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A panoramic fish-eye look at the Fontenoy table from the British/Dutch side. Photo by Dave.

Little Lords of Fontenoy: 1745

by Russ Lockwood

By random rolls, I joined Dave, Marc, and Mike as the "Pragmatic" British/Dutch force. Across from us, as French, were Larry, Rich, Sam, and Chris. Jay was the GM. The battle was Fontenoy, of which I knew so little, I thought it was a Seven Years War battle.

The Allies (l to r): Dave, Marc, and Dutch Mike.

Hey...let's not snicker about who knows what. The good news is that I could just play by gut instinct -- and my gut is larger than what it was when I first started playing miniatures. The rules were modified *Tricorn*, which is modified *Shako*.

Jay noted the year was 1745 and it was the War of Austrian Succession.

Jay's 15mm figures were gorgeous, complemented by Dave's usual terrain excellence. My troops also seemed to be stacked up with no maneuvering room.

Fontenoy was a walled town that jutted out in front of the main French defensive line. Artillery-held redoubts populated the interim space between Fontenoy and the next town over on our left (French right). A couple redoubts were on the opposite side of Fontenoy and also contained cannon.

We Brits had only two batteries and not near me.

The French side (l to r): Larry, Rich, Sam, and Chris. Far right: GM Jay. The Dutch are beginning their charge.



Suicide Attack

I took one look at the setup and saw my British infantry in three lines before Fontenoy. I asked GM Jay if we could alter the disposition.

No.

But this is a dumb attack into the teeth of the defense. Can I shift a little bit?

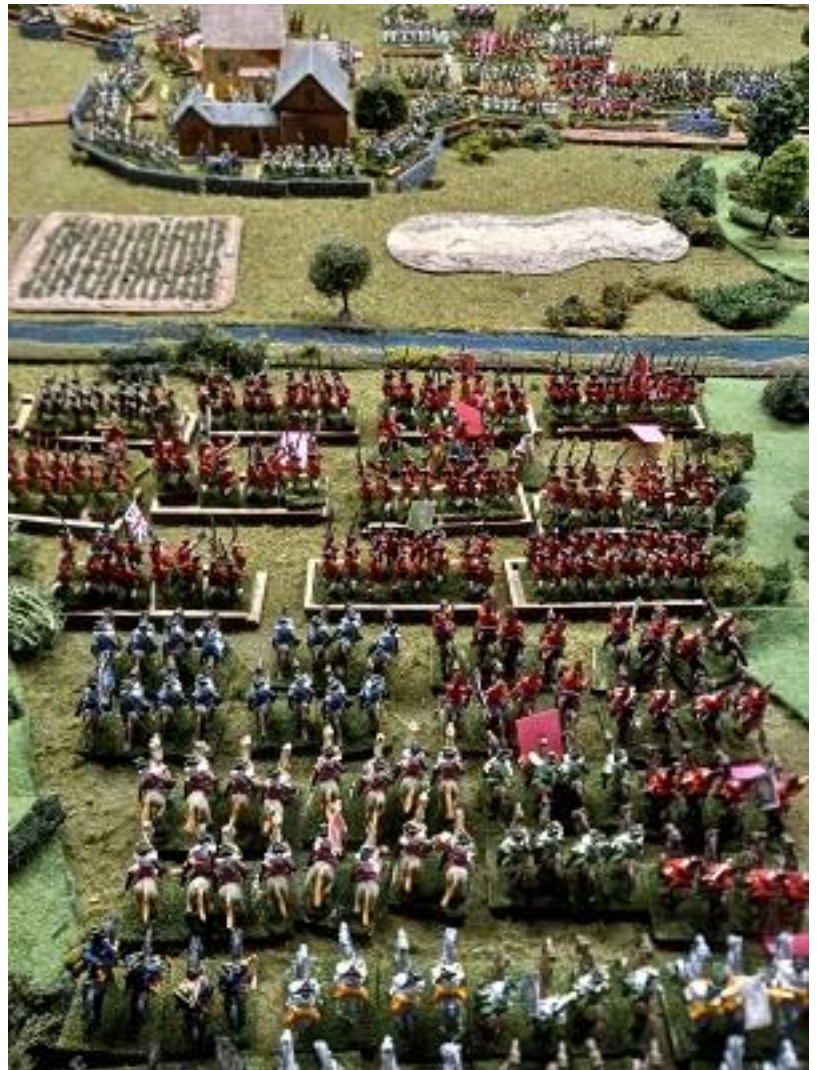
No. It's a historical battle.

I turned to fellow commander Marc and said, "If I was in charge, I would turn my lads around and march off the table." Most of the French line was either behind a wall or in a redoubt. These were +2 defenses. Even though the French troops in Fontenoy were substandard (3s in *Shako* parlance), when you add the +2 wall, that makes them 5s -- the equivalent of British Guards.

I had a few Guards-rated units, but not enough to engage the walls. Last thing you want to do is charge in when your opponent is one-up to your starting melee total.

GM Jay took pity on our British whining and made them +1 walls, but the town buildings were still +2. That seems at least long-shot doable. Then, Jay informed us Brits that we win ties in melee. That was a big help at times.

My British infantry have no room to maneuver: right are the woods and left is Marc's force. Behind is Dave's cavalry with even less room.



The British Left and Center

Marc and I advanced as fast as we could towards the French line. Cannon fire sent balls bouncing through our ranks. Our left (the French right with the tag-team duo Larry and Rich) took hit after hit. Mike's Dutch troops were hit repeatedly by massed French cannon. Then again, he also presented flank to the French by galloping across the French line. Larry enjoyed the view as musketry tore holes in Mike's cavalry.

What else was there to do without artillery? Worse, a river protected the far left flank (French right flank) and the Duke of Cumberland failed to pack a pontoon train.

My first and second lines of infantry clear the small stream while my third line heads into the woods to clear out the Prussians. The pink "flags" indicate elite troops.



The British Right

The main British infantry force had woods to its right. It took a few turns to reorient the third line troops and advance into the woods to protect the flank of the suicide force that was advancing on Fontenoy. It would take a while to try and overwhelm the defending infantry.

The British infantry inside the woods turned and headed right to a wide open field on the far right flank. Opposite, French cavalry massed and began to move up.

Meanwhile, one road led through the woods -- just enough to get the cavalry started on the way to the wide open field. Again, it would take a long time to re-orient the British cavalry units.

Indeed, there was never any battle on that far right flank. The closest was the British C-in-C (me) moved to the right to give the cavalry (Dave) an order to turn a cavalry unit and flank the French unit nearest the woods edge.

The British cavalry commander was far too worried about the French cavalry. In the first place, second line cavalry does not support the first line cavalry -- and this I admit, was a surprise. Infantry does, but not cavalry. Three British cavalry units were already in line.

In the second place, the British infantry support marched up to link with the British cavalry. The infantry should be able to steadily push the French cavalry. It never got to that point, but that was the indication.

The Dutch force at the start of the game. The river (top left corner) is not fordable. Photo by Mike.

French Artillery Move

The central French commander (Sam) took the artillery battery that was opposite the woods and moved it towards the center. Bad enough the town battery (Rich) and redoubt battery (Sam) played hits across my lines. Now, another battery?!

Wait a second...how did that battery get so far over as to clear the woods? Sam traced a path with his finger out the front of the redoubt.

Wait a second...the battery hurdled the wall?

Sam was almost convincing when he said the troops pushed the cannon up and over the dirt embankments.

I said "almost." Marc leaned over and joked, "He moved it out the front gate. Every redoubt needs a front gate."

Wait a second...how did he move the battery through his troops formed up on either side of the redoubt?

Sam obligingly sidestepped his unit to leave a gap between the redoubt and the adjacent formed unit.

Jay ruled that was OK. I received a karmic ruling when Sam whiffed when firing his moved battery and his stationary battery.

The Dutch maneuver to attack the redoubt and line troops (upper right corner). Blue rings are disorganization. Red rings are losses.

Dutch Courage

The Dutch commander (Mike) decided the best way to attack the French was to pass in front of the French line and charge the redoubts.



I mean, why not? If artillery can be pushed up and over the embankments, surely the bravest of the Dutch brave could attack across it.

Mike told me to stop calling him Shirley.

Well, the French commander (Larry) thought that was an excellent idea. Musketry hit the Dutch flank while canister tore great gaps in the Dutch cavalry.

A different view of the Dutch charge.

And yet, despite the odds, despite the conventional wisdom, the Dutch cavalry broke the front French line and overran two redoubts and in between. It was a stunning success. It was a motivating success. It was a brilliant success...

...until it wasn't.

The hot French counterattack cooked the victorious cavalry in what would be known as a Dutch oven. Riderless horses raced for the rear and the entire Dutch command was treated to demoralization.

Storming the walls of Fontenoy failed once...

Fontenoy Folly

My lads braved the shot and shell of French defensive fire to try and storm the walls surrounding the town. The operative word is "try." The French commander (Rich) called upon the gods and odds of fate to spare his troops and in a rolling tribute to beating 50-50 chances, all five of his firings resulted in my troops taking casualties or being staggered and the assault stopped short. Only the cannon was meled.

...but success was soon to come.

That only stopped my mad suicide charge for a turn. I tried again and this time, the 50-50 chances rolled my way. Indeed, when an infantry fire fails against an infantry (but not



cavalry) charge, it becomes a "failed volley" and the unit receives a -1 in melee.

The yellow badge of failed volleys sprouted on four of five French defending units.

To my amazement, in the melee, I held the advantage. The elite troops (5) benefitted from side support (+1 = 6) and rear support (+1 = 7). Alas, they had more casualties (-1 = 6) and previous disorganizations (-1 = 5). Most defenders (3) had side support (+1 = 4), wall (+1 = 5), and failed volley (-1 = 4). As artillery does not give side support, those were down to 3.

So, my elite troops ended up 5 + d6 versus 4 + d6 or versus 3 + d6. My regular troops were 4 + d6 versus 4 + d6 or versus 3 + d6.

Some I won outright, some I won by 1, and some I tied (British win ties in this scenario rule, otherwise I wouldn't be anywhere near the town). Only on my left did I fail to clear the walls of French. My lads inflicted minimal damage, but it forced French retreats, making the next series of melees even better.

And the British attack takes the first of two buildings of Fontenoy. Cavalry support the attack even if they have nowhere to go.

Terrain Shapes I

Here is where a disagreement came to pass. To my mind, this was one big British attack on a curved town wall. Now, if the defenders could be following the curve of the walls and get side support, certainly the attackers would too. To others, units that advanced "around the corner" to take the position no longer would supply side support -- the stands would be physically separated on the table.

This went round and round for a bit until Jay ruled what was good for the defenders was good for the attackers.

The British attack next successfully stormed one of the two buildings and occupied it with one unit (the maximum). The next turn, I tried to storm the other building.

British infantry continue to push deeper into French troops on the right of Fontenoy. Inside the town, the battlelines remain static. To the left of Fontenoy, Marc's troops make inroads.

Terrain Shapes II

Here is where another disagreement came to pass.

No can do, ruled Jay. You have to exit the building and form up before attempting to storm the other building. There was a French unit in the "alley" space between the two buildings.

OK, I charge the French unit.

No can do, you form up in the "courtyard to the left" and that's all, Jay ruled.

"But my unit doesn't fit."

"Close enough."

"But what about the unit (Larry) on my left facing away? Can he about face and charge me in the flank?"

"No, but he can about face and shoot. If he does, he no longer supports his unit in front of it."

OK. I form in the courtyard and bring a second unit into the building I just captured.

The French commander, no slouch, declares his alley unit charges my "courtyard" unit and the unit in the other building charges the unit in my building.



Here we go again with building charging. Personally, I think that a unit in a building could charge out and into another building. So did French cavalry commander (Chris). Jay did not and he is the GM. As we all know, the GM's word is final...well, final after one side or the other whines like an oenophile at a cheese convention.

No, Jay ruled. The French unit must come out of the building and form. And when it does, it supports the melee in the courtyard.

Wait. What? The "support" French unit has no space to deploy. It'd be standing on the charging unit's shoulders. No, Jay ruled that's how it was.

Well, when the brou-ha-ha subsided, in went the French attack and the British received a karmic ruling: I rolled a 6, Rich rolled a 1, and the charging French unit vaporized. It still left its support in the space between the two buildings.

Usually, we play with single buildings representing villages or towns. This was a two-building town with both buildings glued to a base, so they cannot be moved.

Lesson? When you put a big VP town in the middle of the table, it will attract players like movie piranha swarming a floundering swimmer. If you have a two-building town and want to have alley space and courtyard space and space to support units in alleys and courtyards, use separate buildings. 'Nuff said.



The Dutch close on the French (lower left corner). GM Jay (upper left corner) smiles with quiet anticipation while Dave moves his cavalry through the woods. British Russ (upper right corner) is amazed his lads got as far as they did, but can see his momentum falter. Photo by Mike.

Bye-Bye Dutch

About this time, the Dutch lost enough units to trigger another division morale die roll, which Mike failed and all Dutch units routed away. The French commander recaptured the VP redoubts and began an advance versus British commander Marc, who was engaging the side walls of Fontenoy.

Where did the Dutch go? Far, far away. When Mike failed his second morale test, all Dutch troops teleported to the rear.



End of Game

And that's where we ended after three hours: A French victory. The British would disengage and retreat, the Duke of Cumberland's tail between his legs. I'm not sure how far the Dutch would retreat -- they were pretty bashed and battered before the division morale rolls. I lost one unit, and Marc and Dave lost none, so their forces were almost entirely intact.

The French cavalry was intact, as was most of Sam's force. Rich's Fontenoy garrison force (technically, I believe they were organizationally assigned to Larry's command, but he was so busy with Mike, Rich took over) suffered the largest losses, but these were the lowest-rated troops.

End game. Foreground: With no Dutch, Larry's troops (lower left corner) begin to advance. Marc's troops (right) counter. Fontenoy is half British and half French.



Scenario

GM Jay showed us the scenario book map. Sure enough, the Brits were crammed into a small area -- he had opened up the right flank and put a road through the woods in an effort to have the cavalry players do something. It didn't really work, but it was a valiant effort.

As Jay noted, it's a historical battle. True that!

He mentioned a couple other battles he was thinking of putting on, and that sounds great. I suggested he pick one with a wider front and less restrictive terrain. Or, use the historical forces, but allow some pre-game maneuvering. Otherwise, it's a straight ahead die roll bash looking for *Yahtzees*.

Hmmm. Maybe it's time to think about *Snappy Freddy* for the Seven Years War, War of Austrian Succession, and War of Spanish Succession? Hmmm. Need to learn more about the organizational aspects before that can happen.

Thanks to Dave for hosting, Jay for GM-ing, and gamers for gaming another Friday night at the tabletop fights. And how about that fish-eye photo of the start of the battle? Credit Dave for starting off this recap with a new visual treat.

Dutch Treat: The Left Flank

by Mike

My die rolling started really bad; I rolled a "1" and was assigned the left flank of the Pragmatic Army. So, I was the Dutch Pragmatic Dude that had to take the three redoubts and French line between Fontenoy and fortified village of Antoing on the banks of the non-fordable river Scheldt.

The only certainty I could detect was "Death."

The near certainty was "Soon."

How? "Cannonballs galore."

My brilliant and very carefully worked out plan, all in five seconds, was to demonstrate. As my command was boxed in, that was either to stand still or move forward very slowly, because I had the choice between the five French batteries (four medium and one heavy) firing cannonballs or canisters.

At start (l to r): French Sam and Rich, Dutch Mike, and GM Jay, who explains how a 1:1 attack vs entrenched French has possibilities. Note the open field made for cavalry but unused.



I also let the French commander (Larry) know that I had a pontoon bridge, which they promptly encouraged me to launch so that their heavy battery on the far side of the Scheldt had something to practice on. At least that was what my scouts told me.

Maybe a New Plan?

My first initiative roll was another 1. I promptly discovered Larry's artillery needed no practicing whatsoever because my command's 17 stands had 13 rings of death and shock around their necks when the French guns paused.

A new brilliant and very carefully worked out plan was needed immediately; "Charge!" And that improved my odds greatly to "Death with Glory!" which I shouted out loudly to nobody...and hoped that Marc, the British gentleman commanding the command to my immediate right, would hear it, cease eating breakfast (bully beef and ale), and send his brave souls forward. Alas, he apparently was eating lunch.

My new brilliant, pragmatic, and carefully worked out plan was that my six stands of regular horse (4s, but already bloodied) would dance forward, demonstrate gallantly with their flank facing the fortified village of Antoing brimming with French infantry regulars (4s) and a medium battery (plus the heavy battery on the far side of the Scheldt), and thus, with whatever staying power a morale of 4 provides, screen my 10 stands of conscripts (3s) moving forward at full speed of 6 inches. My aim was to overwhelm the three redoubts with their medium batteries, flanked by infantry and supported by more lines of infantry (3s and 5s). Beyond that, line upon line of French cavalry. I incentivized my conscripts with repeated shouts of "Death with Glory!"

Brilliant Plan

My plan worked brilliantly. Actually, my plan worked beyond brilliantly. My brave horsemen took the three redoubts, destroyed batteries and a couple of infantry battalions, and my single medium battery caused numerous rings of death and shocks to the French infantry across their battleline.

And then we died. Gone. Wasted.

The French promptly reclaimed the three redoubts (5 VPs each out of a total 45 on the table). Elsewhere lunch was good. No dead. No glory.

I was gloriously dead, so I cannot comment of how the balance of the Pragmatic army fared and why so, but we did what Cumberland's Pragmatic army did: failed to break Saxe's French and then relieve the besieged town of Tournai.

Scenario Thoughts

It is hard to see how the outcome of this scenario could have had a different outcome. GM Jay seemed to suggest we, the Pragmatics, were very close to succeeding, and perhaps we were, but I doubt it, and I suspect if we played it again 10 times, we might succeed once. After my initial poor dice, I had a long string of the right dice at the right time, all while Larry's dice helped me too. A defeat of the French would need a repeat of that and more.

However, we played a historic battle and I enjoyed it. Many thanks to Dave for hosting and providing a beautiful tabletop (as usual) and Jay for the scenario, figures and GM'ing the game.

Pragmatism On The Tabletop

by GM Jay

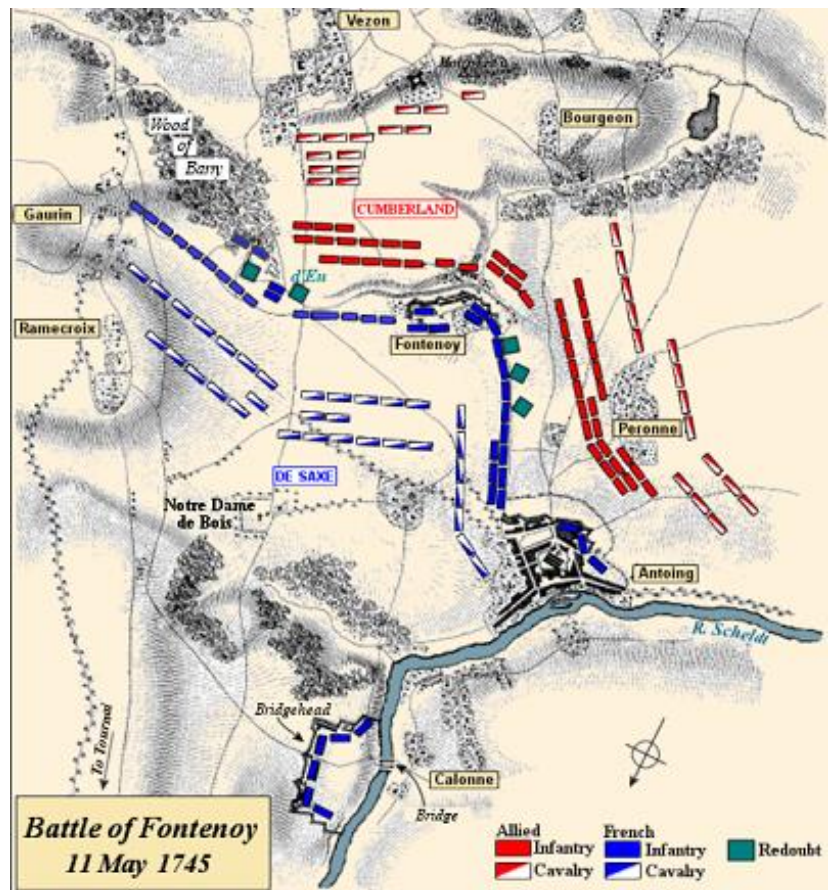
I actually tried to enhance both the Pragmatic options and ensure that each command had something to do.

Western European warfare in the 18th century really relegated cavalry to the flanks and tactical opportunism. One of the many reasons for the popularity of Napoleonic is the emergence of true battle cavalry, in part due to less well-trained infantry, and the added dimension of light infantry tactics. All in all, it makes for a more complex battlefield.

