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Turn 10 action (l to r): Austrians Mike and Theo, Umpire Pat, Austrian Marc and Larry, and French Jay, Rich, and Dave.

The Count of Monte Bello: Napoleonics

by Russ Lockwood

Umpire Pat set up a *Shako II* scenario: the 1800 Battle of Monte Bello pitting the French against the Austrians. The French are marching in some sort of valley and the Austrians block them.

At start. My Austrians behind a line of skirmishers at right. The French at left.

I saw the Austrian blocking force and knew immediately that's the formation I wanted to command: Six infantry battalions, two battalions in skirmish, and two artillery batteries. They were also the worst troops on the field of battle, but I didn't know that at the time. Also, by dint of random roll, I was indeed an Austrian player, so that worked out well.

The 'Rock of Monte Bello' Mike (left) gathers intel while Marc shouts encouragement.

Deployments

I had some hidden units, but had to place them on the table once the French came within eight inches. I had the skirmishers out front, a line of infantry behind them blocking the road, one infantry battalion inside a small village, and the last infantry unit on the far side of the village. The two artillery batteries were placed among my main infantry line.



Behind me, Larry had his troops in line of support. He had a cavalry brigade behind the village, out of sight for the moment.

Austrian Larry (left) schemes while our French opponents shake out into fighting formations.



Our pre-battle "Rock of Monte Bello" Mike was hidden in the hills on the flank of the French. Marc and Theo were marching up the road to provide much needed support to our few brigades.

The French, Dave and Jay, had cavalry and infantry in the front opposite me, with Rich's infantry command behind. Rich also had more brigades of infantry and cavalry marching up in support.

By Turn 3, I formed a line, interspersed with cannon, from hill to village as the French try to overwhelm me with numbers. The white circles indicate casualties. The white squares indicate disorder.

Opening Moves

Umpire Pat mentioned something about me being aggressive as I moved up the skirmishers to engage Jay's infantry. I didn't know what that meant, but soon found out.

All rules have quirks, and I soon learned about a skirmisher quirk in *Shako II*. As expected, Jay's infantry advanced its four inches and pushed back the skirmishers. As unexpected, the skirmishers were no longer able to shoot.

Huh? That's what skirmishers do -- shoot, fall back, shoot, fall back, shoot, and so on.



Mike's Austrians appear in the hills, but Rich reacts with a French advance.

Nope, not in *Shako II*. They just run screaming away without firing a shot.

The correct way to use *Shako II* skirmishers is to plant them six inches away from the enemy and let the enemy move up. Then they can shoot. Go figure.

Jay them charged the guns with his cavalry. Guess what also doesn't get to shoot in its defense?

Nope., the artillery, which fired ball in the previous phase, sits and awaits melee with rammers and buckets of water in stoic fashion. Supporting infantry? Nope, not them either.

Obviously, I've been playing *Snappy Nappy* too long.



Jay sends my initial line reeling, but I make all the 50-50 rolls. Larry's better infantry and cavalry are now in the front line. Mike defends as best he can versus Rich's furious attack (upper left corner). Turn 6 action.



Cavalry was $4 + 1d6$, my artillery was $3 + 1d6$, and the only thing that saved the guns was Jay rolled a 2 and I rolled a 6. My $3 + 6 = 9$ versus Jay's $4 + 2 = 6$, and so Jay's cavalry took three casualties and retreated. Jay made the 66.7% roll for the cavalry to stay on the board.

Infantry Lines Meet

Jay's charging infantry (rated a 5) met my waiting infantry (rated a 3) and after calculating a variety of support factors, I lost three of four melees, but only by one or two. Each of my battalions received casualties and retreated behind Larry's line of infantry and then each rolled to see if they fled off the board.



The French under Jay and Dave storm Larry's line on Turn 8. Umpire Pat (left) keeps an eye on proceedings. Theo's and Marc's troops enter at left.

I needed to roll a 3 or less as a morale roll to stay on the board. Thus, it's a 50-50 roll and I made all three.

As the game progressed, I lost three of four skirmishers in the fusillade of traded fire, but inflicted a hit or two and a stagger or two in the process.

Stymied in the center, Jay tries to outflank the Austrians by climbing into the hills. Theo's cavalry is across the stream and heading to intercept. Marc's force is marching down the road.

The Rock of Monte Bello

At about this time, Mike rolled in from the hill on the French flank. This was not as devastating as first thought, for the French turned a few guns and battalions to the left as well as sent a few battalions from the reserve to intercept the slow-moving Austrians.

The less said about these battles the better, for these Austrian troops performed like 1s instead of 3s and 4s. Rich's French staggered up the hill and in melee fashion, completely routed the Austrians.

Theo's cavalry reserve made mighty



strides in coming to Mike's aid, but Mike collapsed too quickly. "The Rock of Monte Bello turned out to be a pebble," Dave quipped.

Digression: Failed Volley Mechanic

Shako II allows an infantry unit a defensive fire for units advancing to melee them. Why artillery doesn't get a defensive fire is another quirk.

The defensive fire seems to be a zero sum game: Either the defenders inflict a stagger (or a stagger and hit) and the charge is prevented, or, the infantry misses and suffers a failed volley -- the chargers charge in and the defenders suffer a -1 to their melee roll. Now, when infantry is charged by cavalry and misses, the infantry does not suffer a failed volley.

I never understood why an impacting cavalry charge wouldn't unnerve the infantry, or, looking at it another way, why an impacting infantry charge would unnerve defending infantry.

Designer choice, obviously.

Spectator

On the other side of the village, Dave moved up two infantry battalions to my one. When two battalions hit one, the attacker rolls 2d6 and picks the highest number. I blew the defensive fire, but at least tied in the first melee. With ties, each side takes a casualty and recalculates. I lost the second melee and this time, my battalion failed its 50-50 roll and fled back to Vienna.

Jay used a second cavalry unit to charge my artillery, which was not lucky the second time. An infantry unit took out my other battery.

That was it for me for the night -- I occasionally rolled a skirmisher die or the village garrison firing die, but all my surviving troops were in a second line behind Larry's front line troops (4s, not 3s like me).

Larry's cavalry threatened Dave's infantry, which formed square, by the village. A charge by Larry's Cuirassiers against Dave's artillery battery prompted Dave to moan, "Only a 6 and 1 roll will save me."

Larry promptly rolled a 1. Here was Dave's big chance. He skipped the die across the table and it skittered to a halt. We all leaned in to see this monumental roll. Dave rolled ... a 1!

Cheers and jeers all around. The cavalry swept away Dave's guns and withdrew back behind its own guns.

Larry exacted some more revenge in the middle, trading off hits with Jay's better troops. Charges and melees proved deadly, but more and more French and more and more Austrians arrived on the field of battle.

That's where we ended it after three hours: a massive Austrian victory. Welllllll, more like a marginal Austrian victory. The French had to take the town of Monte Bello but the Austrian army was maintaining its line. Reserves were arriving, but it could be another two-three hours of gaming before a full and final decision could be determined.

French Dave and Austrian Theo are all smiles at the end of the game.

Ambitious Scenario

I joked, "A 16-foot table and we're playing in a 3x6-foot section." To be fair, I think it was designed for a 4x6-foot table, but most of us were crammed on the one side of the table, elbow to elbow. There wasn't a lot of maneuvering on the tabletop: one army was the road block and the other the battering ram. Such is history.

I'm not sure which player earned the title Count of Monte Bello. Maybe young Theo? He had to endure the "wisdom" of the Pebble of Monte Bello's advice -- after said Pebble's command routed off the table -- and also otherwise witness a lot of old man jokes -- a category worse than Dad Jokes.



Thanks to Pat for umpiring, Dave for hosting, and the rest of the gamers for a deep dive into humor among the die rolling.

After I wrote this recap, Rich and Mike sent these notes via e-mail.

MVP

by Rich

The battle was tough but possibly doable for the French with better planning.

My MVP vote goes to Theo. His command had no casualties and he successfully dealt with his advisor, Mike, throughout the battle with no complaints.

Ditto

by Mike

I totally agree with Rich's first paragraph and the first 10 words of the second. Well, I actually agree with the balance of the second paragraph too. Well done Theo! And Pat.

As to my own performance, give me credit for my ability to repeat my achievement from the last game -- My command and I were done and dead halfway through the game.

End game.





*The end of the German phase of Turn 1.
At right, Dan maneuvers the Brits on Turn 3.*

Big-Time A&A: Europe 1940

by Russ Lockwood

It was time to crack the shrinkwrap of *Axis & Allies Europe 1940*. Dan came over and by random selection, he was the Allies and I the Axis.

The mapboard is larger with more spaces than regular *Axis & Allies (A&A)*, although I always wish that Europe would be larger. Yes, in reality Africa is indeed three times larger than Europe, but WWII in Europe was primarily in, well, Europe. All those plastic pieces are stuffed like sardines in a can while Africa offers a wide-open areas with minimal forces.

As Germany and Italy, I pondered the setup. It's a bit odd. Actually, it makes no WWII sense. France is still intact, but Denmark, Norway, and BeNeLux (Belgium, Netherlands, and Luxembourg) are German held. The first two you could argue were largely conquered in April, but the invasion of France and BeNeLux was simultaneous in May. A British infantry and tank unit are in Paris and French infantry are in London.

As I maintain over the years, any resemblance to WWII is minimal. Great game system, but minimal.

At least the US and USSR are neutral, although both will come into the war on Turn 4. Note that each country goes in sequence. Germany first, most Allies, Italy, and then France.



Der Plan

First things first France has to fall, so that was goal number one. But here's the weird part -- no Vichy. Any French units still on the map after Paris falls remain Allied.

France has three areas: Paris, Normandy-Bordeaux, and Southern France. The Germans can get to all three in a stretch, but I used the southern force to attack Yugoslavia. My main force would attack Paris and enough to grab Normandy.

End of German phase on Turn 3.

That left two British fleets: one in the Channel and one in the North Sea. A Canadian Destroyer and Transport were off the Canadian coast. I had submarines in the Atlantic. I didn't want to leave any of these fleets untouched, but there were only so many Luftwaffe aircraft and only one German Battleship. It's a nice dilemma and I suppose if I spent a day analyzing the pieces and odds, I would come up with a great plan...but I don't do game homework.

Turn 1

The big blitz thundered into Paris with an offshoot into Normandy-Bordeaux. I didn't take it in one round, but did enough damage to take it on the second round. Normandy-Bordeaux fell in one round, as did Yugoslavia.

I sent an infantry into "Pro-Axis" Bulgaria, which is a free conquest. Here, I bobbled the rules. When the Axis invade a "Pro-Axis" country, Germany gains the resources AND the armies. In Bulgaria's case, that's four infantry. I never got 'em, which would have been helpful invading Greece in a later turn because I had to lose panzers instead of infantry.

As for the Navy, I sent subs against the Canadians and sunk both ships, and sent one sub way out of the way between Iceland and Canada because I didn't see any safe harbors.

I made another error here. I sent the Bismarck battleship deeper into the Baltic out of range of the British Navy. However, at the time, I neglected to note that the Allies could not move into the Baltic unless they controlled Denmark. That left my battleship out of the Turn 2 fight in the Channel.

US industrial might begins to be felt, even from afar.



Longest Range Spitfires Ever

Kudos to Dan for completely surprising my subs off Nova Scotia, Canada. This version has Airbases, which add 1 Movement Point (MP) to aircraft taking off from an area with an airbase. Whaddaya know -- it is exactly five spaces between UK and Nova Scotia. Spitfires (fighters) move four, plus one is five).

Seriously? The U-boats are sunk on Turn 1.

Likewise, UK has a Naval Base, which adds 1 MP to ships, which move 2 MP. It is exactly three spaces from the UK to the waters off Nova Scotia that contained my subs. A destroyer, cruiser, Lancaster Heavy bomber, and two Spitfire fighters headed to Nova Scotia and sunk all my subs. The two fleets in European waters consolidated in the Channel.

The US and USSR built.

The Italians took Southern France and Tunisia. I had eyed Gibraltar, but Dan landed British infantry on the UK turn. The Italian Navy swept the British ships from the Med.

And, in a stunning coup, the Italians took Malta. The Italians were mighty proud of pounding the Brits and capturing the island. A C3 success.

The French did not form any Vichy government. Indeed, the Italians need to capture Southern France as part of a bonus IP boost.

Turn 2

Germany took Greece and started shifting forces eastward to deal with the USSR. I sent the Luftwaffe to deal with the British fleet. And here's where the blunder of not knowing about Denmark came back to haunt me. Oh, I sunk the British fleet, but I could have used the firepower and the one hit absorption of the Bismarck in the battle. It would have saved at least one ME-109, if not two.

Germany also took Finland -- this time making sure to incorporate the Finnish army into the Heer.

I lost a transport to a Spitfire -- dumb placement on my part.

Italy pushed ahead, taking Syria, Algeria, and TransJordan. The UK took out Italian East Africa.

The Allies built. The USSR pulled back from the border areas with Germany.

End Turn 3.

Turn 3

This probably should have been the turn to launch Sea Lion, but I was unprepared. No British Navy, but only one transport. And the Luftwaffe was rebuilding.

Italy marched into Morocco, Alexandria, and Iraq --



making sure to incorporate the Iraqi army into the Italian army, and then captured Cairo. Who knew the Italians could be so bold and good? The Med, except for Gibraltar, was an Italian lake. It was the high point of Italian arms.

The British landed in "Pro-Allied" Brazil, absorbing those armies.

Ah, but the Allies were also still building like crazy. Who knew Canada could build aircraft carriers? South Africa turned out tank after tank.

Turn 4

The Germans repositioned units for the expected Allied attacks. I debated attacking the USSR on this turn, but figured I would wait and grab a few extra IPs and reinforce the eastern army. My plan is to goad the Soviets into attacking and then counter-attack.

It didn't quite go that way. The Soviets grabbed Northern Persia. They were joined by one lone British infantry from India that grabbed "Pro-Allied" Persia.

The UK recaptured TransJordan and Cairo.

The US launched Operation Torch and took Morocco. Two US aircraft carriers, a battleship, a cruiser, a destroyer, and four transports made for a nice task group.

Operation Torch on Turn 4.



Victory Conditions

About now I started looking at Victory conditions, thinking I had to stick around for a certain number of turns. Was I wrong! For the Germans to win, I had to take and hold eight cities of 11. What? Eight of 11?

What are these cities? Berlin, Rome, Warsaw, and Paris: Got 'em. Cairo: Can get it back. London, Washington DC, and Ottawa: Not a chance. Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad. Oh...no.

Well, this is a fine kettle of fish.

Turn 5

The Germans advanced into the USSR to put the idea of defend and counterattack into action. The Soviets grabbed Finland rather convincingly. Then they built some more.

The US fleet rolled over the single Italian sub guarding the Med while the Brits and Soviets captured the rest of the Middle East.

The Italians pulled back as best they could, defending Europe as best they could.

End Turn 5.

Turn 6

The Germans sank the Soviet Navy in the Baltic and beefed up where they could. They took a couple USSR areas, but as a whole, Europe seemed rather crowded with Allies. The Brits and US invaded Greece as the US cleared North Africa.

The Soviets captured Norway.

The UK launched D-Day and stormed ashore in Normandy. The entire British Royal Navy was in the Channel again. The one German infantry was swept away.



Then the Italians attacked and recaptured Normandy-Bordeaux.

D-Day. The UK invades Normandy on Turn 6.

Turn 7

The Luftwaffe, along with the remainder of the Kriegsmarine, attacked the British fleet in the Channel and sunk it...again. By now the Channel acquired the nickname Ironbottom Sound...

Not to worry, the German ships were sunk in the Allies' turns.

The Soviets stormed out of Leningrad and destroyed the army in the Baltic States. It wasn't that close. So much for defend and counterattack. Poland was wide open.

Despite the loss of the British Navy, the rebuild rate is tremendous.

At this point, I could see it was pointless, so I conceded.

Thoughts

As each turn is supposed to be 6 months, the end of the seventh turn was the end of 1943. The Soviets were ahead of schedule, the Western Allies about right, although Italy remained in the Axis camp.

End of Turn 7.



Germany really has to think about the first three turns and what to do with the UK. This requires some analysis. I probably overkilled Paris and could siphon some Luftwaffe planes to go after one of the British fleets, probably the Channel one is closer to most planes.

A Sea Lion also needs transports. They have to be built no later than Turn 2.

But even if the UK and Scotland falls, then what? The US has the IPs to build a navy and army and invade the UK instead of Morocco. And probably get tossed out, and probably return.

Which leaves the USSR as the wild card. Germany occupied in the UK leaves the USSR alone and a proper mix of infantry, artillery, and tanks can go a long way to forcing Germany to abandon the UK to defend Berlin.

But that's all speculation after a grand total universe of one game. Like Pacific 1940, there's a lot to think about in these materialschlacht wargames where all units are equal when it comes to tossing dice.

Great game, Dan.

The Allied View: A&A Europe 1940

By Daniel

Russ recently acquired *Axis & Allies Europe 1940* (2nd Edition) and offered to host a Saturday game at his place, which sounded fine to me. I have the 1st Edition and re-acquainted myself with it since it's been more than 10 years since I've played it. Two days before the game I downloaded the 2nd Edition rules and starting set-up to see if there were any significant changes between the 1st and 2nd Editions – and “Yes” there were:

Air Bases allow "scrambling" of FTR and TAC into adjacent sea zones (the airbase does not have to be on an island to use the "scramble" ability).

National Objectives changed for many in a number of ways.

Starting Set-up has a few significant differences, especially for Italy and UK.

Building a Major IC can only be done on a Territory earning at least 3 IPCs.

New AA pieces in each nation's color: each gets up to three (3) “shots” per AA gun at enemy planes (maximum one shot per plane). AA does not shoot at planes that fly over the area they're in. AA fire only at planes in their area for combat. ICs and bases have their own intrinsic AA versus bombing against them.

I saw some new molds for some pieces, which I welcomed. Italy still uses brown pieces, which seem too similar to USSR. (I spray-painted my Italians light gray.)

Russ put an Axis and an Allied marker in each hand and asked me to select. I chose his left hand and became Allies. The player sequence was: Germany, USSR, United States, United Kingdom, Italy, and France.

We went over a number of rules and discussed possible German opening strategies. We agreed that Paris had to be taken (which has slightly less troops at Paris and greater German forces than in 1st Edition), but decisions about what to do with the Royal Navy (and possibly Sea Lion) or preparing for Barbarossa needed to be figured out on Turn 1.

