made quick work

With each arrow loosed, Skybreaker loosed a mighty crack of thunder. Whether that startled the goblins or not, I don't know, but the clamor drew in a new enemy.

Then the self-proclaimed “Lord of the Mountain” roared into battle. Well, he looked like a Yeti and acted like a Bumble. A few spells here and there, a few arrows artfully placed, and a mighty big whack from our barbarian strew his teeth about and finished off the beast.



The young dragon fell soon thereafter. It seemed too easy.

Despite howls from my comrades, I sliced open the late Lord of the Mountain and removed his liver, heart, a smidgen of brain, a bit of lung, and the entire spleen. I stuffed the squishy parts along with some teeth into a bag packed with ice and snow. Nevar our alchemist might have use for the parts in his potion creation. We did the same with the dragon parts, too. All of it went into our Hole of Holding. Oh, the parts might leak a bit, but we didn't plan on staying long.

Our party enters the hall of the White Dragon.

Hall of the Ice Dragon

You've got to admire a dragon with a sense of humor. The sign outside its lair read: "Adventurers welcome. Dinner is served at six."

So in we entered the mountain hall through a gate. One precaution we took was to hew a massive tree down and make a good post. The portcullis was open and we propped the log under it so we'd have an escape route if worst came to worst.

The place was dark, although some diffused blue light came from the ice floor itself. Fortunately, Rufus brought some lantern that lit up the entire hall. That was certainly necessary for me -- I did not have darkvision. I kept close to



Rufus.

As we advanced across the initial icefield, Sarge fell into a hole and discovered a tunnel system underneath. We all became more cautious as he climbed out.

A series of frozen statues, or, more to our eyes, adventurers frozen in place, dotted the icefield. We could hear water dripping, but until one of the statues took a swing at Gavriel, didn't think much about it. The counter-attack shattered the now partially frozen statue into a million little pieces. Hammer shattered another. We had little to fear from them.

I followed our mighty hippo -- that's Rufus -- across the ice field and into a stone corridor. An ice wall slid across the opening, trapping us. A quartet of kobolds charged down the corridor at us. Two arrows shafted two of them. Rufus chased the remaining pair away. They dropped a stone door behind them.

Rufus chips away at the ice door while I cheer him on. Balien helps us.

Rufus turned to the ice wall. Pulling an axe from his pack, he swung a mighty stroke but only chipped the wall for a measly 5 HP. "Did it go down?" he asked.

"No, but now we have enough ice for a martini," I quipped.

We set upon the icewall until it cracked and shattered.

That was when we saw an ice dragon pop out of the ice floor right behind Cristof. The beast roared, "Die, enemy of Dragonkin."

I had no idea what Cristof did to anger all of dragon-kind, but this ol' Winter Wannabe made good his threat and breathed a cone of cold that caught a number of the party. Then the bugger dove back into the ice.

Cristof! Behind you!



I stood so gobsmacked, I didn't even fire an arrow. That shoot and scoot move was that quick.

Meanwhile, icicles fell from the ceiling, sometimes hitting, sometime missing. Goblins shuffled around.

That's when the Mama dragon offered up an ice breaker, shooting out of the ice and ice cream coning us again. And just like that, poof, she disappeared beneath the ice. Great. Mom and Dad dragon tag team. I'm guessing that polishing off draco junior didn't sit well with them.

It's mighty hard to attack a pair that hits and runs. I stayed off the ice and in the corridor. Rufus left his lamp hanging just outside and headed deeper into down the corridor.

"Where are you going?" I asked. If our hippo cleric answered, I didn't hear it with all the battle noises coming from the Mountain Hall. I had a grand view when a trio of Ice Moppets showed up and surrounded Hammer. Then the moppets exploded. That made Hammer mad and he summoned a mini-Beholder with laser-beam eyes. Our battle seemed so desperate, I hauled out the conch shell and summoned the genie.

To my eye, we were too separated and the dragons too fast and furious. Balian agreed that we needed something to encourage the dragon to stick around.

I joked, "What are we going to do, stake the hippo out on the ice?"

That loosened up the panic and mitigated the shock of the hit and run attacks.

In my head, a bard's song played...

Yo! A-Team!

Let's kick it.

Ice ice A-Team...

Ice ice A-Team...

All right, stop!

Collaborate and listen.

Dragon's back with a brand new attention.

Cold claws, grab a hold of us tightly,

Fire me an arrow daily and nightly.

Will it ever stop?

Yo, I don't know,

Turn off the lights and ice'll glow.

To the extreme, rock magic like a vandal,

Light up a hall, wax dragons like a candle.

Dance!

We rush the moppets that boom.

We're killin' them off like a poisonous mushroom.

Deadly!

When we play magic melody,

Anything less than the best is a felony.

Love it or leave it

Sarge better gangway.

I better hit bull's eye,

These beasts don't play.

And if there was a problem,

Yo, we'll solve it.

Check out the fight while A-Team resolves it.

Ice ice A-Team...

Ice ice A-Team...

Ice ice A-Team...

Ice ice A-Team...

And Now: The Wandering Hippo

Wiser now, we started setting up our own ambush. The wizards prepped their mighty spells, I readied my bow, and our clerics readied healing spells. All, that is, except Rufus, who meandered through the mountain corridors, farther and farther from the main battle. His spells and power ripped up the goblins that tried to stop him. He grabbed magic items from various halls. Meanwhile, we could have used his healing spells in the dragon battle.

I bet it was our fault. Back when we were defeating some sort of slime in a tower that contained a room full of books, we agreed that an all-out attack involving Rufus would start with the battle cry, “Hippo in the Library!”

Well, we forgot that. Rufus wandered the corridors, beating goblins up while dragons beat us up. From requests for his healing presence to demands he join the battle, Rufus ignored all our entreaties.

Meanwhile, Cristof might get the nickname Yo-yo from this fight. He was up, he was down. He was healed. He was smashed. He was healed again. And smashed again. Man, when he upset dragons, he really upset dragons. Those hit and run draco attacks were pushing us deeper and deeper into peril.

Our ambushes evened the score at times, forcing either Mama dragon or Daddy dragon to take a rest to get healed. Of course, as they healed, so did we. We needed to keep the dragons above ice if we were to slay them.

Hammer figured it out. He taunted, “Come fight us, you coward! Try to defeat that which your son could not!”

Well that had an effect. Mama dragon roared out of the ice. The readied attacks hit her like magic whirlwinds. She staggered and just before she could disappear, I popped two arrows into her, the genie blasted her with a wall of water, and Balien skipped, jumped, and slashed. The bloodied corpse fell to the ice and did not move.

Mama dragon falls.

I hummed anew.

Now that the party is jumping,
Dragon ass kicked in, the A-Team is pumpin'.
Quick to the point, to the point, no fakin'
We're cooking dragons like a pound of bacon.
Pounding 'em,
If they ain't quick and nimble.
Mage go crazy when he weave a symbol,
And a hi-splat,
With a souped up tempo.
He use a scroll,
It's time to go high-low.
Rollin',
With a five point Oh,
Use a D twenty so my crit can show
The re-rolls on standby,
Waitin' just to say, “Hi.”
Did you stop?
No,
I just let fly.
Kept on,
Pursuing to the next shot.
I bust a roll and I'm aiming for the next fop.

And if there was a problem,
Yo, we'll solve it.
Check out the fight while A-Team resolves it.

Ice ice A-Team...
Ice ice A-Team...
Ice ice A-Team...
Ice ice A-Team...



The Return Of Tuvok

In the battle banter, we learned that this old white dragon, the Winter Wannabe, had some long name that I shortened to Tuvok.

I considered the losses and the cone of cold attacks. It did not look good for a frail human like myself. I got to test that theory out.

A cone of cold hits the party.

Cristof fell anew. So did Gavriel. So did Scurg. Rufus was screwing around with kobolds and looting. Requests for his assistance were still ignored. He was intact and full of healing spells but ghosting us.

I broke from my corridor sanctuary and raced to Gavriel and poured a healing potion down his gullet, then one for Scurg. Alas, I could not get to Cristof, but one of the other two did.

There I was on the ice when Tuvok popped up behind Cristof... again. Out exhaled the cone of cold. A whopping 72 points of damage. I had only 70 HP. Down I went like a frosty statue. I lingered near death. Once I heard my name called from the great beyond. I shrugged it off. Then I heard my name called again. I drifted farther from the land of the living.

So many are down, including me!

And then, poof, I was back, courtesy of a magical infusion of energy. I rose to my feet and stumbled back to the entrance of the hall.

With me down, Hammer tried to gain control the genie. Worse, that bugger tried to send the genie against Cristof. What's this mystery comrade doing?

Failing that, Hammer yelled, "You vile worm! You cower in your hole. You have yet to face your mightiest foe!"

That seemed to infuriate the beast. Apparently, it has a bit of an ego problem. Maybe mommy issues. Probably wasn't allowed to play in any of the dragon games.

Well, now Tuvok really got mean. He loosed a series of disintegration spells. He disintegrated Gavriel into a pile of dust. He disintegrated Scurg into a pile of dust. He disintegrated Hammer into a pile of dust. He grabbed Cristof in his jaws, chomped the life from him, and stuffed the wizard in a tunnel.

The beast took damage, sure. It was the most he ever took in the fight. I shafted the beast. Balian chopped. Sarge alternately drank magic healing potions from Scurg's belongings and ran around gathering up dust.

Still, Ol' Tuvok refused to die. In fact, the winter worm was around so long, even Rufus finally meandered over to join us. He seemed non-plussed that half the party was dust or dead. Enjoy the vacation?

And yet, we could feel the battle turning in our favor. Tuvok's deep-throated voice echoed in the Hall. "Leave now and I will give your friend back."



Oh? What's this? Negotiation?

The beast rumbled anew. "My patience grows thin. Leave my lair and never come back or die in an icy pit of doom."

He really must be hurting. After defeating all those adventurers, including half this party, he's now offering an armistice? Hmm. Dinner will be served at six. And I smell dragon stew.

The beast popped up again and did more damage and took more in return. Yet this time, it did not disappear. It aimed to finish this party off.

The Winter Wannabe disintegrates Hammer.

As the bloodied and gasping beast dragged itself across the ice, I lined up a shot. True, I was shaking with blood loss.