So many historic battles are decided grand tactically that is hard to get alternate results purely by tactics. Napoleonic with its greater complexity seems to offer greater recourse to this conundrum. Time and again one side was forced into historic battles under unfavorable conditions due to strategic or less frequently grand strategic considerations.

The Actual Battle: May 11, 1745

Just like the tabletop battle, the Dutch charged the French and were pummeled by artillery and musketry, but managed to take at least part of the redoubt line before being forced to withdraw. The British managed to push to the right of Fontenoy and were on the cusp of breaking through when the French cavalry launched charge after charge. The British formed a hollow square, but suffered fire from three sides and withdrew. Indeed, the British retreated over 100 miles, abandoning the fortress of Tournai, which was the object of the attack in the first place. Tournai surrendered just over a month later.





Fred (left) and Dan contemplate mid-game German moves in *Bitter Woods*. Below: Russ scrambles to make a line. Photo by Dan.

Battle of the Bulge: *Bitter Woods*

by Russ Lockwood

Two years ago, Dan, Fred, and I played *Bitter Woods* (*BW*), a hex wargame about the Battle of the Bulge. We try to play a Bulge wargame in December -- doesn't always work out, but we try. In the past, besides *BW*, we've played GMT's *Ardennes '44*, *Axis and Allies Bulge*, and GDW's *Attack in the Ardennes*.

As for *BW*, each hex is two miles across and each counter is an infantry regiment or a CCx for US Armor. Each turn is a half day. The rules are of medium complexity, although we added a number of optional rules to boost the complexity. The setup is fixed. The map (we use the L2 version) has the info printed on the map.

Last time, Dan was the US, I was the northern Germans, and Fred took the rest of the Germans. This time, we rotated. I was the US, Fred the northern Germans, and Dan the rest of the Germans. Yes, the US has nothing to do while the Germans sort out their attacks. I re-read the rules while I waited.

Note that there is a German Army border that Fred's units could not cross to the South and Dan's units could not cross to the North. We were pretty good about policing the line, needing only the occasional re-do of movement.



The CRT is mostly a "push" CRT. The higher the odds, the more hexes a unit is retreated, with four hexes being the maximum before a step loss occurs. The attacker can follow up as long as the first hex is the vacated defender's hex and advance after movement is not farther than regular movement or the number of hexes, whichever is smaller. A slight road bonus for mechanized units is available.

March of the Panzers

In the South, the US is rather thin along the river line and the Germans easily pushed across the river in a couple of places.

Two bridges blow, but a thin US line end 16am turn.

In the Center, and for me, that's basically from Clervaux to St. Vith, the Germans poured over the Our River, tumbling US units back with high odds attacks and surrounding units to open gaps in the US line.

In the North, the German advance was more subdued, partially because the units were not that strong at the start. The big 1st SS Panzer division starts in reserve and cannot move until Turn 2 (Dec 16 PM turn).

The US has some movement restrictions as well due to the German surprise attack.

The Germans push in the south and center as I trade space for time.

By the end of the first day, I was able to cobble together a line, in part by retreating units as fast as I could to better defensive terrain and hexes that at least put a Zone of Control across the board.

December 17 was much the same. The Germans used high odds and advance after combat to push my units back and back, sometimes trapping one or two. For example, at the end of the Dec 17 AM turn, 9th Armor Division CCA was trapped by the 2nd Panzer's 304th Regt and the 14th Regt of the 5th Fallschirmjager Division.

End of the 17am turn. The US Armor (upper left corner) sits on Bastogne. The surrounded attack of the Lehr (upper right corner) failed completely.

I performed some counterattacks, but I have to say my die rolling was miserable. For example, on that same 17AM turn, I attacked the 902 Regt of Panzer Lehr with units of the 2nd Infantry and 99th Infantry at high odds. To destroy it, all I had to do was not roll a ... Oh, you've got to be kidding: No Effect? No Effect? Sure enough, that unit plagued me for a few more turns before I finally cut it off and eliminated it.



Moving Wall, Not A Bulge

Dan remarked that the game was more about a moving wall than a bulge. And that's quite true. By the end of Dec 18 PM turn, Fred's units were 10 miles outside Liege and Dan's captured Bastogne and my units were 12 miles away on a line roughly from La Roche to Neufchateau. The Germans continued forward as I traded space for time.

Top: The end of 18pm in the north. Liege (upper right corner) is within striking distance. I've finally gotten a line together.

Bottom: End of 18pm turn in south. If you mentally overlap the photos using the red tinged counter (destroyed fuel dump), you can get an idea of the "wall" front.

We used the optional fuel depot rule -- instead of the US fuel depot being in the hex printed on the map, I rolled 2d6 at the start of the game to see if that hex or one of the six surrounding hexes held the depot. Fred scattered some units to find the first one, but I made sure to man the other depot when Dan found it. I rolled successfully on the depot destroyed table. Come the 20th, one random Panzer Division would be immobile without fuel.

The biggest problem for the US is the paucity of spare units to mass for a counter-attack and still cover the line. On occasion, I left gaps in the line around the roughest of terrain -- robbing Peter's defense to pay for Paul's attack, so to speak.

Blowing bridges at Liege. End 19pm.



Hold the Line

Amazingly, I was able to hold that line on the 19 AM turn because the Germans could not bring enough troops forward fast enough to mount an attack.

Germans pull back in the south to shift attack towards Liege in the north. End 19pm turn. This part of the front didn't move in 20am.



In the meantime, both Fred and Dan were forced to peel units off to guard the edges of the map with units or ZOCs where US troops would enter. That did more to dissipate the German advantage in numbers than the combats.

At the end of the Dec 20 AM turn, my La Roche to Neufchateau line still held. Indeed, Dan ran out of units when he shifted his forces towards the center and north to help Fred attack Liege.

For victory, Liege is important as it's the closest point from the original German front line to cross the Meuse River. I had what I could stuff in there defending the river line, but it seemed never enough with the push CRT.

That's where the game ended -- 20 AM turn.

Thoughts

Dan and Fred executed movements and attacks with skill and then generally rolled well. Dan got lucky early with some significant Defender Retreat 4 hexes and followed up -- it was like getting an extra 50% move.

Russ (left) and Fred battle over the Schnee. Photo by Dan.



Time and time again, US units became surrounded by German advance after combat movement. Kudos to extracting maximum damage to US forces when the opportunities arose.

Actual step losses were only about three or four, and that from Firefight (each side loses a step) results. All totaled, 14 US units were eliminated and a few others reduced versus two German units eliminated and a few others reduced.

Part of this is due to scale: regiment-sized counters versus battalion or smaller units. A counter can only hold one hex and ZOCs. Historically, the German attack was successful in hitting a weak part of the US line. The panzers drove forward well, but small US units, some famously down to platoon size at crossroads, held up German attacks for an hour or two to blunt the advance.

That said, the US can move like lightning across the road grid -- more than I think they really could do after getting pushed back in combat. So, that's the US answer to the German momentum. To be fair, German mechanized troops moved at the same rate (1/4 MP per road hex), although infantry (1/3 MP per road hex), and corps artillery (1/2 MP per road hex) are appropriately slower.

The flip side is that if you drill the scale down to battalion, you'll end up with triple the units to move. And that'll be an extremely long game.

Improved Positions in The Bulge

Historically, the German offensive began on December 16, 1944, catching the inexperienced and thinly spread 106th Division on the Schnee Eifel in the "quiet" Ardennes sector by surprise. German forces executed a double envelopment, cutting off the 422nd and 423rd Infantry Regiments by the night of December 17.

Starting positions. The four US regiments are in "Improved Positions" (counters are underneath combat counters).



Despite being isolated and cut off, the trapped US soldiers continued to fight against numerous German attacks.

With no hope of rescue, dwindling ammunition, and heavy casualties, the regimental commanders made the decision to surrender their commands on December 19, 1944, to save lives. This resulted in the capture of about 7,000 men, one of the largest American mass surrenders of the war.

In game turns, that's six turns of resistance. It'll never happen in this game. I'm guessing that's design for effect. The Designer Notes emphasize German momentum.

As for the US stand at St. Vith, historically the Division's remaining regiment, the 424th, along with remnants of armor units, fell back to St. Vith. Joined by other American forces, these forces held the vital road junction for several more days until December 21, delaying the German advance and disrupting their timetable.

In game turns, that's 10 turns of resistance. Even the worst luck like Fred and I had a couple years ago still allowed us to take St. Vith before 10 turns were up.

Obviously, Dan and Fred were far more efficient at surrounding, attacking, and eliminating US 106th regiments by 17 AM and capturing St Vith by 17 PM. Granted, they had some great rolls at the right time.

Dan's comment of our *BW* game as a "moving wall" instead of a bulge is rather insightful. It's hard to design a wargame campaign that's just right -- enough German advance to stretch the US lines and enough US reinforcements to contain and push back the advance -- without considerable luck on the CRT.

Always Fun

I like *Bitter Woods*. It has enough complexity, especially if you include a half-dozen or so optional rules as we do, to make it interesting, but not so much as to overwhelm you. I do especially like the effect of tying German advances to the road grid. The Germans don't have to stay on roads, but they move faster that way, which makes road junctions all the more important.

Incidentally, we played for over 10 hours, or about noon to 10:30pm. I gotta say, I haven't done such long wargame session in decades! I couldn't believe how fast time went. One blink and it was 6pm and dinner.

Some of that was taken up with flipping through the rules to sort out one question or another, but a half-hour per side per turn is about right. The Germans can't waste early-game opportunities to attack and the US can't blow placement to create a defensive line or a precise counter-attack. The dice have something to say about thinking about retreats and advances, which adds to the time.

Thanks, Dan for hosting and both of you for a fine game.

The German Perspective: Key Points

by Daniel

The key points from my perspective from playing 5th Pz Army/7th Army:

Building two bridges over the Our River on 16 AM that were in use by 16 PM.

Clearing Clervaux by 16 PM.

Clearing out the US 106th Infantry from the Schnee Eifel by 17 AM.

Panzer Lehr reaching St Vith by 17 AM and capturing St Vith by 17 PM.

Capturing Bastogne by 18 AM.

Shifting north to force the center as 6th Panzer Army (Fred) cleared the north, making the "Bulge" looking more like a moving wall.

Rules Quibbling

I believe all of us questioned the *Bitter Woods* rules on these aspects:

Off-board reinforcements and flanks: The rules were not detailed enough about the "map edge" restrictions -- if any, as we all seemed to agree that allowing US reinforcements to enter "at the nearest hex free of enemy units or ZOCs" could be abused by entering behind the German starting area. It certainly forced the Germans to maintain a secure flank with the map edges, but has no accountability or concern for the US to secure their side of the "off-map edge."

After looking at the BGG Forums, I was surprised at how few questions were asked about this. On only one thread wondered how to calculate the "nearest hex." It's a common problem with any game that has to deal with what I often call the "Twilight Zone" map-edge issues.

Low casualties overall: The CRT is relatively "bloodless" unless you can surround units. After the 20 AM turn, 14 US units and two German units were completely eliminated and I suspect there were about five or six reduced units on each side as well.

Randy Heller discusses this in his Designer's Notes: "*Bitter Woods* offers a step reduction to depict unit losses. It is not until the upper limits of the Combat Results Table that one experiences outright defender elimination. Be careful not to misinterpret the meaning of unit removal.

U.S. units were almost always removed from the front at 20% casualties; this would represent a defender eliminated. Figure 10% losses represent a flip or step reduction.

For the Germans, the formula is more difficult. German soldiers had a reputation for attacking in the face of imminent death and futility. Americans would not. So defender eliminated results for the Germans would represent a 40% to 50% loss, or double U.S. losses."

Commandoes: No rules to cover the German commandoes that caused traffic misdirection, other than a possible "random event."

Underwhelming Impact of "Improved Positions" and "Forts": I'm not as "underwhelmed" as Russ on this...

From Randy Heller's Designer's Notes: "I was an alpha playtester for *Ardennes '44* and designed *Bitter Woods* (*BW* was released before *A'44*). Both are fine games in their own right. Each has its advocates. I obviously like both of them, and will play either. Anyone, of course, is free to declare one the better game, but I would ask that one not declare the other more historically accurate, as there are many reasons to support one over the other in that arena."

***BW* Bulge: The Other German General's Perspective**

by Fred

The difference, other than the dice being extremely favorable for me, is that I had a nearly 100% understanding of the game and had set up the starting positions for a review. I spent about an hour the night before looking at various options for the Germans, but not so much for the Americans.

Understanding the rules was likely more important.

What? You mean there was homework? No wonder the twit of an American commander did so poorly. -- RL

BW at start. Photo by Dan.



***Dominion* Trio: Two to One**

by Russ Lockwood

Stopped by Dan's for a quick game or three. We hadn't played the card game *Dominion* for a while, so out came the boxes. We randomly rolled for the set up -- Dan has a list of about 700 setups from various tournaments and online games.

So the game began. For those new to the game, you build a deck from a pile of common cards. No collectible game this -- everyone starts out with seven treasure cards worth 1 "gold piece" (GP) each and three Estate Victory Point cards worth 1 VP each. The 10 "Kingdom" card piles (each with 10 of the same cards) are available to all who can pay for them -- usually 2 to 6 GPs. The more expensive the card, the more it does -- draw more cards, play more cards, earn more GPs, and so on. It's quite the clever game, although with a dozen expansions, I think they've milked it far enough.

Anyway, the whole point is to buy VP cards. The game ends when either one VP pile or three Kingdom Card piles are empty. Tally up the VPs, highest wins.

Dan reads one of the Kingdom cards.

It's interesting that with 10 Kingdom cards of varying capabilities, plus Copper, Silver, Gold, and Platinum GP cards to buy, each player has the exact same opportunity to buy cards. And yet, card selection as a strategy plus random shuffling make for different player deck performance.



Game the First

This one was neck and neck for a while, but Dan pulled ahead. There was one Colony VP card left, so the game was about over. As it turned out, we both felt Dan was ahead, but not by much, so if he bought the last Colony card, he'd win the game.

Dan drew a miserable hand of five cards with no chance to buy a VP card of any type. It looked like he'd have to basically pass, giving me a chance at that last big VP Colony card. Yet, one of his cards was an Action card that allowed him to "trash" (remove from game) one card and draw a number of cards from his deck equal to the GP cost of the card he trashed.

So, he trashed a 13 GP Colony card in his hand -- draw 13 cards. He gambled that he'd pull enough GP cards among the 13 to buy that last Colony card and secure the victory.

Well. He drew mediocre 13 cards and bought what he could, but not the Colony. On my hand, I bought the last Colony card.

We tallied VPs. Dan 96, me 98. I had squeaked out a win. Losing the big 10 VPs from the Colony card he trashed was the difference. It was a great gamble that failed to pay off.

Game the Second

The less said about this game, the better. We got 10 new Kingdom cards thanks to a random roll for one of those 700 setups.

Dan's deck was so well tuned, it was watching the card version of a Philharmonic Symphony perform classical music. Mine was so poorly tuned, it sounded like a rusty dryer with unevenly loaded laundry on an uneven floor scraping the wall.

I resigned after not too long.

Game the Third

In this, I pointed to a random Kingdom card in each box. So, it was completely random.

This started out even, but I slowly fell behind, then hit a magic combo that allowed me to buy two Colony VP cards to bring me back in it.

Alas, that was the high point of my deck and I steadily fell behind and lost.

Thoughts

I rather enjoy *Dominion* and its mixture of luck and strategy. Sometimes that's frustrating when you see the wrong card combos show up in one hand that would have been better in another hand, but that's the luck of the draw. These games usually last about 45 minutes to an hour each, although when both players realize one deck is amiss, resigning after 15 or 20 minutes is acceptable. Play enough times and you'll get a feel for futility.

I will say it's usually hard to come back from deficits. Once one deck is working well and the other not so well, VPs pile up for the tuned deck. It's not like you can perform a desperate attack at low odds and roll a miracle die. The card draw is the card draw.

***Kingsburg*: Random Influence Peddling**

By Russ Lockwood

With some time left, I asked if we could play *Kingsburg* and the game speedily popped onto the table. Both Dan and I like this game. It's a mix of die rolling and resource decision making.

Again, both sides have exactly the same set-up: 3d6 and a card showing the buildings you can build and the stone, gold, and wood resources needed to build each. You can build one building per phase, unless you were given the king's envoy, in which case, you can build two.

Most buildings provide VPs. Some provide extra benefits: like a soldier for defense against the end of year attacks, gold discounts on construction, re-rolls, and so on. Most VPs at the end of five turns (15 build phases and five end-of-year attack phases) wins.

The die rolls gain you access to individuals in the King's Court, who will provide you a number of resources -- some you pick and most are fixed. Some also provide VPs, or soldiers, or sneak peaks at the invading monsters. The higher the roll, the more resources.

Each die can be used individually or in groups, with the proviso that you can't place dice on the same court individual if another player's die is already there -- unless you have the envoy. Handy, that envoy.

The King also provides an extra d6 to help a player get a higher dice total. That's always handy, too.

One other wrinkle we had not realized in previous two-player games: we rolled 3d6 and 2d6 to represent two other "players." The dice are placed on whatever total was rolled.



The Game

We both concentrated on building defense buildings on Turn 1. The monsters that come in the Winter Phase can ruin your game and they get worse as the full turns go by. We both beat the monsters and continued building.

I fell behind a bit, but the envoy allowed me to build a second building in a phase when I got lucky and scored just enough resources to do so. We each got an extra die at times, which is always helpful in gathering more resources.

Now, I had lost many games because Dan had consistently built a row that ended with an Embassy that gives a VP each phase. Not this game. I hammered in the morning. I hammered in the evening. I hammered on that row to build an Embassy only one turn after Dan built one.

On occasion, I would gain an extra +2 marker (adding 2 to a die or dice) and sometimes two of these +2 markers. I had a building that allowed me to trade in a +2 marker or resource for 1 VP. I used this a couple times when I had two +2 markers.

The monsters came and were always defeated. I headed for the bigger VP builds and pulled ahead.

During the last phase, I kept tallying defense points on both our cards. It came out even as we went into the monster invasion phase. As I had a 9 VP lead, it didn't matter what happened for we would suffer the same fate of a loss or win...except I overlooked that Dan had gathered a couple extra soldiers.

The invasion came, I rolled a 1d6, and as Dan noted after the roll, had I rolled a 1, I would not have had enough defense points and soldiers to defeat the invasion, whereas he would. Good point.

I didn't roll a 1 and thus secured the victory, but as you can see from Dan's soldier ploy, even at the last die roll, victory wasn't certain. If I had lost the battle, I'd have lost a ton of VPs that would have vaulted Dan to the win.

Thoughts

Good close game. The inclusion of the two other "players" did affect us from time to time. Once, I was at a complete loss of picking a court individual when I realized I had the envoy that allowed me to drop my dice on an already used individual. That gave me the resources I needed to build that phase -- and you always want to build in a phase. You sometimes can't, for dice are fickle, but in this case, the envoy saved me.

I should mention we played the first edition. I recall Dan said a second edition was released with some tweaks to the cards and perhaps individuals' resources.

Field of Glory: Fantasy Bash

by Daniel

We "weathered" through the *Field of Glory* rules well enough, though some of us were a bit rusty.

Ed (left) and Keith advance. Photo by Dan.

Ed (Elves), Fred (Goblins/Orcs), Keith (Dwarves/Hobbits/Humans alliance), and I (Orcs) battled until Keith's command broke, which was around 5pm. Ed's command had no losses thus far and Fred's command was still intact. It would take a few turns to turn significant attention to the Elves, although one big unit was at least facing them.

Much of Keith's demise was due to good shooting and well-chosen magic: Giant of Coot and stone-throwers drove off one of Keith's giants while Fred softened up the other with his own giant and archers before taking it out. The Giant of Coot and the stone-throwers then focused on the "chicken-riders," routing one first with my Uruk-Hai archers and then the second. The Giant of Coot attacked the dwarven foot knights with Fred's manticore to deliver the coup de grace with the help of magic.

Ed, Keith, and Fred close into combat.

The extreme flank in the woods was mostly a side-show, as Keith's hobbit slingers and archers dithered with my goblin squig-riders in the woods. Keith's Roc tried to take on the squig-riders and they were taken out swiftly.

The Uruk-Hai archers were my choice for MVP: They not only routed the 1st "chicken-riders," withstood an attack by a summoned Earth Elemental, and survived a flank attack by the 2nd "chicken-riders" by fighting them to stand-still. That bought time for a gnoll warband to charge the "chicken-riders" and force them to break-off and evade -- and be punished severely by the Giant of Coot and the stone-throwers.

The Uruk-Hai archers then had time to reorganize and rally -- they were down to four stands from original six stands. Amazingly, the archers received a charge by an eight-stand pike unit and only lost one stand but maintaining good order. Reinforced by a Drake and assisted by a Bugbear warband flank charge, the Uruk-Hai fell-back fragmented, now down to two stands - but the pikes had been driven back and then Keith's command sounded the retreat.