Round 1

What Russ decided on was taking out Yugoslavia as well as France (Paris and Normandy) and gets France's IPCs. The Royal Navy (RN) was ignored, but the U-Boats took out the fleet off Canada. These attacks were all successful. Russ retreated the German fleet into the Baltic (which he did not need to, as the Royal Navy can't move past the Denmark Straits – which I inquired about later when I started my turn as the UK player).

Russ contemplates what to do with Italy. Photo by Dan.



This became a significant error in hindsight as the German fleet was no longer at a Naval Base and unable to participate in the attack against the Royal Navy on Turn 2. Russ built more land and air units for Germany.

The USSR cannot attack anyone until Turn 4, so I pulled back all troops except a token garrison at all the border territories and built Infantry and one Artillery. I entertained moving into Persia until I reminded myself I can't go anywhere until Turn 4.

The United States is in the same situation. The US can “declare war” during IPC collection on Turn 3 (which really means it can't go anywhere until Turn 4). The US builds a destroyer, transports, and some troops to put on them.

The UK has some options, especially since a Turn 2 Sea Lion invasion is not possible. The RN consolidates between Ireland and England, while the RAF takes off to bomb the U-boats out of existence using the destroyer from

Ireland. One U-boat escapes after the destroyer is sunk by a lucky U-Boat. However, the RAF is stuck in Canada and has to re-route back to England via Iceland.

The UK fleet attempts to take out the largest of the Italian fleets, but fails to sink the battleship, losing everything (except the transport left behind below Suez). Troops from India and South Africa start the slow march to the Middle East as the 8th Army consolidates at Cairo (fearing the worst since the fleet is gone). UK builds 2 Armor in South Africa and a fighter in UK and submarine to join the RN.

Italy takes Malta, Southern France, and Tunisia easily as well as Greece – but no activity in the Middle East itself.

France moves what few colonial troops it has to attempt to link up with UK units.

Round 2

The Royal Navy's false sense of security is abruptly shattered by a massive airborne attack by the *Luftwaffe*. Except for two air units that supported the Balkans campaign on Turn 1, everything available is sent. The misplaced *Kriegsmarine* cannot participate, so Herman Goering takes all the credit. The RN is sunk, but there is a lot less *Luftwaffe*. I think it was a good move in spite of the misplacement, but the German fleet needed to participate to spare some losses. The Germans start to take positions on the Eastern Front, but no attacks.

US and USSR continue building up. USSR sends a sizeable force into Karelia.

US adds a battleship, carrier, and planes now that the RN is gone.

Italy attacks in the Middle East and Algeria. Syria & Trans-Jordan captured.

UK takes Italian East Africa and takes back Trans-Jordan.

France has little left.

The War Continues

Germany does not build any transports beyond the one it starts with, so no Sea Lion eminent. Germany invades USSR and takes the three lightly garrisoned USSR areas.

USSR takes Finland and repositions its armies with a strong Leningrad and Ukraine and a mobile reserve near Moscow. A small force enters Persia to deal with Iraq.

Turn 6: Italy recaptures Normandy for the Axis. The Germans sink the British Royal Navy...again.



UK takes back Trans-Jordan. UK has 2 transports operating off east Africa and 1 off West Africa, landing one unit in Brazil to bring Brazil under the UK. Starts building a new fleet off Canada and a fighter in South Africa.

US builds another carrier and planes and other naval units. Doesn't move anywhere but declares war at end of turn.

Italy takes Morocco and takes Cairo and Alexandria, earning Italy 35 IPCs!

Germany makes cautious attacks into central Russia (two infantry and planes). Leningrad and Ukraine were not attacked. Russian forces seemed too strong apparently. I see this as the turning point in the game as Germany is no longer using her might to land a major blow of take an important territory. German fleet is placed between UK and Ireland to prevent RN from being built and U-Boat tried convoy raiding, which does force UK to lose some IPCs. German troops starting to take positions in Western Europe.

USSR takes Norway and one of the two central areas. Attacks Iraq but forced to retreat after atypical 1st round losses. Adds some armor and artillery to its forces for a counterattack.

US takes back Morocco with 4 transports full of troops and a fleet with one battleship and 2 carriers, cruiser and two destroyers.

UK attacks the German fleet with the RAF and a destroyer from Canada in a risky even-up battle, but Russ rolls lots of 6's and the German fleet joins the RN at the bottom of the sea with lighter than expected losses.

UK takes back Cairo with help of transports gathering enough troops to make this happen. UK builds a fighter in South Africa.

Italy's eclipse may be too soon to predict: Italy retakes Cairo and parks a sub near Gibraltar to delay US fleet.

Rounds 5, 6, and 7 continue the slow but certain momentum of the Allies, at which point Russ concedes. The USSR has two armies too large to attack (one being too large to stop from attacking). The US fleet is too big for the Italian Navy to stop. The US can attack with 4 transports in one group and 3 more in another. The UK rebuilt its fleet with a battleship, 3 destroyers, and 5 transports, although Russ eliminates it again with his rebuilt Luftwaffe, showing how much fight is left in the Axis. It would take at least another four to five turns to take Rome and/or Berlin.

Alternate A&A Europe 1940: Set-Up

By Daniel

Russ and I discussed if the turn sequence could be shortened to just "Axis Turn / Allied Turn", which is something I've explored in other A&A games, but it always seemed to impact play balance, especially at the start of the game. It might be worth exploring in this game, with some assets at the start removed and automatically built at the end of the Axis turn (like Italian transports) to avoid some 1st turn play-balance issues.

After the game, I started looking at the differences in starting set-up for each nation between 1st & 2nd Editions:

Italy (1st Ed): 15 Inf, 2 Mech, 3 Art, 3 Tank, 2 Ftr, 0 Strat Bomber, 2 Trans, 0 Sub, 1 DD, 2 CA, 1 BB

Italy (2nd Ed): 17 Inf, 1 Mech, 5 Art, 3 Tank, 2 Ftr, 1 Strat Bomber, 3 Trans, 1 Sub, 2 DD, 2 CA, 1 BB

Germany (1st): 28 Inf, 4 Mech, 7 Art, 8 Tank, 4 Ftr, 3 Tac B, 1 Strat B, 1 Trans, 5 Sub, 1 CA, 1 BB

Germany (2nd): 36 Inf, 4 Mech, 8 Art, 9 Tank, 5 Ftr, 5 Tac B, 2 Strat B, 1 Trans, 5 Sub, 1 CA, 1 BB

USSR (1st): 24 Inf, 2 Mech, 3 Art, 2 Tank, 2 Ftr, 1 Tac B, 1 Trans, 1 Sub, 0 CA, 1 BB

USSR (2nd): 27 Inf, 2 Mech, 3 Art, 2 Tank, 2 Ftr, 1 Tac B, 0 Trans, 2 Sub, 1 CA, 0 BB

UK (1st): 11 Inf, 0 Mech, 3 Art, 3 Tank, 4 Ftr, 1 Tac B, 0 Strat B, 3 Trans, 5 DD, 3 CA, 2 BB, 1 AC

UK (2nd): 16 Inf, 2 Mech, 4 Art, 3 Tank, 5 Ftr, 1 Tac B, 1 Strat B, 3 Trans, 5 DD, 4 CA, 2 BB, 1 AC

France (1st): 14 Inf, 2 Art, 1 Tank, 1 Ftr, 2 DD, 2 CA

France (2nd): 15 Inf, 3 Art, 1 Tank, 2 Ftr, 2 DD, 2 CA

US (1st): 2 Inf, 1 Mech, 1 Art, 1 Tank, 1 Ftr, 1 Strat B, 1 Trans, 1 DD

US (2nd): 2 Inf, 3 Mech, 1 Art, 1 Tank, 1 Ftr, 1 Strat B, 1 Trans, 1 CA

A significant increase for German forces (especially air power).

The Italian increase is modest, but the extra bomber and transport help quite a bit.

The UK also has a significant increase at start (but what's left when they get their first turn is a big question).

Other forces have very minor changes.

There are also some changes in starting positions. The biggest change is UK's "Force H" (1 AC, 1 CA) that started at Gibraltar in 1st Ed but starts by Suez in 2nd Ed.

If I *were* to adapt A&A Europe 1940 to a 3-player sequence (Axis/USSR/Allies), this is how I would adjust the 2nd Edition starting set-up:

Axis & Allies 1940 2nd Edition Set-Up: Modified for 3 player turn sequence: Axis/USSR/Allies

Addition represented by + *unit*.

Reduction represented by ~~unit~~.

Bonus build represented by (unit).

Italy

Starting Income: 10 IPCs

Southern Italy: 6 infantry, 2 AAA, 2 fighter, air base, naval base, minor IC

Northern Italy: 2 infantry, 2 artillery, 1 tank, 2 AAA, ~~1 strategic bomber~~, major IC +1 Tac Bomber

Albania: 2 infantry, 1 tank

Libya: 1 infantry, 1 artillery

Tobruk: 3 infantry, 1 mechanized infantry, 1 artillery, 1 tank

Italian Somaliland: 1 infantry

Ethiopia: 2 infantry, 1 artillery

SZ 95: 1 transport, 1 submarine ~~1 destroyer~~, 1 cruiser

SZ 96: 1 transport, 1 destroyer

SZ 97: ~~1 transport~~, 1 cruiser, 1 battleship

(Bonus builds on Turn 1: 1 artillery, 1 destroyer, 1 transport)

Germany

Starting Income: 30 IPCs

Germany: 11 infantry, 3 artillery, 3 AAA, 1 tactical bomber, 2 strategic bombers, major IC

Western Germany: 3 Inf, 4 mechanized infantry, 1 artillery, 3 AAA, 2 fighters, 3 tactical bombers, air base, naval base, major IC

Denmark: 2 infantry

Norway: 3 infantry, 1 fighter

Holland/Belgium: 4 infantry, 2 artillery, 3 tanks, 1 fighter

Greater Southern Germany: 6 infantry, 2 artillery, 3 tanks

Slovakia/Hungary: 2 infantry, 1 tank, 1 fighter

Romania: 2 infantry, 1 tank

Poland: 3 infantry, 1 tank, 1 tactical bomber

SZ 103: 1 submarine

SZ 108: 1 submarine

SZ 113: 1 battleship

SZ 114: 1 transport, 1 cruiser

SZ 117: 1 submarine

SZ 118: 1 submarine

SZ 124: 1 submarine

Soviet Union

Starting Income: 28 IPCs

Russia: 1 infantry, 1 mechanized infantry, 1 artillery, 1 tank, 2 AAA, 1 fighter, 1 tactical bomber, air base, major IC

Archangel: 1 infantry

Karelia: 2 infantry

Novgorod: 6 infantry, 1 artillery, 2 AAA, 1 fighter, air base, naval base, minor IC +1 Tank

Vyborg: 3 infantry

Baltic States: 3 infantry

Eastern Poland: 2 infantry

Belarus: 1 infantry

Western Ukraine: 1 infantry, 1 artillery

Bessarabia: 2 infantry

Ukraine: 3 infantry, minor IC +1 Mech Inf

Caucasus: 2 infantry

Volgograd: 1 mechanized infantry, 1 tank, minor IC

Smolensk: +1 Mech Inf
SZ 115: 1 submarine, 1 cruiser
SZ 127: 1 submarine

United Kingdom

Starting Income: 29 IPCs

United Kingdom: 2 infantry, 1 mechanized infantry, 4 AAA, 2 fighters, 1 strategic bomber, air base, naval base, major IC +1 Tank, +1 Fighter

France: 1 artillery, ~~1 tank~~ +1 Inf

Scotland: 2 infantry, 1 AAA, 1 fighter, air base

Iceland: air base

Quebec: 1 infantry, 1 tank, minor IC

Ontario: 1 infantry, 1 artillery

New Brunswick/Nova Scotia: naval base

Gibraltar: 1 fighter, naval base

Malta: 1 infantry, 1 AAA, 1 fighter

Alexandria: 2 infantry, 1 artillery, 1 tank

Egypt: 2 infantry, 1 mechanized infantry, 1 artillery, naval base

Anglo-Egyptian Sudan: 1 infantry

Union of South Africa: 2 infantry, naval base, minor IC

West India: 1 infantry

SZ 71 or SZ 81: 1 destroyer, +1 Transport

SZ 86: + 1 Cruiser

SZ 91: 1 cruiser +1 Destroyer, +1 Aircraft Carrier, +1 Tac Bomber, +1 Transport

SZ 98: ~~1 transport, 1 destroyer~~, 1 cruiser, ~~1 aircraft carrier (carrying 1 tactical bomber)~~

SZ 106: 1 transport, 1 destroyer

SZ 109: 1 transport, 1 destroyer

SZ 110: 1 cruiser, 1 battleship, +1 Submarine

SZ 111: 1 destroyer, 1 cruiser, 1 battleship

United States

Starting Income: 35 IPCs

Eastern United States: 1 infantry, 1 artillery, 1 fighter, 2 AAA, air base, naval base, major IC

Central United States: 1 infantry, 3 mechanized infantry, 1 tank, 1 strategic bomber, major IC

SZ 101: 1 transport, 1 cruiser

France

Starting Income: 17 IPCs

France: 6 infantry, 1 artillery, 1 tank, 1 AAA, 1 fighter, air base, major IC, +1 Tactical Bomber

United Kingdom: 2 infantry, ~~1 fighter~~

Normandy/Bordeaux: 1 infantry, 1 artillery, naval base, minor IC

Southern France: 1 infantry, 1 artillery, naval base, minor IC

French West Africa: 1 infantry

Morocco: 1 infantry

Algeria: 1 infantry

Tunisia: 1 infantry

Syria: 1 infantry

SZ 72: 1 destroyer

SZ 93: 1 destroyer, 1 cruiser

SZ 110: 1 cruiser



Middle of Turn 1 with three British amphibious operations – one already successful. Below: Dennis maneuvers the French.

Operation Ironclad: UK Invasion

by Russ Lockwood

One icy afternoon, I ventured out into the tundra to Dennis' to play Decision Games' *Operation Ironclad: Madagascar 1942*, the British invasion of the Vichy French island. This proved just about the perfect magazine game: playable in three hours, relatively straightforward mechanics, and enough chrome to make it thematic.

It's only eight turns long and uses an area map with the areas connected with roads and tracks. The counters are easily readable and on the larger size and the French defensive forces start face down, so the British face a bit of fog of war. Both players gain 1d6 plus held objectives' worth of Logistic Points, which refresh air units and can be used to purchase supplemental forces and specialty markers -- drawn randomly out of an opaque container.

In a clever twist, some of these supplemental counters are unique to each player.

The French Logistic Points (LPs) are 1d6 plus one for every airfield held. As the British capture more and more airfields, the French LPs decrease. Likewise, the British LPs likely increase as the game goes along.

The British have to conquer the French capital and every port and airfield: nine areas in total. If done in four turns or less, it's a strategic UK victory. If done by the eighth turn, it's an operational UK victory. Likewise, if the French eliminate all UK units on the map, it's a strategic French victory. If the UK can't occupy all nine areas by the eighth turn, the French win an operational victory.



British Key

The British key is the Amphibious marker, which allows amphibious invasions of a port area. The UK player has two at start and a third is in the supplemental force, which numbers about a dozen counters. As supplemental counters are drawn randomly, gaining the third Amphibious marker takes a bit of luck.

The first of three amphibious assaults on Turn 1.

As the British start with one random supplemental counter, I was extremely lucky to draw the third Amphibious marker for use on Turn 1. I didn't realize how lucky that was at the time, for it allowed me to invade three ports on Turn 1 instead of two -- helpful in trying to grab seven ports and two inland towns (Capital and airfield) in four or eight turns.

Reinforcements and Withdrawals

A secondary UK aspect concerns a regimental withdrawal (HQ and three battalion counters) at the end of Turn 1 and again at Turn 2 to defend India. That really guts the UK offensive potential -- although the UK receives other ground units as reinforcements. I should add that four odds-shifting aircraft counters are also pulled (the Navy's carrier aircraft) at this critical juncture to defend India.

The French have no withdrawals, but any reinforcements come from the supplemental force.

To the benefit of the UK, British ground units possess two steps and can be refitted back to full strength. The French units have only one step and cannot be reconstituted when eliminated.

Dennis had set up the French and I took the British.



Invasion Madagascar

With three Amphibious markers, I loaded all the lads and invaded three ports. Aircraft, naval gunfire, and marines helped shift the odds in my favor, while towns, entrenchments, and aircraft shifted the odds in the French favor.

Middle of Turn 3. Dennis responds to British invasions.



Some of the supplemental counters are "Ambush," which also shift the odds in favor of the owner.

I successfully eliminated all French in two of the ports, but only managed to retreat the French from the Diego Suarez port. Aha, I had paid for a randomly-drawn supplemental counter, which turned out to be "Exploit," which gave me a follow-up second attack against the retreating French. I was successful in eliminating them now that they didn't get odds shifts from the town and entrenchment.

At the end of the UK Turn 1, I had captured three of the nine objectives.

The French consolidated and bought supplemental counters and so repositioned some troops.

Then one of my regiments withdrew.

Turn 2

I spent LPs for three garrison troops, for any area without UK troop counters automatically reverted to French control. I dropped them on the captured ports. I spent LPs for entrenchments for the three ports as well as a few supplemental counters.

Then, two more Amphibious Assaults were sent against two more ports. Alas, only two of the three were captured -- the second was repulsed due to a D1 result on the CRT. The French lost a unit, but the other troops were not eliminated or retreated. Back those lads went to East Africa.

Still, four of nine areas were in my hands after Turn 2. The downside was the withdrawal of the carrier and four aircraft, a regiment, and an Amphibious marker.

Turn 3

I tried again with two Amphibious attacks and a drive up the road towards the inland airfield. The inland attack succeeded and one of the two Amphibious attacks captured a port. At the end of the turn, I had six of the nine areas.

Dennis mounted an attack on the inland airfield, including using the guerrilla counter to surround my force, but my lads saw them off.

Turn 4

So, I puzzled and puzzled and puzzled about how I was going to capture the last three objectives for the strategic victory. The two ports were doable, but I didn't have enough troops to really press the issue.

I was about to give up the effort, when I read that UK reinforcements landed at a UK-held port could move and attack. Oh-ho! I had a regiment coming in and I had luckily bought a Free-French marine unit. The two ports were doable, but the Capital was just inside the realm of doable.

And by just inside, I meant a long-shot one-in-six roll on the 50% to 99% CRT column. Why percentages are used is beyond me: 50 years of "something to 1" odds or the flip side "one to something" is well ingrained, but percentages seem to me just convoluted.

Anyway, it seemed the only finagling of forces to even get that long shot. A really bad roll (two-in-six-chance) could cripple the Brits.

No guts, no glory!