The healing I received was enough to allow me to stand upright and shoot, but not in a steady stance. I missed (roll of a 1). My second shot also missed (another roll of a 1). Although at the time I did not know it, the beast was down to its literal last HP -- despite all the ice-healing.

Up to this point, we had nailed the dragon for 503 out of its 504 HP. My arrows flew way wide.

Balien was not so affected. He danced over and rammed his sword into the heart of the beast.

Tuvok the Winter Wannabe dragon fell. Sarge the barbarian cut off its head and the Mama's head, too. The Hall of the Mountain was ours. Even the goblins scurried away.

Healing and the Haul

Besides a motherlode of magic items, potions, weaponry, and scrolls, we looted roughly 650,000 gold pieces' worth of coin. Did I also mention dragon eggs, scales, and sliced up organs. Good thing we brought a Holding Hole and a Bag of Holding plus we found three Bags of Holding in the hoard.

We also found Cristof's body in a tunnel -- it was off to a major city to find mages high enough to resurrect him and the disintegrated ones. I had no idea that disintegrated bodies could be resurrected. Apparently that's why Sarge went around collecting dust. Learn something wizardly new every day.

There ensued a silly round-robin discussion with some Duke of Demons regarding Hammer, who apparently was connected to this demon. Basically, it came down to either letting the character stay deceased or resurrecting him. Hammer, being a pile of dust, refused to give an opinion. Given his effort to turn the genie, I was perfectly happy to allow Hammer to remain on another plane. Cristof argued forcefully for his return -- apparently forgetting that Hammer tried to turn the genie against Cristof.

Balien had the good sense to avoid all entanglements with this diva demon, but Sarge entertained some sort of quest.

I said no deals. "Evil never keeps a deal." Then that demon mentioned something about slaughtering kobolds. I admit, in a moment of weakness, I was intrigued. But good sense finally returned to me and I returned to my first argument: No deals with evil.

In the end, all, including Hammer, were resurrected. I'm not sure how much coin and magic items it took, but the A-Team stayed intact. But I'm not quite sure about Sarge, who was last seen deep in private discussion with the demon.

Maybe.

Sarge may or may not have made some sort of deal.



Interlude: Next Quest?

by Ed

“Surely now we must turn our eyes to the lich Charis, the cause of much unrest and chaos here in these lands -- chaos that others grasp as they too seek power.”

All here know that the root of Charis’ power also serves as his most vulnerable point: his Phylactery. I have heard of previous dealings with the Devil Miraxador and believe Charis covered his tracks there, but I am given to understand we hold that Devil’s contract. No strike against Charis can succeed unless we strike also at the undead’s means of gaining power and continued existence. It may be that Miraxador can be compelled to surrender knowledge of the Phylactery in exchange for his contract, that and other concessions we may extract for the favor. Order must return to these lands or they may suffer the fate of my family holdings now lost to Iuz and chaos.”

Rufus disagreed. “No more bargains with evil! The last one cost 200,000 gold! Think of how much good we could have done with that much coin.”

“Actually, it was 500,000 gold pieces to bring back the three members who were disintegrated as well as Cristof the Crunched,” Balien noted. That leaves 12,500 gold for each of us plus a number of magic items.”



“Eye don’t wanna work. Eye want to play D&D all day...”

Our party party (l to r): Ed, Fred, Steve, Chris (red), GM Sean, Connor, John (yellow), and Dan (cap).

Shhhh! We're Huntin' Liches

by Russ Lockwood

“And there’s the question of why ol’ Hammer here sent the genie after Cristof,” I said.

“I did not,” Hammer said.

“I heard you.”

“You could not.”

“Momentarily, no, but when I was revived, I certainly did.”

“What I spoke was no language you can understand.”

“I understood enough.”

“No, you did not and do not,” Hammer insisted. “The genie is under your control, but if it can do as you command and harm our party in the process, it will.”

“How?”

“Some attacks inflict damage over an area. If it can maneuver to place our party members within that area, it will. And you were temporarily dead.”

“I...see.” That was an interesting observation. Apparently, when I was down, the genie acted according to my last command, but had its own ideas about how it would comply. “My apologies. I must rethink genie deployment.”

Indeed, I thought about it some more. We were essentially biding our time with the genie, waiting for his three wishes power to return. We’d use the two wishes for something within its power to grant and then the third would be to

release the genie from its conch shell in exchange for never interacting with our party, allies, and those under our protection, directly or indirectly through its actions or inactions. Well, the wording would be for the future.

In the present, we had a crazy lich to track down and disintegrate.

Fire Dragon Deal Gone Right

In the meantime, a party of kobolds showed up at Sheffield bearing a chest. I wanted to shaft the lot of 'em, but cooler heads prevailed and we accepted the chest with 10,000 gold pieces from Fireass the Red Dragon. Apparently, the party had worked out some sort of deal where if we killed off Tuvok the Winter Wannabe dragon, he's pay us off. I guess we're on his Nice list, or at least not on his Naughty list.

For those of a poetic mind, whether the world would end in fire or ice seems to have shifted to fire.

I couldn't wait to see the kobolds gone, but to my chagrin, they left still breathing.

But what to do with the 10,000 gold pieces?

I suggest buying more vacant lots adjacent to our HQ and expanding to include a full suite of small businesses, including blacksmiths, leather workers, bakers, millers, masons, fletchers, barrel makers, wagon builders, woodworkers, shopkeepers, and so on. We pay to rebuild and charge minimal rent for them to ply their trades in exchange for them providing us with labor and goods as part of their rent. It's part homesteading (we provide habitable locations) and part fiefdoms (they provide goods and services).

We should stop those refugees passing through and even make the offer to others who have already passed through. We can offer land to farmers with our Iron Wolves, bugbear, hobgoblin, and goblin patrols giving some degree of safety.

Outfitting

Within our haul was a set of magic studded leather armor that was stronger than the mithril shirt I was wearing. Although I could certainly wear both, the magic didn't stack. Still, I liked the idea of greater protection, so I claimed it. I had to meditate over the armor and it shaped to my body.

I already owned a magic shield with a smiley face upon it, but almost never used it because I could not wield bow and shield -- not enough hands.

Nevar also bestowed upon me 12 magic (+2) arrows (+d6 damage), which should come in handy. They went into my quiver of many holdings. It wasn't an infinite bag of holding, but I had plenty of regular arrows within as well as 26 Walloping (+1 and save vs fall) arrows that only seem to topple man-sized and smaller targets and do little else.

The newly returned rested back to their full potential. The wizards and clerics readied their magical spell arsenals. And we were ready as ever.

A Cristof teleport spell brought us back to Hilltop and a night's rest. Come morning, we traveled to Nevar's Ent friend at the sacred grove, where he could trade knowledge of flora. At the crack of dawn, we headed south along the road on the way to the Eye of Stirling.

Rut-Ro!

As we marched, we found a set of giant ruts that crossed the road. Why? Probably to get to the other side.

These were big and wide and I thought of an old story from a bygone age: Grond.

The big ram. Image from web.

This was initially met with skepticism, but more thoughts of siege engines joined my own. We decided to follow the ruts as they carved a path across the fields generally to the northeast. We consulted a map, but although the rut path was straight, it led to no town, city, or castle we could see. It was a straight line from mountain to swamp. Maybe it was a staging area far from prying eyes.

We dealt with a couple of small scouting parties made up of skeletons.

Oh great. Undead.



We eventually came upon an encampment, partially enclosed by an earthen wall, containing a variety of siege engines in various stages of completion, a group of robed chanters, and 1,000 skeletons working on said engines of war. Just outside the wall were scouting parties of skeletons and one Skelly Big Bones of the laser eyes -- we had met that undead fellow in the catacombs under Sheffield. Back then, he had fried Cristof, stabbed me through the heart, and slashed Rufus. It's a good thing we had an instant death teleport and revival spells from Pelor.

*We surveyed the skeletal army from our hilltop.
Photo by Ed.*



Oh, from our vantage point atop a small hill about 150 feet from the wall, we watched wights and ghouls direct the thousand skeletons. Attacking would be a mighty tall order, but we felt that after surviving the white dragons' lair, we could take on the undead. We felt the need to put a stop to all this siege preparation. We discussed ways to infiltrate the encampment, from all-out assault to magical ingress and egress.

In the meantime, we spied 15 to 20 banshees mingling with the skeletons. That dampened our spirits a bit.

Above us, a small speck grew larger as it flew to the encampment.

Rut-ro! The Dragon Lich from the original siege of Sheffield. And it carried in some old friends: Captain Marcellus of the sword and Black Tide the wizard. All of a sudden, not so easy-peasy.

The Dragon Lich flew off, relieving us of him, so we made a plan.

The Battle

I gave a mighty fine speech about heroic ideals that pumped up everyone's morale. I was in turn Hasted and Blessed, which gave me an extra attack and better chance of hitting a target and evading those who swung or shot at me. And let me tell you, those skeletons on patrol seemed to have a significant number of bows.

I took out Skybreaker, took careful aim at Skelly Big Bones, and loosed three magic arrows. Surprise!

Thunder. Thunder. Thunder! I had such great sound effects. I mean, I was a cool cat.

You see, every time I fired Skybreaker, thunder would echo across the sky. Now, if I needed to be stealthy, my other bow would do, but in a bold attack against an encamped force at long odds, Skybreaker would announce whistling death.

Two arrows thudded into Skelly's torso and one entered an eye-socket and lodged in his skull. Ol' Skelly Big Bones crumpled to the ground and his bones turned to dust.

Skeletons fell from our attack and Cristof took out a banshee.

Yet the defenders soon recovered from our first strike. Marcellus blew a horn. Black Tide opened up a Demon Door and summoned a Black Tyrant. Somewhere in there a Balrog showed up. There was quite the concentration of dark forces inside the encampment. Then again, we had the concentration of generally good but sometimes morally ambivalent forces of light.



The Balrog shows up, as does Captain Marcellus (flag) and Black Tide (upper right corner).

Once again, I shot three times, this time at the Balrog. I missed the first shot, but the other two struck (51 HP). The next thing we know, a Demon Door opened up on our hill and out popped all the bad boys in the bad boy band. So much for long-range bombardments.

The Big Bad Balrog stabbed and whipped Scurg (92 HP), who dropped. Rufus hit the triple B for a lowly 12 HP. This might be a long fight...