Napoleon in Europe: Risky Risk

by Russ Lockwood

I cracked the shrinkwrap on an old Eagle Games game, *Napoleon in Europe*. It has a gorgeous big map divided into a multitude of provinces, cards for reinforcements, and big 40mm soft plastic figures in a variety of colors.

Renaud popped over and by random roll took the French in the "Everybody Against The French" basic game scenario. The basic game is somewhat like *Risk*, with extras. Among the many differences is that the figures consist of infantry, cavalry, artillery, and leaders with varying dice tosses and capabilities for each type. One twist from most wargames is that the firer, not the owner, selects casualties.

Renaud considers a response to the British landing in Holland while his French push into Austria.



When To Advance The Reserve

Since a battle consists of a front line and reserve, what you put in the front line is what can be targeted and if all your front line figures are eliminated, regardless of the reserve, you lose the battle and the opponent gets a free shot at the reserve.

So, deciding what to put in the front line at the start and when to advance figures from the reserve to the front line often determines how well you do in a battle. For example, cavalry toss more dice than infantry, so you might keep cavalry in reserve to avoid casualties on the opponent's turn, then advance the cavalry on your turn for extra firing dice.

Every figure counts as one when it comes to assigning hits, so the firing player will always choose any artillery in the front line, followed by cavalry, and then infantry. Leaders, by rule, are the last ones to go. Defense fires first.

Reinforcements

Like *Risk*, you collect cards and turn them in for figures -- the cards show the particular type. The more cards you turn in, the more figures you receive. All reinforcements start in a home territory.

You get a card for each player capital you control, a card for every five provinces you control, and a card for each major battle won.

Movement

The infantry and artillery move one province while the cavalry and leaders may move up to two. Amphibious operations are limited to six figures for the British and four figures for all other players and must go from one port to another port. During movement, each amphibious figure rolls 1d6 and on a 1 is eliminated. If the French land in England, it's a 1 or 2 to eliminate an amphibious figure.

When a player moves into an enemy-held province, a battle occurs. Defender fires first. Hits only on 6s. Lots of dice rolls!

The Set Up

In the "Everybody Against The French" scenario, the French face the British, Austrians, and Russians. The Allies in total have a slight advantage in numbers, but the French have the central position and British are limited to six figures movement across the seas per turn.

There are no other figures on the board other than the players' figures. For example, Prussia, Spain, and Turkey are not in the game, so none of their provinces contain figures, nor do any other province.

The Game

I sent most of the Austrian army south into the Balkans to capture as many provinces as I could. I concentrated the rest of the Austrian army in the north of Austria. The Russians made their way west through Prussia with some troops sent into Sweden and Finland. The British invaded Holland. I had thought to head to Spain, but I wanted to bring pressure against the French with a combined army. My hope was to lure the French army northwards.

Alas, my ruse failed. Renaud sent most of the French into Italy and then Austria. I could not defeat the juggernaut and just left a thin line as the French swept into Austria. Vienna fell, but I thought that an acceptable trade-off as Wellesley thrust into France and met the French in Paris.

The Battle of Paris

Our first major battle! I didn't have much -- two infantry, three cavalry, one artillery, and a leader. The French had four infantry, three cavalry, and a leader. It wasn't much of a battle as the French gunned down all but my leader, who escaped. I did a little damage, but Wellesley was truly bested.

So much for cutting the head off the snake. Renaud increased the garrison of France and placed a number of troops in ports to threaten Britain. These were not available for the rest of the continent, so I gained a bit.

Battle of Paris combat with two lines. Gentlemen of France, fire first. Well, they were defending.

Central Battles

A thin screen of British interposed between France and Napoleon's big army in Germany was swatted away, but it cost a turn.

The main Russian army slowly advanced westward into Silesia, with a secondary army massing in Russia. The Austrians finally got some reinforcements as the British rebuilt.

The French invaded Spain with a couple infantry. Without any opposition, Renaud scooped up provinces. Then they jumped the Med into Africa. Italy was swallowed up. It seemed the blue tide was unstoppable.

Turn 6: French invade Spain while an Austro-British force gathers in Germany and the Russians mass in the East.



Yet the Austrians and Russians were not done yet. A small Austrian contingent swept through the Balkans and into Turkey, aiming for Cairo.

The French garrison of Vienna seemed vulnerable. The Austro-Russian army marched into battle, determined to liberate the capital. The battle for Vienna was short and sweet and returned it to Austrian control.

Other battles forced attrition on both sides.

A small Russian army pushed through Germany in the north and a tiny three-infantry Russian force sailed from Leningrad all the way to Algeria and proceeded to liberate most of North Africa except for Cairo and Morocco, which remained in French hands.

The British finally got their act together and landed in Portugal, then advanced into Spain, picking off isolated French troops until Renaud sent a cavalry army to Madrid. The face-off began in Spain.

Napoleon still clung to Belgium and Western Germany, but the provinces grabbed by the Allies began to tell. The loss of Vienna and its reinforcement card was a small, but telling shift.

Game Called

Delegates met for a peace conference. The Allies in total squeaked out a teeny victory based on provinces collectively gained versus provinces started with. France did better than any individual Allied country, but not versus the collective Allies.

End of game. Austro-Russian army recaptures Vienna. Three big French armies kick the British off the continent -- except for the army facing off against a French army in Spain (upper right corner). Another Russian army falls back in the face of the French.

Interesting. Had we four individual players (or up to seven), the game would play out quite differently. No marching through empty provinces. More players vying for provinces.

The game took three hours, including looking up and discussing rules -- although not that much as this was the simple basic game. Paging through the Standard game rules adds more complexity. A possibility.

Thanks for the game, Renaud.



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Renaud checks the Mobilization Table to figure out build costs at the end of the Japanese part of Turn 1.

Axis and Allies: Pacific 1940

by Russ Lockwood

I've had the *Axis and Allies Pacific 1940* and *Europe 1940* versions for a couple years, so it was time to tear off the shrinkwrap. I love the smell of a new game in the morning.

Compared to original *A&A Pacific*, the *1940* version comes with a bigger map with more territories and additional unit types. In general, the plastic figures are the same as the original, although I've a few quibbles about components.

I like Cruisers (CA) in being between Destroyers (DD) and Battleships (BB). Great. Except CAs are so similar looking to DDs, you are literally counting the smokestacks to discern the difference.

The US uses twin-tailed P-38s as fighters. That's fine, but it looks a little goofy using P-38s on carriers. Wildcats, or at least Hellcats, would be more appropriate. Maybe there's something on Etsy?

Green chips represent three units, which is a nice addition to the gray chip equals one unit and red chip equals five units. We kept running out of gray chips. I stole the ones from my original *A&A Pacific* game.

The "Mobilization Chart" with summaries of unit costs and capabilities is printed on the map in teeny-tiny 4pt type. The rules need a full-page summary chart, but alas, none available. Oh, the details are in the rules across several pages, but that is far from convenient. In a \$70 game, would it kill your profit margin to add five pages? I ended up taking a photo of the chart and printing out full-page versions.



MOBILIZATION ZONE				
UNIT STATS:	Cost	Attack	Defense	Move
LAND UNITS				
Infantry	3	1	2	1
Artillery	4	2	2	1
Mechanized Infantry	4	1	2	2
Tank	6	3	3	2
AAA	5		1	1
AIR UNITS				
Fighter	10	3	4	4
Tactical Bomber	11	3	3	4
Strategic Bomber	12	4	1	6
SEA UNITS				
Battleship	20	4	4	2
Aircraft Carrier	16		2	2
Cruiser	12	3	3	2
Destroyer	8	2	2	2
Submarine	6	2	1	2
Transport	7			2
FACILITIES				
Major Industrial Complex	30			
Minor Industrial Complex	12			
Airbase	15			
Naval Base	15			

Set Up

Each box lid of the five powers (Japan, US, UK, China, and ANZAC) contains the set up info. When you are done, it looks like a nice game set up with just enough pieces to make the board look good. As the turns go by, some spaces get overloaded, but at start, it's a thing of beauty.



The F4F would make a better US carrier plane than the P-38.

As the game starts in 1940, Japan is at war with China but no one else. While Japan can declare war on any other power, only the UK player can declare war on Japan during the first two turns. On turn 3, the US can declare war on Japan.

I made a slight rules error. I thought that if Japan was at war with the UK/ANZAC, it did not get the 10 Industrial Points (IP: currency of the game) bonus. In fact, if the Japanese declare war on the UK/ANZAC, yes, it loses the 10 IP bonus, but... if the UK declares war on Japan, Japan continues to receive the 10 IP bonus. A nuance, but an important one.

According to the *Axis and Allies* website, each turn represents about six months of time. Turn 1 is Spring/Summer 1940, Turn 2 is Fall/Winter 1940, Turn 3 is Spring/Summer 1941 and so on. Thus, the game allows the US to jump the gun. As I have never played the game before, I can only guess it was a balancing mechanic.

Turn Sequence

It's the typical *A&A* turn of build units, perform combat moves, combat, perform non-combat moves, and collect income for next turn's builds. We tended to perform combat and non-combat moves at the same time. Airfield and Naval Bases provide one extra Movement Point for units starting there.

The dice are d6s per usual. The hit numbers are the same. Low rolls are good in combat.

Japan At War

The Japanese are at a deficit versus all the Allies when it comes to IPs, so I wasn't going to attack the US until Turn 3 -- the turn the US could declare war on Japan. I wasn't going to declare war on the UK or ANZAC either. I wanted those 10 IPs (worth the production cost of a fighter) for as long as I could get them.

That left China.

So I concentrated most of the Air Force there and pushed inland with the infantry and artillery. I swept into the adjacent provinces and killed off most of the Chinese Army. Alas, it rebuilt and launched a counterattack that succeeded.

As for the rest of the Pacific, I repositioned units and built an aircraft carrier and loaded it with fighters. I sent transports south towards the Solomons and south east to China for future use against the Philippines.

End of Japanese Turn 2.



The US, British, and ANZAC built up, with the British starting to edge out of the Indian Ocean to occupy Dutch-controlled islands. The ANZACs landed some troops in New Guinea.

Japanese advance in China.

Turn 2

My dilemma was how to prepare for the US entry, or, how to prepare for a Pearl Harbor strike. As the historical Japanese found out, they didn't have enough troops and transports to do everything.

I continued to roll through China, severing the Burma Road and taking more provinces. I had a considerable air force dedicated to the conquest. With any luck, I would overrun China and then turn south towards India before the British could do anything about it.

The ANZACs continued to build up New Guinea. The British declared war on Japan and attacked and took Siam. The India-based factory churned out British ground units.

Start of Japanese Turn 3: Operation Pearl Harbor.

Turn 3

I launched the Pearl Harbor attack with the Kido Butai: three carriers with three fighters and three dive bombers plus two strategic bombers against the beefed up US fleet of three fighters, one dive bomber, one aircraft carrier (CV), one battleship (BB), three subs, two transports, a cruiser (CA), and a destroyer (DD). I had thought about sending in two more destroyers and a submarine, but that would've equaled the US subs. As submarines can't shoot at aircraft, I decided against adding in any surface ships. This would be a pure aircraft strike.

After Operation Pearl Harbor.

Note that the US had ground forces, including two AA guns. Since this was a sea-only battle, none of them were involved in the battle. At the end of the back and forth dice-off, all the Japanese air units were shot down and the US lost its BB, CA, DD, and air units. I really wanted the CV and transports, but ran out of planes. I guess the fourth aircraft carrier and the two fighters I sent southeast would have been rather helpful at Pearl. That would have set the US back a turn or two more than what occurred and maybe saved me a fighter or two in the process.

I invaded French Indo China, a gimme since it had no troops, and the Philippines, a relative gimme with a minimal defense.

I also made a major, major mistake: I forgot to do any combat moves in China. I had a few, but completely was absorbed with Pearl that I forgot. Dumb! So, two-thirds of the Japanese Airforce sat idle. The Japanese troops sat idle, and the Chinese were able to build a turn without being bothered. I did say dumb, right?

The British stormed the southeast anyway. The ANZACs built up New Guinea.



I kept too many troops in Manchuria instead of moving them right away into the expanse of China. Don't even remind me that I idled all the Japanese in China on Turn 3. Just forgot, which I realized on the British turn. Too late! So...Dumb!

I did little against ANZAC – only took New Britain for the air basing potential. ANZAC is sneaky -- their 10 IPs don't seem like much, but they can build and build and all of a sudden, there's one potent ANZAC force on the southern reaches. And that was even after I sank its starting transport, setting them back a turn.

End of Turn 4: ANZAC and Britain surround the Japanese in the Philippines.



I do like the extra spaces of the 1940 map versus the original *A&A Pacific*. I also have the *A&A Europe 1940* version, so that may be the next game to crack shrinkwrap on the tabletop.

Good game, Renaud.



End of Turn 4. China resurgent. Doh! US and Britain multiply. Doh! ANZAC becomes a force. Doh!

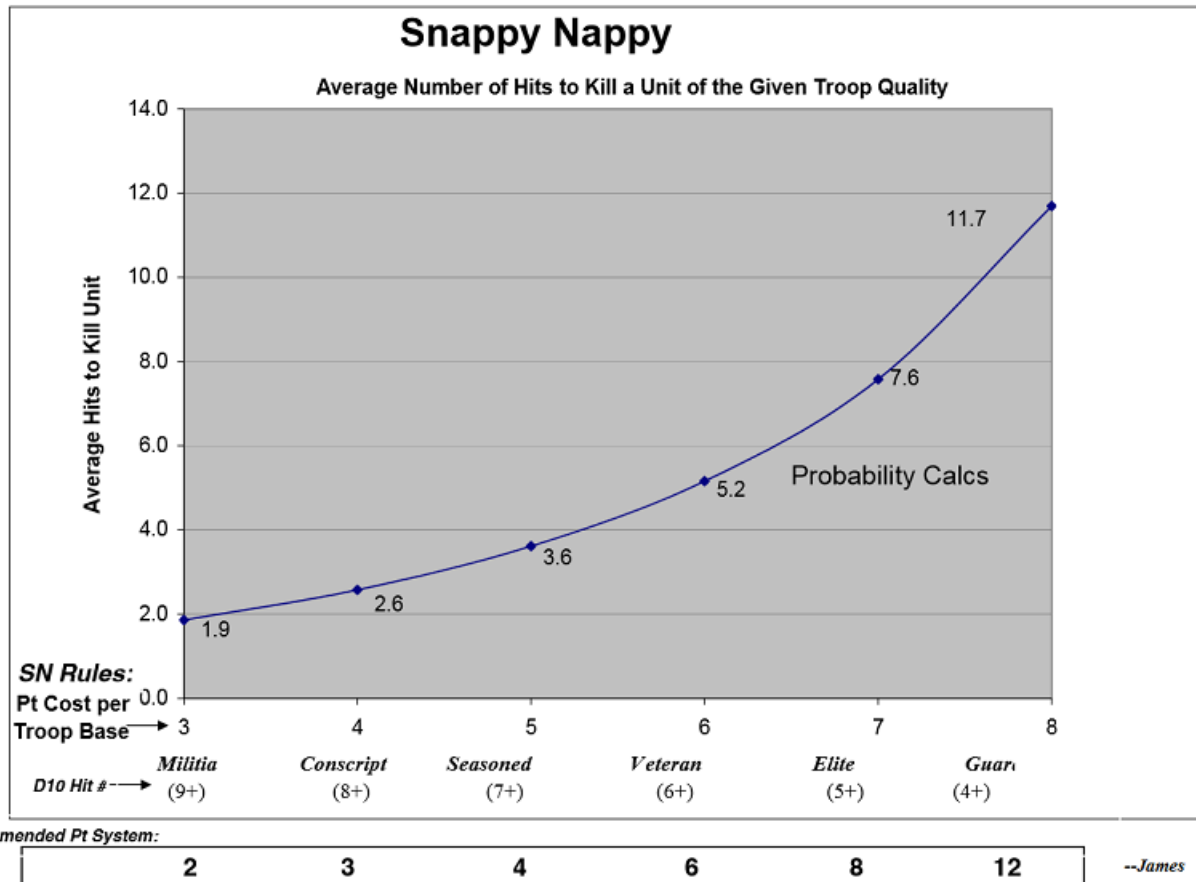
Snappy Nappy Point System: James' Alternative

by Russ Lockwood

Leave it to James, who created the excellent wish-I-had-thought-of-it Deployment Zone idea for multi-table Snappy Nappy Campaign in a Day games. Now he's come up with an alternative points system.

Since I used Snappy Nappy with historical scenarios, I never worried much about points. The points system I included in the rules was weighted towards better quality troops for those wishing a one-on-one tournament-style game.

James applied a more mathematically-oriented analysis to the sliding scale of d10 rolls for quality. His table is thus:



It sure looks like a much more accurate points system than my original system. Within a mix of unit qualities in a command, it's worth a try. As always with a points system, I also wonder about extremes. Hmmmm. How about where the Old Guard, Middle Guard, and Young Guard (three guard units at 12 points each = 36 points) can stand off 18 militia units (at 2 points each = 36 points) on a terrain-less table.

But outside extreme tournament point manipulation armies, I look forward to hearing how this alternative point system works.

For my own pick-up scenario design, I like to provide each player with a variety of cavalry, infantry, and artillery and a variety of qualities. That way, players get the three arms and can find out about how quality affects the mission. If it's a learning scenario with new players, I make every unit Veteran (50-50 rolls to hit and save that are easy to remember).

For a Campaign in a Day scenario, such as the 1814 campaign, a player's force depends on the historical OOB (the science of scenario design) leavened with a bit of fudging (the art of scenario design) concerning how particular units did at that time. A unit that performed brilliantly in one battle, might, because of losses or transfers, do poorly in the next, or visa-versa.

And of course, die rolls determine how a unit performs in any particular game.

Snappy Nappy Point System: Dan's Design Thoughts

by Daniel

James' point system should work well for a straight-up *Snappy Nappy* battle with equal leadership and similar terrain advantages for both sides.

From the *Snappy Nappy* games I've put together, I start off with the "historical" forces available and convert them to units (depending on the scale).

So for "Division" commands as an example, the units would be regiments or 1500-2000 infantry, half to two-thirds that for cavalry, and artillery would be 12-16 guns.

I then consider the number of units per command. This can be adjusted to give each player a similar number within the context of a total number of units as well as the number of Artillery, Cavalry, and Infantry units. I further subdivide Artillery into light, medium, heavy.

A point system is used for the quality rating and then an overall "Command" and "Army" rating can be made to see how the "historical" armies match up.

Leadership is assessed separately, as would the strategic circumstances -- who is the aggressor, how close or far apart are the elements of each army, and is one side or the other considering or dealing with some unique circumstances.

If the "historical" sides are too lopsided, which happens, then a number of "what-if" considerations can be made to make a more balanced game.

Allies And Axis: Card Game

by Russ Lockwood

We had some time left, so we again tried Renaud's WWII card game *Allies And Axis* -- somewhat of a pun on the more famous *Axis & Allies* name. Decks are identical - no collectible shenanigans here. By random selection, I got the Germans and Renaud was the US.

Cards get played in three columns. If you have all three columns with at least one card per column, you get three actions. If only two columns, then two actions. If only one column, one action. If none, game over. You eliminate cards by having a higher number card "attack" the card at the top of the column, or, use artillery cards, mortar cards, air strike cards, and so on. Many variations of specific cards needed to eliminate specific cards -- for example, engineers needed to destroy bunkers.

The other usual way to win is to find an objective card. An unusual way to win is not to be able to play any card and having more than nine cards in your hand.

One playtest tweak from last time involved a thematic change between Scouts and Raiders. Scouts became more an info gathering card and Raiders were more a combat and capture card. Otherwise, play remained the same.

Out came the cards and the battle began. Thanks to a "Veteran" card, I was able to win a couple ties in attacks -- normally the defender wins ties. I even pulled off a switcheroo with the Engineers to destroy a bunker card.

Thanks to an overactive LMG, I smashed through one of his three columns, dropping him to two actions per turn. It was shortlived, but I was able to do it again. And again it was short lived.

Alas, we were unable to finish the game, but it was quick and easy to pick up again. The Scouts and Raiders switch was seamless.



Star Wars Skirmish: Command and Control

by Russ Lockwood

Over the holidays, Renaud experimented with a new Command and Control system for *RUSE*. If you recall, the card per unit system evolved into a card per leader (or unit) activation system. For this *Star Wars* playtest, he wanted to try dice-based.

Start of the game. Rebels at bottom.

By random selection, I had Luke Skywalker and 18 Rebel troopers while Renaud took the Imperial commander and 13 SandTroopers. Three of my lads carried a handheld laser MG and the rest carried the standard blaster/laser rifle. Luke only had his light saber. The Imperial commander carried a pistol, had a light mortar team, and a dozen SandTroopers with blasters and armor. Unlike movie armor, this armor actually had an effect.