The two ports were taken, but I did indeed roll the two-in-six-chance and took two step losses and retreated. That left the airfield vacant and Dennis rolled right in. Now I only had seven of the nine and both the inland Capital and the airfield areas were filled with French troops.

Well, that was a British fiasco, but the one-in-six chance of a strategic victory was worth it.

Turns 5 through 8

I repositioned forces and began picking off the French units outside those two inland areas. I bought a lot of supplemental counters, but found most unneeded. For example, I had



three Forced March markers at the end of the game. This was not extra Movement Points, but allowed troops entering a terrain area (like Jungle) that stopped movement to ignore the stop effect. That's great, but it wasn't a double move or anything like that.

I conceded on Turn 7. I just couldn't get enough troops repositioned and massed to take both inland spaces. One, yes, but not both. Well, I suppose that would depend on the low-odds die roll of the first. I had an Exploit marker to allow me to roll into a second attack, but Dennis was holding odds-shifting markers for the last attack on the Capital.

A Not-So-Odd Question

The one question we had concerned when the odds shifting and the maximum 7:1 odds takes place. Two sentences threw us, and we came up with four possible interpretations. Here's the question I posted on BGG and the answer from designer Joe Miranda.

Played the first game and had a question about when to apply column Shifts:

18 British factors with two shifts (aircraft) against 2 French factors with three shifts (two aircraft and an entrenchment). So, odds start at a 9 to 1. Which procedure is correct?

Is it A: 9:1 gets two British shifts to 11:1, but three French shifts down to 8:1. As the CRT only goes to 7:1, the combat uses the CRT maximum 7:1 column *OR*

Is it B: 9:1 gets two British shifts to 11:1, which is dropped to CRT maximum 7:1 and then the three French shifts drop it to the 4:1. column *OR*

Is it C : The two British column shifts and the three French shifts equal one French shift, which drops the 9:1 to 8:1, which is resolved on the CRT maximum 7:1 column *OR*

Is it D : The two British column shifts and the three French shifts equal one French shift. The 9:1 is reduced to CRT maximum 7:1 and then the French shift is applied to make the combat use the 6:1 column.
OR something else we hadn't considered?

The answer was: D.

So, aside from that odds shift question, the rules are pretty clean.

Had I not tried to go for that one-in-six-chance of a strategic victory and instead played conservatively, it is far likelier that the British would have been able to hold onto the airfield and mount a good-odds attack on the capital in a turn or two for the win.

Remember, I had a big advantage by pulling the third Amphibious marker. Without it, a UK strategic victory seems rather difficult -- although Dennis noted that in his solo testing, he dove for the two inland objective areas from the outset and would leave the ports for last. That's a strategy to try next time.

Martial Madagascar: Another Ironclad

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud came over and I set up the Madagascar game *Operation Ironclad*. This time, I chose French and let him take the British. It's almost a solitaire game because the French generally stay on defense -- but a sharp counter-attack or two does help.

The game progressed more or less as the game with Dennis. The difference was that he didn't have the third Amphibious Marker at the start and he had a run of bad luck when it came to invasion: five of them were turned back. He also suffered two interior repulses. Each failure to land helps the French delay the inevitable. By the time the eighth game turn rolled around, he had no chance of conquering the two interior victory areas.

Thoughts

As Dennis noted, the British may need to head inland quick to take the capital and the airfield areas in the try for the strategic victory. If the British nibble around the edges, time flies and not enough troops will be available to garrison the ports and hit the two interior areas.



Alien Ambush: Xenomorph Bait

by Russ Lockwood

Vasquez, Wierbowski, Apone, and Hudson led the way onto the SpaceShip *Deckard*, with Ripley, Bishop the Android, and Burke the corporate overseer just behind. The other five soldiers waited at the airlock, ready to come in.

The inner door opened and Vasquez, Wierbowski, and Apone entered the corridor, followed by Ripley and Bishop. That's when a pair of Xenomorphs dropped from the ceiling in ambush. Despite more soldiers entering the corridor, it was all over in seconds.

The Deckard. I entered in the upper right corner.

RUSE Test

This was a test of the *RUSE* system in a confined space. The field of play was a spaceship kit of heavy lidless cardboard boxes, wonderfully printed with sci-fi decor and a square grid and populated with a variety of computer consoles, barrels, and other gizmos.

The figures came from *Alien*, a game with the bases helpfully ID'd with the name of the human characters and a variety of xenomorphs.

As with the *Star Wars* game, we used die rolling to determine actions. Here's where some of the mechanics of wide open terrain didn't work as well in enclosed spaces.



For example, the usual open spaces allowed melee within 3 inches, so the minimum range for most weapons in the test started at 3 squares. In the corridor, it was hard to get a shot off since the Xenomorphs had all the humans packed into one end. No minimum, no shot.

Part of the team sent to explore the Deckard.

Terror Bonus

This test also had a Terror trait, which basically made a defense die roll maximum of 4. The Aliens tossed three or four dice in the attack, so it was a 50-50 chance of a hit, but any hit was a kill. Worse, a successful kill generated a breakthrough move. Hence, the two Xenomorphs rolled over the first four characters in the corridor and the remaining humans were too close to fire at them.

We considered a few tactics within the system that might alleviate such limits, along with a few changes to the mechanics to better replicate a spaceship crawl, or if using medieval or fantasy figures, a dungeon crawl.

Ripley and the corporate stooge face the only two Aliens encountered. Red dots are dead figures. I never got past this first room.



Alien Bug Hunt: More Xenomorphs

by Russ Lockwood

Out came *Alien Bug Hunt*, a game of exploration and extermination for one to four players. Four human Corporation Marines -- don't call them Space Marines as GW will have a fit -- pop over to board a derelict spaceship made up of 30 square tiles: a 5 x 6 grid. All the tiles are face down.

Who knows what Renaud will randomly draw?

Each player has a plastic figure, who is a Fire Team leader, and a card on a Fire Team dashboard. Two other Marines are with him, but they are only cards on the dashboard. Sheesh. The company couldn't spring for eight more plastic figures in the box?

A small card deck is made up on three cards per player, two Alien cards, and a Marine Wild Card. Player cards provide up to 3 movement points for a Marine to explore the ship, turning over a tile when entering, and one action -- shoot, burrow through a barrier, reload, or pick up an objective marker.

As you flip over the tiles, most are nothing but empty corridors, but some have one to three xenomorphs and some have xenomorphs and an objective marker.



Xenomorph Power

The xenomorphs in this game are d6 dice (Dice? Really? Why not tiny xenomorphs?) with four blank sides, one survival side, and one inflict a wound on a Marine side. When you shoot, you roll one die per xenomorph. A blank side kills one xenomorph. Survival sides allow the xenomorph to live in the square. Wounds make you pull a wound marker from a pile of face down wound markers to give to the lead Marine.

Our ship docks. Our teams enter from Sector 3.

The majority are simply one wound, but if you pile four of them on a card, the fifth one kills the character. Sometimes, you pull a wound counter that has KIA on it -- instant death.

Back at the deck, when you flip over a xenomorph card, a marker is moved up a nine-spot track. Six of the spaces are no effect. Three of the nine spaces send xenomorphs heading to the nearest player or onto the shuttle. When they climb aboard the shuttle, you remove one of the 30 dice. When all 30 dice are gone, the game is over. That's the clock mechanism.

Renaud swapped out the game figures and cardboard counters for better-looking figures.

Mission Balance of Power

Nine objective markers are hidden in the 30-tile ship. Each time you find one, you place it on a mission card. Put three on a card and complete the mission, which usually gives you some benefit -- free actions or skip a xenomorph turn, or some such. Complete all three and get back on the ship and win the game.

Not mentioned is what happens when you show up on base with a few xenomorphs hanging onto the shuttle. Don't think too hard, just go with the flow.

Game The First

Boy, this seemed too easy. And well it should. We didn't quite follow the rules as we missed a few nuances.

First of all, we only put one xenomorph card in the deck. That meant while we zipped around chopping up xenomorphs with our guns, the xenomorphs stood pretty still with signs around their necks: "Just Shoot Me."



The deck should have started with two xenomorph activation cards.

Furthermore, when the xenomorph card was flipped up, we did advance the marker and when we hit the ninth space, we did, as the rules say, to start back on space 1. What we didn't do is add another xenomorph card to the deck.

We also ignored the Tracking card draw, which places lots of xenomorphs on the tiles.

So, as Renaud joked, this was a training exercise.

Game The Second

Well, this was a turnaround. We entered the ship and flipped over the tiles and still did great shooting, but the number of xenomorphs multiplied and multiplied.

Once we actually played the rules as written, the mission became far more difficult.

First one Marine and then another fell, either by the accumulation of wounds or the KIA marker draw.

Renaud was down to his main character and he fell. I also soon succumbed to the relentless Alien wounds.

This was a much better game. I believe we had completed two missions and just started on the third, so a nice balance. So close!

I suggested that next time we start at the far row and work back to the ship rather instead of starting at the near row and working far away.

Also, in the first game we had better mission completion benefits than the second -- luck of the mission card draw, that.

Thoughts

We eventually used the plastic minis from the spaceship crawl for our player characters and the xenomorphs. They looked better. Then when xenomorphs arrived, we used the plastic figures, not dice. Oh, we still rolled, but everything looked better.

My main man finally succumbs.

As there were only two of us, the initial deck make up was six player cards, one Wild Card player card, and two xenomorph cards. As the game progressed, the extra xenomorph cards added into the deck became a bigger and bigger factor. That's quite a nice mechanic to prod the players into separating to cover more ground before the xenomorphs overrun everything. The Tracking cards put lots more xenomorphs in play.

Nice game. Nice tension. Thanks, Renaud.





My reserve preps to move left as my front-line troops take cover. The higher the number, the better.

Ready, Aim, Fire: *Point Blank*

by Russ Lockwood

A while back, Dan and I played a card game called *Up Front*, which is a 1980's skirmish-level WWII game. The cards were soldiers, equipment, and terrain played out on a gridded mat. It was OK, although the *Squad Leader* wargame or *Chain of Command* miniatures game would be my preference.

Our troop cards deploy face down on the gridded mat. They would soon be joined by terrain cards.

Enter *Point Black: V for Victory*, a recent skirmish-level WWII card game played on a grid that harkens back to *Up Front*. Big cards are troops and terrain and the small cards are equipment and leaders. Everything has a point value (DYO in the game's vernacular) and Renaud suggested 50 points per side.

By random roll, I was the Germans and Renaud the Americans in Normandy. I looked over the cards and selected three squads of regular soldaten, one squad of second-rate soldaten (trainees?), two MG-42 MGs, a Panzerschrek, and a NCO named Berauer or something like that. That was 50 points exactly.

Renaud selected three squads of the 82nd Airborne, one Jeep with 50cal MG, and one 60mm mortar. We drew random terrain cards and lined up four sectors (rectangles) apart.



Command and Control

Each of received five Action cards. These have an icon on them. You play such a card on a sector: troops with that icon activate that icon. Not all icons are available on all troop cards. Some Action cards have two icons -- more's the better.

Sample action card.

Actions such as moving, shooting, and assaulting generate a fatigue on the troop card. When you get two fatigue, the squad functions but at diminished capability. When you get three fatigue, the squad becomes Spent .

The helmet icon removes one fatigue, or you can discard any Action card to remove one fatigue from one squad.



Shooting

When you play an Action card with a shooting icon, one sector's worth of troops, including any support weapons such as MGs, with a firing icon now shoots at the enemy.

Sample Troop card.

First, check the range on all cards: Straight ahead is 1 per sector and to the side is 2 per sector. You never fire diagonally, only orthogonally, although you may combine row and column sectors.

Then check Line of Sight: This is a bit convoluted, but the examples are clear enough for most gamers to figure out.

Pick a lead squad (and support weapons) to fire. Any other squads and weaponry in the sector adds half the attack factors (rounded up).

Add up all the attack factors plus the result of a 1d6 roll to get the attack total.

The defender totals the terrain factor (cover), +2 for concealment (i.e. not spotted), plus 1d6.

If the attack factors are greater than the defense factors, the attacker scored a hit. The difference is added to a 1d6 damage roll. If the attacker's result is greater than the morale value of the target, the target is Shaken (virtually useless until rallied). Worse results occur at 2x (Shaken and step loss) and 3x (eliminated). Two Shakens equal a step loss -- a full squad is replaced by a half squad. A half squad is eliminated.

This is just the infantry being targeted. Tanks and other AFVs use a different procedure.



Moving

This is a two-turn process. You play a move Action card and place a move token and a fatigue on the squad to move. At the start of the next turn, you actually move the squad.

A move can be into a new sector, or, within the existing sector to change the terrain card in the sector. Note that after you move, you may play an Action card.

Action Deck

Note that when I say 1d6 roll, you draw a card from the Action deck -- for all Action cards have a die icon showing from one to six pips. This is your die roll. You don't actually roll dice.

If you need 2d6, you draw two cards and add the die icons together.

This deck also serves as a game clock. When the deck is empty, the turn is over. I suppose you can roll actual dice, but you have to remember to discard a card or two cards when you do.

Other

We never got to an actual assault, although Renaud moved up a squad with the idea of trying.

The game has a lot more options than this 30-second overview. If interested, view the core rules online:

Game On

Well, we set up and started the learning game. No objectives, just carnage.

It was fast and furious...not. Granted, this was a brand new rules set and we were constantly consulting the rules to see how mechanics worked.

On the plus side, the mechanics hold together well. There is a logic to the rules and game play, which we really only lightly touched, can get rather nuanced judging by the cards.

The end of the third turn. The face down cards have not yet been spotted by the enemy.



On the minus side, it takes a lot of card play to do anything. Part of that was identifying the icons and then re-reading the associated mechanic. We played faster through the second turn versus the first. Like any new game, I can only expect to get faster with multiple playings.

We played two turns (ran through the Action deck twice) in about three to three and a half hours. We may not have understood everything at first, and made decisions that needed revising as we read through the rules, but like I said, we got faster

The Game

My three-sector wide line sported a stone wall (left), stone building (middle), and wood building (right) a nice selection of terrain. I started one squad in each and put the second-rate squad with the NCO and panzerschrek in the middle sector behind the stone building. MGs were with the squads in the stone wall and stone building.

End game.

Renaud started his forces in clear terrain half an airborne squad and jeep opposite my stone wall, full airborne squad with BAR



and 60mm mortar in woods in the middle, and another full airborne squad with BAR in woods opposite my woods on my right. The opposing lines were four sectors apart.

Action started on my left as the Jeep opened fire, mostly ineffective, on my troops behind the stone wall. The mortar chimed in and dealt some shaken results, which I eventually cleared.

I replied with MG 42 fire to some effect, eventually eliminating the American half squad and driving the jeep to flee, where it promptly got bogged down in a marsh.

Meanwhile, terrain cards were played, creating some blocking terrain in the middle -- for both sides.

I tried to swing my reserve to the left and get behind the stone wall. Movement takes a long time. You have to think ahead. Even with a NCO prodding movement, it's a two-turn endeavor: one turn to prep and the next turn to actually move. But when a squad moves, it gets a fatigue, which takes another action to clear.

Next Deck

We kept firing and mostly missing, although some shots generated a Shaken marker. Removing it proved difficult, especially for my NCO. Each attempt is an Action card play and a 2d6 die roll to roll (er, draw two cards) a 6 or under. NCO 'Stonewall' Berauer failed many, many times. Indeed, we were about to end the game as the deck was down to the last card when I insisted we play one more card -- my Rally so I could say he finally got un-Shaken. Silly me, his two-card draw failed again. I noted "There cowers Berauer like a stone wall. Rally behind the Swabians, because this NCO suffers from the thousand-yard stare."

The German squad made it, causing problems to Allied sectors and eventually moved over into woods to concentrate fire on one Allied sector.

The second run through the deck ended and I'd call it a slight German victory. One Allied squad had been reduced to half and a half squad had been eliminated. The jeep was still stuck in the mire. One German squad was reduced to half and the NCO was shaking in his boots.

It's an interesting layered card game, and we certainly played faster the more we played, but it's pace of action on the tabletop needs to pick up. Oh, we learned how to use the mechanics, but needing cards for everything slowed the movement and firing of the units. Can't I just toss a die?

Anyway, good to try a new game and you can't argue with the portability of a card game. Thanks, Renaud.

Bigger Points: *Point Blank*

by Renaud

Jerry and I set up a larger *Point Blank* game and got through part of the second turn of a "historical" scenario. Jerry had the US while I had the Germans. Jerry was on the offense.

The bigger game.

Jerry fielded three leaders including a captain, three M-10 tank destroyers, and nine infantry squads. I had two lieutenants, one Tiger I tank, one Pz III tanks, and five infantry squads including two PanzerFaust 30s.

When we ended, my two PanzerFaust squads eliminated two M-10s, but my Tiger failed to hit the 3rd one (on the flank). Jerry also lost half a squad, while I had lost 1 squad.



Mars Needs Women: GIs vs Martians

by Russ Lockwood

On the spur of the moment, Renaud set up a *RUSE* scenario where Martians landed and the Americans sent troops to find out why the Martians were bar-b-queing live cows on the farm. The 25mm Martian figures came from the *Mars Attacks* game. You've seen the US WWII troops and Sherman tank before. The Martians had to grab the flaming cows and put them in the spaceship. The US troops had to stop them.

Dawn finds the Martian spaceship on the ground and Renaud marshalling a US squad and tank.



The Martians fielded General Tor the Mighty, five Martian soldiers (one armed with a Freeze Raygun), five Martian Stealth Marines (one armed with a sniper laser), and one mini-saucer armed with two Heat Rays. The Stealth Marines started anywhere on the board 12 inches away from any US troop. The mini-saucer started off board and needed a die roll to get on.

The 16 US troops included two-man LMG team, two-man mortar team, two-man bazooka team, one sniper, one NCO with SMG, one BAR man, and the rest with M1s. The Sherman tank was a typical Sherman tank with 75mm main gun, coax MG, hull MG, and pintle-mounted MG (which needed a crewman to be outside the turret and hull to fire). The tank and bazooka team started off board.

Slight Command and Control Change

When we used *RUSE* for the *Star Wars* scenario, Renaud tried d6 for actions, but about a third of the troops never moved. This time, he simplified it to Defensive Action, Hold Action (fire, dig in, overwatch, rally, etc), and Offensive Action. This went much smoother and all the figures usually did something in a turn.

There's more to it, but much better.

Boogie Woogie Martian Men of Company C

The Martian troops started around the flying saucer along with the General. The US troops were across the farm fields. The firing started early, but some miserable firing rolls -- or I suppose you can look at it as great defensive rolls -- prevented either of us from hitting. That soon changed as we exchanged shots with ever increasing lethality.