Except Cristof came to the rescue and Banished the Big Bad Balrog to a different dimension. Handy, that spell.

The evil Black Tyrant loosed a Disintegrator Ray in my direction, but I saved. The Banshee screamed, but I saved that, too. Gavriel became paralyzed from something.

Meanwhile, the mass of skeletons and some more banshees advanced against us.

This Is Getting Dangerous

The evil Captain Marcellus swerved his way to me and swung three times. My trust to luck and my layered defenses worked and he missed. "Your defense has improved since we last met," he said. I remained silent and concentrated upon a tougher foe: the Black Tyrant.

Captain Marcellus meleed me, but Balien (green cloak) joined the fight.

Five arrows sped from Skybreaker. Five times thunder roared overhead. The first three struck deep, the fourth missed as the foe staggered, and the fifth finished it off. The effort proved tiring, but worth it to remove such a dangerous enemy.

Marcellus dodged a lightning bolt from Cristof. Balien sliced Black Tide while Nevar extended a healing word while shooting a banshee. Gavriel recovered from his immobility, Rufus' fireball incinerated a banshee, and Hammer's ice storm picked off another banshee and shielded us from skeletons for a while. Balien rushed to my defense and hit the evil Captain.

From the center of the encampment galloped a Black Knight upon his Steed of Hell. He pulled an orb and threw: Nevar, Scurg, and Cristof were caught in the blast of hellfire and necrotic damage.

I swayed away from two of Captain Marcellus's three swings and shafted Dark Tide with a trio of arrows. Nevar continued his healing ways and put a magic bullet into Dark Tide. Gavriel sent light damage into Black Tide.

That dark wizard sure could take a lot of damage, so he conjured up a spell that Gavriel countered before it could take shape. Rufus cast a Sacred Flame that felled Black Tide.

Unfortunately for Rufus, the Black Knight pulled a sword of flame from his scabbard and hacked Rufus down. To add insult to injury, the knight then hacked off the hippo's head and held it for all to see. Cristof and Hammer then tag-teamed damage on the Black Knight, knocking him off his horse.

The Black Knight slays Rufus the Gif.



A veritable storm of skeleton arrows rained upon us with uneven effects.

The Skeletons Convince Us

Marcellus disengaged from me and ran to Cristof, a quick slice for damage, and Marcellus bolted for the encampment, Balien in hot pursuit.

Hammer yelled, "He shanked him."

I added, "It was a drive-by shanking!"

I was so used to being annoyed by Marcellus, I fired -- and missed -- three times. Appalling!

Nevar went to the body of Black Tide and began to drag it away from the battle. The Dark Knight went to recover the wizard's body. More skeleton arrows showered us. Scurg's healing and Bless spells were in demand.

Marcellus took another run at Cristof. It finally dawned on me why he was so intent -- Cristof had banished the Balrog, but needed to concentrate to keep the portal closed. Every time Cristof was hit, he needed to check his concentration. We yelled for Cristof to run away. We were holding our own, but a returned Balrog would tip the fight back in evil's favor.

Enough was enough. I shafted Marcellus thrice and the evil Captain disappeared, dropping his cursed sword.

Now it was the Black Knight's turn to feel the wrath of the party. He was hit by all involved, his arrogance slipping into panic. He tossed a Wall of Force with such precision, it fell between Nevar and Black Tide's body.

We looked at the skeleton army, supplemented with wights, ghouls, and banshees, and thought about whether to stay or go. We didn't think too hard or too long. We retreated.

We found a good spot to hide and recuperate. Good thing, too. Eight more Black Knights on Steeds of Hell appeared at the top of the encampment wall. Above us, the Dracolich flew a haphazard search pattern. At least the skeleton search parties stayed away -- guess they learned their lesson.

We did, too. We teleported back to the Hilltop Abbey and relative safety. While members brought Rufus' carcass to be resurrected, Lord Denothor sent out hunting parties to quash any evil search parties. He led a scouting party to the encampment. It was abandoned, although the siege engines made out of bones were still there. A Shatter spell crumpled them all. Wherever that was heading suffered a setback and delay.

Poke In The Eye

Well recovered, Gavriel conjured up magical steeds that bore us to the Eye of Stirling, a tower in the foothills that once housed a domed astronomical observatory. Our magical efforts to spy what, if anything, was inside came to naught. Balien sent his magical owl to look in the windows, but poof! The owl was no more.

While these wizards debated this, that and the other thing about how to defeat the magic shield, I shot a regular arrow at a window. Oh man, I love the sound of breaking glass.

That settled that. I handed Balien my rope. He conjured up a fly spell, flew to the top of the tower, and tied off the rope. Hammer hopped into a Bag of Holding for me and I climbed up to the top and let Hammer out. The rest of the party followed.

We opened the trap door and climbed down the ladder to the top floor. A series of lenses on rails allowed us to see the heavens and faraway constellations. Then we focused the lens on the city of Stirling. It was in ruins with bodies in heaps.

We looked at Fort Harrow. Captured by evil forces.

Then a shadow fell upon the lens and a vision of doom with three factions of evil vying for the remains of the land. Sheesh! We have our work cut out for us.

The Door Burst Open

Skeletons spilled into the top floor from a door that led to a stairway. Hammer immediately called for his favorite Beholder to help in the battle.

A Death Tyrant appeared to fry the Beholder.

Then I realized what a wonderful entity the Death Tyrant was -- too sexy for its shorts, for sure. I smiled and waved. "Hi! Hello! It's me, Tazan! I'm your buddy. I'm your pal!"

The eye of the Tyrant turned in my direction again. A ray of indescribable fear washed over me without effect. "I don't fear you. You're my buddy. You're my pal! That banshee, though, is not." I shot it up, but it still screamed. I went down with my hands over my ears. Hell hath no fury like an evil creature shafted. Cristof finished her off with a fireball. My ears thanked our wizard of light.

Rufus showed no signs of debilitation and turned the undead skeletons.

That's when a Black Knight, this time without horse, appeared.

Hammer had a great idea -- a wall of fire with the Knight inside. Oh Knight of Darkness, you should have stayed at the encampment. It strode through the flames for the sole purpose of sending me a Death Ray. I staggered a bit, but remained on my feet, immune to its evil purpose. On the plus side, I finally shook off the effects of a bromance with the Tyrant. I shafted it twice to kill it off.

The fireball (red wire) finished off the Black Knight.



That's when a flurry of attacks hit the Black Knight, who was shoved back into the box of fire. A Cristof fireball exploded over the box.

Hammer dropped his wall of flame and we found the Black Knight a crumpled, charred, pile of ash. We scattered those to make it far more difficult to resurrect it.

Treasure

Our take was minimal, but then again, minimal forces held the tower. Pearls, ivory comb, and 500 gold pieces were in various spots. We also found a Cloak of Tides -- handy for walking on water. A Hall of Records yielded celestial information back when the tower served as an official observatory.

We used the lenses again to discover an entrance to catacombs underneath the city of Stirling. That will likely prove useful in the future.

For now, it was time to teleport back to Sheffield for some rest and relaxation.

Once again, kudos to Sean for running a *D&D* campaign. It's always an entertaining afternoon.



Through the lens. Image from web.

Books I've Read

By Russ Lockwood

Solid as a Rock. by Albrecht Zimburg. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 273 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Fallschirmjäger Regiment 1 on the Eastern Front and the Winter Battle for Orel 19 October 1942-31 March 1943*

This is an absolute gem of a chronological account of the 1st Fallschirmjäger Regiment's winter battles from 1942-1943.

The tactical details of fighting near Velikye Luki in the 9th Army are superb -- from terrain to organization to foxhole-level battle descriptions. Lots of patrols, counter-patrols, and repulsing attacks accentuate the superior training of this paratrooper regiment. It even was shifted to be part of a relief operation, although few Germans escaped a pocket.

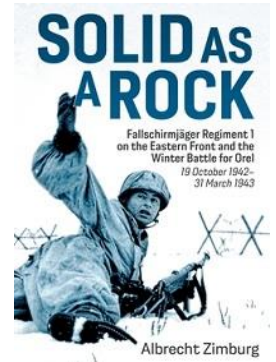
You can pull some scenarios from here, although you'll need to research the Soviet OOB a bit.

One typo: "planed start of operations" (p137) should be "planned start."

The book contains 170 black and white photos, 21 black and white maps, and 25 period color maps (I believe at 1 km to the square, but not entirely sure as they have no scale).

Despite the author's protestations that records were hard to find, he's done a magnificent job presenting the preparations, desperations, and successes of a regiment that generally held the line against overwhelming odds.

Enjoyed it.



The Year That Made America. by Tom McMillan. Hardback (6.2x9.3 inches). 383 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *From Rebellion to Independence 1775-1776*

This fascinating history of the beginning of the American Revolution recounts the political battles of the Continental Congress to create an independent country. In between the anecdotes and related events, you begin to realize just how precarious liberty became, with the initial canvassing of seven states for independence and six against.

Many know the vote for independence occurred on July 2, not July 4, but I didn't know that it was only in the latter part of June that states began to move from voting against to voting for independence -- aided by British troops burning towns and battling with Americans. The final vote was 12 for, zero against, and one (NY) abstention (p160). NY joined the other 12 states on July 9 (p176).

The reason for July 4 was the printed "Dunlop Broadside" that printed the Declaration of Independence with "July 4" at the top. Initially, only John Hancock, as president of the Continental Congress, and Charles Thompson, Secretary, signed the Declaration. A later version on August 2 contained 49 of the 56 signatures (p191).

Also of note, after the British victory at the Battle of Brooklyn, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Edward Rutledge met with British General Howe to discuss an American surrender and return as a colony (p208). It went nowhere and Adams later learned he was on a list of "traitors" to be hanged once America returned as a colony.

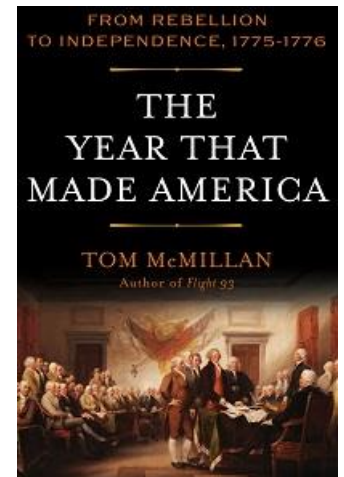
Ancillary comments cover threats to democracy with the ACW and Vietnam, plus how Thomas Jefferson's words were altered for use in Jefferson Memorial and twisted anew by the January 6, 2021 mob that stormed the US Capitol.