The new command and control system had each player roll 1d6 per figure. Each number 1 through 5 was a specific action. For example, 1s were Withdraws and 5s were offensive movement. A 6 was a wildcard and could be used for anything.

All 1s go first, then 2s, and then 3s, 4s, and 5s, with 6s turned to a 1 to 5 as wanted. The player with the fewest dice of a particular number went first. Ties were a roll-off and the winner of the roll-off can decide whether to go first or make the other player go first.

I rolled my 19 dice and assigned each one to a figure. The twist here is that you could alter any roll downward, but never upward. That turned out to be a great mechanism within the context of the command and control system.

Mid game. Figures tipped over are KIA. Luke hides behind the wall (bottom middle).

Rebel Attack

I started two of my six-man squads in total cover of a wall outside the ruins. The other squad started on the left in the open.

The first thing that happened was that I gave all the 5s and 6s (turned down to 5s) to the left squad in the open. As movement comes last in the 1 through 5 progression, they became targets. Half fell -- no armor, you understand, so die roll ties were in favor of the Imperial. My lads raced toward the ruins.

My other two squads were behind the wall and could not see anyone -- so, neither shoot at or be fired upon.

So the turns progressed. As only a 5 or 6 could move, that meant by die roll average, 2/3 of the troops would remain in place. As I popped a few out each turn, they were gunned down in the open.

I did some damage, but the Force was not with me. The Armor was not with me either, and it basically meant the SandTroopers won ties and were unhit whereas ties felled my Rebels.



I soon reached the greater than 50% losses means breaking off and losing the skirmish. We did use an optional rule to roll to continue "To The Bitter End."

What happens when you roll d6s – some figures stay behind all game. Note that Luke always rolls a 6 – and so can pick any order.

Use the Farce, Luke

Renaud asked why I hadn't sent Luke out. He was a Hero. I replied he would be a dead duck moving out into the open. There'd be so much crossfire, numbers of dice would catch up to him. It'd be a farce.

Eh, then I thought, "Why not?" It's a playtest. Let's try it! We played another turn. I sent out Luke.

Jedi heroes like Luke used their lightsaber to block and deflect laser shots. Thus, he had double defense dice. Another big trait was that all misses were "shots" back at the firer.

Well, out went Luke and he soon took three hits. That would kill any human non-Hero, but Luke could take five damage. He charged a SandTrooper who was on Overwatch. Luke took his fourth hit as he charged in. He took his fifth and final hit in melee, even as his light saber chopped off the SandTrooper's head.

Luke charges a Sandtrooper in a final bid for victory. Two other rebels have fallen.

Now, I am too much the gentleman to deign to say, "I told you so." That would be in my own mind. Across the table, I shook my head and said. "Yep. Told you."

Renaud joked, "Luke never went to Dagobah."

Of course, this triggered all the "historical" comparisons within the movies.

The game took about an hour and a half proper, if you don't include explaining and examining the holistic nature of combat systems and commenting on various aspects of the command and control system.

On the plus side, dribbling Rebel troopers out piecemeal ended up with a lot of dead Rebels. I say plus because piecemeal attacks across open ground should indeed result in lots of casualties. Once more cover-filled terrain was reached, the firefight became a tad more even.

Always interesting to playtest a new subsystem. Thanks for the game, Renaud.



NEWS

Cold Wars 2026: February 5 to 8, 2026

by *Russ Lockwood*

Cold Wars 2026 will be held at the Wyndham Lancaster Host resort in Lancaster, PA, from February 5 to 8, 2026. The convention theme is The Wild West.

Highlights will be two huge cowboy games and plenty of smaller ones along with the usual cornucopia of historical games, from Napoleonic's, American Civil War, Pike and Shot, Wooden Ships, World War II, and so on.

For the first time, we will have Midshipmen from the US Naval Academy attending and they will run a training game on Saturday and may put on other events plus a lecture.

Per usual, the Dealer Hall will be filled. Of note, UK based Pendraken Miniatures will make their first appearance at the show, including its owner, Leon.

Cold Wars also offers Wally's Basement and its range of flea market items, War College lectures, tournaments, and Hobby U painting classes.

Info: www.hmgs.org

HMGS Dues Increase: 2026

by *Kevin Carroll*

Director, Marketing & Communications HMGS Inc.

The HMGS Board of Directors is announcing a membership dues increase to \$35.00 for 2026, effective on January 1, 2026, for both new and renewing memberships.

Membership dues have not increased in a long time, and the Board would have liked to not take this step, but we feel it is a necessary for us to continue to bring conventions to our members and the general gaming population. The costs of running conventions and HMGS itself have risen every year and HMGS Board feels that this is a necessary step to help lessen the impact of those rising costs.

The current benefits for membership are under review and discussion with an aim to increase the actual benefits of being a member.

In addition, the cost to attend a convention will also be going up, effective starting with 2026 Historicon. At this moment the new convention prices are being discussed. HMGS conventions offers the least expensive multi-day gaming conventions in North America. Even with the price increase they will continue to be a great value.

The convention prices for 2026 Cold Wars will remain as they are and not increase.

Morven Festival of Trees: 2025

by *Russ Lockwood*

Morven, in Princeton, NJ, used to be the governor's mansion (1944 to 1981) until Drumthwacket became the official mansion in 1982. Besides permanent collections on display, Morven holds a number of exhibitions per year, including the annual Festival of Trees.

Garden clubs and other civic organization decorate trees and fireplace mantels, usually picking a separate theme for each tree. Trees



included Tribute to Pollinators, Movie Magic; and my personal favorite: Family Game Night. You vote for your favorite and I guess that's bragging rights for the winners.

My favorite mantel was The Yule Lads of Iceland -- 13 gnomes from Icelandic folklore who steal food and goods from bad children. I had never heard of them, but I smell a 13th verse for the 12 Days of Christmas song.

"On the 13th Day of Christmas,
My true love gave to me:
13 Gnomes of Iceland..."

Hmmm. Maybe, given the gnomes' rather naughty dispositions, that might be an ex-true love...

In case you're wondering, the winning tree display was: Contemporary Garden Club of Princeton's Midnight Winter Conservatory. The winning mantel was To Everything There is a Season by West Trenton Garden Club.

Info: www.morven.org



Warning Order: Wargame Magazine

by Russ Lockwood

Want to start your wargaming year with a free wide-ranging wargaming magazine? Visit *Warning Order*. They're up to Issue 70 and come as downloadable pdfs. And yes, you can go back to issue #1.

Each issue is about 40-45 page (20 to 25 MB) and comes with lots and lots of game boardgame and miniatures recaps, reviews, and columns. With a traditional three-column format, it's a better-looking mag than this AAR. From time to time, it even includes a game to print out and play.

Issues: <https://www.wfhgs.com/wrnorder.html>



Video Lecture: Development of US Partisan Newspapers

by Russ Lockwood

The Washington Crossing American Revolution Roundtable presents a 46-minute YouTube video of Dr. Shawn David McGhee's presentation: *Fenno vs Freneau: Politicized Printers, Partisan Papers & the National Order in the Age of Washington*. He covers a newspaper war during the early republic about the new nation and its Constitution. Originally delivered to the WCARR on December 8, 2025.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYqW5Hd-xsA>

54mm F&I War Civilians: 3D Printed

by Russ Lockwood

Chris Parker Games is offering a seven-figure 54mm set of French and Indian War civilian figures in 28mm (\$19.00), 40mm (\$24.00) and 54mm (\$42.00). Miniatures are gray plastic and heads and arms may need attaching.

Info: www.chrisparkergames.com/product/french-and-indian-war-civilian-set/



Paddy Griffith Videos: YouTube Doubleblind Wargaming

by Russ Lockwood

I had never seen these videos from a British TV show Game of War about refighting famous battles via wargaming. Best of all, they were doubleblind, with the two



Game Of War: Episode 3 - Waterloo

sides in separate rooms and a central umpire room. I'm not sure how old they are, but the quality holds up. Waterloo is first up.

Waterloo:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ta9u5t9FFeg&t=138s>

Balaclava (Crimean War):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PauN2sthVAE&t=504s>

Naseby (ECW):

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A4nU6vw_oHs&t=131s

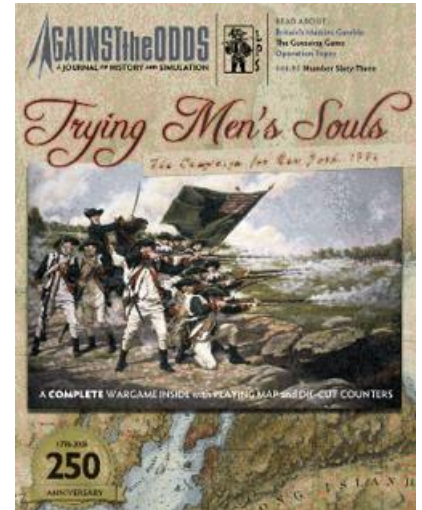


ATO Magazine: Last Call for Subscriptions

by Russ Lockwood

Note that *Against the Odds* (ATO) magazine is still selling subscriptions to US residents (only), but that the new/renewal subscription webpages on the ATO website have been turned off. Basically, just send ATO an e-mail to sales@atomagazine.com saying you're interested and want the last 3 issues (#63 - #65) as a subscription for \$100.00. ATO uses PayPal, which accepts credit cards if you don't have a PayPal account. Issue 65 is the "bingo issue."

This option will close for good once issue #63 (*Trying Men's Souls* -- American Revolution Battle of Brooklyn/New York Campaign 1776) is published.



New Wargame: Attack on the Tirpitz 1943

by Russ Lockwood

High Flying Dice released the new wargame *Operation Source: The X-Craft Raid on the Tirpitz, September 1943*. This solitaire game places the player in a British X-class mini-sub attacking the German battleship Tirpitz and other warships in Kafjord (Norway) on September 23, 1943.

The game contains: one 11x17-inch map, 28 double-sided, un-mounted counters, and three pages of rules.

Players need to supply a standard deck of playing cards, one six sided (d6) die, and one ten sided (d10) die. A custom card set sells for \$11.00 plus sales tax and shipping.

Cost: \$16.95 plus sales tax (where applicable), and shipping / handling.

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



Napoleonic Design Tips: Wargame Design Magazine

by Russ Lockwood

One of our AAR readers pointed me to Kevin Zucker's *Wargame Design* magazine. Lots of design ideas, history, and other gaming considerations from one of the greats.

WD: <https://napoleongames.com/blogs/wargame-design-magazine>

Napoleonic Tour with Kevin Zucker: Italy

by Russ Lockwood

While poking around Kevin's site, I found his latest Napoleonic Tour: May 18 – 26, 2026. It starts in Milano and includes 1800 Battlefields of Alessandria, Montebello, Marengo, Hotel in Verduno at the castle of the King of Piedmont; April 1796 Battlefields of Montenotte, Dego, Hotel in Verduno; April 1796 Battlefields of Ceva, Millesimo, La Biococca, Mondovi, Hotel in Verduno; May 1796 Battlefields of Stradella, Pizzighettone, Lodi, Hotel in Piacenza; June-July 1796 Battlefields of Lonato, Castiglione, Borghetto, Peschiera, Hotel in Mantova; Nov '96 – Jan '97 Battlefields of Rivoli, La Corona, Arcole, Legnago, Hotel in Mantova; and then ends at Verona or Milano airports. Guides are Kevin Zucker, Nicola Contardi, and several local historians.

The total cost of the tour (not including airfare) is estimated at \$3000 per person double occupancy. The tour fee includes all meals and lodging, transportation in the group vehicle, tickets and guides. Airfare: Each participant is responsible for making airline reservations and ticketing independently.

Set up is a \$750 deposit to secure your space (double-occupancy). Additional room options available. At 60 days prior to departure, you will be billed for a second deposit (40%). The full tour cost must be paid at least thirty days prior to departure. No refunds after that. Cancellation refunds less \$100 administrative fee.

More info: <https://napoleongames.com/pages/napoleonic-tour-to-northern-italy-2026>

Battle of Princeton 1777: Reenactment

by Russ Lockwood

On a blustery day in the 20s F, I attended the Battle of Princeton reenactment.

Continental cannons prepare for battle. In the background, the line of spectators grows.



I had not expected very many people, but given the Ken Burns documentary and the 250th American Revolution anniversary year, I should have known better.

According to the Princeton Battlefield Society, the reenactment had 2,200 pre-registered spectators. How many showed up? Sure looked like all of them and more. Call it about 3,500.

As for the number of reenactors, the Princeton Battlefield Society brought in 350 reenactors. Impressive. I was also impressed that three Continental cannons and two British cannons fired away during the reenactment. Three British dragoons on horseback showcased skirmishing and firing tactics while mounted.

British concert after the re-enactment.

In the reenactment, the British dragoons were driven back by Continental infantry and state militia. The British redcoats formed up and attacked, causing the American line to flee and General Mercer to be bayoneted. Then General Washington reformed the troops, added reinforcements, and drove the British from the field. Nicely done.

Casualties dotted the field as the lines swept forward and back. And you have to give one reenactor credit. He played a doctor who moved from casualty to casualty bandaging the wounded and even helping some limp back to their lines. Well done, whoever you are.

The park historian kept up a nicely done narration throughout. At the end, British and Americans held a ceremony at the "new" Mercer Oak. And I thought a nice touch was the British fife and drum unit providing period music in an impromptu concert. Well done.

As this was the 249th anniversary of the battle, next year's reenactment is tentatively slightly earlier: Dec 27, 2026, to better tie in with the Trenton re-enactment. Check the website throughout the year for details.

More info as the year progresses: <https://pbs1777.org/>





Battle of Princeton commanders at the Weston Library.

HMGS NextGen: 2025 Success

by John Spiess

2025 was a great year. Next Gen hosted 70 library events in NY and CT, as well as Jim Stanton's after school program in Stamford. 2026 is already filling up as well, including eight events booked for January.

American Revolution in Weston: CT

Next Gen wrapped up the 2025 year with our final scheduled library event at the Weston Library: American Revolution Battle of Princeton. We had 11 kids, so six played the Continentals and five played the British. A lot of these kids have played with this ruleset in the past, so it was an easy 5 to 10 minute summary before we started.

I noticed a few kids on the British side drawing some maps with arrows indicating which way the troops should move. That was pretty impressive, even if it didn't work out. The Americans took advantage of their numbers and just really pressed the British along the entire line until they finally broke.

The event ran from 5pm to 7pm. However, the library closed at 6pm. So most of the parents were in the room watching and really liked the historical summary that I give at the end of every game.

I still think it's funny that the library director asked me to lock up for them since all the employees were leaving at 6pm. So after we cleaned up and everyone left, I had to lock up the library by myself.



WWII in Larchmont: NY

We represented the first day of the Battle of the Bulge and the fighting around the village of Noville. The board was split into three sectors, where the Americans held a small farm or a few destroyed buildings in each.

The four German players had to take all three objectives to win. Each gamer had a few tanks with some infantry support. We used modified Bolt Action rules that the kids picked up very well.

In the end, the Germans took the farm and small village on both flanks, but could not dislodge the Americans from the center. A few lucky hits on a Tiger which resulted in a fire and the crew running away sealed the victory for the Americans.

Thanks again to John Manning for loaning me some tanks.



1781 Battle of Doggers Bank: Rye, NY

In Rye, NY, we played the 1781 Battle of Doggers Bank (British versus Dutch) set during the American War of Independence. Sixteen kids played, so each one had his own ship. The British players were a little more coordinated and managed to concentrate fire on a few individual Dutch ships, putting them out of the fight early on. For some reason, everyone really liked keeping track of the damage on their player aid sheets. This is a good crowd, so it's always fun to play a game in Rye.



279 BC Battle of Asculum: Somers, NY

HMGS Next Gen put on the Battle of Asculum, fought in 279 BC during the Pyrrhic War. The head librarian in Somers just loves Greek history, so when I told her we would be using War Elephants, she was all in. We also had a very enthusiastic parent that I let play as well. While the elephants all ended up getting killed, they caused just enough havoc for the second line of Greek spearmen to break the Roman line. This was an incredibly close battle, and it came down to who would pass their army morale check on the last turn.

While most libraries have monthly newsletters that advertise our games, Next Gen also has a growing special parent mailing list that I find very helpful in getting extra attendance.

Thanks again to John Manning for the loan of his Greeks to fight my Romans!



German Armored Train: Hobby Project

by Andrew

Over my school's holiday break, I had time to do some modelling and I thought I'd share it with you. I 3d Printed an armored train car as a Lionel car cover for my grandfather and got the chance to run a Normandy game. My STuG company prevailed and we got to use some of the German infantry (*provided by HMGS Next Gen -- RL*) given me last year in combination with some of my own.



Impressive painting skills, too! -- RL



Our gaming group (from bottom left corner going clockwise): Steve, Chris, Jordan, GM Sean, Lil Moon Witch, Ed, Fred (invisibility spell in action), John, Jared, and Mike.

Sovereign Territory: D&D

by Russ Lockwood

With the death of the lich, the clearing of the undead, the obliteration of the phylacteries, and the vanquishing of winter dragons, our territory of SunStone was soon recognized by the neighboring Yeomanry and the Sea Princes.

Of course, not all was unicorns and butterflies. The Great Ooze, or Eye-Ooze, or I-oz, or Mr. Fuzzy-uzzy, or however you pronounce this troublemaker's name, was still bent on world domination, or at least our part of the globe. Granted, that was up north, but evil creatures were closer by: The Drow. Those buggers tried to kill us before and had an underground lair in the nearby mountains, so we decided to seek revenge on them -- and help our Dwarven allies in the same mountain range.

Nevar the Alchemist believed the Drow are the closer local threat that can be dealt with in short order, while heading north to Iuz will be a longer trip. He noted he'd rather put his "back yard" in order before traveling quite a ways to deal with a new land and new set of uncertainties.

I, Tazan Rell the archer, thought this a marvelous idea. Most others agreed. The Hammer, however, scorned such a mundane good deed.

The Hammer said, "Friends, we who have achieved the impossible and brought order to these lawless lands must look to sterner challenges than scouring the land of a colony of drow who annoy our worthy allies the dwarves. For what value that feat of arms if on the morrow the greater threat we let rest now takes what we have won into the arms of chaos?"

All the lands hear rumor of war. War in my homeland is no rumor. Forces loyal to Iuz already hold it, and to win it back could be the work of a generation of heroes, if indeed the whole world does not fall to darkness and it require a hundred generations to bring order once again. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. As we are long past the remedy of an ounce, I fear we must be that pound of cure lest the future require weight beyond our shoulders to bear.

Hear me, friends, when I say Iuz be the greater threat to all we build here. For the first time in a year and more those who till the land do so without fear of the night. If we hold back our lawful hand from Iuz and her minions, how long until darkness again brings constant terror to those we rely on as the stout heart of this, our land of Sunstone?"

Our next great campaign must shake the very world. One den of drow more or less will not carry the war for the side of law. But if we act this day to bring down Iuz, we may in history be said to set the foundation of victory in these coming days and months. Victory not just for Sunstone, but for all law-abiding peoples across the lands."

Alas, he was outvoted. As an anarcho-syndicalist commune, we take turns to act as a sort of executive officer for the week. We needed a two-thirds majority since it involved external affairs.

An Intervention From The Sky

As we, the A Team, busied preparing ourselves for the adventure ahead, a faraway flash brightened the northern sky in the mountains. As it seemed not to affect us save for some tremors, we continued with our plans. That's when a missive arrived from the Yeomanry.

Apparently, an eye-witness told its Council that a red glare flared against the stone peaks, turning snow and rock into molten scars. White spears of lightning stabbed downward and a green mist rolled in, followed by a coating of frost. The earth heaved and shockwaves sped outward.

This eye-witness told of dragons who came a calling in the mountains. Six of them, including a gold one. As dragons are territorial enough among their own color, six different colors forming a gang proved a most distressing development.

The Yeomanry asked for help.

To Stirling Tower

We went to the top of Stirling Tower and looked through the magical telescope.

Devastation.

Blackened trees marred what was left of the frost-coated mountain. All seemed quiet enough, as no dragons soared around.

One More Piece of Baggage

Before we could leave, I brought up one last item: The Marid Genie in the Conch shell. Through various conversations with said Genie, we learned that the dragons, including a gold one, were being controlled. There were "chains" binding the gold dragon to the evil ones.

We turned to Cristoff, our dragon expert. He related that a generally lawful good gold dragon hanging around with evil dragons was a strange and foreboding development.

We pondered. The Genie could grant two wishes and I had suggested that one of them would be to set him free in exchange for not covertly or overtly attacking us directly or aiding anyone trying to attack us as well as fulfilling the first wish. But what to wish for?

We asked the Genie if he could break the chains binding the gold dragon. He could not, but he said we could -- a strange answer from an all-powerful genie.