Two Stealth Marines charge into melee. One was successful in taking out three GIs, but the other quickly fell to the GIs. A blue ring means the character already rolled and failed Hero status.

I placed my Stealth Marine sniper in the top floor of the house, where he took shots at anything he could see. He eventually hit, too.

I placed a pair of Stealth Marines on my left flank and discovered that most did not



have ranged weapons, but they all had knives. Uh-oh. Two did have laser pistols and I set them out. They gunned down an advancing GI.

The Americans were having none of that. One was gunned down immediately. The Other took longer to slaughter.

I placed two more Stealth Marines, knives only, behind trees on the lane. I charged down the lane to melee two US soldiers, who were reinforced by two of their buddies.

My first Martian Marine, Private Snorp, evaded defensive fire, "First Strike" in the vernacular of RUSE, to stab one GI and then the other. General Tor the Mighty gave a three-fingered salute to indicate his approval. Alas, Private Plarczik was less effective at bringing a knife to a gun fight. First Strike took care of him before he could raise his blade. Before Snorp could move again, he was gunned down by other GIs. Alas, poor Snorp, we knew thee not at all.

The GI sniper, named Harold, gunned down a Martian soldier and became inspired (die roll). He became a hero. None of the other GIs did, but Harold the Hero bounded over the fence and advanced on the Martians along with the BAR man and eventually the LMG team.

An advancing Martian disintegrated the BAR man.

The mini-saucer arrive and fails to hit the LMGs.

Spiders of Mars

The mini-saucer wove a trail of destruction across the landscape, its twin Heat Rays burning up the landscape. However, when it came time to burn the LMG team, Pilot Orsplatz couldn't hit the broad side of short side of a LMG team. It hovered looking for another chance.

It never got it. The Sherman roared onto the farm, turned the turret and blasted the mini-saucer to the ground with its first shot.

Venus and Mars are Alright Tonight

The Freeze RayGun-armed Martian fired and hit Harold the Hero. Ol' Harold wasn't hurt, but he froze in place and would not thaw until the end of the round. Another Martian trooper fired on the LMG team and did some damage, but not enough.

As soon as the Sherman tank arrived, it nailed the mini-saucer.

No, that honor went to the three cows, named Mercury, Venus, and Mars. They were cooking away under as fire roared on their back. They ran one way and then the other. And then the luck of the Martians shined through -- the cows stampeded straight at the LMG team.

First Strike took out Mercury the cow, but Venus and Mars trampled the LMG team, hooves crunching bones and splattering internal organs. One of the team was dead and the other just about dead. The cows just missed trampling Harold the sniper and ended their day heading towards another GI, which was fortunately on the other side of a fence.

General Tor advanced into he field, covered by a Martian soldier, who was gunned down in the process of shooting up GIs. Tor realized his raid was failing, so he inspired his soldiers with his mighty battle cry "Blipplesnortz! Blipplesnortz!"

He charged the LMG, for Tor only had knives, not guns. It was



a smart charge, for the half dead LMG gunner was in shock from the cow damage. Tor made quick work of him. That triggered Bloodlust and the nearest enemy was the frozen sniper. Dead meat! Tor whirled to face the tank.

Until the Cows Come Home

Technically, the cows were home, but losses triggered what is basically a morale check. The Martians passed the first one, but subsequent losses triggered another and Tor the Mighty failed. Yet the GIs had their first check and they failed too, but not by as much, and they had a tank and the Martians didn't have anything that could really stop it. So, we declared the GIs the victors as both withdrew. The Martians fled to their saucer and took off. The GIs gathered and assessed what they had seen and fought. Dead Martians would be taken for an alien autopsy. The cows would be put out of their misery and served for dinner.

Cows stampede randomly – in this case, right over the LMG team.



The revised Command and Control mechanic worked well for this skirmish game. *RUSE* continues to offer challenges and opportunities for both sides.

Nice on the fly scenario, Renaud!

Psycho Killer: Run, Run, Away

by Russ Lockwood

I received the *Psycho Killer* card game at Xmas, and it has nothing to do with the Talking Heads other than to induce me to sing the song for a few days. Damned earbug!

No, this is a take on classic horror movies where a psycho killer stalks the players. In a twist, you start the game with no cards in your hand and draw a card at the *END* of your turn.

As your hand grows, you draw (or are given by other players) weapon cards. When a Psycho Killer card pops out, it's immediately played and you place all your weapon cards and the Psycho Killer card in front of you. If you have 10 or more points, you are "left for dead" and somewhat limited in what you can do.

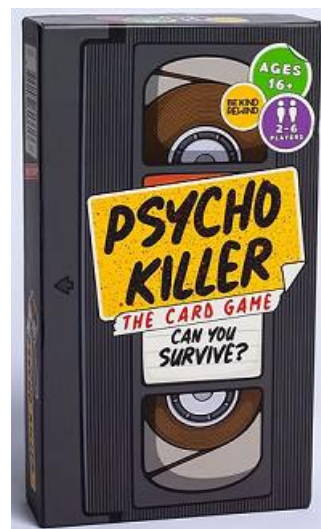
As you can imagine, you try to accumulate safe cards and send of weapon cards to other players.

Sad to say, this isn't much of a two-player game, except as a way of learning the rules.

Renaud took it up to another gaming group and played with four -- a much better option, he reported. It's designed for two to six players.

Right: Two PK cards trigger my weapon cards.

Far Right: Renaud considers his cards.



Dice Masters: Dungeons & Dragons

By Daniel

WizKids expanded their *Dice Masters* game system into the *D&D* world in 2015 with several expansions released through 2020. I've played *Dungeons & Dragons* since 1979 (when *Supplement II: Blackmoor* was released) but stopped in the 1990s – but this prompted me to look into *Dice Masters D&D* as a “fast” means of reliving *D&D* adventures without hours of roleplaying.

Game 1: Russ committing an Orc to attack.
Photo by Dan.

It caught on with my gaming group after I introduced some “home rules.”

1. “Character dice” are sub-divided into “Adventurers” and “Monsters.”
2. NPC dice are sub-divided into “NPCs” (white dice) and “Minions” (black dice).
3. Active Adventurers and NPC dice can only be blocked by active Monsters and Minions.
4. Active Monsters and Minion dice can only be blocked by active Adventurers/NPC dice.
5. Unblocked Adventurers/NPCs score “Glory Points” and 20+ wins the adventure.
6. Unblocked Monsters/Minions reduce “Resolve” (Life). Starts at 20. Down to zero loses the adventure.
7. Winning an Adventure gains a Treasure die/card.



Customized Functional Playmat

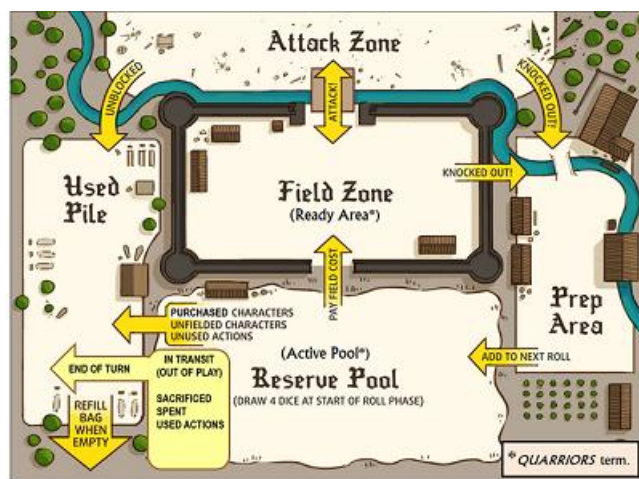
I customized a playmat from one I found on BGG. We haven't played *Dice Masters* since 2020-2021, so when Russ was coming over and did not have any game in mind, I resurrected this one.

Concepts

Dice Masters is similar to a “deck-building” card game, but uses dice instead of cards. Both players start with the same number and type of dice, but try to improve this dice pool by purchasing new dice.

As dice are drawn, when the dice bag is empty, all the dice in the “Used Pile” on the playmat are recycled into the player's dice bag -- including the newly purchased dice. So, strategies that cycle through the dice bag faster, moving dice from the bag or “Used Pile” to the “Prep Area,” or removing weaker dice from the bag are viable.

The big change of my house rules from the standard game is that players assume dual roles: Instead of the player's Adventurers and Monsters “cooperating” as one force (meaning the Adventurer dice and Monster dice fight



LIFE: 1 • 2 • 3 • 4 • 5 • 6 • 7 • 8 • 9 • 10 • 11 • 12 • 13 • 14 • 15 • 16 • 17 • 18 • 19 • 20
Customized Functional Playmat

together), the player must organize a separate force of Adventurers to venture into the opponent's "dungeon" and must "populate" his own dungeon with Monsters and minions.

If a player's Resolve, which starts at 20, is reduced to zero or less, he abandons the quest and the opposing player wins. If a player scores 20 Glory Points first, he wins.

Sample die. Sample card.



Mechanics

Each player starts with eight dice (five NPC dice and three Minion dice) in his dice bag and a total of 10 dice distributed among their group of four Adventurers (3,3,2,2). A total of 20 Monster dice are available on six cards that anyone can purchase from, as well as 12 Action dice on four Action cards.

Each player starts his turn by drawing four dice randomly from a dice bag and rolls them. Each rolled die will display either an Energy face or a character face. Energy is used to either "field" other dice displaying a character face (bring into play) or purchase new dice to add to your pool of dice. Dice used to generate Energy are "spent" and moved to the "Used Pile."

Dice brought into play may activate "Fielding" abilities described on the card corresponding to each die. The fielded dice are now "active" (meaning it can be used to attack or block). "Action" dice that roll an "effect" are brought into play and can be used later for their active ability or "equip" an active character die.

Russ' cards.

Attack and Defense

After "Fielding" dice and/or purchasing new dice, the player may choose to attack with any of his active dice. He selects any number of attackers (even dice just fielded this turn) and moves them to the Attack Zone. Adventures/Characters attack to score "Glory Points" while Monsters attack to reduce an opponent's "Resolve" (loss of life). After you declare all attackers, apply any effects that happen due to characters attacking.

Dan's cards.

The opposing player assigns blockers, moving them into the Attack Zone and assigning each one to block a specific attacker. As noted before, my house rule is that only Monsters/Minions can block your attacking Adventurers/NPCs and only Adventurers/NPCs can block your attacking Monsters/Minions. The opponent may block with all, some, or none of the appropriate dice.

A single blocker can only block one attacking character -- it can't block more than one. However, more than one blocker may be assigned to block a single attacker. After all blockers are declared, apply any effects that take place due to blocking or being blocked. As is the case with all ties, the attacker resolves first, then the defender.



Each attack die inflicts its Attack Value on the opponent's die or dice assigned to block it (and vice versa). Damage is done simultaneously. Attackers may assign damage as they choose if multiple blockers were assigned to an attacking dice. Once all damage has been assigned, “knock out” (KO) each character die that took damage equal to or greater than its Defense rating. When a character is KO'ed, move it to that player's Prep Area. Dice that received non-lethal damage survive and return to the Field Zone.

The monsters in the common pile available to be bought by all players.

Unblocked Attacking Adventurer dice score Glory Points equal to their Attack Value, then go to the Used Pile. Unblocked Attacking Monster dice deduct Resolve (Life) equal to their Attack Value from the opposing player, then go to the Used Pile.



Our Trio of Adventures

Since Russ and I haven't played in years, I kept the scenario very basic with minimal amount of keywords, Global Effects, and few special abilities to track. Russ' main Adventurer, Sir Errol, was customized for a former D&D character he played. My main Adventurer, Spy, was customized from my first D&D character.

Game 1

Both of us took our time to purchase dice the first few turns, adding our main Adventurers and secondary adventurers, but I purchased Trolls and Giant Spiders as well, while Russ purchased a Werewolf and some Orcs. My monsters did not show up for a while, so when Russ fielded his Adventurers, I either had no monsters or minions or perhaps only one minion, so Russ scored Glory points early. Once my Monsters showed up, Russ had no Adventurers in play (because they all attacked and scored during his turn), so I attacked and reduced his Resolve.

We started considering leaving dice to “hold the fort” to stop or reduce attacks. Then we started looking at Action dice or our Adventurers to see if there were any abilities that could impact what looked to be a stalemate. I had a Bard that could “spin up” an Adventurer (change the die to the next strongest face) and the Troll can also “spin up” itself at the start of a turn. Those abilities allowed my dice to reach their strongest face for an attack or block.

Once I had two Trolls and a Giant Spider in play, I would attack with the Trolls, forcing Russ to block or allow me through. He always seemed to have some NPCs or other fodder to block, but eventually, his rolls didn't replace the ones KO'd the previous turn, so a Troll or a Giant Spider would score and then go to the “Used Pile”.

It became a race between Russ winning or Russ losing, but I managed to reduce his Resolve to zero before he reached 20 Glory.

Game 2

After refreshing our memories on the mechanics, I added a random treasure for each of us. I got a Ring of Regeneration and Russ got a Resolve enchantment. The Resolve enchantment definitely influenced our next two games, as it could reduce a Monster's damage by 4.

Russ' second purchase was the Resolve die and as soon as it recycled into his bag, he drew it and rolled its ability.

That shifted my focus from Monsters to Adventurers. I still purchased a Monster to defend against Russ' Adventurers, but it took a while to recycle and then I would not attack with it, using my Adventurers only.

That accelerated the game as it became a race to see who would reach 20 Glory first. Russ took advantage of my absence of monsters and minions, scoring early and often, but I was catching up and got to 17 when Russ was at 19.

Now the game could end on any turn and Russ went next. He did draw an Adventurer, the Elf Wizard, but rolled its weakest face (0-2) and did not have his Blessing Action die in play (adds +1 Attack/+1 Defense), so had no means to score 1 Glory, even with no monsters or minions defending. He even failed to roll a NPC minion, despite being able to reroll a pair of dice with a 50% probability of rolling a minion.

The opportunity passed, and I drew an Adventurer and NPC and successfully fielded them and attacked to score four Glory Points for the win.

Game 3

This started almost identical to Game 2 with Russ purchasing and recycling his Resolve enchantment very quickly, prompting me to pursue the same strategy. This game was even faster than the second and I reached 20 Glory when Russ was at 15.

Thank you for the games, Russ. It was nice to play this again after several years.

Dice Masters: A Kinder D&D

by Russ Lockwood

Dan's done a great job explaining how the dice game works, including his house rules, and the three games we played. The original rules allowed attacks and blocks by any die, so his house rules are thematic changes.

I have little to add. I will say this is a kinder, gentler idea of *Dungeons and Dragons (D&D)* gaming. In *D&D*, every adventurer, monster, and NPC possesses health points (HP). You kill off all of the above once hits equal or exceed HPs -- although there are a number of saving die rolls that delay the ultimate demise and wizards have special spells that cheat death.

Dan considers buying a special card (left). The common monsters are between our playmats.

In *Dice Masters*, you have Resolve, not HP, so when damage becomes equal to or greater than the 20 Resolve Points, the party abandons the quest and goes home.

Furthermore, individual dice are almost never killed off (removed from the game). Instead, they are temporarily "knocked out" and returned to the game the next turn. However, since 50% of each die's faces are energy (resources), it's a bit random what comes back from the non-great beyond.

That said, it's an odd mechanic that multiple defenders can gang up on a single attacker, but multiple attackers cannot gang up against a single defender. I suppose you can always implement a house rule.

As you can tell from my *D&D* RPG write-ups about the adventures of Tazan Rell, you can play many, many *Dice Masters* games in the time it takes for one *D&D* adventure. We completed three *Dice Masters* games in about two to two and a half hours -- and there's never a dull moment trying to figure out attacks and defenses.

The second game proved the most exciting, when I had a chance to win it and managed to roll everything except a single-point adventurer or minion to take me from 19 Glory Points to a game-winning 20. Arghhh!

Alas, Dan had no problem tacking on enough Glory Points to exceed 20 for the win. It just goes to show you that anything can happen when you roll dice.



Transformers: Risk Averse

by Russ Lockwood

I cracked the shrinkwrap on another game: *Transformers Risk*. If it seems like I'm cracking a lot of shrinkwrap these days, you're right. I'm trying to get "new" board wargames on my tabletop.

Now, I'm not a *Transformers* fan. I never connected with the 1980s cartoon and the movies, while amusing at times, seemed odd that few of the main robots ever were destroyed. Oh, Optimus Prime seemed to die, but like ET, he sparked back to life. But I bought the *Risk* variant figuring it might be amusing.

In any case, I laid out the board and Renaud (Autobots) and I (Decepticons) plopped down our robots and main character on the areas.

Renaud considers placement of his reinforcements.

Differences

Combat-wise, the game uses the same up to a maximum of three attack dice versus up to a maximum of two defense dice. The main characters toss d8s and the robot flunkies d6s. Compare the highest rolls and the higher roll wins the combat.

The main robots can be either in robot mode (+1 benefit at times) or in car/truck mode (movement benefits).

Movement is the same as *Risk* -- attack, move in if successful, and continue the attack if wanted.

The cards, drawn one per player per turn if the player conquers an enemy area, provide benefits. At end of turn, the card draw has an area listed on it -- whichever player owns the area gets three free robots.

One twist is that four spaces on the board (two sliding and two rotating) require a card to activate. The rotating areas can be rotated to sever movement connections. The sliding area can be slid off to reveal a hidden factory good for two more robots per turn. If someone plays a card that slides the slider back, any robots in the factory are squashed and thus eliminated.

The game board. Rotating areas in green and purple. Sliding areas in red and yellow.

The Game

It was quite apparent that Renaud was in for a rough game. His dice were horrible.

Autobots died so quickly, the Decepticons could almost take the day off. Meanwhile, my evil robots triumphed everywhere except in one place where Renaud played a card that gave his defending robots d8s instead of d6s.

It was a rout. Well, it is *Risk*. Bad die roll runs happen. It's just that Renaud's first bad run never stopped.

I didn't see much to bring it out again except if any *Transformer* fan kids need something to do on a rainy day.



Omen: Fantasy Card Game

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud brought out *Omen*, a two-player fantasy-themed card game pitting two forces at war over three cities.

The cards represent different types: beast, soldier, spirit, and oracle. Each has a gold cost, strength factor, and ethereal factor. The strength is important in defeating the opposing player for control of a city while the last is mostly used -- or at least we mostly used it -- to draw new cards.