The book contains 12 black and white photos and nine black and white illustrations.

The last 100 pages or so include footnotes, bibliography, index, and two versions of the Declaration of Independence.

Fascinating book.

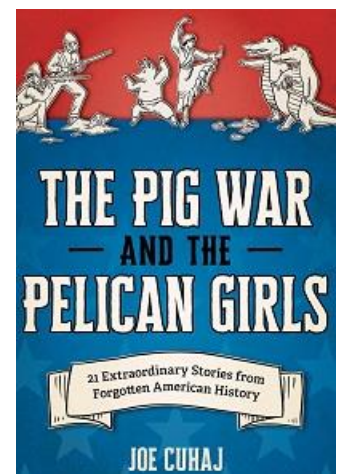
Enjoyed it.



The Pig War and the Pelican Girls. by Joe Cuhaj. Softcover (7.4x9.7 inches). 228 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *21 Extraordinary and Forgotten Stories From American History*

This pleasant read centers around 21 anecdotes of history -- some I knew, some I kinda knew, and many I did not.



For example, a "Pig War" almost erupted between the US and Britain over a US farmer shooting a pig belonging to a British farmer on a Canadian-US border San Juan Island. Events spun out of control until cooler heads prevailed.

The "Pelican Girls" were a group of young women sent from France aboard the ship Pelican to marry French trappers in Louisiana area. I had heard of women sent to Canada, but not to Louisiana.

To me, the best story was the "Two-Girl Army" which sounds too absurd to be true, and yet, that very absurdity makes it believable. During the American Revolution, the British were landing to raid Scituate Harbor, MA -- scene of a number of raids in the past. This time, two girls grabbed a flute and a drum and played previously-learned military marches and drill songs. The closer the British came to shore, the louder the girls played, fooling the British into thinking the garrison was prepared and ready to shoot them as they disembarked. So the British raiding party turned around and withdrew back to their ship and the port town was saved.

The book does not contain any illustrations.

It does contain an obvious typo: Pearl Harbor was first attacked in 1941 and not "1942" (p173).

It's all quite innocuous light reading and each of the chapters ends with a "footnote" of a page or two about some related event.

Enjoyed it.

The German Way of War on the Eastern Front 1944-1945. by Jaap Jan Brouwer. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 209 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *The Decline and Fall of Tactical Management*

This is the follow-up book to *The German Way of War: A Lesson in Tactical Management* (see the review in the 06/28/2024 AAR or up on hmgs.org) and chronicles the decline of German prowess as WWII wound down. The main cause was simple: not enough of everything, from manpower to supplies to logistical support.

As the German army suffered shortages of these three aspects, corners were cut in training, forces available for attacks and counter-attacks, and freedom of action. The result was a slow, steady decline in prowess. To that you can add that the enemy also became more proficient because their three aspects increased.

For example, ideally, the average German division could defend about 10km of frontage. By 1942, the average division had a 13km frontage, or about 30% more than ideal (p41). As the German divisions shrunk from losses and general attrition, the frontages only became larger.

There's more to it than that simplification. Despite the growing disparity, man for man the Germans still held an advantage over all the Allies. Appendices explain the calculations that argue 6.07 Soviet soldiers fell for every German soldier in 1944. For the Western Front, that number was 1.53 Allied soldiers fell for every German soldier.

I found discussions about logistics to be interesting as well. The average German division needed 10,000 tons per month, which would take 1,200 Open 2-ton Blitz trucks. For all 130 or so divisions at the start of Barbarossa, that would mean 156,000 trucks. Given attrition, the bare minimum would be about 170,000 (p26). In 1941, the Germans produced 67,000 military vehicles of all types and in 1942 produced 96,000 of all types. In Stalingrad alone, they lost about 100,000 vehicles (p25). The point was that mechanization was only so much at the start of Barbarossa and declined as the years rolled by despite increasing production and scrounging throughout Europe.

A couple typos: The chart of German 1943 tank production lists six types of tanks, but contains only five bars (p30), although I suppose production could be "0" for the Pz 38(t). The chart refers to the Panther as "Panter." The text usually refers to "Panthers." This carries over to "Jagdpanter" (p105 and 107) when we know it as Jagdpanther.

The book contains 71 black and white photos and 14 black and white maps.

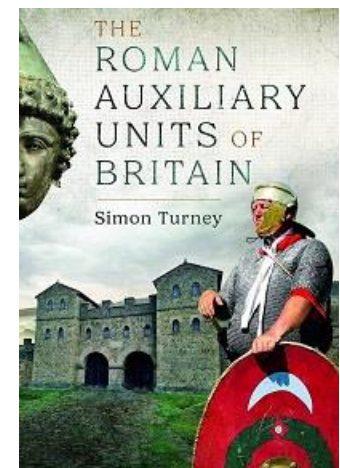
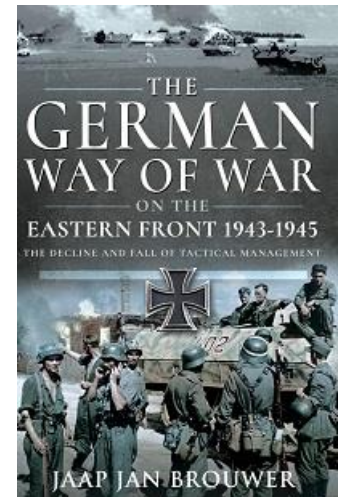
The book takes a holistic approach to defining the German decline in offensive and defensive projections. Given sufficient support, they could and did perform successful operations, but that advantage eventually faded at the strategic level and then the operational level until the tactical level declined as well.

Enjoyed it.

The Roman Auxiliary Units of Britain. by Simon Turney. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 284 pages. 2024.

As the title says, this offers exhaustive coverage of all things Roman auxiliary in Britain divided into three main parts.

The overview covers history, organization, origins of ethnic nomenclature,



weapons, equipment, and fortifications. as the legions were accompanied by auxiliaries, this should help you think about scenario deployments.

Part II contains all known auxiliary units -- Alae, Cohorts, and Irregulars -- in Roman service up to 410AD. When I say all, I mean all -- even ones mentioned in a single inscription. The info per unit depends on the archeological and written evidence and each uses the same format of history, officers, and inscriptions. This, too, will help you zero in on which auxiliaries were in Britain for a particular tabletop scenario.

Part III provides history of various fortifications, list of altars to various gods, and a timeline of British events.

The book provides 133 black and white photos, three black and white maps, and one black and white illustration. The photos are often nicely slotted to illustrate points in the text.

This is a magnificent survey of auxiliary units. It is limited to Britain and I would look forward to follow-up books on other geographical areas.

Enjoyed it.

The Forecast for D-Day. by John E. Ross. Softcover (7.4x9.7 inches). 112 pages. 2014.

Subtitle: *And the Weatherman Behind Ike's Greatest Gamble*

I didn't take very many notes because there's not much inside to employ on the tabletop. That said, you don't think of forecasters as being part of the Army, but they played a crucial role.

The biographies of the various weathermen who advised Eisenhower proved interesting. This is supplemented by a Axis and Allied contest to gather weather data from ships, planes, and weather stations on Greenland and across Europe. Some of this I knew from previous books, and some, like clandestine weather service stations in occupied Europe I did not.

Also new was that the US Works Progress Administration (WPA) had a program to manually enter weather data from 1880-1933 on punch cards. A machine could sort these cards for types of weather and thus pave the way for forecasts (p26).

This led to the heart of the book -- the crucial week before June 6. Besides a primer on weather patterns, the infighting between the weathermen sometimes gave conflicting forecasts. That the weathermen gave the OK for June 6, but not June 5, prompted Eisenhower to issue the one-day delay.

The book has 20 black and white photos and seven black and white maps.

In game terms, weather is usually some sort of die roll. Historically for 1944, there's more to forecasting than a roll of a die.

Enjoyed it.

Light Panzers. by Thomas Anderson. Hardback (8.0x9.9 inches). 288 pages. 2025.

I've enjoyed past volumes in this series and this one is no exception. This history of the development of Germany's light tanks starts in WWI with the A7V, although that wasn't exactly a light tank. Still, post-WWI development continued surreptitiously in Sweden and Russia as tractors and such. These humble clandestine beginnings evolved into the Pz I and Pz II, which ultimately became obsolete during WWII.

Yet the designs were extended to include tank destroyers, self-propelled artillery, and other vehicles that served throughout the war. Anderson provides plenty of insightful analysis about the originals and their evolutions in addition to the nuts and bolts that treadheads love.

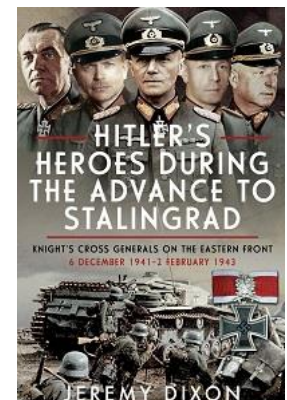
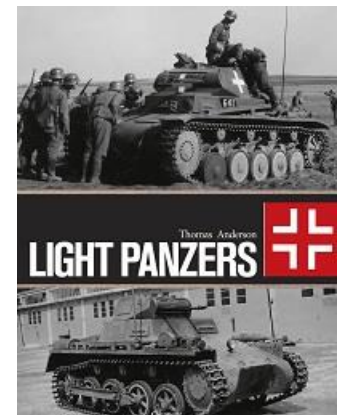
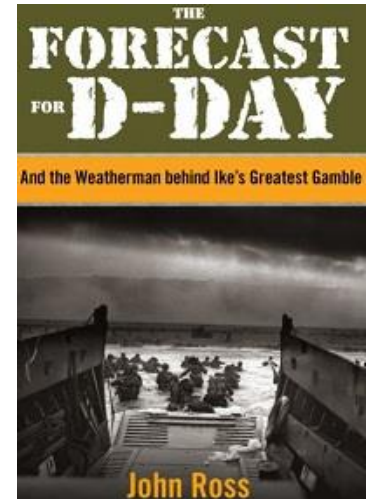
The book contains 225 black and white photos and six black and white illustrations. Good photos and nicely paced.