So that was our first wish: Allow us to break the chains.

From the sky came a golden orb of gold dragon control. Surprise, surprise, it controlled not one but three gold dragons. Soraus the wizard attuned to the orb and immediately became less wise and all potions not in a bag of holding were rendered inert, but he gained control of the orb and dragons.

Now, we figured whoever had this orb would be mighty upset and so time was of the essence on how to free the dragons. Soraus made sure the three gold dragons knew his name, our names, and what we were going to do. Cristoff noted that in dragon lore, such an orb could be destroyed using a Disintegration spell. And so we disintegrated the orb and set the dragons free.

"Wait!" Cristoff cried out. "What were the names of the dragons?"

"It was only a one-way communication," Soraus explained.

"So you couldn't have asked them to write their names in the sky?"

That Cristoff. Always thinking.

We only managed to get the name of one of the gold dragon, albeit the oldest and most powerful one of the trio.

The Genie fulfilled the first wish and so we fulfilled the second wish and set him free.

This chronicle might record the genie said, "I am glad to have met your acquaintance and many happy returns."

That would be a complete lie. He was mighty upset that he had to deal for his freedom, but we had at last come to a meeting of the minds. Actually, he was rather rude about being set free under our wish conditions. Before he disappeared into his freedom, he barked, "I hope I never see you again!"

That brought some guffaws among my fellow adventurers that claimed I performed all sorts of outrages against the Genie.

After the Genie disappeared, I just looked around at my fellow adventurers. "Well, not to worry. I've learned a lot more about genies since I negotiated him back into his shell. He's just mad I outfoxed him."

Their eyes rolled like perfectly round boulders bouncing down a steep mountainside.

A Voice of Spite

While looking through the magical lenses at the Tower of Sterling, and thinking we should really change the name to something more benevolent, like Heavenly Observatory, or I Spy With My Tower Eye, we zeroed in on the charred mountains. The spot was exactly where the Drow fortress, Minas Odorous, part above ground and most below, used to stand. Little was left above ground and shallow valleys on the surface showed the collapsed pathways below. Nicely done to whomever. That's one post of pestilence we didn't have to clear out.

Then again, the Drow would have been more entertaining than the next joker who showed up in puff of smoke and fire. Oh, man, another ugly dude with a chip on his shoulder and delusions of grandeur. Oh, why of why couldn't it be the *I Dream of Jeannie* genie? No luck, that. An Efreeti twice the size of a human showed up.

"You have seen my strength," boomed the malevolent voice. "The drow did not fall by chance. They were ... unnecessary." The Efreet shifted his sword and fixed Tazan with a disdainful gaze.

I examined my fingernail, then looked up. "Sorry. What was that? Wasn't paying attention."

The Efreeti narrowed his eyes. "Such insolence. Know the dragons answered my call. Sky, storm, flame, rot, frost, and ruin brought to heel. This is what obedience looks like."

"Oh, that's what that was. I thought you had some gas," I said. "Dragons, you say? Dragons? Oh yes, we've taken care of them all. Green ones. White ones. Even a dragonlich. You should read the saga. Or are you waiting until the pantomime play comes out?"

The Efreeti's eyes widened in anger. His voice didn't echo. He pressed, "My master now speaks through me."

I smiled. "Does he. So that's what obedience looks like."

The Efreeti began to shake and extend his hands to grab me when he froze in place. A cold voice growled, "You stand at the edge of a choice. Join what is coming, and you will not be swept aside by it. Serve, and your names will be written into what follows the chaos."

The voice paused, as if expecting an answer.

I said nothing, waiting for more. One thing I've learned about meglomaniacs, there's always more. I wasn't disappointed.

"Refuse, and you will learn what the drow learned -- that resistance is not remembered, only erased."

"Oh my," I replied. "Quite wordy. Try something pithy, like: 'Resistance is futile.' That has a nice ring to it, doncha think?"

"You have seen our strength. Decide whether you stand beneath it, or beneath its shadow!" The ultimatum hung in the air.

I feigned a look of puzzlement. "We'll have to get back to you on that. You ain't bad, but we've heard it all before. As the bard sang about the kid who paid for the call, 'Don't call us, we'll call you.'"

The possession left the Efreet, who staggered a moment before he regained his senses and body. Flames coiled around him as he reasserted his presence.

I prodded, "That looked painful. So, how's this obedience thing working for ya?"

The Efreeti gave one last glare and vanished.

How Now, Brown Drow?

We teleported to the Drow fortress. Apparently, the Drow found the orcs keeping an eye on them and slaughtered them all. Orc heads on pikes surrounded the once orc hideout. We found the secret door and entered the half-destroyed mausoleum.

The ambush by Hezaros, Balors, and Galabradoodles was nicely done, but I was faster, aided by Soraus' Haste spell. Thunder, thunder, thunder echoed throughout the chamber as arrow after arrow sped into the nearest hezaroo: 257 bits of hezaroo flew off the body. It toppled, quite dead. I was amazed that it didn't bounce. Rumor had it that hezaros bounced like bumbles. Maybe they had to be alive to bounce.



The hezaroo at right became punctured. The balor in the middle exploded.

"That's my jam, ta-da!" I sang. My next thunderous flurry with fewer arrows only chopped off 136 bits of a balor. The wizards added their damage and the balor fell atop a headless statue -- and exploded. Some 72 bits of balor shrapnel raced outwards towards each adventurer. I was fortunate enough to evade half the projectiles.

Soraus was not so lucky and took the full brunt. In doing so, he lost concentration and the Haste spell that aided me was lost, leaving me with weak knees and heavy arms. I leaned against the wall for support and was out of the fight temporarily.

So the battle raged with spell and counter spell whittling down the uglies in this pitched battle. Right in the middle of the battle, Cristoff the wizard disappeared.

Sanctuary

Cristoff found himself in a chamber somewhere, but where was unknown to him. Judging from the statue, it was an intact room deeper in the Drow fortress.

Our old friend the Efreeti arrived and immediately made the sign for a parley. "I mean you no harm," the Efreeti said.

"What is this place?" Cristoff asked.

"Just another room in the fortress and one shielded from outside interference ... or eavesdropping."

Cristoff considered his predicament. Level for level, it was unlikely he could take an efreeti one on one. So, he parleyed. "What would like to discuss?"

The Efreeti glanced around and asked, "Is it true you broke the chains that bound the gold dragon?"

"Yes. We've freed many beings. Dragons. Genies. Giants. Goblins. Even gave back a phylactery to a lich, which is a sort of freedom. We're the friendly A Team."

"You freed the gold dragon!?" The accusation carried a tinge of amazement and respect.

"That's us," Cristoff confirmed as he searched his memory. Something about this efreeti nagged the wizard.

"Maybe, you might be able to free me?"

And then Cristoff remembered. This Efreeti wasn't king, but he was the equivalent of a duke. "We might just take you on as our next good deed."

"I could not ask for more." And with that, Cristoff was whisked back to the battle just as it ended with the death of the last of the Galabradoodles. The A Team won the skirmish.

The dragons gather outside the city.

Enter the Dragon

Make that enter the four dragons. The mausoleum door opened and four flowed into the chamber. In our depleted state, they would be too much. Cristoff immediately read a teleport scroll. "Where should be go?" he asked.

"Sheffield," I blurted.

Cristoff finished reading the scroll and the A Team appeared in Sheffield. The A Team immediately put into effect civil defense plan number 1 -- run away. Or more precisely, run down into the catacombs.

That may or may not have any effect considering what the dragons did to the Drow fortress, but this time, the flying lizards didn't have their Gold Dragon leader.

With the citizens safe, or at least as safe as they could be, the A Team read their spells and potions. The dragons soon appeared, along with five kobolds bearing a white flag.

I, fortunately, had ensconced myself in a stone tower inside the city with windows facing north, south, east, and west. I figured dragons would be flying all over the place, not just at the city wall. I did not see the kobolds.

Rufus alone wanted to negotiate and so exited the city and found out the dragons and kobolds wanted 200,000 gold pieces to give a two-day reprieve from the dragon attack.

Well, that was rejected, but we did learn the dragons were some sort of mercenary grouping. That meant the dragons were less under Efreeti obedience and more under an opportunistic contract.

The city gate opened anew and Rufus led the kobolds in for tea.



I, who was scanning the skies, could not believe what he saw: kobolds entering Sheffield. "Kobolds," I growled. "I hate kobolds."

Thunder echoed with the city as five arrows slayed five kobolds.

The recriminations towards Tazan began with the death of the first kobold. "What are you doing?" "No!!!!" "Stop shooting!"

The recriminations didn't end with the death of the last kobold.

I came out of the tower and ambled to the corpses. "Not bad. Not my best work, but not bad."

"Why did you do that?" "How could you?"

I was puzzled. "They're kobolds. You said yourselves they would only steal the 200,000 gold and attack anyway. Besides, the only good kobold is a dead kobold."

I bent down and rifled through their pouches. Seven silver pieces. "Better than nothing," I mourned and stuffed them in one of my cash pouches.

Meanwhile, the five dragons -- blue, red, green, black, and white -- waited until dusk to attack. And scour the city with their foul breaths they did.

Dragons swarm Sheffield.



Draconis Attackus

As the sun dipped below the horizon, the Draconis 5 thought flattening the city would be as easy as 1, 2, 3, as simple as Do-Re-Me. As we steeled ourselves against their advance, we would try to prove just how wrong they could be.

By this time, I had moved to one of the city wall towers to the right of the main gate. The battle at the wall was in the center and to the left. The red dragon breathed fire on the left tower and the black dragon did its breath on the central tower and gate, and the green dragon breathed poison gas on my right tower. Fortunately, I had consumed an Invulnerability potion as the dragons came in, so only coughed half my lungs out.

As I looked for a good shot, the blue dragon burst out of the ground within the city limits.

Apparently, blue dragons burrow through the ground. Did not know that. Betcha Cristoff did.

The gold dragon (bottom) chases away all the evil dragons except the blue dragon (left), which has succumbed to several attacks and my arrow volley.



No matter. Thunder, thunder, thunder rippled out of my tower as I shredded the blue dragon into 256 pieces, finishing the damage done by our Ranger. Granted, it was a young one compared to the three ancient ones, but one less dragon was good for the defense of the city.

That's when the dragons tossed a fog spell -- couldn't see more than 10 feet in front of your face. That took me and many of our party out of the battle, but not the dragons. Apparently, dragons possess TrueSight that ignores anything that blocks vision. I did not know that. Betcha Cristoff did.

Magical efforts to dispel the fog failed. I can't shoot what I can't see. I descended into the catacombs at top speed and headed for the central tower and gate. The Black dragon sat atop the tower. If I could climb the tower, I'd have a perfect flank shot at the black dragon. Now, Soraus had asked the freed gold dragon to come to the aid of Sheffield and gain a little revenge. That did not happen.

But our cleric Frank defied the odds and rolled perfection when seeking ethereal aid. A gold dragon flew over the city to confront the other four.

Now, the red one, also a young one, was half dead. The black one had taken damage. The green and white ones were intact. The Blue was dead, crumpled in and among the buildings of Sheffield. The four took one look at the gold

and fled northward. The gold dragon dipped his head towards Frank and chased after the other dragons. Who knows how long the chase lasted.

I popped up in the central tower and raced up the stairs to the roof. No dragon. No fog. No other dragons. "Where'd all the dragons go? Where did the fog go?"

Aftermath

The Hammer seemed to have changed and become more energetic and certainly more charismatic. When he spoke, he was most persuasive. "Iuz would not expend this show of strength without fear of us, fear of our mortal power upon this plane. Heed not the promises of chaos. They are but smoke on the wind, worthless as the tainted air used to breathe at us. Hear me and know this: Law must prevail, or all we value here in Sunstone perish in ash. Law must prevail, lest we ourselves be forgotten in the annals of time. Law must prevail! Let us scourge chaos from our world!"

Well, huzzah! Apparently, it's Hammertime. I warbled a little tune:

"Hi, bye, why, die.
Magic hits me,
So hard.
Makes me say,
"Oh Black Guard.
Thulsa,
For looking sweets.
With a mind unkind and two rare feats."
Feels good,
When you feel knocked down,
A super dope homeboy from way down.
And he's known,
As such.
And this is a fight, uh, you can't touch.

I told you plowboy (You can't touch this).
Yeah, that's how he rollin' from below (You can't touch this).
Look in his eyes, man (You can't touch this).
Yo, let me bust the funky legend (You can't touch this).

Fresh new kicks,
And spell.
You gotta like that,
Now he's comin' up from hell.
So move,
Outta the street,
And make a flee roll or catch defeat.
While we're rolling,
Hold on.
Pump a few flames and let 'em know it's going on.
Like that.
Like that.
He's on a mission so fall on back.
Now you know,
That he's too much.
And he is a beast, uh, they can't touch

Yo, I told you (You can't touch this)
Why you standing there, man? (You can't touch this)
Yo, toll the bell, school is in, sucker (You can't touch this)

Break it down! Whoa whoa whoa-whoa-whoa. Stop! Hammer time!"

We stripped the blue dragon, now named Zephy Dirt Nap, of his scales. They'll make ideal shields for our garrison militia. We need a militia to supplement our mercenary band that roamed SunStone dealing with any wandering monsters and criminals. Might also need to think about some sort of bolt-throwing anti-air and anti-ground war machines.

Next, we separated the head from the body and had the local taxidermist stuff it and mount it. We hung that inside our A Team HQ. Wish we had the other dragon heads. And the yeti head. Pity.

As for me, I put in some serious training in Battlemaster school. I added a number of techniques to my repertoire to have more options in battle. I'm not sure when I would use them, but it's nice to have more aces up my sleeve.

As for what's next, unsure, but I have a feeling I'll be saying, "Shhh! I'm huntin' dwagons. Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh..."

Dragons vs. A Team: Round 1

by Fred

We received multiple messages from various sources that Iuz is looking to wipe us out. He controlled six dragons: one was an ancient gold dragon (good aligned) and all the others were evil – blue, black, green, red, and white.

We discovered that a magical orb, maybe an artifact, was controlling the gold dragon. We used a wish to bring it into our possession, then I cast disintegrate on it, causing it to be destroyed. We believed this freed the gold dragon, but were uncertain at the time.

We were able to determine the dragons could find us anywhere, so the group decided to retreat to Sheffield. I thought this a bad idea, as it now involved 3-4,000 civilians at Sheffield. I wanted the showdown to occur at the Eye of Stirling. I teleported us to Sheffield, then immediately set to evacuating the populace to the catacombs beneath Sheffield. Surprisingly, no one helped me, as all the others wanted to take a short rest to recover hit points and spells from a prior encounter with fiends that we defeated/chased away to their plane prior to the teleportation. So I rounded up a number of NPCs that work for me including Reger my steward and the Iron Wolves mercenary company in my employ, and hustled the town's population underground. That left me without any 6th and 7th level spells, having used the teleport (7th level), disintegrate (6th level), and having also used some of my 5th level and lower spells in the fiend battle.

We fought the dragons to a standstill, killing the smallest (adult blue dragon). Tazan shot it for 237 points of damage on his first turn. I believe we would have won, but they created a fog that covered a large part of the town and made it impossible to see. They were using Dragon TrueSense to find us in the fog.

The gold dragon eventually arrived, I believe since it "owed us" and that convinced the other dragons to leave. It would have been a long battle with our eventual success, however, the remaining dragons were lightly damaged or not at all, and with most of them being ancient, probably had a cumulative 2,000 hit points or more.

There is an adult blue dragon carcass in a courtyard in Sheffield. We discussed a few other items to consider and that was the end. Basically, we have a powerful being from the Greyhawk campaign that has taken notice of us and wants us dead. Likely we are the most dangerous group in all of Greyhawk with around 10-12 characters at 15th level.

One item that made battles long was the high turnout. We had nine player characters present. With the high level, and the dangerous complex creatures attacking, it can make for long battles. All of the dragons were also spell casters, so there were multiple counterspells going off, sometimes as many as a chain of four.

A GMing Thought

GM Sean and I discussed starting earlier if the possibility of a battle exists and a large amount of people are attending. The numbers also make it difficult for role playing, investigation, or any other non-battle events. Sean did a great job sending out messages prior to the game session and managing the two battles to move them as quickly as possible.

One more time: Original mausoleum attack.

Sean and I also discussed breaking up the group into two parties, but that means two DMs and two scenarios, a significant additional undertaking for preparation. It was a lot of work to do that at the first session (see the Oct 2024 AAR) where we had multiple tables with around 15-18 participants.



On My Mind: Book Reviews

by Russ Lockwood

On a year-end whim, I counted up my book reviews in the AAR for 2025: a total of 303, including a few historical fiction books but excluding sci-fi and fantasy.

Folks often ask how I could read that much. Simple: an hour with breakfast, an hour with lunch, a half hour during midafternoon break, and an hour or so per night -- sometimes more and sometimes less depending what's happening on any given day. You can add in the hours it takes to write up the reviews, but that's even more fun than the reading. Oh, and downloading the book covers and shrinking the pixel size to fit in well on a page.

I figure as long as I'm consistent in evaluating each book, you'll find the reviews informative and sometimes entertaining.

Google AI on Lockwood's Book Reviews

While doing a Google search for a specific book review, the Google AI did its top of page thing. Talk about entertaining, here's what Google AI thinks of my book reviews.

HMGS (Historical Miniatures Gaming Society) book reviews featuring "Lockwood" refer to reviews written by Russ Lockwood for HMGS.org's blog and the HMGS website. These reviews cover a wide range of historical and wargaming-related books, with Lockwood often focusing on military history, wargaming scenarios, aircraft, and pirates, providing detailed commentary on content, maps, illustrations, and their utility for tabletop gaming.

Key Aspects of Lockwood's Reviews:

Focus: Books on military history, battles, campaigns, specific units (like aircraft), and historical figures, often with wargaming potential.

Content: Detailed analysis of historical accuracy, narrative, and visual aids (maps, photos, illustrations).

Wargaming Utility: He frequently points out how books can be used to create scenarios, noting tactical details like unit locations or terrain, as seen in his reviews of Ottoman history or Norwegian resistance.

Style: Generally positive ("Enjoyed it"), but with constructive criticism on writing style or map quality, advocating for better presentation.

On the one hand, the description of my reviews is generally accurate, although picking out Norwegian resistance for a scenario is like one out of 1,900 reviews. And I suspect the reason for the "pirates" mention was that at the time, a book about pirates was the first review of the blog. But kudos for the "advocating for better presentation."

Now, the image Google AI paired with the above is a fiction book cover about ghosts and horror. Apparently, Google AI can't tell the difference between fact or fiction or even a fictional Lockwood from a real one. For Google to notice, I guess I need to plaster my face on every review... Would I torture you so?

Apparently, yes. Photo by Steve.

In any case, here's to a new year of fantastic reading for information, fun, and wargaming.



Books I've Read

By Russ Lockwood

Broken Eagles: Volume 1. by John H. Gill. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 486 pages. 2025.
Subtitle: *Napoleon's German Allies and the Campaign of 1813: The contingents of Saxony and Bavaria*

The first of two volumes covers the Confederation of the Rhine, specifically the 1813 armies of Saxony and Bavaria (not Prussia), in exquisite detail. Not much of the Saxon and Bavarian troops remained after the invasion of Russia and hastily-raised conscripts peppered with veterans performed with varying degrees of competence. Some units disintegrated while others proved quite steadfast.

An overview of the 1813 spring and autumn campaigns explains the maneuvers and subsequent battles as well as an overview of the political activities of the Confederation members, pre-Coalition Austria, the Allied Coalition members, and France. The kings of Saxony and Bavaria tried to play both sides as the Spring campaign saw a French recovery while the Autumn Campaign saw the French tumbled back to France. They were rightly concerned for their sovereignty as they threaded the diplomatic needle.

Yet the bulk of the volume covers the maneuvers and battles of the Saxon and Bavarian components of the French force. From skirmishes to major battles, detailed recaps and insightful analysis explain their participation. You can certainly pull more than a few small battles from the pages, although you might want to use other sources for the Coalition forces.

If you ever wanted to use Cossack troops on raids, this volume will provide plenty of scenario grist for the tabletop gaming mill. Cossack units as small as 50 and as large as 1,000 penetrated behind French lines and plagued supply columns, even those escorted by troops. These raids sometimes captured places through bluffs and loss of defenders' morale and sometimes the Cossacks were annihilated.

One typo: Bavarian Crown Prince Ludwig in 1808 "toasted Napoleon's death" (p261), which is likely "toasted to" as the Emperor was very much alive in 1808.

The book contains one black and white photo, 23 black and white illustrations, 31 black and white maps, one color photo, and 21 color illustrations. Once again, Gill supplies lots of maps, including tactical ones that you can use to drop terrain on a tabletop and position troops. Well done.