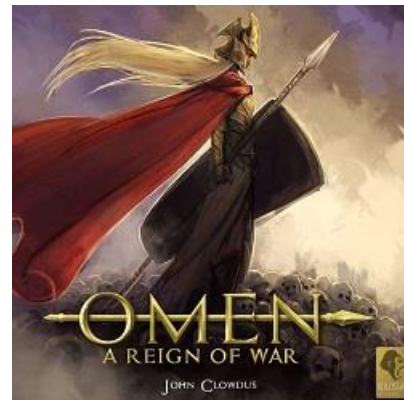
Each city had four tiles, each worth 2 Victory Points. When you defeat the enemy in battle, you pick the top tile. You can keep it for 2 VPs, or, flip it over for 1 VP and use its benefit.

Furthermore, if you complete a particular task, such as place a beast at all three cities, or place five stacking points of troops at one city, you earn 2 VPs -- six separate tiles track task completions.

It does take a bit of getting used to, but you can start seeing the clever interactions of the cards. It's a fairly quick game once you get the sequence down.

In our game, we tended to take gold at the start of a turn and cards at the end. The middle is where the luck of the draw and the occasional thinking ahead. The game ends when all 12 city tiles have been won.

Renaud edged me out by a single VP. Worth playing again. Thanks for the games.



Above: Renaud checks the finer points of the rules.

Left: My forces at bottom, Renaud's at top, and the cities in the middle.



Darien gamers slug it out in the Battle of the Bulge. All HMGS Next Generation photos by John.

HMGS Next Generation: New Year Gaming

by John Spiess

Battle of the Bulge in Darien: CT

We had a full house with 15 kids playing Germans and Americans in a Battle of the Bulge scenario. It was pretty funny to see the few kids who arrived early going straight for the Tigers. We used Bolt Action again, with some modifications for infantry and close assault.

As expected, with this many kids, it was complete bedlam. But everyone started picking up the rules and really didn't need to wait for me to do everything. I just shouted out that if you could figure it out yourself, just go for it. That's actually a big part of the learning process. Learn by doing.

At the end of the game, I gave the usual 15-minute historical recap. These are middle school kids so have not covered WWII yet. Only one kid knew about the Battle of the Bulge. I was pretty happy that they were really focused on listening to the historical summary. The teen librarian also was in the room to listen.

One really fun part of the game was when the German Tigers pulled up to a ruined farmhouse complex. Instead of hiding and shooting, the kids playing the American paratroopers charged out and engaged the few German infantry around the tanks, eliminated them, and then tried to close assault the tanks themselves.

It was a lot of die rolling that everyone just really enjoyed since it was so close and came down to the last few rolls. Basically, the paratroopers had only four figures left who tried opening hatches to drop grenades in. They actually managed to damage one of the tanks and then ran back into the farmhouse.

Naval Battle in Greenwich: CT

We ran a well-received naval game in Greenwich, CT.

Naval gamers at Greenwich.



WWII Battle of the Bulge in Simsbury: CT

Being winter, we ran a Bulge game. It was great to be joined by Eddie Regendahl in Simsbury for the WWII battle. Eddie is one of Next Gen's Directors, so it's always good when he can make it to an event. However, he must have left all his luck at home, since he couldn't hit a barn with the German tank he was helping out with.

Germans on the attack.

Romans in Simsbury: CT

The ever-popular Romans descended on the tabletop versus the Greeks in Simsbury.

Naval Battle in Larchmont: NY

We ran that well-received naval game in Larchmont, NY, too.

Naval gamers at Larchmont.

Dark Age Vikings in Rye: NY

The Rye Library has been extremely pleased with our teen program for middle and high school students. So I was contacted by its Director to see if we were interested in running additional events for younger kids -- 4th and 5th graders. The Dark Age Vikings game was the first for this younger group.

Tabletop vikings.

I wanted to keep it simple, but after a few turns I realized that I didn't need to. Both teams of four on each side were making battle plans and working together. This is obviously the goal, so it worked out very well.

Most parents arrived a bit early for pick up and saw the end of the game. I thought it was funny that three parents came up to me and asked if we did birthday parties. Hmmmm....

I also heard one kid tell his mom that he had a great time and if she could leave me a tip. That was cute.

Battle of Asculum in New Canaan: CT

We played the Romano-Greek Battle of Asculum today at the New Canaan library. As we were cancelled in January due to the snow storm, it was good to get back here to game.

Ancients gamers at game start.

We had five Roman players and five Greek players.

After I divided up all the troops to each player, I was very impressed when a few of the Roman kids asked if they could all just play together and make decisions as a team. Not to be outdone, the Greek team actually had a "huddle" to come up with their battle plan.

These are all regulars now and everyone has already played this system. Instructions were limited to just a few minutes. I made some adaptations for the ancients and came up with some quick elephant rules based on some tutoring from John Manning.

The game broke down into three sectors. Each team had some cavalry which fought each other on the flank. Whoever won this fight was supposed to hit the opposing center line in the flank.



In the other sectors, each team was hoping to overwhelm one with extra troops while hoping their own outnumbered troops would hold off long enough for the attack to break through.

The battlelines close.

The Greek infantry lines advanced and at the last minute halted. The elephants crashed through, crushing a few of their own men on the way. The Romans had some skirmishers throwing javelins, but they broke and ran back behind the main line.

The main Roman line took a lot of casualties, but held. Half the elephants were killed, and the other half ran off rampaging in all directions, including once again, trampling some poor Greek spearmen.

At the same time, The Romans launched their own attack and broke the Greek line.

The game was a lot of fun. The kids really enjoyed the elephants. I borrowed five elephants from John Manning and bought five of my own from Tophers Miniatures. These are great models. I even bought the elephant casualties. See the photos below.

"Death to Dumbo!"

One of the best lines I heard was when the Greeks yelled, "You just killed Dumbo!" The Romans shouted back, "Death to Dumbo!"

Maybe you had to be there, but it was hysterical.



HMGS Outreach: Reaching Out

by *Cliff Brunken*

Learn to Play *Bolt Action*: PA

HMGS Outreach held a *Bolt Action* (version 3) learning game on January 8, 2026 at Showcase Comics and Games in Bryn Mawr, PA. At the end of the presentation, the team collected four names.

Americans prepare to assault the house.

PAGE Convention: PA

HMGS Outreach attended the Pennsylvania Area Gamers Expo (PAGE) 3 convention January 15-18, 2026 at the Philadelphia Convention Center in Oaks, PA. The team ran *Wings of Glory*, *Ruthless: Tombstone*, *World of Tanks*, *Nuka Cola (Fallout)*, *Silver Bayonet*, *The Sand Pebbles*, *What a Cowboy*, *Frostgrave*, *SAGA* tournament, French Foreign Legion, and Wiley Games' Fantasy. We were able to support our vendors by selling product like *Wings of Glory* for Mr E's Gaming World, Diabolical Terrain, The Consortium, and Things from the Basement.

Some of the HMGS games at PAGE.



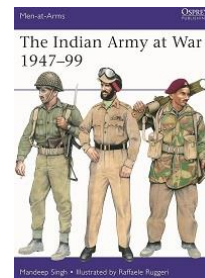
Special Thanks to our team: Scott Landis, Jeff Kimmel, John "Lord" Hollier, Russ Orr, Kat Hultberg, James Nickolson, Bob Edoe, Jon Yuengling, David Cinabro, and Cliff B.

By the end of the convention, the team collected 23 names.

NEWS

CORRECTION

An AAR reader, who specialized in India's defense matters and history as a DoD analyst, noted that in my review of *Indian Army at War 1947-99: Men-at-Arms 566*, I misspelled Junagagh as Junadagh. I rechecked the Osprey text and Junagagh is spelled correctly in the text -- but the map (p5) I doublechecked had the mis-spelling of Junadagh. Nice catch.



Historicon 2025 Report

by Scott Landis, Convention Director, Historicon 2025

Director Landis released his convention report. I excerpted parts. Link to the entire report at end of this news item. -- RL



Highlights

Total Attendees: 2,600 includes Spouse/Children: 164/136
Number of Games: 693 (of 740 registered) not including dealer demos
Number of Exhibitor Demo Games: 25
Average Fill Rate: 83%, with 102 games taking on additional players
Special Notes: 25+ walk-up games; 100+ Kid Friendly games; 71+ Beginner Friendly games
Number of Game Hosts: 253
Number of Tournaments: 22
Number of War College Presentations/Attendees: 30/656
Number of Hobby University Classes/Attendees: 52/263
Hobby U Paint and Take Attendance: 60+
Iron Paint Brush Competition: 22 participants in 6 teams
Board Game Ticketed Events: 23+ games
SPI Events: 59 games, some running all weekend long! (will be back in 2026).

Duke Seifried Game Host of the Year: Thomas Uhl
Best of Show: Martyn Kelly: Battle of Pavia 1525
Best of Theme: Robert Schaible/Brandon Fraley: Arracourt 1944
Best Terrain: Bradley Meloy: Battle of El Moro & San Juan

The HMGS Social Media team posted photos to Facebook, Instagram, and X of 279 games (Wednesday: 15, Thursday: 75, Friday: 95, Saturday: 89 and Sunday: 5), in addition to all of the coverage of events throughout the Convention over the five days.

The full report, including lots of photos, is at:

<https://hmgs.org/blog/2025/08/20/historicon-2025-after-action-report/>

FYI: Great job by the entire HMGS Convention staffers and volunteers! -- RL

Olde West Buildings: Mexican Territories

by Russ Lockwood

Diabolical Terrain released a series of 3D-printed Olde Wild Western Rush: Mexican Territories adobe-style buildings in 15mm, 20mm, 25/28mm, and 32mm scales. Prices vary by scale, of course. For example, a Cantina in 15mm is \$17, in 20mm is \$28.00, in



25/28mm is \$40.00, and in 32mm is \$52.00. Free shipping with orders of \$200.00 and more.

All buildings feature removable roofs and detailed interiors. Multi-story buildings feature removable floors as well as roofs.

Info: <https://diabolicalterrain.com/collections/early-america-wild-west-mexican-territories>



Light Bobs 250: Upgrade

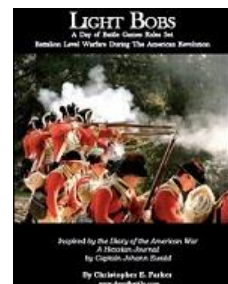
by Russ Lockwood

Chris Parker Games is working on *Light Bobs 250*, a revised version of Chris' *Light Bobs* American Revolution rules.

Info: chrisparkergames.com

Demo Video (2 parts):

<https://www.chrisparkergames.com/new-light-bobs-250-demo-video/>



D-Day to Berlin: Free Download

by Russ Lockwood

Chris Parker Games is offering its WWII rules as a free pdf download with a Watermark. CPG's hope is that gamers will be more interested in them and purchase a pdf or printed version.

D-Day to Berlin (DDtB) is an abstract operational treatment of Corps-level actions on the Western Front 1944-1945 during WWII. Players are Division and Corps commanders, with each commanding one or more Divisions.

Info: <https://www.dayofbattlegames.com/downloads-page/>



New Wargame: Mr. Lincoln's War

by Russ Lockwood

Compass Games reports Mark McLaughlin's *Mr. Lincoln's War* is up for pre-order. This grand strategic American Civil War wargame covers from 1861 to 1865. Don't confuse this with the miniatures ruleset *Mr. Lincoln's War: Regimental Combat in the American Civil War* designed by Stephen F. Phenow and Terry L. Gore and published in 2000.

This box set contains two sub-games: *Army of the Tennessee*, which deals with the war in the western theater, and *Army of the Potomac*, which deals with the war in Virginia. Each has four short scenarios that recreate maneuvers and famous battles. A full campaign game is included for each sub-game and a grand campaign game simulates the entire ACW on both fronts.

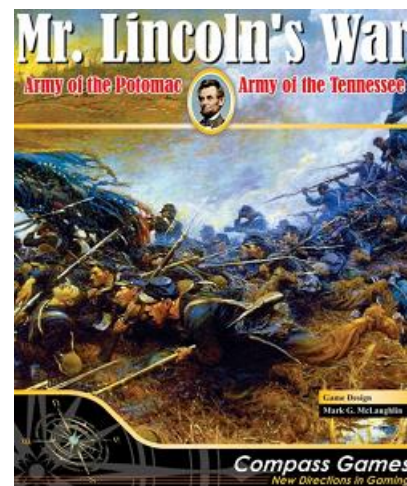
Details: Complexity: Medium; Solitaire: Medium; Time Scale: 1 Turn = 1 Month; Map: 1 Hex = 2.3 Miles; Unit Scale: One Strength Point = 3000 Men; Players: 2 to 4; Playing Time: 2 to 6 Hours For Scenarios and 10+ Hours For Campaigns.

Game Components: 2 22x34-inch MOUNTED Game Maps; 850 1/2-inch Die-Cut Counters (4 Sheets); 10 Plus Player Aid Cards; 1 Rules Booklet, 1 Scenario Booklet; and two Six-Sided Dice.

Retail price: \$99 and Pre-Order Price: \$82.00.

Info:

<https://www.compassgames.com/>



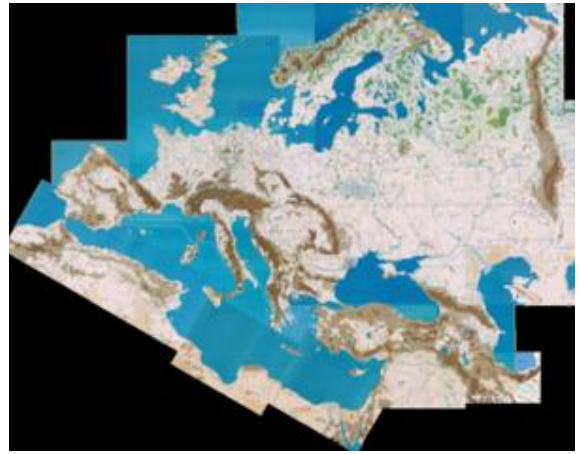
Return of *Europa*: Wargame Series

by Russ Lockwood

Europa Series Wargames (ESW) announces it is reprinting the *Europa* wargame series. ESW has use of the *Europa* trademark and copyrights from owner Paul R. ("Rich") Banner.

Mark Miller, Interim Executive Officer, noted "Our mission is to republish the existing games in digital and print format, to create new and updated *Europa* games, and to see the *Europa Series* completed as its founders envisioned."

All Europa games' maps placed together.



Miller noted a stellar line-up of *Europa* veterans: John M. Astell as Chief Designer and editor of *Europa Series Briefing*, a to-be-released *Europa* magazine; and Bill Stone as Chief Resources Officer.

John Astell noted "My goal with *Barbarossa Unleashed* (*BU*, working title) and future titles is to return playability to its rightful place. I believe *Second Front* went too far down the road of adding complications to cover secondary and tertiary issues. The draft version of *BU* is currently at the *SF* level of complexity and like *SF* is somewhat slow and difficult to play. I believe *Scorched Earth* had a good balance between playability and complexity, and I am working on a core set of rules to make *BU* nearer to *SE*'s complexity than the *SF*'s. I want *BU* to be a living game, one that hits the right level of playability, historical details, and accurate but playable orders of battle.

This does not mean *BU* will just be a patched-up version of *SE*! My plan is that it will become the state of the art for playable *Europa*, with a revised air-on-demand system like in *SF*, a simpler naval system, and new features such as changes in how overruns work (and more!). When a playtest version is ready, I will put out a call for playtesters and will appreciate your help in realizing this game!"

I downloaded the draft *BU* rules for a look-see.

Also, the number 1 Primary goal: Revise the Soviet OB and maps for 1941-45.

Info:

<https://europaseries.com/>

<http://classiceuropa.org/> or

e-mail EuropaSeries@gmail.com

io group: <https://classiceuropa.groups.io/g/main>

Bag o' Moscows

by Russ Lockwood

Visiting the *Europa* io group, I left an off-hand comment about cutting out the Moscow hex of the *Drang Nach Osten* map. *Europa* grognards know that way back when, you got a discount on the upgraded game release.

What I didn't know -- Marc Miller wrote this in reply: "I was just looking at my bag of Moscow's last week. I rescued them from GDW's archives when they closed down."

Wow. I wrote back that if they did Kickstarter, an original Moscow hex would be a nice unlocking goal.

Bill Stone's Computerized *Europa*

by Russ Lockwood

While poking around, I discovered Bill Stone's *Computerized Europa* Project, explaining how he is making a computerized version of *Europa*. Within its extensive content, I found his links to online WWII references -- many I have explored.

The direct link to the resources:

<http://stonebooks.com/europa/researchlinks.shtml>

<http://stonebooks.com/europa/related.shtml>

But do poke around his site. You may not be a *Europa* gamer, but spend some time there and you might just become one.

<http://stonebooks.com/europa/>



AHIKS: New Issue

by Russ Lockwood

Kommandeur



AHIKS publishes the hex wargame newsletter *The Kommandeur*. Congratulations on completing 60 years of publishing! The group runs a PBM matching service, missing components service, and covers the news of boardgame releases. In fact, *The K* pointed me in the direction of the *Europa* reboot.

You can read the issues here:

<https://ahiks.com/the-ahiks-kommandeur/>

Battle of Princeton Re-enactment: 2026

by Russ Lockwood

The Princeton Battlefield Society sent a link to a 2 minute 22 second video recap of the re-enactment. I'm guessing the slo-mo effects were for artistry.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pn09B-ATAP4>

A still from the video.

Link to PBS: <https://pbs1777.org/>



Gratuitous Monte Bello Photo

Photo by Mike



Jay explains to Dave that you need to place the ruler "Numbers side up" to measure. Photo by Mike.

Shhhh! We're Huntin' Dwagons: Heh-heh-heh-heh-heh

by *Russ Lockwood*

The successful defense of Sheffield, our capital of Sunstone, saw the carving up of Zephy Dirt Nap, the Blue Dragon I slew as it exited the ground. Hmm. I wonder what its tunneling did to the catacombs. Anyway, its head, mounted and stuffed, sure looks good in the entryway to the A-Team's headquarters.

Alas, there is no rest for the wicked. Our inquiries stretched far and wide and we discovered that the Drag-Bag of dragons had split up. Intel put the Black Dragon, known for spitting acid, back at the ruined underground Drow fortress. I guess its tunnels run deeper than we thought. Cristoff informed us that black dragons like water. Come to think of it, a river gorge flows next to the fortress.

The Hammer Speaks

"Friends, Founders of Sunstone, Warriors of Law, our duty is clear: we must face the minions of Iuz, cauterize the wound they have caused, and strike at the heart of what infests and poisons our very world. Whether we plumb the depths of the Drow, roasted in their fortress merely to threaten us, or strike out for the lands north where the forces of Iuz ravage, including my very homeland, we must strike, cleave the forces that compel a company of dragons to their will, break them, and send them howling to the wasteland of history."

Somehow, Hammer seemed to have picked up an abundance of charisma to replace his usual miasma. He continued.