Enjoyed it.

Hitler's Heroes During the Advance to Stalingrad. by Jeremy Dixon. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 189 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Knight's Cross Generals on the Eastern Front 6 December 1941 - 2 February 1943*

This is the second volume in a projected four-book series about generals who were



awarded the Knight's Cross, including oak leaves, swords, and diamonds attachments. This one covers 150 generals and follows the same format as the previous volume *Hitler's Heroes During Operation Barbarossa* (see the review in the 12/19/2024 AAR or up on hmgs.org).

As with this first volume, each entry has a brief bio, a summary of why he was awarded the Knight's Cross, additional citations for the attachments, other events during WWII, and usually a photo.

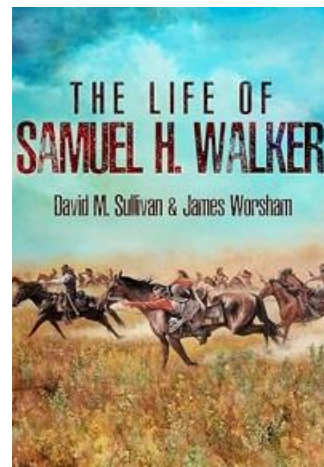
Also as with the first volume, there's not much for the wargame table here. I suppose if you're doing a battle that forms the basis of a citation, you can award the German player some sort of morale, combat, or other creative bonus.

The Life of Samuel H. Walker. by David M. Sullivan and James Worsham. Hardback (6.3x9.2 inches). 489 pages. 2025.

This biography of Samuel Walker, known primarily for the Colt Walker pistol, should be retitled *The Letters of Sam Walker*. There's minimal writing and maximum retyping. If you thought my complaints about books increasingly containing too many excerpts and too little analysis were too strident, then you should have heard me trying to read this tome of letters, reports, and other period writings. After about 50 to 60 pages, I set it aside.

Harsh? Possibly, so I later picked it up and skimmed though half of it. It soon was clear to me that the authors did little but put such in chronological order. The authors certainly did their research, but to me, bundling a bunch of correspondence and reports together does not a biography make. A reference guide, maybe.

I guess I didn't find the letters that interesting. That said, collecting such period writings in one place offers a benefit if you are interested in early to mid-19th century letters.



Leatherneck Warrior. by Col. Richard D Camp. Hardback (6.25x9.25 inches). 196 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *General Lemuel C. Shepherd jr.*

Subtitle: *Leadership in Action*

Newly minted USMC officer Lemuel C. Shepherd jr. shipped off to France in WWI and had his baptism of fire as a platoon commander at Belleau Wood. It's a heckuva start to a lifelong career, especially when he's wounded by German machine guns.

He later served in various roles, including aboard ships, before being tapped to command various units in WWII. Although late to Guadalcanal, he was early to Guam and Okinawa. He even took the Japanese surrender of North China, which you don't read about in most WWII books. He was called on to serve at the highest levels at Inchon during the Korean War and in 1952 went on to serve as the Commandant and in the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

This breezy read offers an understanding of his wartime and peacetime duties. I sometimes wished for greater detail in some sections, particularly the infighting as he joined the Joint Chiefs of Staff and fought for USMC acceptance at this high level of decision making. His four years at the post seems to merit more than what was provided.

The book contains 34 black and white photos, five black and white maps, and four black and white illustrations.

I admit I didn't know who this Marine was at the start. By the end, I learned about his dedicated service.

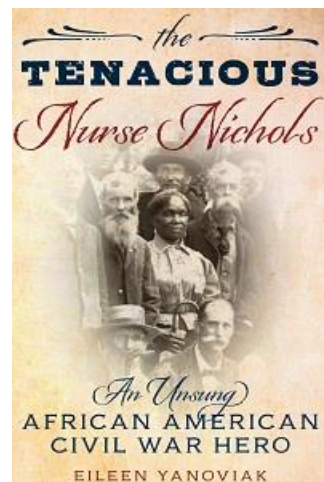
Enjoyed it.



The Tenacious Nurse Nichols. by Eileen Yanoviak. Hardback (6.2x9.3 inches). 167 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *An Unsung African American Civil War Hero*

The title of this book is exceptionally accurate: Lucy Higgs Nichols proved to be a rather tenacious woman. Born in 1838 into slavery in Tennessee, she organized an escape upon learning she and her child would be sold to a plantation in Alabama or Mississippi. With Union troops not that far away, both made it to relative safety with the 23rd Indiana.



She put her cooking, cleaning, foraging, and seamstress skills to use with the 23rd. Her enterprising and effective efforts endeared her to many a soldier and the doctor in charge made her an unofficial nurse. As Nichols had little in the way of documentation, much of her bio contains a unit history of the 23rd Indiana. She stayed with the 23rd throughout the war as it moved south and became part of Sherman's March to the Sea.

Post war, she moved to Indiana and became a servant for former officers and was extremely active in the GAR. The real battle came when she applied for a pension. Denied repeatedly, she overcame racism and her unofficial status through sheer will -- and the written support from former enlisted and officers of the 23rd. An act of Congress finally secured her pension.

One wobble (p80): a reference to the 1866 Civil Rights Act "about one year after the Emancipation Proclamation." The Emancipation Proclamation was in 1863, although you could argue that its full implementation didn't occur until after the ACW was over in 1865 with the ratification of the 13th Amendment.

The book contains 38 black and white photos, one black and white map, and six black and white illustrations.

Every once in a while, I find a real interesting book about an obscure person. This is one of 'em.

Enjoyed it.

Five Flags: The Warship That Reshaped The World. by Stuart Buxton. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 360 pages. 2025.

During the American Civil War, the CSA paid for warships to be built overseas. While a technical violation of neutrality laws, the sums made winking at the laws acceptable.

The ship originally designed as the *Sphinx* for "France" (i.e. CSA) served under five flags: Denmark as the *Stoerkodder*, Confederate States of America (CSS *Stonewall* -- made it to Cuba just as the war ended), Spain as the *Fragata H. Nuestra Salud del Carmen* (bought it and one day later sold it to the USA), USA back to being *Stonewall*, and Japan (*Kotetsu*). She was an ironclad ram by design and leaked like crazy from day one. The downside of all this winking were shortcuts and less than optimal construction.

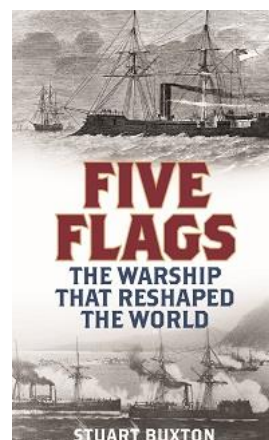
In Japan, she proved its worth in combat with other ironclads in the country's civil war between the Emperor and the Shogun. Here's where a couple of naval scenarios could play out on the tabletop.

Not all is about the ship. The book contains a long account of the Emperor-Shogun war that hardly mentions naval matters until the *Kotetsu* shows up. It's good to have a background to the final naval battles.

The book contains 19 black and white photos and 10 black and white illustrations.

It's an interesting read and the final battle in Japan could make for an interesting tabletop scenario.

Enjoyed it.



Che Guevara's Final Adventure: Latin America at War 45. by Antonio Luis Sapienza. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 108 pages. 2025.

I didn't know much about Che Guevara other than he was some sort of South American communist revolutionary who somehow became famous for his face on T-shirts. After reading this, it's a wonder he became famous at all.

Born into an Anti-American family nonetheless owning tea farms and a shipyard, he grew up relatively well off. He became a medical doctor and went to Guatemala to join a guerrilla movement. When that didn't work out, he escaped and traveled the South American ports as ship's doctor on a cargo ship.

He soon joined Fidel Castro in Cuba as a doctor, and showed leadership skills that landed him as prison warden and head of the National Bank. He soon drove the bank into the ground, executed a considerable number of former Batista soldiers and officials, and headed off to Bolivia to foment Communist insurrection.

Most of this book concerns Che's relative incompetence, even given the limitations of the Bolivian Army. In 1967, he led a small band of less than 50 guerrillas that did little except ambush Army patrols. Eventually, so many Army patrols, aided by peasants who reported guerrilla sightings, ran him and his divided band to ground. Che was executed.

That said, a number of skirmish scenarios can be created. Indeed, the last few pages are an OOB of sorts by individual name. Of note are the number of Bolivian enlisted soldiers that surrendered after the platoon leader was killed. That probably needs a rule in a scenario.

The book contains 345 black and white photos (a considerable number of them postage-stamp sized), eight black and white illustrations, three black and white maps, six color maps, 14 color camouflage profiles of aircraft, two



color camouflage profiles of trucks, one color camouflage profile of a riverine patrol boat, and three color uniform illustrations.

If you want a good concise biography of Che and his Bolivian guerrilla movements and skirmishes, here's your book. T-shirt not included.

Enjoyed it.

Korea: War Without End. by Richard Dannatt and Robert Lyman. Hardback (6.3x9.4 inches). 368 pages. 2025.

This one-volume history of the war offers enough of an overview to follow the June 25, 1950 North Korea invasion of South Korea, US defense of Pusan, Inchon counter-attack and drive to the Yalu, Chinese intervention, and general stalemate. Obviously, there's a lot that's covered quickly, but the salient battles and tactics are there.

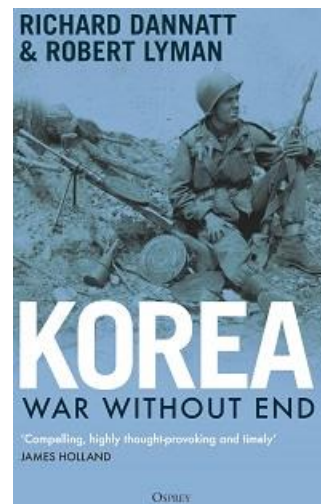
Because it's often at such a high level, tactical battle descriptions suitable for tabletops are minimal. The section covering the UK Gloster battalion's mountain defense against most of three Chinese divisions is quite well done. Now, that is worthy of a tabletop scenario. Page 241 has a rudimentary map sans terrain that's a start, but will need additional sources.