Also, he includes Saxon and Bavarian Orders of Battle a plenty, complete as much as possible with actual numbers per regiment. Nothing warms a wargamer's heart like units matched with numbers.

Exceptional research, smooth prose, detailed orders of battle, and a cornucopia of tactical, operational, and strategic maps make this another brilliant examination of the Napoleonic era. Excellent.

Enjoyed it.

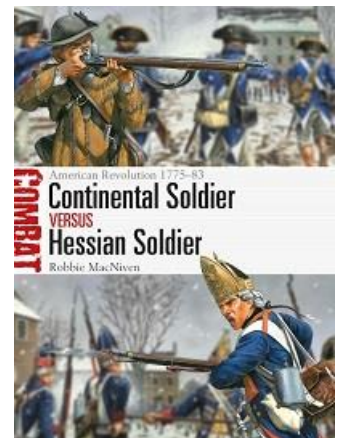
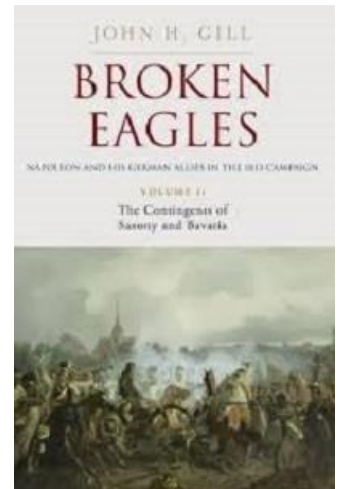
Continental Soldier versus Hessian Soldier: Combat 83. by Robbie MacNiven. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *American Revolution 1775-83*

The usual illustrative excellence of the Combat series continues with an examination of a Continental Soldier (1st Maryland Brigade) and a Hessian Soldier (von Lossberg Regiment). The format is well defined: a short introduction -- in this case, the post Battle of Brooklyn NY, NJ, and PA campaign -- a look at the uniforms and equipment of the featured soldiers, an encapsulation of the tactics used by each, and an analysis of three battles: White Plains (October 28, 1776), Fort Mifflin (September 26, 1777), and Trenton (December 26, 1776). You can gin up a tabletop scenario for each of the three.

Of interest, the Hessian maneuver rate was 75 paces per minute while the British were between 120 and 150 paces per minute (p15), which is why sometimes the Hessians are portrayed as slow in period histories. However, on occasion, when brigaded with a British unit, the Hessians would match the higher paces per minute rate.

Both the British and Hessians endeavored to deliver a coordinated battalion (regiment) fire and bayonet charge starting at 100 yards (p26).



For fans of Molly Pitcher, usually associated with the Battle of Monmouth, a similar event happened at the battle of Fort Washington. When Margaret Corbin's husband fell while manning a cannon, she took his place during the battle (p48-49).

One typo: the same sentence is repeated twice in the same paragraph (p32).

The booklet contains nine black and white illustrations, three color photos, 33 color illustrations, eight color maps, three color two-page action illustrations, and four uniform illustrations (front and back of 1st MD and front and back of von Lossberg soldiers).

For those inspired by the American Revolution's 250th Anniversary to field tabletop miniatures, here's a great start.

Enjoyed it.

Imperial German Army Motorized Troops 1914-18: Volume 1. by Jacek Zabielski. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 132 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Origins, Organization, and Mechanical Innovation in the Great War*

As early as 1902, the Prussian War Ministry offered a prize for the delivery of a truck with 10-ton capacity with two trailers (p12).

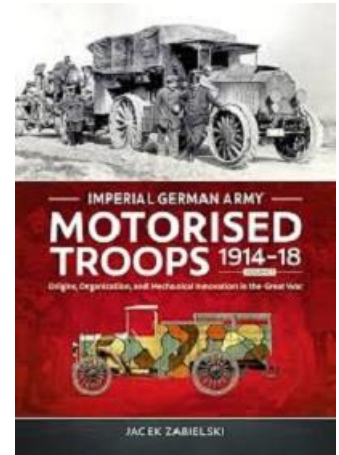
As the years passed, a series of trucks, tractors, and other transport vehicles came into use with varying degrees of success. In pre-war planning for mobilization, the Army could count on 4,000 motor vehicles, of which about 1,750 were trucks. By 1914, the Army could count on German industry turning out 10,000 vehicles, which increased to 15,000 by 1915 (p24). By the end of the war, Germany had built 50,202 trucks, trailers, ambulances, and special purpose vehicles such as ammunition carriers, ambulances, motorcycles, pioneer unit transports, and aircraft towing trucks (p63)

Besides the organizational info that evolved as the war went on, the book contains an impressive photo collection of cars, trucks, tractors, and specialty vehicles. All are supported by informative captions.

The book contains 207 black and white photos, eight color profiles of cars and trucks, one color profile of an artillery piece, and seven black and white organization charts.

Plenty of ideas for tabletop logistics and model dioramas.

Enjoyed it.



Imperial German Army Motorized Troops 1914-18: Volume 2. by Jacek Zabielski. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 132 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Armoured Units, Assault Tanks, and the Weapons of Modern Warfare*

The follow-up volume concentrates of tanks, including the limited production run A7V and the array of captured British and French tanks, as well as armored cars.

First up are motorized AA guns, with the equivalent of the AA gun mounted on a flatbed truck. Then, the armored cars, although the first German car units didn't activate until early 1916. The Germans had captured between 100 and 150 Allied armored cars during the war that were pressed into German service (p52), but only built 17 German armored cars (p64).

After the British introduced tanks and the German Army captured a few, German industry responded with the A7V. While notable with better suspension and a higher speed than the Mk IVs, war production was only 20. It was enough to equip a few Assault Tank Detachments at five A7Vs per detachment accompanied by trained stormtroopers. A half-dozen or so more Assault Tank Detachments were equipped with captured tanks.

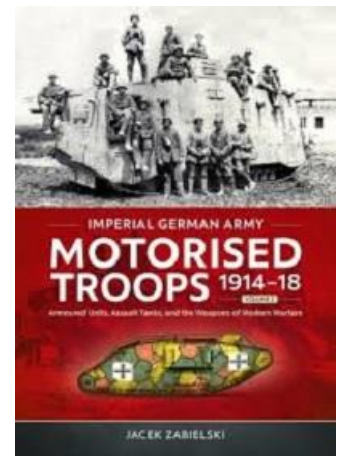
Some tank actions are described, which might be a start for a tabletop scenario. The first armored car duel was in July 1917 in Brzezany (Russia) between the British Royal Navy Air Service and the German 1st Armored Car Detachment (p48). Yes, you read that correctly.

Some non-fatal typos: "driver>s" and "<conning tower>" (both p68) and ",,female" (p74) have errant characters.

Like *Volume 1*, photographs dominate the pages. The book contains 182 black and white photos, five color photos, five color illustrations, four color profiles of armored cars, four color profiles of tanks, one color profile of an artillery piece, one color organization chart, and two black and white organization charts.

Again, plenty of ideas for model dioramas.

Enjoyed it.



The Ancient Germans and Rome: 120 BC to AD 68. by Raoul McLaughlin. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 256 pages. 2025.

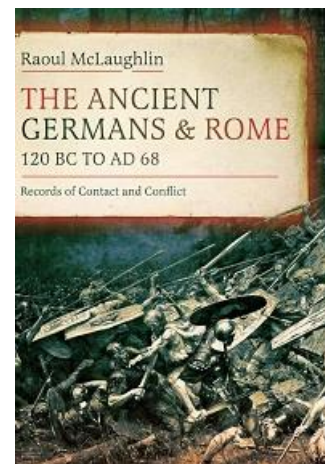
Subtitle: *Records of Contact and Conflict*

This is a collection of ancient texts, or mostly excerpts of ancient texts, that showcase interactions between Germans and the Roman Republic and Empire. There is no cohesive narrative and no analysis of the texts -- it is translated sections of sources in a generally chronological order. Lots of Julius Caesar, Tacitus, and Dio and a smattering of other lesser-known sources.

This has some value for those researching Roman-German relations and has some impact on finding tabletop scenarios. The numbers cited are the numbers in the original texts, so...beware of huge tribal numbers.

The book contains 30 black and white photos and four black and white maps.

Without a broader context and analysis of the texts, it's a collection of original texts.



War of My Fathers: Life Under the Death's Head. by Alexander De Chastelaine. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 212 pages. 2026.

This is a tale of two Germans, the author's father and grandfather, under Nazi rule. The two could not be more different.

The grandfather protested against the Nazis and was arrested twice and imprisoned. The second time, in 1939, he was given a choice: get sent to a concentration camp or receive a pardon by volunteering for the German armed forces. He chose the latter and picked the Luftwaffe as his service. He rolled into France without firing a shot. That would change in 1942 with Fall Blau and his assignment to the 5th Luftwaffe Division.

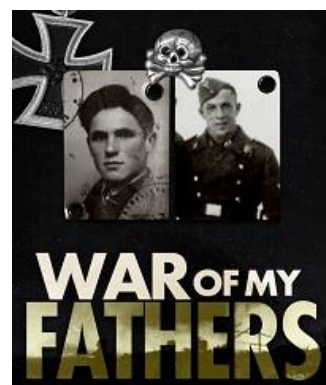
The father was a pro-Nazi kid who worked his way through the Hitler Youth and eventually found himself in the Hermann Goering Division. He was sent to suppress the Warsaw Ghetto in 1944.

The book intertwines the stories of grandfather and father and their service in the Luftwaffe ground forces during WWII. Both survived initial combats, witnessed a variety of horrors and genocides, and lived to see the end of the war. Both made it to surrender to Western troops and the grandfather escaped a train full of German POWs being sent to France to work in the mines.

The book contains 60 black and white photos, one black and white illustration, and one black and white map.

The story rolls right along for a very personal and fascinating look at two German soldaten during war.

Enjoyed it.



The Armies of the French Revolution: Uniforms and Equipment. by Paul L. Dawson. Hardback (7.2x10.0 inches). 293 pages. 2025.

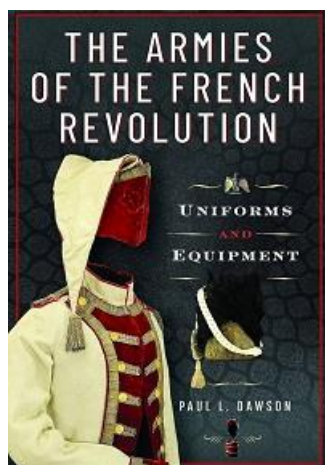
If you need info about uniforms of the French Revolutionary forces, here it is. In painstaking detail, based on transcriptions of inspection reports, you will come to understand just how much the French scrambled to outfit their regular and volunteer infantry and cavalry.

Not every unit is covered, but so many of each type are that you can extrapolate for entire armies. Indeed, the inspections generate reports on the number of each uniform piece -- coats, vests, shoes, and so on -- as well as their current state of usefulness, uselessness, and need for repair.

During the Revolution, the soldiers' pay was garnished to pay for uniforms and equipment. If it needed repair, it was up to the soldier to repair it himself or pay to get it repaired. No wonder the French of the period looked like proverbial bums. Shortages of just about everything plagued the army and delivered quality often didn't match standards and wore out quickly.

All of this is marvelously illustrated: 164 color uniform illustrations (most of a single figure, but many with multiple figures) and 105 color photos of uniforms and close-ups of uniform pieces held in museums.

I can't say it was always scintillating reading. One unit reads like the previous with number of coats, number of shoes, number of vests, and so on and so on. I skimmed over a lot of the text, but I sure stopped and looked at the images, even when they showed pretty much the same ideal uniform.



If you are looking for a source of color illustrations for painting period uniforms for your miniatures, as well as charts for facings and other colored uniform pieces, here's your book. Granted, French revolutionary armies were a hodge podge lodge of mismatched and raggedly clothing, but you won't soon run out of ideas how to match tabletop figures with historical uniforms.

Enjoyed it.

The Armed Forces of North Korea: Asia at War 56. by Stijn Mitzer and Joost Oliemans. Softcover (8.2x11.7 inches). 64 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Volume 1 Part 2: Tanks and Artillery*

The first volume covered Infantry and various hand-held weaponry. This covers big iron: tanks and various self-propelled guns, self-propelled multiple rocket launchers, self-propelled air-defense systems, and other specialty vehicles.

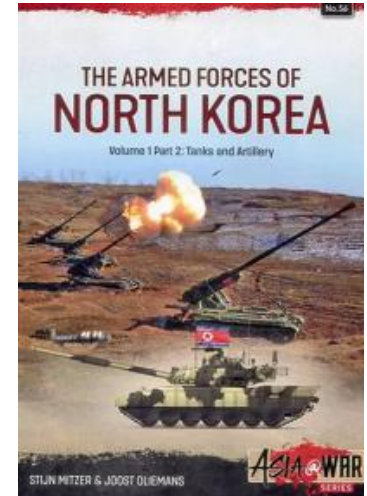
Each vehicle receives a history of development, modifications, and deployment. However, information being somewhat sketchy, no spec charts and the text is often vague about various performance statistics. Some conjecture is included based on the study of exported foreign vehicles or captured North Korean-exported vehicles. It's still a reference of note for modern warfare treadheads.

You won't find scenarios or battle descriptions per se -- the country hasn't been in a war since 1953, although North Korean infantry is fighting against Ukraine, so more information will likely accumulate.

The booklet contains 101 color photos, one color illustration, three black and white photos, one color map, 11 color profiles of tanks, and three color profiles of artillery.

Pair this with *Volume 1 Part 1* and you have a nice overview of North Korean ground equipment.

Enjoyed it.



The Hitler Years: Holocaust 1933-1945. by Frank McDonough. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 416 pages. 2025.

The book covers the slow and steady erosion of personal freedoms that start with minor nuisances and ends in crematoriums in concentration camps and killing fields all over Europe.

As the WWII generation and the Holocaust generation pass, a real danger exists that the systematic strangulation of rights under the facade of lawful execution by the government can ultimately lead to wholesale genocide.

It can start with economic pressure: of the 100,000 Jewish businesses in Germany in 1933, by 1938 70% of them were closed or sold for a pittance to Aryan Germans. Of the 50,000 Jewish-owned individual shops in Germany in 1933, only 9,000 were left in Jewish control in 1938 (p132). Additional laws expelled non-Aryan civil servants from government, fired teachers, professors, staff, and other education professionals, and revoked licenses for doctors, plumbers, and other professionals. For example, of the 9,000 Jewish doctors in Germany in 1933, only 4,200 were left to practice in 1937 and only on non-Aryans (p133).

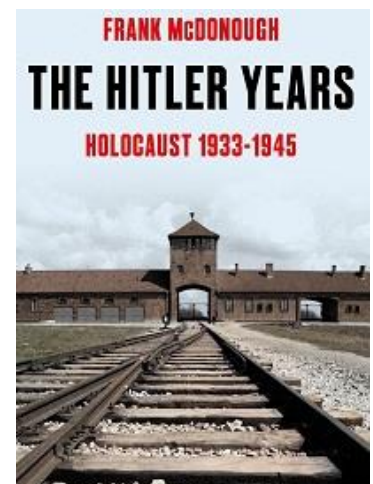
Early in the Nazi dictatorship, the official German policy was one of forcing Jews to leave Germany -- with an 81% tax as of 1936 on transferring money abroad (p130). That's assuming countries would allow such immigration.

Edict after edict and law after law, the Nazi government took away rights. With the start of the war, forced labor under inhuman conditions coupled with accelerated development of concentration camps increased the rate of murder.

The book contains 106 black and white photos, one color photo, and two color maps.

This isn't exactly holiday reading, but propaganda whitewashing of genocide must be remembered to prevent the erosion of liberty. It's well-researched, well-written, and well worth your time to understand the horror that can grow from complacency and denial.

Enjoy is the wrong word, for there is no joy about loss of rights leading to genocide, but to keep consistency with my other review conclusions: enjoyed it.



War in Ukraine Vol. 11: Europe at War 56. by Stijn Mitzer and Joost Oliemans.
Softcover (8.2x11.7 inches). 72 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The Battle of Chernihiv: February-March 2022*

The big Russian blitz towards Kyiv planned to roll through Chernihiv, a city of about 300,000 NNE of Kyiv. Artillery barrages on Russian concentrations delayed the attack of the 41 Combined Arms Army and the 2nd Guards Combined Arms Army. The Ukrainian 1st Tank Brigade and 58th Motorized Infantry Brigade defended tenaciously and launched the occasional sharp counter-attack. Numbers did eventually tell and the Russians encircled the city and sieged the units within. By July, Russian losses were so severe and progress so slow, the order to retreat was given. The Ukrainians recaptured territory and weaponry.

A full OOB down to brigades is available for both sides, but specific numbers and TO&E remain elusive. Even the casualties sustained by both sides is at best vague. The Ukrainians lost about 400 civilians and 200 soldiers killed (although this doesn't quite tally with the reported 73 killed and 202 wounded of the 119 Independent Brigade alone). Russian losses are estimated at 50%, but precise figures are missing. The Russians don't want to report actual casualties -- although Russian President Putin is allegedly quoted as saying losses don't matter as long as victory is achieved.

Plenty of battlefield accounts, from skirmish to formation level, populate the text. You'll be able to pull some scenarios from the text, but you'll need a better -- or at least more speculative -- reference manual to get actual numbers.

The booklet contains 70 color photos, three color illustrations, five black and white photos, four color maps, one black and white map, 15 color profiles of vehicles, three color profiles of uniforms, one color profile of a jet (SU-34), one color profile of Mi-8MT helicopter, and one color profile of Bayraktar TB2 drone.

The first 10 volumes proved well done and the eleventh in a fine addition to this series by concentrating on one battle that was indicative of the early 2022 Russian attack.

Enjoyed it.



Armies of the Achaemenid Persian Empire: 550-330 BC. by Gabriele Esposito.
Hardback (7.0x10.0 inches). 164 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Organization, Weapons & Tactics*

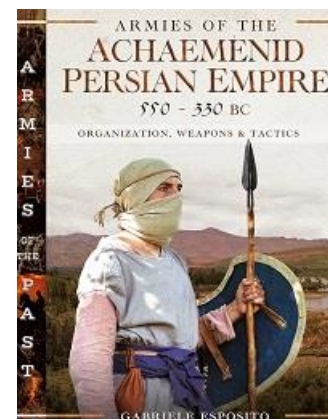
The first half of the book up to page 107 covers Persian history and the second half covers uniforms and weaponry.

I've enjoyed his *Armies* books, but there's something off about the text in this one. It contains odd phrasings and odd word use that kept interrupting the flow of the information. I don't know if the editor was pressed for time, some sort of translation problem, or even use of AI -- it's that different from his previous work. Don't get me wrong, the information is there, just that the prose seems "off."

The 42 color photos of re-enactors are just as good as always, but the 51 color uniform illustrations seem a bit impressionistic. You won't confuse them with Osprey quality. That said, the illustrations showcase the Persian uniforms well enough for a painting table. You won't run out of ideas for painting up units.

A mixed bag this volume, although it's still valuable as a resource. Ties go to the author.

Enjoyed it.



Eragon. by Christopher Paolini. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 511 pages. 2003.

This fantasy novel pairs a boy named Eragon and his newly hatched dragon named Saphira, a mysterious mentor named Brom, and two non-human assassins called Ra'zacs -- the king orders all dragons and dragon riders killed as a matter of policy. Of course, if they can't find the kid, they kill everyone around him.

So starts the path of vengeance, aided by said mentor and a rapidly growing dragon, through a variety of terrain, from forests to deserts to mountains to cities. More baddies show up, like urgals (aka orcs), a sword- and magic-wielding Shade, Arya the elf-mage warrior, dwarves a plenty, and others who help or hurt his path.

It's a pleasant enough book and I can see how it could be popular: boy learning to become sword-wielding mage riding a dragon, elf princess, and urgals and other baddies a plenty to defeat and make the world free from kings.



The teenage author had one huge advantage over other first-novel authors: his parents owned a book publishing company. No worrying about attracting editors' attentions. Contacts beyond the publishing house. Editorial and marketing support. Good for him. Book publishing is like a casino -- editors and management never know what book will hit it big. With hedge funds running the big ones, the odds of taking on a newbie is infinitesimal.

World building is good. Characters are good. Plot is good. All the fantasy boxes you want to see in a book are checked off. It didn't grab me as some novels do, but I kept reading and that is a good thing.

Enjoyed it.

Merry Friggin' Christmas: An Edgy Christmas Comedy. by Joseph Cillo, jr.

Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 221 pages. 2018.

If you are going to read a Christmas novel, Christmas is a good time of year to do so.

First, a disclaimer: Joe is in my writing group and has offered valuable feedback on my own as yet unpublished Xmas novel. So, I know him. Second, this is the "nice" version of the book with naughty words replaced by less than naughty words: Think of the movie *Elf* where Buddy screams "Son of a nutcracker!" Joe notes he also offers a "naughty" version with enough NC-17 words to make George Carlin proud.