"The people of Sunstone and indeed peoples everywhere cry out for Fair Play. War and foul magics steal the bread from their babe's mouths, rob them of the fruit of their labor, and cast a shadow on all their futures. Only through Fair Play can there be freedom and law, Zillichus be praised! We are called to be the instrument of law -- a spear in the very heart of spreading chaos. We cannot rest here upon laurels justly won through might and courage. Let us take justice abroad and bring law to the future."

Christoff nodded and added, "While it is most unsettling especially to myself to leave a cadre of mercenary dragons unattended, at this time there is no certainty that they will continue to pursue us. Therefore, I must support Hammer in that the minions of Luz should be dealt with now rather than later when they will have surely grown into a much greater threat to all. Hammer has already shown much patience in this matter and we would do well to support this just cause for all."

Well, thought I, who could argue with such sterling silver logic? I had already checked and packed my usual gear. I turned to the team. "Well, OK then. Coming up next on Ooze News, a radical reinterpretation of dragon anatomy by the A-Team."

Half of us grinned and the other half grimaced. It would not be easy, so I added, "And if we can bag a few kobolds, so much the better."

I ignored their woe-are-us groans.

Squeezing Blood from Stones

Five of us teleported to the abandoned orc camp atop the Drow fortress -- Balien, Hammer, me (Tazan the Archer), Cristoff, and Rufus -- and we descended the spiral staircase in that order. No ghosts this time, but blood oozed from the walls and ran down the stairs. Oh great, some sort of bloodthirsty wizard must have moved in -- this was no black dragon endeavor. Acid? Yes. Blood no.

As we reached the landing, I asked our resident dragon lore master, "Hey Cristoff. What type of music do black dragons like best?"

"I don't know. What?"

"Acid rock."

The groans from disembodied spirits couldn't compare with my fellow adventurers.

As we hit the throne room, we discovered a dampening field that prevented teleportation and other magic movement spells. Hmm. Now why would a wizard want to prohibit movement into a half-collapsed Drow dungeon?

For a moment, no monsters met us as we squished across the floor. Then we heard kobold chitterings somewhere in the distance.

Now, kobolds are rather devious creatures on the wrong side of the evil-good barrier. I've found the red-robed wizards are the worst of the bunch. It would be just our luck that one of these minions of menace lodged in here. Certainly our run-in with the kobolds surrounding the red dragon Pyroaxis way back when cemented my distaste for them.

Hammer sent Bruce the Bat in for a long-range recon. That was the last we saw of Bruce the Bat. He found kobolds and the little monsters struck down our beloved Bat. As Bruce the Bat's life waned, the kobolds chattered with mirth.

I couldn't see 'em, but I could hear 'em. Close enough, I thought. I nocked the first arrow and loosed three in a row. Thunder pealed thrice within the throne room. As the echoes faded, we all heard the scream and the skittering of kobold feet in flight. Oh, the A-Team knew I was good, but they were amazed at such shooting prowess. From the duration of the scream, it was evident it was not just a hit, but a critical hit. We advanced and found the bugger. I dug my arrow out and collected a couple copper pieces as trophies.

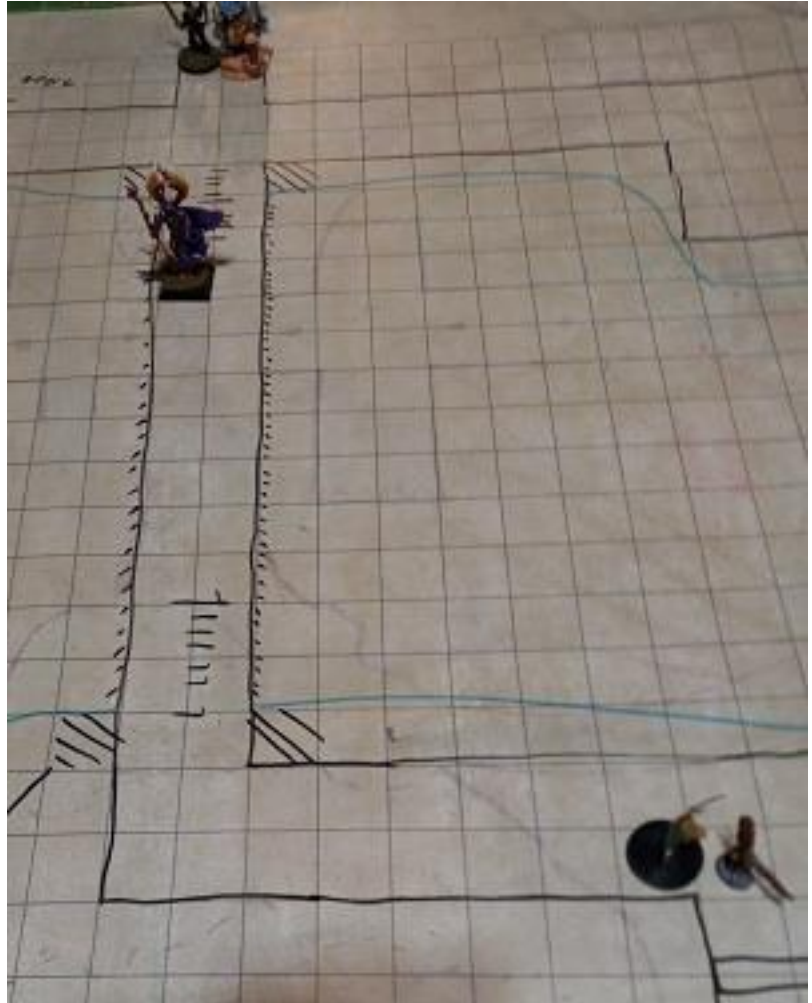
Down a Kobold Hole

A few rooms later, we found a large hole in the floor. I looked in. Three kobolds were looking up. Three quick shots and three kobolds dropped with arrows, their eyes wide and with pupils fixed.

We slid down a rope. I dug out my arrows and collected nine more copper pieces to the guffaws of my teammates. Let them laugh. I carry a wide range of coin, for you never know when you need to spend a copper piece or two instead of a gold piece.

We heard the roar of a river and emerged into a large cavern. Hallways stretched left and right, but the opening to our front led to a bridge across the river gorge. If the roar of the water was loud, the creak of wooden waterwheels drew our attention off to our right. They were maintained, which is a minor miracle for kobolds to maintain anything. We couldn't see what was turning, but we spied the turning shafts that entered a cavern wall. Obviously, this was put in when the dwarves owned the fortress and associated mines. No idea what it powered, but it creaked along.

We enter from top. Balien runs across bridge with his owl. Hammer stands on the bridge.



Bridge Over Troubled Water

Balien sped across the bridge to explore a hallway beyond. As the bridge did not collapse, Hammer strode to its midpoint. He looked around, judged the water deep enough for a black dragon, and issued a challenge for any dragon around. It was more an insult than challenge, questioning the dragon's heritage and breeding.

The water began to roil and froth. Hammer increased his stream of challenge with references to the dragon's lack of mental acumen and physical shortcomings.

The rest of the team prepared spells except for me. I nocked an arrow.

Sure enough, the black dragon reared its ugly head out of the water. I immediately shot and hit while our spells loosed. The damage was minimal to the ancient dragon, who tail whipped Hammer and suffered a fiery rebuke in return.

Cristoff searched his memory and came up with the dragon's name: Umbreth.

Pffft! That's no name for an opponent. We shall call him Badbreath. And we'll give him a breath mint to solve his halitosis. Permanently.

Before we could inflict misery on Badbreath, that wily b. dragony sank beneath the water, safe from spells and arrows. Oh great, another deadly game of hide and seek with a dragon. Last time was with white dragons in an ice lair. This time was a black dragon in a river lair. A tidal wave crested over the bridge, sweeping Hammer into the water. For a fiery guy, he sure gets dumped in water a lot.

The dragon's claw grabbed him and pulled him under, but Hammer broke free and reached the surface for air.

Badbreath rises from the water to confront Hammer. Turbines at lower left corner.

Kobolds Across The Water

Next thing you know, two boats filled with kobolds rowed up the river. Three arrows later, three kobolds toppled into the water as thunder echoed within the cavern. Rufus' fireball and Cristoff's sunray spell fried a bunch. Of course, a black-robed kobold magic-user started spell-tossing.

Black-robed? I muttered, "I thought kobolds were all red-robed."

Cristoff answered, "Kobolds take on the color of their dragon master. Pyroaxis was a red dragon, hence red-robed. Badbreath is a black dragon, hence, black-robed."

"Whaddaya know. Like choices on a roulette wheel. Maybe we'll find green ones next," I said. "No matter. The odds are all the same. I'm an equal-opportunity kobold slayer."

In the meantime, the kobolds tossed a net around Hammer and pulled him from the water into the boat. "Surrender!" they called.

Hammer laughed and rolled to free himself, but only managed to wrap the net around him tighter. The kobolds stabbed him with spears.

Lots of dead kobolds floated away downstream, but Balien attacks two who remained with the netted Hammer in the blue boat. The kobold wizard was in the red boat ducking to avoid any more arrows from Tazan (upper left corner).

I shafted the magic-user, but had a feeling that he fell too quickly. I thought about leaping onto the boat, but as the water receded from the bridge, it perched at an ever-increasing angle. I'm agile, but I'm thinking the best place for me is on solid ground pumping arrows into our dragonic adversary.

Just then, kobolds came from below deck, leapt off the boat, and surrounded Cristoff, who fried a few with his sunray as I shot away all but one.

The dragon tail whipped Balien into the water, but Rufus tossed a rope to pull him out.



The magic-using kobold popped up and cast a spell: Banishment. Balien and Cristoff failed their counter-spells, but Hammer was successful -- only to see the magic-user counter his counter-spell.

"I knew it!" I blurted. "I should have shafted the bugger twice over!"

I wasn't in the line of fire, but Hammer, Cristoff, and Rufus failed their saves and poofed out. Balien made his and stayed.

Balien leapt on the boat, killed a stray kobold and then leapt onto the second boat and cast a Feeble-Mind spell. Alas, the kobold magic-user ignored it.

It took all I had to pump arrows into that black-robed kobold. I sent another arrow into him just to be sure. The banishment spell broke with the death of its caster and our banished members zapped back into the battle.

A Statue To The Rescue

From the depths of the dungeon, a statue came to life and waddled down the corridors, finally making it to the battle. It tossed some rocks to some effect.

Rufus flamed the statue, Cristoff sunbeamed it, and I finally put a trio of magic arrows into it to kill it. I had joked that a kobold was inside the statue. Imagine my surprise when I discovered I was half right -- not a kobold but an Indolant. This was some sort of spirit that fled away towards the water wheels, not to be seen again.

Badbreath the dragon made an appearance to spit some acid. Tail whips failed, but a claw slashed Rufus, who cast a blade barrier around the dragon.

As the ginzo-matic sliced and diced, the water surged anew and dragged Cristoff and Rufus into the water, although they soon swam out. I proved agile enough to sidestep the curling water and put three shafts into Badbreath. Hammer added a fireball.

Badbreath cast mini-dragons, which fluttered and pecked at Cristoff, who swatted at them to reduce their attacks. His wand of magic missiles fired, but a special magic scale protected the dragon from such harm.

Balien, who had consumed a fly potion and hovered on the ceiling, dove in and hit the dragon. I followed up with multiple arrows and that finally dropped Badbreath, who sank beneath the water. We have no idea where the carcass went, but as I sang out, "When facing an acid-spitting dragon, it's all about that base, 'bout that base, no trouble."

And you thought the Acid Rock groans were loud.

Cristoff the Soggy

Cristoff took a potion of water breathing and scouted the bottom of the river. He found and reported a seaweed-covered opening in the floor that led to an underwater tube.

Meanwhile, Rufus spoke with the dead kobold magic-user to little avail, although we did find out the dragon hoard was "here."

I did a little scavenging, finding a 38 Gold Piece symbol, a wand of healing, and a 50 GP gem on the magic-user's body. Scant reward for all the trouble he caused, but better than nothing. I gave away the wand.

Balien cast water-breathing on all and we swam the tube to emerge into a air-filled chamber holding the dragon's hoard worth 14,000 copper pieces, 100,000+ silver pieces, 100,000+ gold pieces, and 42,000 platinum pieces. It wasn't all coins, but a mix of coin, gems, and other valuables.

Of greater note was a number of special items that we divided up. Of course, being that I'm the genie expert of the group, I was given the Ring of Djinn Summoning -- worth a cool 25,000 GP. Thanks to a magic inquisition -- nobody expects the Magic Inquisition -- the djinn would be from the Plane of Air, not the Plane of Water where my buddy the Marid genie lived. Pity. I bet he misses me already.

Of greatest note was some sort of magic boat, called a Whamma-Jamma that could propel us through the air -- assuming we could haul it out of this air bubble of a cave. And get this: Rufus was especially ecstatic for he said this Whamma-Jamma could fly up and into space to the stars we spied through the lens at the Eye of Stirling.

"No way," I said.

"Yes way," our A-Team wizards replied, although they pointed out it was broken. Well, obviously we might need Nevar's spell of fixing or something wizardwise to put the Wham back in Whamma-Jamma.

As we searched the skyship, we found MindFlyer and gnome skeletons aboard. Not being entirely sure what a MindFlyer does, I was assured it dined on Filet-o-Brain sandwiches. Oh, joy. Best disintegrate, cremate, or do whatever to those skeletons -- I had enough unpleasant experiences with the undead to avoid hauling them back with us.

We still needed to disconnect the teleport-jamming spell. I had a feeling it wasn't a dragon thing. And we now know it wasn't a kobold wizard thing. So, there is some other thing down here. No rest for the weary.

Cristoff announced he could send a telepathic message back to Sheffield to tell our tale. So, I said, "I can send a telepathic message, too."

Cristoff stared in wonder that I would know such a powerful spell.

I explained, "The message goes from the left side of my brain to the right side of my brain." I gave him as wide a toothy smile as my super-high Charisma Quotient 19 could offer.

Cristoff groaned anew and countered, "Spoken like a guy with a low Intelligence Quotient of 8."

In any case, his telepathic communication brought our A-Team wizard Soras a coming. We relayed what happened in the fortress, including that the dragon hoard was here, and noted we were heading deeper to counter the teleport-jamming spell. Soras left and noted he would help with a welcome home party -- if we came back.

Solar Sammy sits on a dais throne with Bob the Balrog nearby. Merryliths yet to appear.

More Bloody Spiral Stairs

We found another stairway down and again encountered blood seeping from the walls. We followed the corridors, crossed over mine cart tracks, and with an escort of a half-dozen to a dozen evil gray dwarves, found the Solar Throne Room.

Solar?

We're just about into the UnderDark and that's pretty deep. We didn't even see any kobolds. This had the Dwarven touch to it. And as we all know, the Dwarves always dig too deep.

The double doors opened. At least the vast room was lit by rows of torches.

And look who we found. Our blood wizard. Seated on a throne, he regarded us with his eyes that teared in blood. Or his mascara was runny. I'm not sure which.

"Come in and be judged," the wizard boomed. He seemed to glow a bit. In my experience, glowing wizards are cause for concern. He also seemed to have wings.

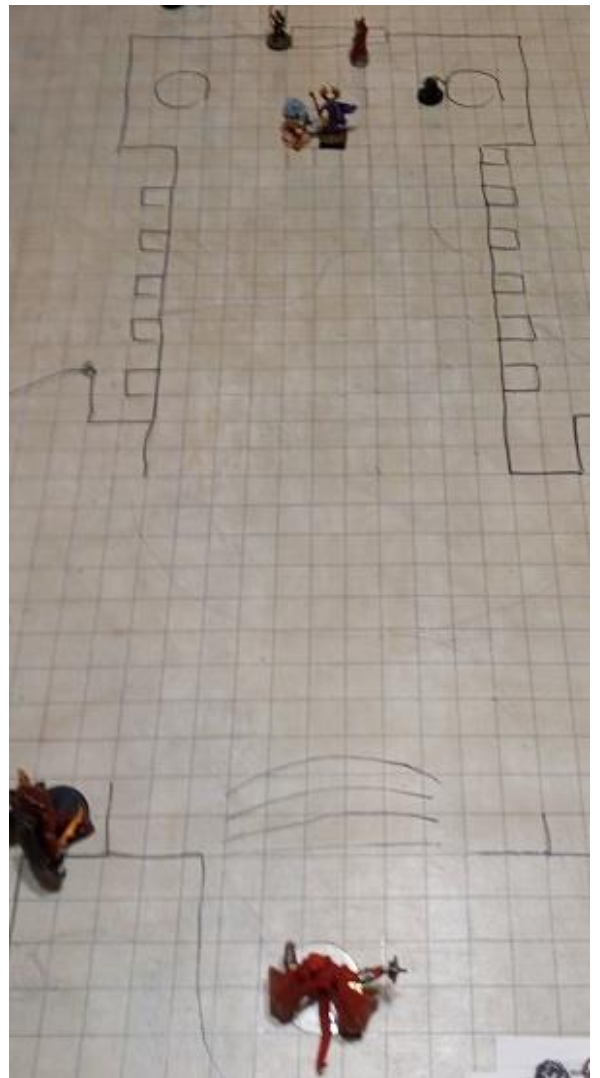
The Hammer strode forward. "We come not to be judged, but to render judgement."

Rufus was next to Hammer. "Who are you to judge?"

The rest of us filed into the room. I sidestepped at the door and casually readied myself. A 200-foot shot isn't difficult, but it isn't easy, either.

To the left and right of the doors were two statues of abomination, each with the torso of a woman with six arms and the body of a snake. Worse, each arm held a sword. Doubly concerning indeed.

Then I studied Bob the Balrog next to the throne. A Balrog as adviser or bodyguard is triply a cause for concern. This is not looking good.



Here Comes Da Judge

Solar Sammy the radiant wizard leaned forward on his throne. "You will be judged for your sins."

A defiant Hammer retorted, "Don't have any -- just you!"

The radiant wizard stood and pulled a bow out. With speed even faster than me, two arrows were in the air and slammed into Hammer. The damage was tremendous.

I screamed, "Haven't you learned anything? Don't let the bad guys surprise you! We always shoot first!"

No matter now. The snake ladies, known as Merrylyth Baxter Birnies, began to phase from stone to flesh.

Cristoff immediately erected a Wall of Force across the doorway.

"Whattaya doing?" Balien screamed. "You just sealed us in!"

"I just sealed off all those evil dwarves."

In the heat of the moment, points of view are sometimes in opposition.

My point of view wasn't. I drilled Solar Sammy with arrows to shred 149 pieces of him about the room. He didn't like that and teleported directly in front of me and fried a slice of my hide with his longsword.