The authors are of the opinion that the drive to the Yalu was unnecessary and the UN should have stopped back at the 38th parallel. Hindsight's a wonderful thing. The discussion about overthrowing the aggressor and turning Korea into a unified country versus just returning the border to the parallel makes for the essence of history -- balance, research, and contemplation. On the one hand, restoring the status quo offers an incentive for dictators to settle. On the other hand, dictators often face little if any consequences, regardless of casualties.

The book contains 31 black and white photos and seven black and white maps.

With the upcoming 75th anniversary of the start of the war, now is as good a time as any to contemplate the defense of countries suffering invasions and how dictators could or should be countered.

Enjoyed it.



STUG III: East Front 1944 - TankCraft 44. by Dennis Oliver. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 64 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Assault Gun: German Army, Waffen SS and Luftwaffe Units - Eastern Front 1944*

I am always impressed with the *TankCraft* volumes. They generally follow the same format: Design, development, and deployment (p1-16 and p49-63), a wide variety of color camouflage profiles (p17-28), and model showcase (p29-48 and p64) provide a cornucopia of color photos of plastic models in various stages of completion. all a marvelous reference work for modelers and wargamers.

This volume on the STuG III is no different. Lots of two-sentence unit histories, visual OOBs of select battalions, and details about various production versions that help modelers create an accurate model.

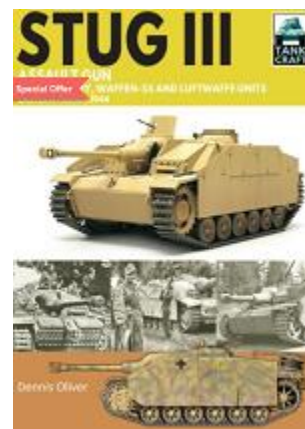
One typo: the table of contents lists "The Eastern Front 1945" whereas the book is 1944.

One point that I wish had been explained better: from Nov. 1942 on most battalions fielded 31 STuG IIIs (p3), up from the original 28 in the Spring 1942, but four battalions fielded 45 assault guns (p7). Of course, that's paper strength. As most of the mini-unit histories attest, actual operable numbers were far below most of the time.

The book contains 43 black and white photos, five black and white illustrations, one black and white map, 24 color camouflage vehicle profiles, 89 color photos (model section), and 17 color photos of plastic model box art.

I've a 28mm STuG III from Chris Parker Games that I have yet to assemble and paint. This provided a little bit of inspiration.

Enjoyed it.



that
It's

Nashorn: East Front 1943-45 - TankCraft 45. by Dennis Oliver. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 64 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Self-Propelled Tank Destroyer German Army - Eastern Front 1943-1945*

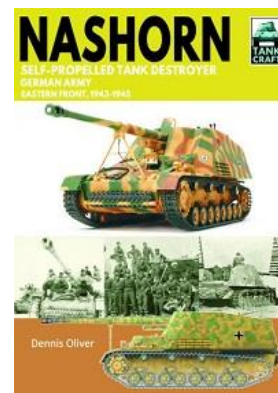
Everything that I said about the STUG III book (*TankCraft 44*) applies to the Nashorn book (*TankCraft 45*). In case you missed it, I noted how impressed I am with the *TankCraft* volumes. They generally follow the same format:

Design, development, and deployment (p1-16 and p49-63), a wide variety of color camouflage profiles (p17-28), and model showcase (p29-48 and p64) that provide a cornucopia of color photos of plastic models in various stages of completion. It's all a marvelous reference work for modelers and wargamers.

Less than 500 Nashorns (originally named Hornets) were manufactured by Germany during the war -- most to the Eastern Front and some to the Italian front.

The book contains 43 black and white photos, six black and white visual OOB illustrations, two black and white maps, 24 color camouflage vehicle profiles, and 71 color photos (model section, including some box art).

Besides the usual suspects of plastic model manufacturers, I was particularly pleased to see Bolt Action models finally mentioned as one source for 28mm (1/56 scale) Nashorns. Enjoyed it.



VGC 2025 Guide to Video Games. by Videogameschronicle.com Hardback (8.5x12.0 inches). 195 pages. 2025.

As you might deduce from the website "author," the text was originally online and was repurposed, rewritten, and edited in a magazine-style layout.

The multi-sidebar layout seems more late 1990s-2000s than 1980s-early 1990s -- or at least that's my memory. I was only an occasional reviewer of video games (back in the day, cartridges for the consoles) but lots of computer games (floppy disks and CDs) for various computer magazines such as *A+*, *Creative Computing*, *Computer Shopper*, *PC Sources*, *Windows Sources*, and *Personal Computing*. I was also a sysop for *Computer Gaming World* forums on Compuserve and Prodigy. And yep, I still have some of the T-shirts...

The book divides into sections: Quick look back at 2024 releases, preview of announced 2025 releases, and reviews of 60 2024 releases. These are almost all twitch games -- see something and shoot it or drop it or run over it. Until my X-box died, I was a big fan of Halo first-person shoot-'em-ups (FPS).



Just to prove video games embrace recycling, there was a new *Doom* game. While not the first FPS -- as far as I know that award goes to (1982? 1983?) *Asylum* on the IBM PC using ASCII characters -- it proved the breakthrough FP perspective, although I'll grant you *Castle Wolfenstein* was a minor hit and preceded *Doom*.

And a new *Tetris* game was released as well. Amazing to me was a recent sports broadcast on cable TV showing tweens or teens playing in the World Tetris Championship. Imagine that after 40 years.

Anyway, the highs and lows of the games receive scrutiny. Most of them receive ratings of 4 stars out of 5, with only a couple 2s, a few 3s, and a bit more 5s.

One typo (p114): "On the trial of..." should be "on the trail of..."

It's nice to see a paper version encapsulating such wisdom. I didn't read each one, but instead paged through and read here and there as the multitude of graphics entranced me.

Most of the games are action, adventure, or RPG, with some puzzle and sports games tossed in. I didn't see any turn-based strategy wargames, but that's not exactly a console's strength.

One thing not in the book is an index. Or at least a table of contents that lists each game. Blame that on the younger crowd that just does a search. In a paper publication, the index is the search function.

So, lots of big, graphically-sophisticated games released in 2024 and many more for 2025. The delivery system (streaming for the most part, I imagine, or a subscription service like Steam or Xbox) changes as technology advances, but one thing you'll find in every review is an emphasis on entertaining game play. Boring or exciting, you'll find plenty of video games that might pique your interest.

Enjoyed it.

DFS 230 Combat Glider: Eagles of the Luftwaffe 3. by Neil Page. Softcover (7.2x9.8 inches). 182 pages. 2025.

While Allied glider operations were a large part of the initial D-Day landings and part of crossing the Rhine, concentrating on the design, development, and operations of the DFS 230 opens up a wealth of German



combat glider operations: Eban Emael, Corinth Canal (Greece), Crete, Saaremaa Island (USSR), and anti-partisan surprise drops in Yugoslavia and France. Further, the DFS 230 was used in a multitude of supply runs on the East Front and in North Africa. Finally, a DFS 230 was used in the rescue of Mussolini in Italy.

Although it only carried nine soldiers and the pilot, it became a handy tool to precision drop such troops in hard-to-reach places. Overviews of the operations provide inspiration for tabletop scenarios -- although you'll need to consult other sources for terrain and a full OOB.

One typo: "taxying" (p69) should be "taxiing" although this may be a British spelling.

The book contains 176 black and white photos, two black and white illustrations, two color maps, two color illustrations, and eight color photos.

It's a nice overview of operations using this glider.

Enjoyed it.

Cormac Mac Art: Sign of the Moonbow. by Andrew J. Offutt. Paperback (4.2x6.9 inches). 249 pages. 1980 reprint of 1977 book.

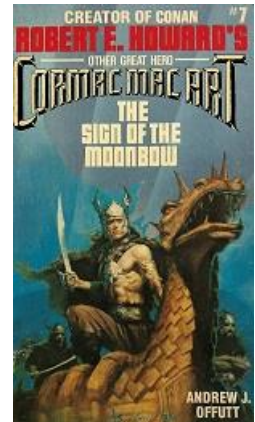
I would have left this paperback in the 50-cent discount bin except it proclaimed "Robert E. Howard's Other Hero." I've certainly heard of Conan, but not Cormac Mac Art. The two are roughly the same type of brawny swordsman with steely determination favored in fantasy novels.

This "Irish" hero had Thulsa Doom wrapped in magic chains and needed a queen to use a hammer to crush Doom's skull and exterminate the sorcerer forever. In an underground world in a different dimension, he found such a queen -- who needed rescuing from a palace coup led by a wizard.

The story itself isn't the problem with suitable fantasy traps, magic, and skull cleaving. The prose, however, is so convoluted, it is a chore to read. Language evolves and so does writing, so this may be an attempt at mimicking Howard's style -- been so long since I read a Conan novel, I can't tell you.

After about 50 pages, I should've just skipped to the end to see if the plot hook of Thulsa Doom resolves in his eternal death or his escape. I'll save you a couple hours. Just start reading on page 234.

So. Great plot hook. Its pages contain a nice *D&D* adventure. However, getting to the end may require more willpower than a Cormac Mac Art.



Serenity. by Keith R. A. DeCandido. Paperback (4.1x6.8 inches). 257 pages. 2005.

This 50-cent discount bin pick up is a novelization of the movie *Serenity*, which somewhat tied up the *Firefly* sci-fi TV series. As I can recall, the book follows the movie straight up. Indeed, I actually stopped halfway through, but then picked it up again just in case the text contained something more. Nope. Not that I can recall.

If you haven't seen the movie, then you may find the text a bit curt since you're missing a dozen or so episodes of background. But if you have, then you've pretty much read the book.



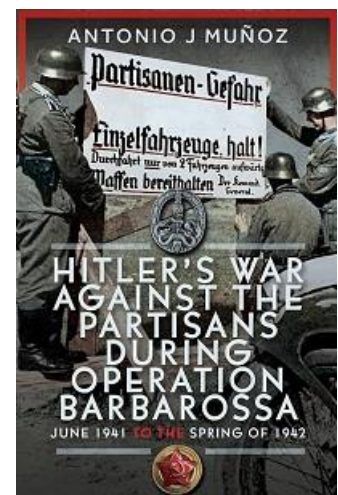
Hitler's War Against the Partisans During Operation Barbarossa. by Antonio J. Munoz. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 268 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *June 1941 to the Spring of 1942*

I don't read very much about WWII anti-partisan operations on the Eastern Front. Usually, you may get a chapter or perhaps an overview of blown up rail lines. This is a far more detailed examination of the units and actions behind the front lines as German troops headed east.