Our "hero," Carlton St. Michael, is a profane stand-up comic whose gimmick is bashing the Catholic religion for its mysteries and lack of foundational logic. He is an avowed atheist with a bad childhood and a well-invested inheritance. He's about to make the big time when he gets hit and killed by a truck owned by the Guaranteed Overnight Delivery company.

As demons nip at his heels, he kicks at 'em in anger and says "Jesus Christ." A hand reaches from above and pulls him from the pit. Lo and behold, he's given a second chance by Jesus -- for 40 days -- and then must make a decision about being an atheist or not.

So begins Carlton's steadfast adherence to atheism, starting with waking up in a hospital room in traction, with his Catholic priest roommate also in traction. And yet, an overwhelming urge to prove atheism is correct leads to a hint of faith.

Comedy is hard to write. The stand-up routine that is supposed to be hilarious didn't tickle my funny bone, but the main character's interaction with all the other characters often causes a nod and a smile and sometimes outright belly laughs. Chapter 4 will leave you with tears in your eyes from laughing.

Chapter 14 is the tragedy part and will leave tears in your eyes for another reason. It is also a turning point in his journey. It is Day 26 -- nice use of a "clock" function to raise the tension -- of his 40-day grace period. His spiritual turmoil ratchets up.

This "edgy" comedy won't be for everyone. I appreciated the humor to a greater or lesser degree, the exploration of some Christmas concepts to a lesser or greater degree, and the interplay of the various characters to a great degree.

Enjoyed it.



The Black Arrow: A Medieval Love Story. by Robert Louis Stevenson. Annotated by Chris Parker. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 271 pages. 2025 reprint of 1888 book.

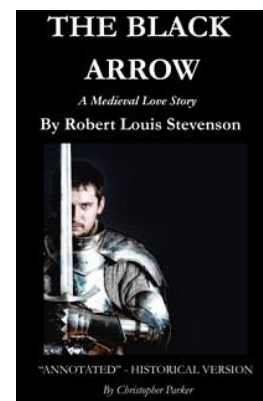
Subtitle: *Annotated Historical Edition*

Robert Louis Stevenson is better known for *Treasure Island* than his next novel, *The Black Arrow*, which is set during the Wars of the Roses. The story follows a young man, Dick Shelton, as he tries to avenge his father's death, reclaim his lands, and marry his sweetheart Joanna.

The plot of this historical novel works well enough and stands the test of time, but the prose ... well, it's hard to read at first. First off, if you've read original material from the 19th Century, you'll understand the verbose difference from today's prose. Second, the general dialogue and conversations are written in a sort of high medieval, tongue-twisting patter. You'll sometimes hear snippets of this in old black and white Hollywood movies. In the book, characters speak like this all the time.

So, I found it a tad difficult to get into the prose. After a while, my brain adapted. Yet, the next time I picked up the book, I had to re-adapt. To be fair, the introduction does warn you about the "Old English" prose.

What makes this different from a straight reprint is a number of annotations that define medieval words and characters. Some of these I knew and some I didn't. For example, "leper" (p73) I knew without looking at the note



explaining leprosy and how medieval society feared and pitied lepers, while "spotted with golden gorse" (p59) baffled me. The note explains gorse was a shrub. Learn something new every day.

In addition, the book contains 32 public domain black and white illustrations paired to sections of the text. They range in quality, from the woodcut ship (not so much) to the Alehouse (cool).

The book contains a number of non-fatal layout typos where a line is truncated before reaching the right-hand side of the page. The prose continues without missing a beat.

The original story was serialized in *Young Folks* magazine between June 30, 1883 and October 20, 1883. RLS released the book version in 1888. According to Wikipedia, *The Black Arrow*, being in the public domain, has been republished many times, especially 2000-2008.

So, this is another version -- call it an illustrated and annotated version. It's not for everyone, but once you get used to the prose, it's an engaging story.

Enjoyed it.

The Defeat and Attrition of the 12SS Panzer Division HitlerJugend. by Arthur W. Gullachsen. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 375 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Volume II: Operations Martlet, Epsom, Windsor and Charnwood 11 June - 12 July 1944*

The 12SS Panzer Division HitlerJugend (HJ) slotted into the German defense line around Caen after D-Day. Relentless British artillery, naval, and air bombardments basically shelled the division to relative oblivion as the British infantry and armor pushed towards Caen.

HJ gave a good account of itself despite being severely outnumbered and with limited supplies, artillery shell shortages, and almost no reinforcements reaching them during successive British offensives. The no retreat rule imposed by Berlin didn't help either. The minimal Luftwaffe support, limited to some night bombings and one daylight effort, failed in the face of Allied air superiority.

Day by day, and virtually battalion by battalion in village after village, the HJ's actions receive considerable tactical examination. Desperate fighting, local counterattacks, and chaotic command and control highlight the HJ's month defending against British and Canadian attacks.

Much is made of the Allied artillery that saturated German defense lines and pulverized counterattacks. Ample shell supplies afforded the luxury of calling in artillery in whirlwind bombardments as well as general harassing fire. It all resulted in escalating German casualties that were not replaced.

By June 24, companies were down to under 100 men, and some, notably the 1st company in SS PanzerGrenadier Regiment 26 was down to 22 men (p104). The HJ resorted to combing out the rear areas to provide more infantry. Yet the attrition continued.

By July, I Btn of PzG Regt 26 was down to six officers, 35 NCOs, and 259 soldiers while the II Btn was down to five officers, 16 NCOs, and 136 soldiers. Considering that a battalion was supposed to be roughly 800 men, those are significant losses. Furthermore, it was down to two or three of each heavy weapon: 75mm AT gun, 88mm AA/AT gun, 75mm infantry howitzer, and 150mm infantry howitzer. The regiment was assigned a 5.5km frontage, or roughly about twice what a full regiment was supposed to defend (p252).

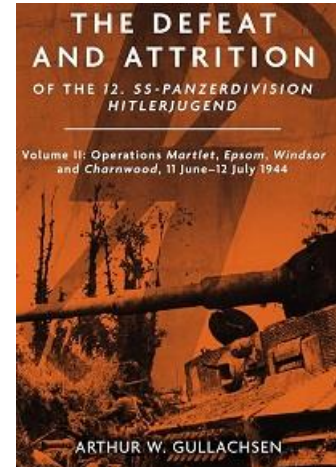
It does make you think about unit losses versus battlefield viability, especially if you think about a variety of WWII wargame rules. Companies that attack when only at 25% of book TO&E strength makes you wonder.

A typo: STuGs were not "open-topped" (p167).

The book contains 40 black and white photos and 13 black and white maps (rather helpfully, most with battalion placements).

As the book often delves into individual German companies and with armor even down to platoon level, you get a considerable amount of tactical detail within the text. It's workmanlike prose sends units here and there, which can get a bit overwhelming, especially when trying to remember all the British and Canadian regimental acronyms and numerous French villages. But that's what a good unit history will do and this is indeed a good one.

Enjoyed it.



Soldiers and Gentlemen. by Colin W. Taylor. Softcover (6.7x9.7 inches). 537 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *A History of the University and Public School Brigade of the Royal Fusiliers 1914-1918*

Britain raised four battalions, the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st, to create the "UPS" Brigade. Each recruited soldier was a student or a graduate from a university or public school -- sort of like a higher education PALs battalion. It a year to train them up and they were sent to France in November 1915. The 18th 20th went to the 2nd division and the other two to the 7th Division, so the Brigade was never deployed as a whole.

This was considered a "quiet" part of the Western Front, but the excellent descriptions of day-to-day trench life sees day after day of casualties from random barrages, No Man's Land patrols, mines exploding, and sniper attacks. Indeed the descriptions become repetitious because the research behind the text examines every death, and I mean every death, of a UPS soldier. It's a constant drip, drip, drip of attrition as trench warfare was.

As overall British casualties mount, especially among low-level officers, the Army turned to these educated soldiers to replenish the officer ranks. The 18th, 19th, and 21st battalions were disbanded and any deemed unfit for commissions were used to replenish the ranks of other battalions (p204).

That left the 20th, which was transferred in 1916 to the Somme. These lads got to know the active front of the attack. Once again, each UPS soldier's death is recorded among the horrors of trench warfare.

On February 1, 1918, the 20th was disbanded and its remaining troops sent to fill out other battalions (p433).

The book contains 68 black and white photos, 32 black and white illustrations, and 12 black and white maps.

Tremendous detail examines training to combat operations and all the losses that resulted. The gritty descriptions makes you wonder how any survived, but survive some did through the entire war. Impressive detail. Enjoyed it.

Nazis on the Potomac: Revised and Expanded. by Robert K. Sutton. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 243 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The Top-Secret Intelligence Operation That Helped Win World War II*

This second edition covers the interrogation of German POWs at Fort Hunt in Virginia by using eavesdropping devices, German- and Austrian-born Jewish refugees, and "stool pigeons" inserted into the POW population. The POWs were primarily Germans, but later included some Japanese officers and soldiers.

After short bios (based on oral histories) of numerous US interrogators, the process of extracting information by a variety of means is analyzed and explained. Some of this information was fed back directly to the front lines, some chalked up as nice to know, and some filtered back to Allied POWs in German hands. For example, documents and money collected from German POWs were copied and sent back to Allied POWs to help with forging documents useful in escapes.

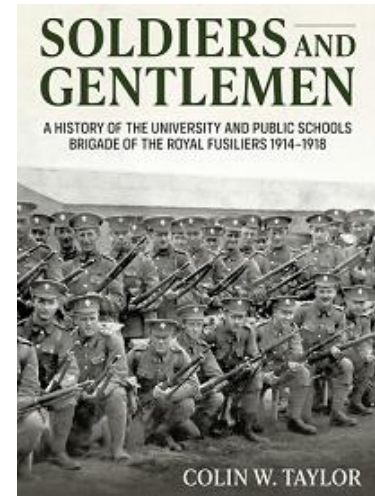
Chapter 8 (p125+) was the most interesting of the chapters: feeding information to intel to help create books with colored covers. The Red book covered German OOBs, the Gray book covered installations and bases, the Yellow book covered the German replacement army, and the Green book covered Japanese OOBs.

One typo: Goering was "scheduled to be hanged on September 30, 1946. He cheated the hangman, however, and committed suicide on October 15, 1946." The dates are likely switched as it seems difficult for an already dead Goering to commit suicide, or the actual hanging date is missing.

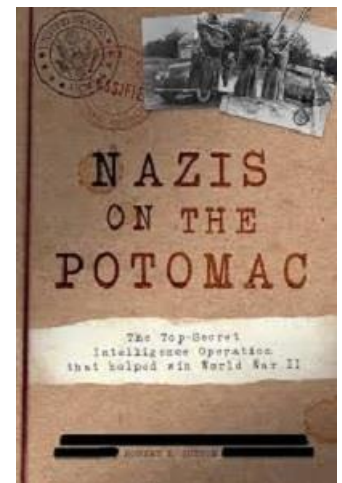
The book contains 39 black and white photos, one black and white illustration, 10 color photos and one color illustration.

While I had known about British efforts to glean information from German generals housed in rural estates, this is the first time I ran into US efforts -- based in part on British successes.

Enjoyed it.



took
and



Fallschirmjager versus US Soldier: Combat 81. by Frank Baldwin. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Saint-Lo 1944*

This *Combat* series volume provides a good overview of the battle between German Fallschirmjager (FJ) paratroopers and US troops in the bocage of Normandy (France) in 1944.

The introduction provides a quick summary of the situation after D-Day along with the troops' uniforms, weaponry, tactics, leadership, and morale. That's followed by the usual three battles: Hill 192 (June 12-July 12, 1944) with the US 2nd Infantry Division, Clearing the Way to St. Lo (June 12-July 18, 1944) with the US 29th Infantry Division, and Mont Castre Forest and Seves River's White Witches Island (July 3-July 23, 1944) with the US 90th Infantry Division.

Within you'll understand how FJ defended each field among the hedgerows and how the US devised "new" tactics of combining a modified Sherman tank, an engineering section, and a infantry squad to clear a field. It was difficult, it was costly in terms of casualties, but it proved effective at wearing down the Germans.

In one attack, the US 115th Regiment hold a 5,475 yard front with three battalions in a line while the neighboring 116th Regt pushed the attack on a 1,315 yard front with one battalion up and two back (p51).

Due to the bocage, platoon-sized FJ counterattacks could infiltrate US lines and launch counterattacks on the flanks of US units, stall a drive, and then fade away. During the Mont Castre Forest and Seves River battle, such attacks pinched off a US salient and forced the surrender of 234 US troops, including two battalion commanders and nine other officers (p68).

The booklet contains 50 black and white photos, four color photos, five color maps, three color two-page action illustrations, and four uniform illustrations (front and back of FJ and US soldiers).

It's another good volume in the *Combat* series.

Enjoyed it.



Roman Infantry Helmets: Elite 266. by M. C. Bishop. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2025.

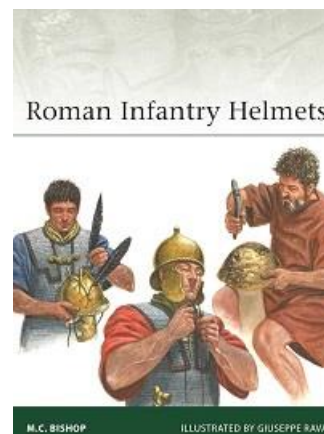
If you want an overview of Roman helmets from the Republic to the Late Roman period, here's your booklet. Includes how they were made, decorated, worn, and carried.

As usual, illustrations abound within, including a collection of photographs of archeological finds plus period statues and bas reliefs. Who knew there were so many 1,500-2,000 year old helmets still relatively intact?

One question still unanswered was the inner liner: One surviving example has a bit of animal pelt, but as to inner straps and rigging, it's still not settled.

The booklet contains 51 color photos, 16 black and white illustrations, three color illustrations, and eight pages of color illustrations: 26 helmets, 10 uniforms, and one row of Roman shields.

Enjoyed it.



VLR P-51 Mustang vs Japanese Fighters: Duel 147. by Carl Molesworth. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Japan 1945*

This volume covers the aircraft and battles between the Very Long Range P-51 and several Japanese late-war fighters: Zeke, Jack, George, Frank, Tojo, Tony, and Ki-100 (no name) from April to August 1945.

Overviews of the design and development of the aircraft showcase specs and performance and lead into the ineptly-run Japanese early-warning system, rivalry of Japanese Army and Navy organizations, and relative experience superiority of the US pilots over Japanese pilots. For example, US pilot training was in excess of 200 hours versus Japanese pilot training of 60 to 70 hours (p48). Even then, the US turned out 193,440 pilots of all types in WWII, far more than the 46,000 Japanese pilots (p50).

One point that was new to me: 1945 Japanese organization. US is pretty simple: Four fighters make up a Flight, four Flights (16 fighters) make up a Squadron, and three squadrons make a Group. Japan transitioned from a Vee of three fighters per Flight to four fighters (p52). Also interesting was that Japanese Army and



Navy apparently had two different fighter nomenclatures: the Army with a Shotai being a Flight and the Navy calling it a Chotai (p51).

The booklet contains 56 black and white photos, two color photos, two color maps, two black and white maps, one color two-page action illustration, two color diagrams of plane formations, six color profile illustrations (front, side, and top for P-51 and Ki-84 Frank), five half-page color illustrations of armament, and two color illustrations of cockpits (P-51 and Ki-44 Tony).

The booklet ends with a series of air battles that you can use to pull out a scenario or two.
Enjoyed it.

A Night in the Lonesome October. by Roger Zelazny. Softcover (5.25x7.9 inches). 262 pages. 2025 reprint of 1993 book.

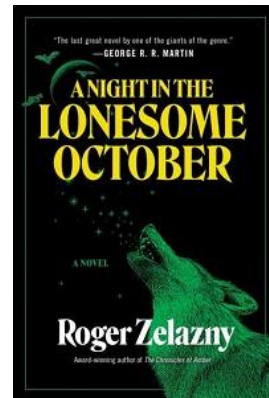
Zelazny's last book follows a watchdog's first-person perspective, er... first-dog perspective around the neighborhood, interacting with other animal familiars. Their owners gather for a ceremony of some type, which is gradually revealed as the plot goes on.

The owners are out and about collecting items, including body parts from graves, for their part in the ceremony. Two sides will square off, and while these two sides will become enemies at the end of the month, for the first half it's generally live and let live. This policy extends to the animal familiars (cat, rat, snake, owl, and so on), who also gather and trade information. The watchdog, Snuff, calculates and recalculates the spot for the ceremony using intersections of geometric lay lines -- although the number of people per side alters the lines and thus the spot.

Meanwhile, our hero Snuff makes regular rounds to make sure the Thing inside the mirror, the Things inside the chest, and the Thing inside the circle stay in their respective containers -- although they occasionally break free.

I don't want to give away the plot of this "game," even if the blurb on the back cover does, so I'll just say the prose reads well. The animal familiars' actions represent the bulk of the book, although the murders of ordinary humans as well as some of the owners bring in the "Great Detective" as well as local police.

Enjoyed it.



The Intoku Code. by Wade Ishimoto. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 222 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Delta Force's Intelligence Officer Doing Good In Secret*

This autobiography begins in childhood and covers Ishimoto's entire career working in intelligence, primarily with the military and then as a consultant for a variety of Beltway companies.

He started in the Military Police, but soon bagged an intel assignment. With considerable effort and commendable results, he worked his way up the enlisted ranks and then into an officer's slot. He did tours in Vietnam, and in some cases he had to wheel and deal to be assigned front-line positions. Prejudice met him along the way as he transitioned into Special Forces, and then was in Delta Force at its start.

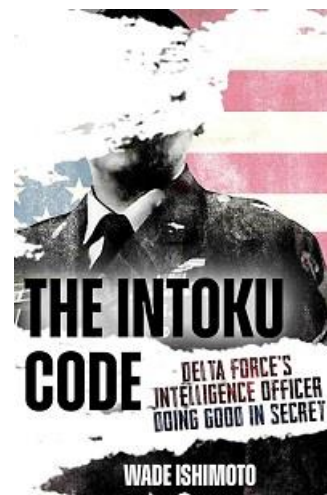
Of note, Delta Force's first compound in Feb-Apr 1978 was at Fort Bragg's jail on Butner Road -- it was cheaper for the Army to transfer the eight inmates to NC prisons than build a new compound (p133).

When the Iranian hostage crisis occurred, he was on the ground in the Iranian desert. The prep work and the actual rescue operation suffered from a variety of ills, from command and control issues to mechanical breakdowns you won't believe -- let's just say it's all recounted in these pages. Of note, Ishimoto was one of the last soldiers to leave the Iranian desert and would have been left behind had not someone counted noses before the last lift out and insisted on getting him.

Post military, he bounced around a number of companies, from security to Beltway intel. Of note, Earl Lockwood of BETAC Corp (p212) offered business advice and later on hired him as a consultant. He even helped the ATF review the storming of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, TX. Ishimoto certainly got around.

One error: "In 1978, the personal computer had yet to be developed" (p147). Actually, sales of the Apple I (July 1976), Apple II (June 10, 1977), Radio Shack TRS-80 (Aug 3, 1977), and Commodore Personal Electronic Transactor (Oct 1977), started the year before. For fans of early PC history, the Atari 400/800 (November 1979), IBM PC (Aug 12, 1981), and Commodore 64 (Jan 1982) were indeed later. The first PC to be sold was the Altair 8800 (December 19, 1974). Yep, nerd stuff, but I was an Asst. Editor on Creative Computing magazine and steeped in such lore -- although I looked up the exact release dates.

The book contains 21 black and white photos and 65 color photos, mostly of group shots.



Anyway, Intoku roughly translates as "good done in secret" although in the context of the book, it's a little less about secrecy and a little more about making sure your buddy or your unit doesn't suffer from various human foibles. I don't know what the Japanese word for "doing wrong in public" is, but like all large organizations, the US military is filled with both.

Enjoyed it.

Brixmis and the Secret Cold War. by Andrew Long. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 248 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Intelligence Collection Operations Behind Enemy Lines in East Germany*

Part of the post-war agreement among the US, USSR, France, and UK was the ability to send recon teams into each other's territory in and around Berlin. This was often under the guise of attending ceremonies marking some military anniversary or another. This book covers the British operations -- part covert spying and part overt spying from 1947 to 1990.

In the 1960s, the British usually ran three "tours" a week: a 36-hour tour, a 24-hour tour, and a local tour (p66). In the beginning, the British stayed in East German hotels and ate at restaurants. Later, the tours involved camping out overnight.

The British often went between Berlin and Potsdam, and often took the scenic route to gather intel on East German or Soviet troops movements, construction of bases and other defense works, and types of aircraft and other military equipment. Equipped with long-lens cameras and souped-up Mercedes and Range Rover vehicles, they drove the main and back roads to conduct surveillance missions.