Teleport? Flaming sword. This is no place for a spell-less archer!

Rufus' spell was for nought, but Solar Sammy locked eyes with Hammer. "I judge your sins!" Bright rays shone and just like that, Hammer was blinded.

Balien cast his own spells and ran over to Hammer and gave him a potion to cure the blindness. Hammer cast his own Armor spell.

Despite my successful parry, Solar Sammy sliced my hide again, even as I pivoted and loosed. Thunder reverberated around his throne room and I would have took more than 100 pieces of his hide, but quick as light, Sammy grabbed Merrylyth Baxter Birney the First and shoved her in the way. My arrows did her the damage.

Both Merediths swung a half dozen times, striking Cristoff and Balien. Meanwhile, Bob the Balrog hammered the Hammer with his flaming sword and his whip. He tried, but failed, to drag poor blind Hammer closer. The Hammer was in bad shape. He dropped.

But so was Merrylyth the First. Balien sliced her head off. Hammer drank his potion and his sight returned.

Solar Sammy dropped his longsword, which became an animated dancing sword that sliced Cristoff. Sammy twanged his bow. Cristoff fell to the ground with a couple arrows sticking out of him, but immediately bounced back up, still alive for the moment by the power of a spell.

Bob the Balrog. Image from web.



Wouldn't you know it, Merrylyth the Second sang a song of six swords in my direction, whacking me for about a third of my vigor. Great, all this time and I'm still a three-hit wonder. I pumped three arrows into her and sent about 100 pieces of scale and skin about the room. Balien finished her off. I guess you can say we made a good tag-team.

Bob the Balrog hit Rufus. Hammer tried to erect a force cage around Bob, but obviously his eyesight was still off and Bob bounded out or reach.

Blinded By The Light

Solar's spells were countered, but his gaze of light fell upon me. "I judge you, oathbreaker!"

I countered with, "Get your facts right, Truthslayer! I outgenied a genie." That didn't help me. My sight vanished. Awfully hard to shoot a bow without sight, but it worked against a kobold. I could do nothing.

Rufus and Bob continued their damage-dealing battle. Balien sliced Bob on the way to giving me a healing potion. Bob finally connected with sword and whip on Rufus, who teetered from the relentless damage.

Solar Sammy flicked a death spell at Cristoff, who countered it and drank a potion of invulnerability, or in reality, a potion of less vulnerability.

I drank my potion to restore sight. As an archer, that was a mighty good feeling.

The battle winds down. Bob will fall, and then Solar Sammy.



While Solar concentrated against Balien, Cristoff magic missiled Bob the Balrog.

I had my choice of targets and picked Bob. I twanged twice and down the Balrog went until it hit the ground, where it exploded. Bone shrapnel sliced through the air and some of us, too. I came away relatively unhurt, but Rufus went down. Balien jammed a healing potion down Rufus' gullet, keeping him alive.

Solar slammed two arrows into Balien and the dancing longsword struck him as well. The Blade Barrier spell took all of us by surprise. Balien dropped to the floor, but bounced up with the barest hint of life. Cristoff, in a display of adrenaline-fueled strength, dragged Rufus away from the Barrier.

Dodge as I might, I took more damage, but not enough to stop me from scattering 125 pieces of Solar Sammy against the wall.

Sammy hammered Balien, who reeled on the edge of consciousness.

And then, as in previous battles, I nearly fainted from loss of blood. I fired three arrows at Solar Sammy, but all three missed. Ironical, huh? In a throne room with blood seeping from the walls, I lost enough to affect my aim.

Cristoff healed Rufus even as Sammy sliced Balien.

Then, I drilled the magic arrows into Sammy's hide. The wizard expired. I raced to the body. "I want that bow!"

Alas, it was not to be. The radiant Solar Sammy slowly dimmed until he faded from view. His bow and dancing longsword vanished with him.

Recovery

Our party recovered strength and wits. Healing potions took care of most damage. I wore my Ring of Regeneration, so I slowly accumulated health. Rufus needed just enough time to cast a Revive spell on Hammer, whom we pulled back from the Abyss.

The walls no longer seeped blood. The teleport jamming ended. We even freed Hammer's crow familiar from its small prison.

Funny, the evil dwarves did nothing during the battle even when the force wall fell. Maybe slaying Solar Sammy, Bob the Balrog, and both Merrylith sisters cowed them.

We trudged and swam back to the Black Dragon's hoard, or should I say our hoard. Cristoff created his teleportation zone around the treasure and zipped us and the treasure back to Sheffield for a long rest.

The regional threat to Sunstone ceased, for we had foiled the plans of Ooze. We still had a green dragon, red dragon, and white dragon on the loose. Or maybe not. As far as mercenaries go, these dragons are not dumb. The blue and black ones are dead. If the dragons have an informal grapevine, they know we killed off three white dragons.

Hmmm. I wonder if we could excavate the carcasses, seeing how they were in an ice cave, so we can mount those heads in our A-Team headquarters. And the black dragon. Maybe we can take a looksee downstream and see if it washed up. Five dragon heads might impress a few fence-sitters about whether or not they should join us or Ooze.

In any case, we had treasure to divvy up and schemes to plan.

My first AI-generated image...Our treasure hoard.



BOOKS I'VE READ

By Russ Lockwood

Hitler's Brandenburgers: The Third Reich's Elite Special Forces. by Lawrence Paterson. Softcover (6.2x9.3 inches). 344 pages. 2025 reprint of 2018 book.

This unit profile chronicles the Brandenburgers from its initial 1939-1940 platoon to expansion into panzergrenadier division. Along the way, its highly-trained special forces nature devolved into a regular infantry unit as the troops were increasingly thrown into front-line defensive battles instead of using their infiltration expertise.

Initially, the unit relied on deception: non-German language skills combined with civilian garb or defender's uniforms allowed the troops to infiltrate ahead of the regular army to capture and hold bridges, tunnels, train stations, communications lines, and other spots critical to the general advance. The Brandenburgers were not always successful, failure to capture some bridges and espionage in Iraq and Afghanistan are examples, but they were successful enough to expand to a three-battalion regiment by 1941 (OOB on p71).

Operations in Belgium, Holland, France, Greece, North Africa, and USSR are well presented and well written -- indeed, many of the missions call out for a tabletop scenario. The Brandenburgers usually operated in small units, often from four to 11 men each, which is a good size for skirmish games.

During Operation Blue into the Caucuses, Brandenburgers wearing NKVD uniforms managed to infiltrate Maikop, divert Soviet troops, and secure some oil facilities. Imagine putting a Brandenburg counter in a hex wargame that would move Soviet units out of Maikop.

The Brandenburgers even mounted an expedition, including a Spitfire borrowed from the Luftwaffe, from North Africa into the southern mountains into French West Africa to try and stop the air bridge from the US to Egypt.

An interesting tidbit: the German Gestapo and Soviet NKVD held a week-long conference in Villa Tadeusz in Zakopane (Poland) in March 1940 to discuss how they would eradicate continuing Polish resistance (p91).

The Brandenburgers even raided Turkey after Turkey declared war on Germany on February 20, 1945 (p285). One typo: "began at 2330hrd" (p128) is probably "hrs".

The book contains 90 black and white photos. A few maps would have been helpful, especially when explaining hyper-tactical attacks.

It's always a pleasure to read a well-written unit history when you have only a general idea of what the unit did. This book was a pleasure.

Enjoyed it.

The Man Who Stopped The Sultan. by Edoardo Albert. Hardback (6.3x9.5 inches). 229 pages. 2025.

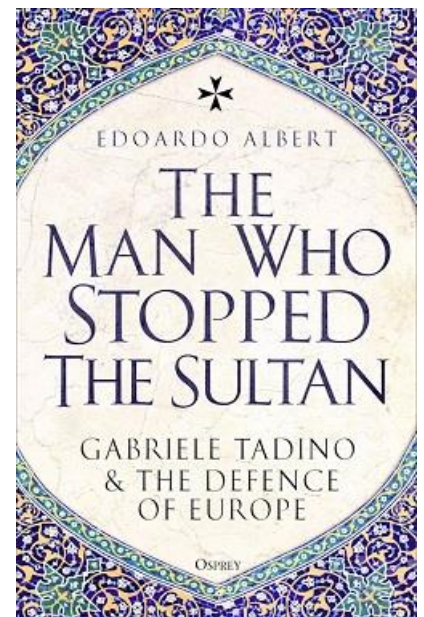
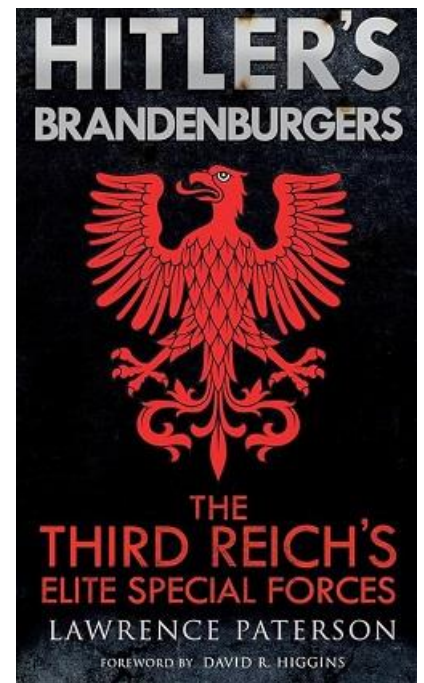
Subtitle: *Gabriele Tadino & the Defence of Europe*

Gabriele Tadino emerged as one of the ablest military engineers and commanders during the Italian Wars at the beginning of the 1500s. With an inclination for military matters and taught geometry by his father, he was apprenticed to a French engineer who taught him the finer points of fortress architecture. By the time he was 30, he was in demand and pledged to Venice.

Yet when Sultan Suleiman and the Ottomans demanded Rhodes from the Knights Hospitallers, the Knights declined, the Ottomans launched siege operations, and the Knights put out a call for defenders. Tadino answered the call and entered just after the Ottomans began their siege.

His forte was counter-mining. As the Ottomans drove tunnels under the walls to explode mines to create breaches, Tadino's detection gadgets found the mines and he directed countermines be created to blow up the Ottoman miners. When he detected mines too late, he had shafts drilled down to dissipate the explosive force up and away from the walls. He wasn't 100% successful, but he foiled all but a couple.

He also oversaw the building of secondary fortifications to stymie any Ottoman penetrations -- and often led from the front. He didn't escape unscathed, for he lost an eye to a lucky shot, but he pulled through.



The siege ended up a draw...but with the Ottomans able to reinforce and the Knights and related forces unable to attract soldiers or smuggle ammo and gunpowder through the blockade. Negotiations ensued and the Knights and followers were allowed to leave with their lives and possessions -- all except Tadino, whom the Sultan wanted for his own army. No fool he, Tadino snuck out and made his way back to Italy.

The book contains two black and white maps, 18 color illustrations, and one black and white illustration.

The full siege receives a detailed recap. Well written, you'll get an excellent idea of how Tadino used his experience and personal leadership to foil Ottoman attack after attack.

Enjoyed it.

Tanker War in the Gulf. by Tom Duffy. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 312 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Operation Earnest Will, Diplomacy and Seapower in Practice*

During the Iraq-Iran late in the late 1980s, the Iranians tried to close the Persian Gulf to shipping, primarily by mining the lanes. The US objected and performed mine-clearing missions, although ships still struck the WWI-era technology mines.

Then an Iraqi aircraft blindly fired a pair of Exocet missiles at a presumed Iranian ship. The actual ship hit was the unprepared *USS Stark*, which didn't sink but was carted back to the US for repairs.

That triggered a US retaliation of shooting at Iranian oil platforms that were being used for surveillance, which triggered an Iranian Navy sortie, which ended badly for the Iranian ships.

If this was only an operational history, it would be a fine recap, but it also explains the strategy of limited war. Underlying the response and counter response that would eventually include European warships are embedded explanations of how seapower can apply to a limited war to achieve objectives without triggering a full-scale war. Well done, that.

The book contains 20 black and white photos, two black and white illustrations, and six black and white maps.

While the Iranian warship sortie would make a good, if likely short, tabletop scenario, a campaign with all the political machinations would be even more interesting. That might even include launching Operation Window of Opportunity, a US plan to invade Iran's Abu Musa Island.

Given the current US saber-rattling in the region, hopefully someone is dusting off the history of USN operations in 1988 to see what worked and what didn't and how the last 40 years have changed circumstances.

Enjoyed it.

Broken Eagles: Volume 2. by John H. Gill. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 594 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Napoleon's German Allies and the Campaigns of 1813*

Volume 2 covers the Confederation of the Rhine, specifically the 1813 armies of Wurtemberg, Baden, Hesse-Darmstadt, Westphalia, and a number of smaller principalities. Like the first volume, you get a tremendous amount of detail of unit organization, numbers (where available), and combats about important, but oft-ignored, forces.

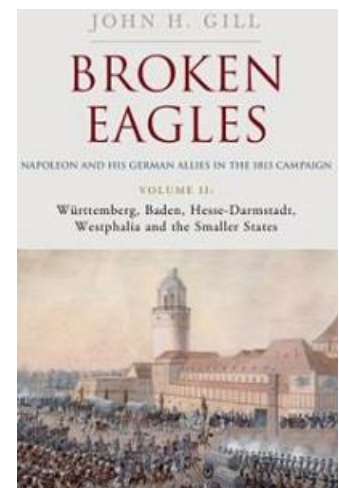
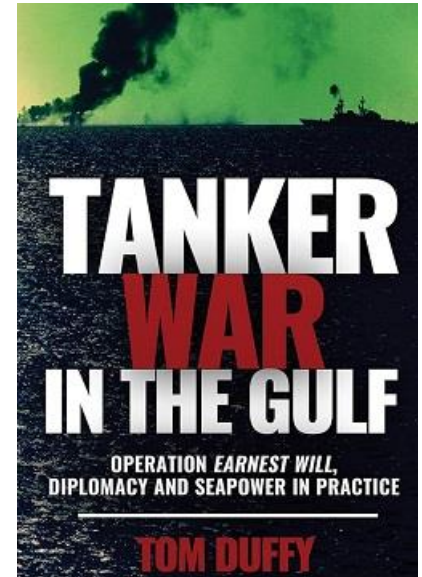
As each force receives its place in the limelight of history, so you will learn how each ally interacted with each other and with the French. Alas for greater glory, many of these smaller states suffered from significant defections and lackluster performance from hastily-raised troops after the Russian debacle of 1812. Indeed, the French come across as dismissive when it came to the smaller states' troops, and sometimes that proved true in battle, but every once in a while, a contingent would prove superior. For example, Berg cavalry was so good, it was assigned under the same command as the Imperial Guard.

The recap of the reorganization of the Wurtemberg troops after the Battle of Dennewitz sets the tone for the the tome.

I had to look up the word "knout" (p167) -- a whip of some sort.

One typo: "drag both guns out the river" (p271) should likely have "of" inserted.

Another typo: Napoleon's birthday is listed as August 10 (p155), but it's August 15.



A production gaffe: The top pages of the Footnotes section (p417-p506) says "Notes to pages xxx" -- someone forgot to insert the page numbers.

Note that the bibliography (p518 - p568) is quite extensive.

The book contains two black and white diagrams, 23 black and white illustrations, 17 black and white maps, 33 color illustrations, and 32 Orders of Battle. Once again, Gill supplies lots of maps, including tactical ones that you can use to drop terrain on a tabletop and position troops. When you read about a battle, it's always helpful to offer a map with the towns and such on them.

Once again, exceptional research, smooth prose, detailed orders of battle with numbers, and a cornucopia of tactical, operational, and strategic maps make this another brilliant examination of the Napoleonic era. Another excellent volume.

Enjoyed it.

Then All Hell Broke Loose. by Dennis I. Fisher. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 181 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The Odyssey of a Marine Corps Photographer in Vietnam*

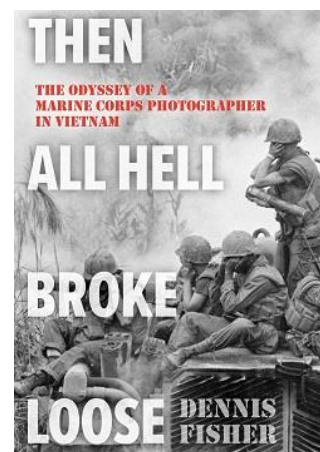
Through a fortunate paperwork snafu, the author was sent to Vietnam as a clerk, not an infantry replacement. This kept him in the rear areas, a reasonably safe spot, and perseverance in getting transferred to a photography unit paid off.

He then humped a camera, not a rifle, through the jungle and at outposts documenting operations. When he had enough shots, he hitched a ride back to his unit base and developed, catalogued, and forwarded his photos.

I thought this would be a photo book, and it contains 179 black and white photos, but it is also a memoir of his tour in Vietnam. It reads quickly, complete with terrifying moments, lucky escapes, and the occasional shenanigan. He saw his job of documenting the good, bad, and ugly of Marine Corps units' daily battles. His words are just as good as his photos.

The book also contains six black and white maps.

Enjoyed it.



Kriegsmarine North Sea Command 1939-42: Fleet 13. by Lawrence Paterson. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Germany's Coastal Naval Command*

This volume in the series covers German small-boat and ship actions from S-boat through destroyers in the English Channel with some extension into the North Sea. It does not cover the invasion of Norway.

Design and development of German boats and ships are well explained, especially the design flaws of the larger ships that caused shiphandling problems and mechanical issues. The Schnellboote (motor torpedo boats), on the other hand, were well-engineered, if often improperly used.

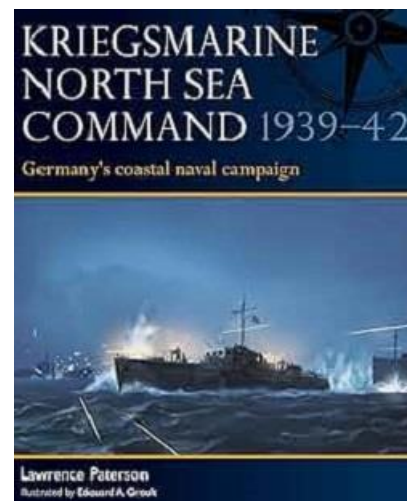
Minelaying off the British coast became a German specialty early in the war, although as the Allies gained sea and air superiority, such missions diminished.

Fleet organization changed as the war progressed, but the problem of little Luftwaffe-Kriegsmarine cooperation remained unsolved. Goering gets the blame here for demanding that all aircraft, including naval air units, come under Luftwaffe control, hence the inter-service rivalry.

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

A fine overview.

Enjoyed it.