This is another one of those tough books to read -- much of the anti-partisan operations carried out by special units consisted of massacres. Some were legitimate ops within forests and swamps to ferret out actual partisans, but most seemed to be massacres of peasant villagers. The Germans kept meticulous records and this book burrows through them.

The OOBs of the security forces, from small gendarmes to full divisions, are well represented. Indeed, sometimes a village held six policemen who tried to hold off a platoon of partisans. Other times, security divisions pulled in regular German troops to



try and surround a forest holding partisan bands. These provide at least the bare bones of a scenario idea -- certainly the OOBs can be tapped for an accurate German scenario force.

One theme is how the regular German Army aided the SS in the slaughter of villagers in the name of partisan ops.

The book covers behind the lines in the Baltic states, Army Group North, Army Group Center, and Army Group South. The security forces were so stretched, Nazi policies so heinous, and German losses so extensive, it was inevitable the partisans would grow into significant threats -- even if they were initially modest annoyances in 1941. German regular army personnel losses were 3,000 to 4,000 per day on a "quiet day" (p85) that sparing units for partisan hunting was challenging.

The book contains 20 black and white photos and 13 black and white maps.

While books about the French Resistance are available, specific books about German anti-partisan ops in the USSR are rarer.

Enjoyed it.

Red Army Self-Propelled Guns of the Second World War. by Alexey Tarasov.

Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 226 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *Photographic History of the Red Army's Second World War Self-Propelled Artillery*

While often misused by the Soviets in WWII as tanks accompanying infantry, this class of armored vehicles eventually received proper doctrine and tactics by 1945. As a result, many were unnecessarily lost in a role they were not intended to perform. Yet, when employed as artillery, they could be extremely effective.

The book divides into two parts.

History (p1-73) includes design, development, production, and deployment as well as examining theoretical and actual doctrine and tactics. The first prototypes were trucks mounting howitzers and other guns before evolving into well-known SU-76M, SU-122, and SU-152 vehicles. Production during wartime often meant cutting corners, and several deficiencies, such as weak running gear, were never quite remedied and units suffered from numerous breakdowns and shorter than expected operational life.

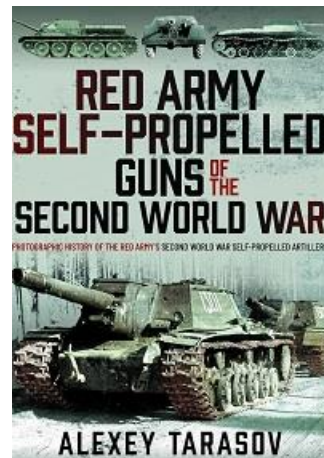
Training was abysmal through 1943 with formations spending only two or three days in training before being sent to the front to learn on the fly (p23). Actual training was planned for eight to 10 days, but as noted, often shortened due to lack of training infrastructure, vehicles, and trained instructors. Brigades completed only 71.9% of combat training and only 25.6% of other training (maintenance, medical, AA, etc.) before being sent to the front (p29). The training manuals specified the SU-152 rate of fire at one to two rounds per minute, but in the real world, that often came out to one round every four or five minutes.

Photographs (p77-216) offers visual details of the vehicles as well as extensive captions about the vehicle or the photo itself.

The book contains 338 black and white photos and 12 black and white illustrations. It also contains a terrific Table of Contents listing every vehicle and variant for fast look up of specific vehicles. Kudos for the organizational excellence.

Interesting deployment: A battery of four vehicles would often deploy in one line, and sometimes two lines, with 40m to 50m between vehicles for SU-76 light and SU-122 medium SPGs and one vehicle every 50m to 75m for the large SU-152s. A regiment would space 100m to 200m between the batteries. If deployed in two lines, the second line would be 2,000m to 4,000m behind the first (p36). Note that direct fire at up to 1,000m was the preferred tactic in 1943 as indirect fire was generally ineffective (p37).

Enjoyed it.



Fighting Ships of the U.S. Navy 1883-2019: Vol 4 Part 3 Destroyers. by Venner F. Milewski, jr. Hardback (8.5x12.0 inches). 204 pages. 2024.

This latest volume in the ongoing series provides yet more compilations of specs, photos, and historical recaps of destroyers. The recaps consist of contracts, commissionings, and fates for each ship. As for the fate, most were sunk during WWII or post-war exercises, scrapped, or transferred to other countries and later scrapped. A few are still around as museum ships.

Yet, it's the 408 black and white photos that are the big draw. The back of the book contains 20 black and white illustrations of various camouflage schemes used by

VENNER F. MILEWSKI, JR.

FIGHTING SHIPS OF THE U.S. NAVY 1883-2019

VOLUME FOUR
PART THREE



DESTROYERS

the USN in the war. I also have to give kudos to the terrific Table of Contents listing every ship, grouped by class.

Another fine volume.

Enjoyed it.

Hitler's Housewives. by Tim Heath. Softcover (6.2x9.2 inches). 182 pages. 2025 reprint of 2020 book.

Subtitle: *German Women on the Home Front*

This collection of diary and journal entries, supplemented with interviews, comes mostly from late teenagers and young women. Most girls joined the Young Women's Organization (Jungmadelbund) when they turned 14 and later joined another bund when older. As such, they were indoctrinated with Nazi propaganda from an impressionable age.

As with the Hitler Youth, these girls were required to serve nine months as a laborer. One extensive entry talks about being sent to a farm in Poland. Many entries, including those of young married women in their 20s, discussed flirting, sex, and promiscuity. As the war turned against Germany and shortages appeared, Nazi officials increasingly demanded sex in exchange for food and other favors.

According to these entries, the German consumer economy was just fine up through Christmas of 1942. No shortages. No rationing. Plenty of Reichmarks. As 1943 stretched on and especially through 1944, the economy increasingly turned from consumer to military production. Many of the women joined the labor force in factories. Bombing turned them increasingly homeless, food became scarce, and deaths increased, but morale held. Very little concerns the Holocaust, but then again, they are teenagers and young women.

The book contains 27 black and white photos and one black and white illustration.

This is well edited and light read through diaries, offering a partial view of the war from the German home front.

Enjoyed it.



III Germanic SS Panzer-Korps: Volume 2. by Lennart Westberg, Petter Kjellander, and Geir Brenden. Hardback (9.0x12.0 inches). 414 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *The History of Himmler's Favorite SS-Panzer-Korps 1943-1945*

Subtitle: *From the Baltics to the Final Apocalypse in Berlin 1945*

This second volume completes the history of the corps, although history is a rather loose definition. It's less a comprehensive narrative and more a collection of short articles interspersed with loads of first-person accounts, excerpts, and mini-biographies of officers and enlisted soldiers. You won't find much about massacres or other war crimes.

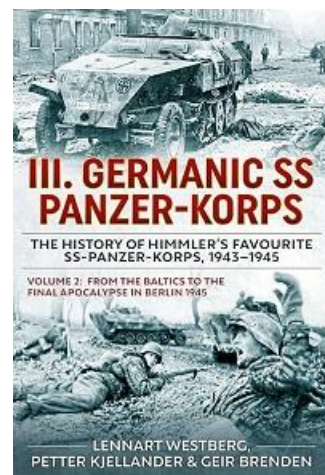
Of course, tidbits and factoids populate the text. For example, up to June 30, 1943, 5,883 Germanic SS volunteers had resigned from the Waffen SS (p xlvi). I didn't know the SS allowed volunteers to resign. In a September 1943 retreat, a unit towed vehicles "to save petrol" (p77). Denmark signed a quick surrender agreement allowing German occupation in 1940, but increasing acts of Danish sabotage -- and German retribution -- started in 1943 and 1944 (p93-106).

Tiger II tanks would open fire and destroy T-34s at 2,500m range (p182). The Tiger II kill ratio to loss was 41 to 6. Then again, the Tiger II needed one day of maintenance for every three days of operations (p192). On average, the Soviets lost 600,000 men per month during the war (p357).

A cornucopia of photos highlights individuals and actions, offering the modeler considerable visual references for dioramas. The book contains 495 black and white photos, 10 black and white illustrations, two black and white maps, and 13 color maps.

Of note, the Battle of Arnswalde in Feb. 1945 would make a nifty scenario. The map is a bit basic and you'll have to pull a better OOB, but this German counterattack put a dent in the Soviet line at a time when hesitations in the retreats were the norm.

This accumulation of info is impressive, but this seems to have been put together in haste and editing typos and snafus are throughout. To wit: "Scrapped the bottom of the barrel" (p61) should be scraped; "opposed seven Soviet assaults white blank weapons" (p107) is a mystery to me; "threw now looked upon" (p152) is likely they; "to prevent ourselves from Russian surprise attacks" (p176) is likely protect; "hade in advance" (p207) has an extra e; "panzer crews



were wasted" (p245) has an erroneous i; "without any frith" (p262) may be faith; and T-34/86" (p321) is T-34/85. Sloppy.

That said, it is an impressive collection of information about the III SS Panzer Corps. Pair this with volume I for a comprehensive look at the soldiers within the SS.

Enjoyed it.

Assault from the Sky: US Marine Corps Helicopter Operations in Vietnam. by Richard D. Camp. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 264 pages. 2025 reprint of 2013 book.

This collection of helicopter-based action during the Vietnam War provides a ground- and cockpit-level view of combat. It's divided into three sections: Buildup 1962-1966, Heavy Combat 1967-1969, and Bitter End 1975.

Anecdotes of landings and pickups offer a number of scenario opportunities. The VC sapper attack on an airfield (p38) offers a nice TO&E as well as explaining assault tactics (mud camouflage and wire cutting techniques) and garrison responses. Thanks to guerrillas who worked inside the base, the VC even created a model to plan the attack. Maps of varying degrees of usefulness accompany each account. The action is well written...

...however, much as I appreciate inserting Medal of Honor and other award citations within the text to provide context about extraordinary individual actions, the citations form speed bumps to readability. It's jarring to switch from nice prose to stilted official prose of something you just read. I'm thinking placing these in an appendix would be appropriate to recognize the individual.