It was all perfectly acceptable up to a point. When British troops snuck onto bases to photograph new equipment, that was crossing a line -- if they got caught.

The Soviets or East Germans would tail the British and the cat and mouse game began as soon as the checkpoint was left behind. As the years rolled on, the tailing car became cars and sometimes armored vehicles. Ramming the British vehicles was not unheard of, and a couple Brits ended up dead and others in the hospital. Arresting the British soldiers was also popular, but usually a USSR commandant would be called and the Brits released.

A double-blind scenario comes to mind as the Stasi player tries to box in and capture a British team that had lost its initial tail in the countryside of East Germany.

One typo: "attempts to interrogate the very poorly corporal" (p171) needs something, but not sure what.

The book contains 40 black and white photos, 22 color photos, and four black and white maps.

One interesting anecdote: A USSR pilot crashed a Yak 28P aircraft (NATO codename Firebar) into the Stossensee (Havel Lake) on April 6, 1966 in the British sector of Berlin. The Brits refused Soviet entry to the salvage site and proceeded to secretly dismantle and analyze the aircraft and its systems before turning it and the bodies of the two airmen over to the USSR.

Enjoyed it.

Royal Navy Monitors of World War II: New Vanguard 343. by Angus Konstam. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Britain's Battleship-Calibre Gunboats*

Every once in a while, you read about British monitors firing shells in support of D-Day and subsequent operations. Monitors were not battleships, but carried battleship-worthy main guns and were specifically designed for shore bombardment.

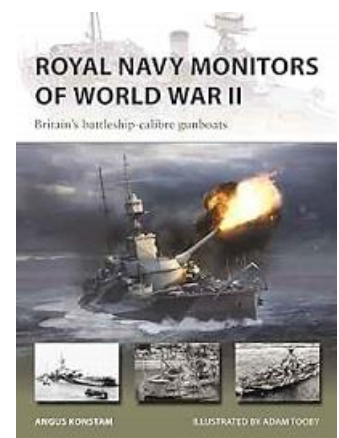
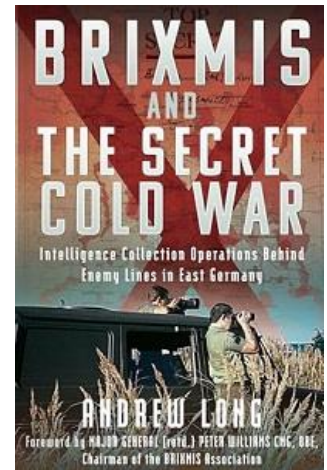
Some started construction in WWI and were modernized for WWII. Britain didn't field many, so the collective impact was not a war-winning design, but they did their part and successfully intervened in land combats.

The booklet includes the design, development, specs, and some combat operations. Forward Observer Bombardment teams went ashore and called in the shells. Typically, a monitor could deliver 20 rounds in seven minutes, with each round creating a 30-yard-wide crater and a blast effect of up to 1,400 yards (p34).

A small section include monitors designed to go in rivers -- one survivor, HMS M-33, which originally saw service in Gallipoli and was a floating office in WWII, is in the naval museum in Portsmouth (UK).

The booklet contains 30 black and white photos, eight color illustrations, three color one-page action illustrations, one color two-page cutaway illustration of the HMS Abercrombie, and four color ship profiles.

Enjoyed it.



Soviet Tanks in Barbarossa: New Vanguard 342. by Steven J. Zaloga. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2025.

It's a Zaloga. It's about tanks. Long-time Osprey readers will know it contains a lot of information in a short booklet form. In many ways, you've seen design, development, and so on before, but for those new to Barbarossa, here's a succinct recap of USSR tanks, including three I had not heard of: the NI Tractor Tank, Kh-133, and Zis-30. Learn something new every day.

Since this is a Zaloga, you can always expect wonderful chart info -- I'm rather fond of the production chart info. The Soviets produced a lot of tanks. Granted, they may not have always worked and the crew training left much to be desired, but there was a bit of a Darwinian effect as the Germans rolled into the Soviet Union.

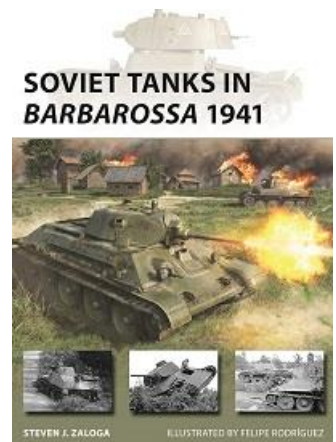
One chart (p40) noted total USSR tank losses of 20,500 from June 22, 1941 to December 31, 1941, but the line in the chart about Moscow Offensive losses ends with January 7, 1942. One or the other.

Also, "regiment were" (p29) should be "regiment was."

The booklet contains 41 black and white photos, one color photo, one color one-page action illustration, and 12 color tank profile illustrations (T-28, T-26, T-35, T-34, BT-7, KV-1, KV-II, Kh-133, Zis-30, and the NI Tractor Tank).

Another Zaloga triumph.

Enjoyed it.



German and Italian Tanks 1943-45: New Vanguard 344. by Steven J. Zaloga. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2025.

Can I just say look at the previous review and write "ditto?" No?

OK, I'll work for it.

Zaloga. Tanks. Design, development. Ah, no spec charts -- there's a difference -- but plenty of charts detailing the number of German and Italian tanks and armored vehicles deployed in Italy from Sicily to the end of the war.

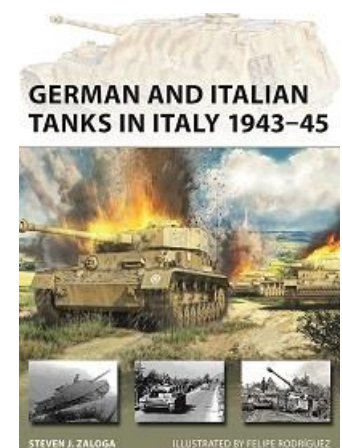
The brief descriptions of tank warfare, such as it was in Italy, read well. The mountains of the Italian boot limited the numbers, but armored units provided ambush and firepower prowess. The German ones, anyway.

Of note, at least two Italian tank battalions used French R-35 (about 100) and Fiat-3000 (18) tanks in Sicily (p18). After Italy surrendered, the Germans captured about 600 Italian armored vehicles, although the majority were earmarked for anti-partisan operations.

The booklet contains 41 black and white photos, one color two-page action illustration (cover drawing), 12 color tank profile illustrations (R-35, Semovente 90/53, two PzIV G, Pz III M, Pz III N, two Semovente 75/34, two STuG III G, Tiger I, and Elephant), and three color unit badges.

Another Osprey filled with excellent color illustrations. Start your paintbrushes.

Enjoyed it.



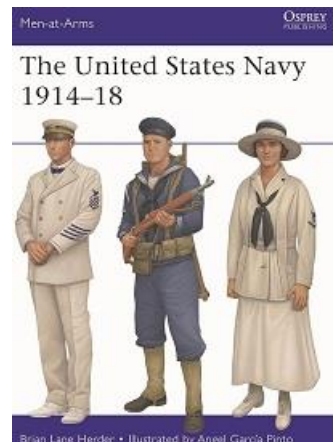
The United States Navy 1914-18: Men-at-Arms 565. by Brian Lane Herder. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 56 pages. 2025.

When I think of WWI naval warfare, the US Navy doesn't leap to the forefront. That's not a knock against the USN, just that most histories center on the German vs British naval battles, with Jutland being the main one. And yet, this booklet explains the greater role the USN played in WWI.

First off, I didn't know the USN sent 14-inch railway guns and crews to France to support the Meuse-Argonne Offensive. They were organized into five batteries of one gun each (p17-18).

Secondly, I didn't know the USN invaded Mexico on April 21, 1914 and occupied Versacruz for six months. The US invaded Haiti on July 28, 1915 and the Dominican Republic on May 15, 1916 (p18-20). Whaddaya know!

For convoy and U-boat hunting duties, 52 USN destroyers were deployed to Ireland, France, and Gibraltar by Nov 1917. By January 1918, seven USN submarines were based in the Azores (p34).



The booklet contains 29 black and white photos, seven color illustrations, 17 male and four female color uniform illustrations, and seven color medal illustrations.

Osprey booklets excel in many different ways, but every now and again, you find the absolute gem of new information not known or even considered. Here's a gem.

Enjoyed it.

The Indian Army at War 1947-99: Men-at-Arms 566. by Mandeep Singh. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 56 pages. 2025.

A half century of military activity in 56 pages (eight of which are color uniform plates) is about a page a year, so don't expect a detailed analysis of the Indian Army. Also, the text mostly covers operations, not uniforms and equipment -- those are covered per usual in the plate descriptions in the back of the booklet. So, it's a little bit more New Vanguard than Men-at-Arms.

That said, as you might expect, various skirmishes and wars with Pakistan are covered. The original dividing line between the two countries in Kashmir was left up in the air, or more appropriately, up on the glacier. No end of problems with the British dividing line ending prematurely. And don't forget China. The line seems rather wavy in the minds of the two countries, especially China. At least Bangladesh was resolved.

However, the big surprise was that India attacked three areas it did not control in the 1947 split: Hyderabad, Junadagh Diu, and Goa. Junadagh was attacked and conquered by the Indian Army Oct. 5 to Nov 9, 1947. Hyderabad was attacked and conquered by the Indian Army Sep. 12 to Sep. 18, 1948.

On December 17, 1961, it was Goa's and other Portuguese territories' turn to be attacked by the Indian Army. The governor surrendered on Dec. 19. There's much more to it than one page of text, but as I noted, this booklet is an overview. Still, I never knew the Indian Army actually attacked Portugal. Learn something new every day.

A typo: The text (p6) calls the territory "Junagadh," but the map (p5) spells it "Junadagh." One or the other.

The booklet contains 25 black and white photos, 20 color photos, one color map with five insets, 24 uniform illustrations, and 13 color unit badges.

If you're looking for a general overview for further investigation, this volume held some nice surprises. Enjoyed it.

Armies of Justinian the Great AD 527-65: Men-at-Arms 564. by Raffaele D'Amato. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 56 pages. 2025.

This well-illustrated overview covers Justinian's Late Roman to Early Byzantine infantry and cavalry. The usual *Men-at-Arms* treatment discusses the organization, recruitment, training, and arming of his military.

Indeed, the bulk of the book quite rightly covers weaponry, equipment, and uniforms -- although you'll have to learn the Latin terms for all of this. It can get confusing trying to separate the terms in your head, or at least in my head, although the detail is delightfully specific.

The descriptions are backed by noting ancient text sources and archeological finds.

The booklet contains 38 color photos, four color illustrations, eight black and white illustrations, and 15 foot and nine mounted uniform illustrations.

Enjoyed it.

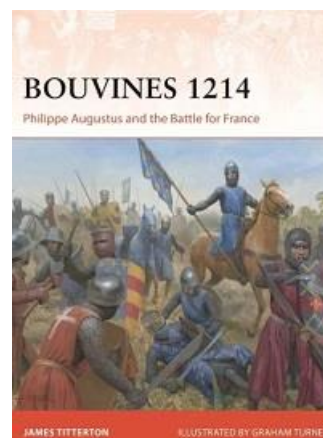
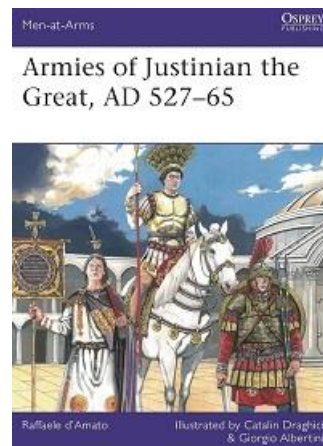
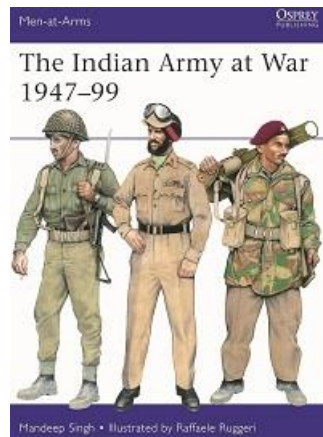
Bouvines 1214: Campaign 422. by James Titterton. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Philippe Augustus and the Battle for France*

The battle of Bouvines was a meeting engagement between King of France Philippe and a coalition of English, Flemish, and German troops. According to the text, it is a rare set-piece medieval battle.

The French Army was marching when French Bishop Guerin decided to mount a scouting party to the flank. He found the coalition army marching on an intercept course and sent back for troops.

The battle is described in some detail. While the OOB is well documented for the French, the OOB for the coalition is more guesswork than listed in medieval



sources. Still, the reconstruction of the OOB and the flat and open nature of the terrain will allow you to recreate the battle on the tabletop.

The booklet contains one black and white photo, 22 color photos, 39 color illustrations, three black and white illustrations, five color maps, two color 3D maps, and three color two-page action illustrations.

It's another good *Campaign* volume.

Enjoyed it.

Hansando and Busan 1592: Campaign 423. by Yuhan Kim. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Admiral Yi Sun-sin's First Victories Against Japan*

Here's a case of me knowing that Japan invaded Korea in Renaissance times, but of little else. This volume provides the overview of what prompted the invasion and how it went. The two battles are the main naval battles, but other naval battles and ground operations are also described.

As you'd expect, the text covers the design and development of the warships, their weaponry, the uniforms and weaponry of the sailors who manned the ships, and the tactics used in sea battles. After a grounding in the background, the three naval campaigns of Korean Admiral Yi Sun-sin versus the Japanese receive attention.

The key was that Adm. Yi gathered his fleet and attacked and defeated scattered and isolated Japanese squadrons. Several sea battles can be translated to the tabletop.

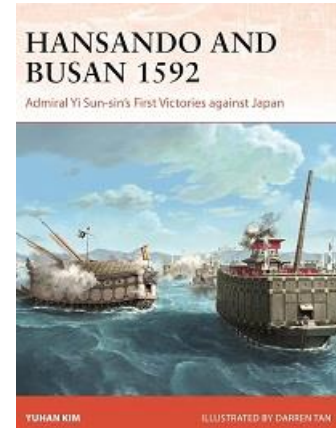
My favorite is the Battle of Danghangpo. It turns out a Korean courtesan believed Japanese "monks" were really spies and so rifled through their belongings. She found a map and altered it to show a strait near Danghangpo instead of it being an inlet. When Yi attacked, the Japanese could not withdraw and instead attacked, falling into an ambush (p51).

A couple typos: "saaw" (p55) is really saw and "eveloping" (also p55) is really enveloping.

The booklet contains 47 color photos, 17 color illustrations, eight color maps, and three color two-page action illustrations.

An enlightening volume.

Enjoyed it.



Austro-Italian Naval War 1866: Maritime Series. by Piotr Olender. Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 182 pages. 2025.

You don't often think of Austria being a naval power, but a 19th Century navy it had based at Pola on the Adriatic Sea. The Italians, as you'd expect, had a bigger navy, in part because it had a lot more maritime trade than Austria.

The Austro-Italian War started because of the Austro-Prussian War. Italy had signed a pact with Prussia and declared war on Austria in an effort to reclaim Italian territories such as Venice.

The book details the developments in naval technology at the time as wooden ships gave way to ironclads. Even as wind transitioned to steam, paddlewheels gave way to propellers, and armor plated the sides of the ships.

At this exact time, cannon tech lagged behind armor tech, so some ironclads were also fitted with rams -- just like ancient triremes -- although powered by steam power, not human power. You get a full spec-heavy account of virtually each ship along with a discussion of tactics with the weaponry involved.

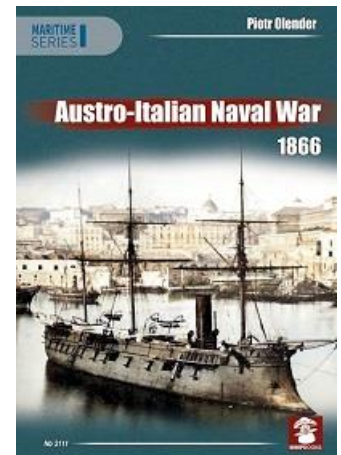
When Italian Army operations failed, the Italian Navy was sent to conquer the island of Lissa in the Adriatic Sea. The Austrians at first thought it was an attack on Venice, but soon discovered the offensive aimed at capturing Lissa. The two navies clashed at the island.

The Battle of Lissa on July 20, 1866 is described in exquisite detail, including analyzing the Italian command and control problems and the hesitation to commit its wooden ships against the Austrian ironclad ships, whereas the Austrian used their wooden ships to delay some Italian ironclads. And in a moment of something like insanity, the Italian C-in-C changed flagships just before the battle and sowed considerable confusion among his captains (p113).

The booklet contains 134 black and white photos, 94 black and white illustrations, 17 black and white maps, and 18 black and white ship drawings.

From war plans to OOBs, this booklet has all that you need to create a small naval campaign in the Adriatic along with your ironclad rules of choice. Well done.

Enjoyed it.



Soldiers' Clothing of the Early 17th Century: Century of Soldier 118. by Laurence Spring. Softcover (7.2x9.7 inches). 347 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *Britain and Western Europe 1618-1660*

This exhaustive analysis of uniform and equipment procurement, including a multitude of charts with prices, includes key information about regimental uniform colors -- a boon to wargamers painting up 17th Century figures.

Gamers may not use the information about the number of stitches, differences in styles, and how tailors and seamstresses sewed them up, but it's all there. Also included are fascinating examples of how contractors shortchanged the government, with delivery of shoddy clothing and shoes that fell apart. It seemed like a never-ending game: the government orders uniforms from a variety of companies and the companies substitute poorer quality materials or leave out parts (linings). Every so often, the government runs out of money and doesn't pay, which may or may not be a contributing factor in the delivery of shoddy clothes.

Then there's the soldiers themselves, who are often charged for the clothing...which falls apart. And when pay gets in arrears, the soldiers sell the clothing. Accounts of raggedy-looking troops and victorious troops stripping prisoners of their clothing are not uncommon.

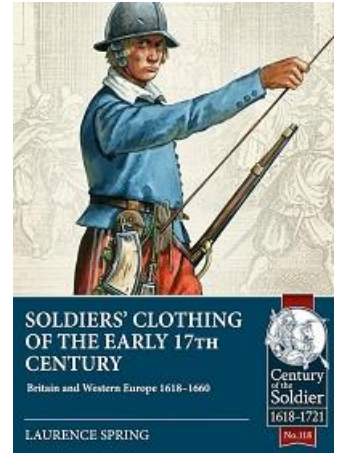
Armies covered are the English Trained Bands of the 1620s and 30s, followed by various Parliamentarian and Royal armies of the English Civil War. Also covered: New Model Army and armies from Denmark, Netherlands, France, Spain, Sweden, and Holy Roman Empire.

One typo: "clothing tor soldiers" (p150 should be "for." Then again, I only read about half the book, for my interest in reading about the constant accounting of seemingly each and every contract faded. It's well written given the repetitious nature of the subject matter, but you may get overwhelmed by such details. I skimmed the rest, which seemed more of the same, so if you love that sort of detail, this is the volume for you.

The book contains one black and white photo and 42 black and white period woodcut illustrations.

To my mind, the text and charts of regimental colors is the main draw for figure painters, followed by some examples of logistics that may prove useful in a campaign game. Those seeking the economics behind 17th Century uniform purchasing will devour every page.

Enjoyed it.



Over Cold War Seas: NATO and Soviet Naval Aviation 1949-1989. by Michael Napier. Hardback (7.9x10.0 inches). 320 pages. 2025.

This overview covers the naval aviation element of the Cold War arms race from the formation of NATO in 1949 to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. An additional chapter extends the timeline to the present day, albeit in a compressed manner.

Each of the main chapters covers a decade: 1950s, 1960, 1970s, and 1980s. It's hardware intensive, summarizing the new planes, jets, and helicopters introduced at the time. Several first-person pilot accounts pepper the text.

One nice section summarizes the Cuban Missile Crisis, as the US Navy established a blockade around Cuba and flew a variety of patrol, recon, and anti-submarine warfare mission. Something new and interesting to me was the dropping of Practice Depth Charges on Soviet submarines -- more than surveillance and less than a shooting war.

The Soviet transition from coastal naval force to blue-water navy in the 1970s and the NATO response offers a succinct examination of both sides' capabilities and goals.

Although NATO (mostly US and UK, with Canada, France, and other countries forces) and the USSR dominate the book, a chapter covers the neutral countries at the time: Sweden, Finland, Spain, Ireland, Albania, and Yugoslavia.

The book contains 101 black and white photos and 126 color photos.

As the Cold War wasn't a hot war, per se, the book mostly ignores any sort of clashes save for a couple here and there. Consider this an overview of capabilities and a solid jumping off point to investigate the era should you wish to consider WWII scenarios.

Enjoyed it.