I especially appreciated the section on how USMC experience influenced helicopter development.

The 83 black and white photos seem a tad dark at times, but the 11 black and white maps and five black and white illustrations are fine.

Enjoyed it.

Generals and Admirals of the Third Reich. by James Jack Webb. Hardback (6.4x9.3 inches). 408 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *For Country or Fuehrer - Volume 3: P-Z*

The third and final book in the series offers brief listings of German generals and admirals. Bios include WWI and WWII war record of commands with dates, awards, and fates. One aspect to remember is that some two-digit dates indicate years in the 1800s (often birthdays) -- for example, '92 being 1892. Likewise, '45 almost always indicated 1945. You can figure it out from the context of the remarks.

Included is a short recap of the European Theater in WWII from the Fall of France to the Fall of Berlin.

The book contains 100 black and white photos, mostly head shots of one officer or another.

I can't say I read them all -- I just skipped around, but as a reference, the three-book series is an impressive collection and compilation of data.

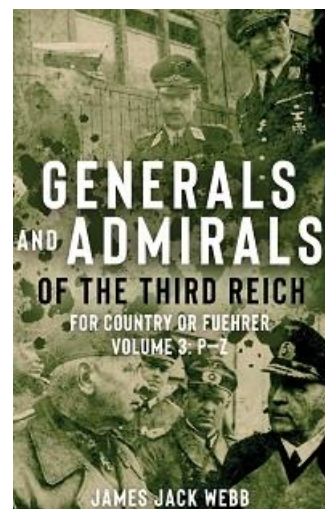
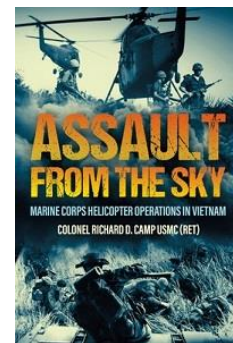
Enjoyed it.

The Panavia Tornado at Low-Level. by Scott Rathbone. Hardback (horizontal: 10.1x7.0 inches). 318 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *The Ultimate Pictorial Display of the Tornado in Its Element*

This photography book will provide the modeler with hundreds of ideas on how to model the Panavia Tornado. The 363 color photos showcase different markings, wing positions, and top, profile, and underside imagery. Granted, most of the color schemes are gray, but every once in a while you'll find a camouflage pattern with some pizzazz. The shot (p169) of the aircraft with flames along its spine would be particularly challenging to duplicate on a plastic model.

The intro mostly consists of various personal reminiscences of photographing various versions of the aircraft as they made runs down in a valley. Some operational history is included, such as the first one deployed in 1984 and the last one retired in 2019.



Rathbone's last Low-Level photo book covered the F-4 to the F-35. This one is just about the Tornado and well worth it for modelers and Tornado buffs.

Enjoyed it.

The War of 1812: The Canadian Theater 1813. by Richard V. Barbuto. Softcover (6.7x9.3 inches). 96 pages. 2025.

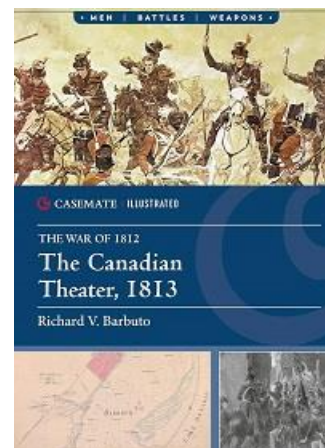
Once again, the US Army "Blue Book" supplies the text that forms the foundation of this edited book. I call it the Blue Book because on my copy the cover was blue. It's like the WWII Green books, only in blue. The first was *US Army 1783-1811: Defending a New Nation*. The next is *The Chesapeake Campaign 1813-1814*. All share the same pedigree.

That said, you can't get anyone better than Barbuto to abridge edit Center of Military History chapters about the War of 1812. The author of numerous War of 1812 books, not to mention the wargame connection as past editor of the Solo Wargame Association magazine *Lone Warrior*, he knows his stuff.

As this is a Casemate Illustrated booklet, it contains lots of illustrations -- the "value add" of the work. The booklet contains four black and white photos, eight color photos, nine black and white illustrations, three black and white maps, 23 color illustrations, and six color maps.

This repackaged package from the *Casemate Illustrated* series offers a pleasing way to read the associated War of 1812 Blue Book chapters. Note some sidebars are original text. For those wanting an overview, here's your book. For those needing more detail, check out Barbuto's full-length original books.

Enjoyed it.



The War of 1812: The Chesapeake Campaign 1813-1814. by Charles P. Meinmeyer. Softcover (6.7x9.3 inches). 96 pages. 2025.

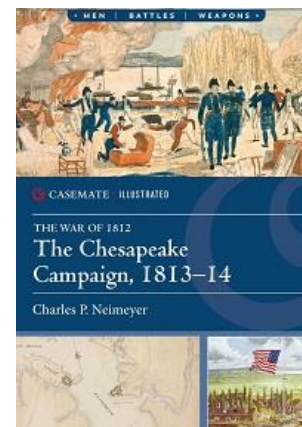
Excuse me for repeating myself, but this volume in the *Casemate Illustrated* series is another abridged and edited repackaging of the US Army "Blue Book." I call it the Blue Book because on my copy the cover was blue. It's like the WWII Green books, only in blue. The first The War of 1812 booklet was *US Army 1783-1811: Defending a New Nation* followed by *The Canadian Theater 1813*. All three share the same pedigree.

Two highlights are the Battles of Bladensburg and Fort McHenry, plus a number of land skirmishes and battles in and around the bay. Considering we lost the national capitol but gained a nation anthem and ultimately autonomy on the oceans, this campaign was a key part in the defense of the US.

The booklet contains four black and white photos, 12 color photos, 10 black and white illustrations, one black and white map, 29 color illustrations, and seven color maps. I believe you'll agree that the multitude illustrations are the "value add" of the booklet.

Again, nicely done, including the original text.

Enjoyed it.



Omaha Beach: D-Day June 6, 1944. by Joseph Balkoski. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 410 pages. 2025 reprint of 2004 book.

Just in time for the 81st anniversary of D-Day is a reprint of a look at Omaha Beach during the day of the WWII invasion.

The heart of the book centers on over 500 excerpts of first-person accounts, interview, and official reports. Sometimes one is inserted in a page of text, but often, multiple first-person accounts appear one after another over a couple of pages. These accounts are taken from writings and oral reports as close to the June 6, 1944 date as possible. That way, although an individual first-person account may not know everything, putting a number of them together pieces together a whole picture of the chaos, madness, and courage of the US troops.

On the one hand, this format provides as close to a June 6, 1944 "real-time" narrative as you can get. The excerpt selections are informative, even if the individual can only recount a small part of what he saw and knew. They are carefully stacked in chronological and locational order.



On the other hand, binge-reading first-person accounts can be repetitious -- at least to me. After the 20th account of soldiers seeing acts of carnage and courage, I tended to skip every other first-person account. While that does not do justice to the soldiers or the author, I reached my limit about half to two-thirds of the way through.

The book contains 37 black and white photos and 27 black and white maps. Those maps are mostly 1.1 inches equals 400 yards and with enough detail to create tabletop scenarios.

Enjoyed it.

A sister book, *Utah Beach*, has also been re-released.

Into the Inferno. by Bill Ibelle. Hardback (6.2x9.2 inches). 185 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The Story of a B-17 Gunner Over Nazi-Occupied Europe*

Towards the end of his life, WWII B-17 gunner Bert Ibelle gave his son Bill a manuscript of his WWII service, which was a complete disappointment to Bill. As Bert was a psychologist in charge of an institution, Bill expected a book full of feelings about how his father and fellow airmen felt about flying missions, the war, and dropping bombs on soldiers and civilians.

Instead, this original manuscript was mainly a collection of dry recounting of day-to-day life in the 15th US Army Air Force in Italy. For example, four pages were devoted to building a aviation-fuel powered heater for his tent out of a 55 gallon drum and joining cans for a stovepipe. As his father told him in person, he did what had to be done and hoped he could get home after the war was won.

Then Bill found a collection of letters his father kept from his then sweetheart and post-war wife. He also had a stash of letters received from a friend serving in the Pacific. Bill went hunting for more and eventually wrapped all of these into a biography of his father, mother, their friends, and the squadron.

It reads like a charm. While you don't get a lot of feeling about being at war, you do get a lot of feeling as Bert pursued Mary Jane "Red" Pierce (his auburn-haired future wife), who was soon dating Bill Harney, but torn up about ditching Bert. So, running through the ins and outs of basic and advanced training is this love triangle within the war triangle of the European Front, the Pacific Front, and the Home Front. Nicely layered and compiled.

The book contains 37 black and white photos, 27 black and white illustrations, and one black and white map.

Here is one case where I read all the excerpts from the letters -- a surprising twist for me, but the payoff was fantastic.

Enjoyed it.



All My Book Reviews

By Russ Lockwood

All my 1,749 book reviews are at:

<https://hmgs.site-ym.com/blogpost/1779451/Historical-Book-Reviews>

Chicago Sun Times Fake Summer Reading List

The *Chicago Sun Times* newspaper confirmed that a 15-book recommended summer reading list had 10, count 'em 10, fake books on the list -- completely made up by AI. Even the one paragraph descriptions of the fake books were fake. Here's the link to the CST:

<https://chicago.suntimes.com/news/2025/05/20/syndicated-content-sunday-print-sun-times-ai-misinformation>

To be fair to the CST, the article was in a syndicated section and not written by a CST reporter. The freelancer admits he used AI and didn't check -- probably because he was paid a pittance of \$10 or so for the "article."

As for all my book reviews, I want to assure you that all of the books I review are real paper books and booklets delivered to me personally. I don't review electronic versions, only paper copies. FYI: Last I found, 80% of all books sold are paper copies. And yes, I read every word in the book -- unless I specifically say I skipped around the pages.

And I doubly assure you that all my writing in this AAR, from recaps to reviews, is hammered out on my keyboard without any AI. Hopefully, all my prose is informative and amusing. It's sad our society is relying on dumb AI instead of creating our own communications. Maybe AI can be useful in some fields, but when it comes to writing, I consider it nothing more than a creative Blue Screen of Death.