The First Battle for Kesternich: December 1944. by George T. MacKnight. Hardback (7.0x9.9 inches). 352 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Hurtgen Forest -- The Ardennes -- Roer/Urft Dams*

Despite the title, the action -- begins in September as the US 78th Division attacked into the Hurtgen Forest just before the Battle of the Bulge. The unit was eventually ordered to take Kesternich, an important crossroads town on a plateau that also overlooked a number of Roer River dams. At first, both sides didn't recognize the importance of the dams, but releasing the waters would flood the valley and make for a difficult to impossible crossing downstream.

This hypertactical examination of the US attack through the nightmare terrain of the Forest, up the sides of the plateau, and into the town itself presents immense detail. In general, it takes you from the regiment level down through battalions, companies, platoons, sections, and individual soldiers.

Better yet, and I can't give enough kudos, the book includes not only US Army maps (I'm eyeballing at 1:25,000 scale) with colored arrows for attacks AND successive time lines through the progression of these 13 maps, but well-marked aerial photos of the area attacked by US troops. Excuse me, I just drooled on the book at the wargame scenarios you can pull from this. Pair these with the detailed terrain descriptions (p47 a must read) to adjust your scenarios.

Before I hyperventilate myself into unconsciousness in praise, allow me to point out that this includes lots and lots and lots of first-person accounts -- mostly taken from the 78th Division magazine *The Flash*. Some go on in tiny type for more than a page. Individually, they offer a foxhole-eye view of situations and actions. Yet, I find they get repetitious as you continuously read about soldiers being cold, confused, and taking/giving fire. Just because you found them doesn't mean you have to put all of them in the text. Well-written narratives will weave the general sense of perception with the pinpointed anecdotes far more effectively than an info dump. To me, these type of accounts are like spice: use 'em but don't abuse 'em.

I know MacKnight can do this: his concise description of the replacement system, and more importantly, the effect it had on division effectiveness (p272) is well done. A tip of the electron to the explanation of US pre-plotted artillery fire and the specific map (p206), although I would have liked to know a little more about the time frame needed to scout the locations, or, presumably, use maps and aerial photos to select the zones. The bibliography lists the original artillery source manual if I need more info, but under combat conditions?

A few non-fatal typos: 600 yards is not 54 meters and 300 yards is not 27 meters (p24), so both meters are missing a zero; "a Jagdpanzer 3812" needs the "12" deleted; and a format error (p330) in the bibliography.

The book contains 105 black and white photos, 10 black and white maps, 14 color maps, and one black and white illustration (bunker layout).

Here's a tactical battle done right and done well.

Enjoyed it.

Pacific Profiles: Volume 19. by Michael John Claringbould. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *American Night Fighters Pacific Theatre 1943-1945*

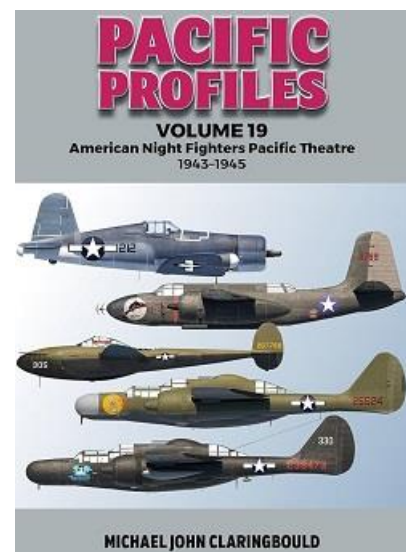
Long-time readers know how I've come to appreciate MJC's profile volumes on WWII Pacific Theater aircraft as well as his excellent operational histories. Well, here's another marvelous profile volume, this one on US nightfighters: P-61, P-70, P-38, F4U Corsair, PV-1 Ventura, Beaufighter, and even the odd P-39 and P-40.

Per usual, unit by unit, short historical recaps of specific airframes are accompanied by color camouflage aircraft profile illustrations. Nose art receives separate illustrative attention.

Combat operations are also covered and you can pull scenario after scenario from the text for whatever WWII air combat game you use.

One typo: Missing period at the end of a sentence (p85).

The booklet contains 44 black and white photos, eight color photos, one color map, one color illustration, 91 color camouflage profile illustrations, and 91 color nose-art illustrations.



One note about the color illustrations: The majority of aircraft seem to be colored in the original Olive Drab color. However, after subsequent US military tests, a semi-gloss finish better hid the aircraft in the night skies (p11). I'm not sure how a modeler handles such, but it's worth mentioning.

Another fantastic volume.

Enjoyed it.

Spanish Civil War in the Air: Volume 1: 1936-1937. by Eduardo Manuel Gil Martinez and Juan Arraez Cerda. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 78 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Europe at War 58*

If you enjoy reading about a hodge podge lodge of aircraft, look no further than this volume in the popular series. The Spanish government (Republicans) and rebels (Nationalists) scrounged new and obsolete planes from all over Europe.

The Italians sent 400 Fiat CR.32 fighters and 600 pilots while the Soviets sent I-15 and I-16 fighters and Soviet pilots to start to wrest air superiority away from the CR.32s and the Heinkel HE-51 fighters. Heinkel also sent HE-45, HE 59, HE-60, and HE-70 aircraft long before the first HE-111 bombers showed up. Then the initial Bf-109s arrived with JU-52s and JU-87s as part of the Condor Legion. SB-2s, SM.79s and SM.81s, Nieuport Ni52s, DO-17s, Potez 540, and a lot of small-quantity or even single version aircraft, like the one Boeing 281, appeared in the air over Spain.

It's all explained, complete with combat operations supporting offensives as well as aircraft deployment strategies. From the original airlift of what became Franco's rebel army to the battles around Madrid and northern Spain, this volume covers it in enough detail to give you the context of first-person pilot accounts.

The Guernica air bombing of April 26, 1937 is covered (p54), with the initial intention of destroying a bridge. Alas, accuracy left much to be desired and bombs hit everywhere except the bridge, ultimately razing 70% of the village to the ground, including the armament factories.

As for typos, the same sentence about Polish Army armaments (p19) appears twice, but the back cover promo of the series may need reworking: "The *Europe @ War* series provides revealing accounts and new insights into armed conflicts and military forces in Europe since 1945" -- which the SCW years don't fit.

The booklet contains 172 black and white photos, one color map, 21 color camouflage aircraft profile illustrations, and six color unit insignia illustrations.

Volume 2 will present "decisive moments" that led to Franco's final victory (p2). I look forward to the next volume.

Enjoyed it.

Hetzer vs SU-76M: Hungary 1945 Duel 149. by Peter Samsonov. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2025.

The latest volume follows the usual series format with an overview of the design, specifications, development, and deployment of both armored vehicles, but with an emphasis on combat operations during Germany's Spring Awakening offensive in 1945.

Both vehicles had positives and negatives. The Hetzer had narrow tracks, which limited mobility in mud and soft ground and the SU-76M had such weak armor, just about any weapon stronger than a MG could disable it. Yet the guns, and the Hetzer had a slightly better one, could take on all the major tanks -- although the Soviets often used SU-76Ms like tanks in the assault, which caused significant losses.

The booklet contains 16 black and white photos, 30 color photos, four black and white illustrations, 14 color illustrations, two color maps, and two color two-page action illustrations.

Enjoyed it.



Putin's Mercenaries 2013-24: Elite 265. by Mark Galeotti. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 64 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The Wagner Group and Other Russian PMCs*

PMC is Private Military Company, which is essentially a mercenary company, while PSC is Private Security Company, which usually handles security of personnel, often VIPs, and installations.

The Wagner Group is a PMC and if you followed the news the last few years, you've heard about the rise and fall of Wagner and its founder Yevgeny Prigozhin. This booklet traces its origins, in part via Syria and Africa, until it ended up in Ukraine in a combat role. All the rivalries between Wagner and the Russian military are explained.

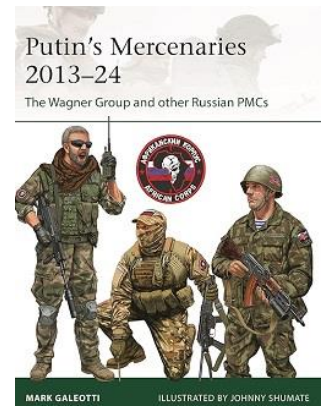
Wagner was decimated in Ukraine, even after it recruited inmates from Russian prisons, until Putin decided to integrate Wagner and other PMCs into the military.

Prigozhin objected and began a march on Moscow, not to overthrow Putin, but to gain an exemption. Ultimately, Putin and Prigozhin struck a deal and then Putin allegedly had Prigozhin assassinated via plane crash. End of Wagner.

The booklet contains one black and white photo, 50 color photos, two color illustrations, 21 color uniform illustrations, three color vehicle illustrations, 16 color patches illustrations, and four color maps.

While I could have done without the first few pages of historical mercenaries, the rest flowed well.

Enjoyed it.



The Kaiser's Panzers: German Tanks of the First World War. by David Mitchelhill-Green. Softcover (6.8x9.7 inches). 259 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Images of War*

The only German "tank" of WWI was the A7V, and only around 20 were produced. The Germans also captured and used a variety of British tanks and even some French tanks. This book cover all that as well as other German armored vehicles such as armored cars, armored tractors, and even a couple of armored flak vehicles.

The star of the book is the A7V and I never knew so many photos, including stills from period propaganda films, of the tank and crew existed. It's a modeler's dream.

The text covers design, development, and combat operations, both by itself and in concert with captured Allied tanks. The Allies captured A7Vs as well, although they were mostly sent back for displays. The UK had two, the US had one, and the Australians had one. Presumably the French had the rest, except one. Between the wars, it was made into a memorial in Germany (photo on p251). Of all of them, only the Australians kept theirs intact -- the only remaining A7V in the world was originally named Mephisto -- while the other countries scrapped theirs.

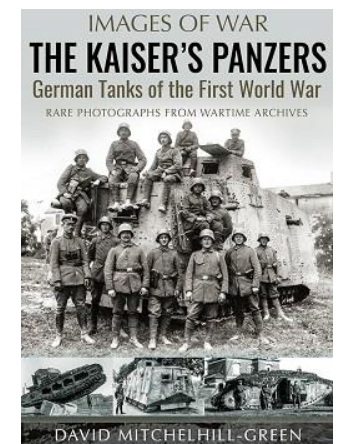
Other vehicles covered by photos include: Orion-Wagen, Treffas-Wagen, Marienwagen I personnel carrier, Uberlandwagen supply carrier, Leichter Kampfpfanzter light tank, a few armored cars, and even wooden dummy tanks.

The book contains 485 black and white photos, 50 color photos, two color illustrations, 21 color uniform illustrations, three color vehicle illustrations, 16 color patches illustrations, and four color maps.

A couple of interesting photos show old British WWI Mk IV tanks -- liberated from the Soviets -- defending the Reichstag building in 1945 (p254-p255)! Best photo might be a prototype A7V without its armor and shows a stripped down interior -- don't see under the armor every day (p56). Honorable mention is A7V 527 stranded ("ditched" in the vernacular of the times) in a trench near Reims in 1918 (p167).

This is truly an impressive collection of photos.

Enjoyed it.

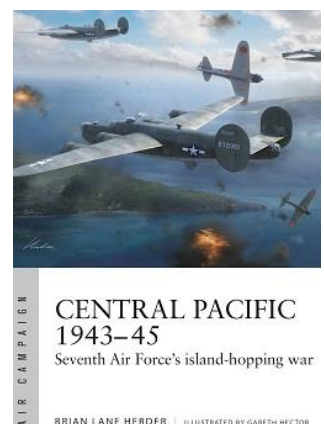


Central Pacific 1943-45: Air Campaign 57. by Brian Lane Herder. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Seventh Air Force's Island-Hopping War*

From the near parity with the Japanese air forces in 1943 to the overwhelming US superiority in 1945, the Seventh Air Force's air war across the central Pacific Ocean proved an essential element in ultimate victory. While not a major factor in bombing islands prior to amphibious invasions, the Seventh kept surrounding Japanese forces occupied and suppressed.

Per usual, opposing forces are compared and a plane by plane basis, as well as



associated forces needed to support the air forces. For example, thanks to mechanization and specially designed bulldozers and other construction vehicles, 100 Seabees (US Navy construction troops) could use interlocking Marston mats atop one to two inches of crushed coral to build a 3,000-foot runway in 100 hours (p13).

The first 34 pages sets the campaign stage and the rest rolls out the hard-fought air campaign between the US and Japanese. The US learned from its tactical errors while the Japanese were slowly squeezed. You can pull some scenarios from the pages, or at least learn where to look in other sources for scenarios.

One possible typo: the photo caption (p20) mentions the B-25 armed with six 50-cal MGs, but the nose shows two 50-cal MGs and a 75mm cannon version.

The booklet contains 56 black and white photos, four color photos, five color maps, five color illustrations, and three color two-page action illustrations. A larger font size would be nice.

Enjoyed it.

Tanks & Armour in Ukraine 1941-1944: Images of War. by Ian Baxter.

Softcover (6.7x9.7 inches). 119 pages. 2025.

Another volume in the series delivers lots of black and white WWII photos -- 150 by my count. The wide range of photos cover the Ukraine, although most are traditional shots of various tanks, halftracks, and other armored vehicles. Most are fine, some even sharp, although my untrained eye finds more blurry photos than usual. Some are really blurry (p14, p 18, p55, p76, p82, and so on) and not being particularly rare in subject matter, perhaps other sharper photos could have been used.

Then there's the text. It seems to have more typos than usual.

Typos: "launched a large began a large counterattack" (p42) needs a deletion of one or the other; "brought invisibility in the eyes of the Germans" (p42) should be invincibility; "following the fall of Sevastopol, the caves that surrounded Ukraine were almost entirely under German control" (p73) -- no idea what "caves" is supposed to be; "identical to the cut of the to the Sturmartillerie uniform" (p51) needs "to the" trimmed; "they were produced in limited numbers and service on all fronts" (p84) is likely served; "panzergreandier" (p85) should be panzergrenadier; "pulled between Some" (p87) needs a lowercase s; "Although the losses were huge in Manstein's eyes another major disaster that had been averted in Ukraine" (p88) needs "that" deleted; and "Soviets continued driving its powerful units" (p89) should be "their" not "its" or "Soviets" should be "Soviet Army".

It's as if this file went in raw without an editor. And believe you me, if you read this AAR close enough, you'll find the same sort of typos in my text because I'm a one-man band without an editor. Then again, the price of AAR PDF admission versus the \$24.95 retail price of the book has something to do with it.

I suspect the text is less important to readers than the photos. And plenty of photos will give you plenty of information about uniforms, everyday armor, and model diorama possibilities. My favorite photo (p28) is taken from a fourth- or fifth-story window of a street scene that shows a horse-drawn field kitchen column, a command car, and two trucks heading down the road one way and two halftracks, one pulling a gun and the other a trailer, heading in the opposite direction. Runner up? A STuG III (p68) column in winter camouflage scheme driving along a snowy track. It's just that a lot of them seem blurry. Ties still go to the author.

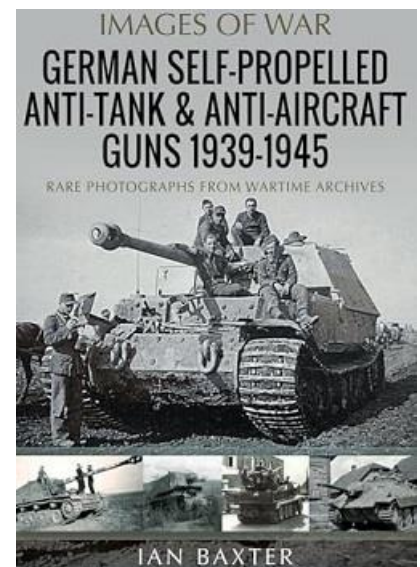
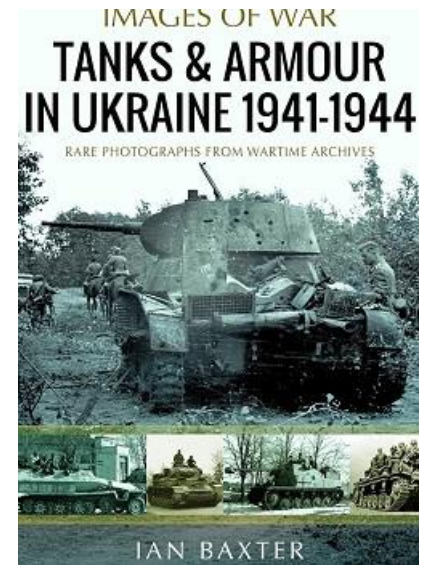
Enjoyed it.

German Self-Propelled Anti-Tank and Anti-Aircraft Guns 1939-1945: Images of War. by Ian Baxter. Softcover (6.7x9.7 inches). 108 pages. 2025.

After the conquest of Poland, the Germans decided they needed additional mobility and firepower and came up with the idea of PanzerJager (self-propelled AT guns) and Flakpanzer (self-propelled AA guns) to keep up with the panzers. First efforts were generally quick and dirty conversions using PzI and PzII chassis with AT guns and halftrack-mounted AA guns.

As the war continued, so did development of heavier guns on heavier chassis until they came out with the Elefant and JagdTiger as well as quad 20mm AA and single 37mm AA guns on halftracks. The STuG became the star of self-propelled assault guns pressed into AT service.

Yet a couple of vehicles were new to me, which is always a pleasure to



find. The Dicker Max 10.5cm K18 mounted a 105mm gun on a PzIV chassis, but had limited traverse and threw up huge dust clouds when it fired (p36-39).

Also, the 12.8cm Selbstfahrlafette VK 30.01 (H) had only two models built, named Max and Moritz after storybook characters (p78). Max was lost in battle and Moritz was captured at Stalingrad.

Two typos: "three-man crew...driver along with the radio operator...the loader was located next to the commander" (p9). That's four crewmen. The list of vehicles refers to the altered French tank as 35R (p107), but the captions refer to the tank as R35 (such as on p26). Other than those, the text and captions seem pretty clean.

Yet the photos are what draws folks to the series and this book contains 142 black and white photos and generally good quality. I can't decide which would be my favorite: a line of Jagdpanthers on the march across fields (p86) for the spacing aspect, or, the 88mm AT gun mounted on a halftrack set up to fire and the crew peering into the distance (p16) along with two motorcycle riders. A pair of photos would be a tie for third because they need to be seen together -- a proper winter camouflage paint job on a halftrack (p60) and a half-assed winter camouflage paint job on a Wirblewind (p61).

A nice, tight book.

Enjoyed it.

Russian Machine Guns Since 1945: Weapon 89. by Leroy Thompson. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2025.

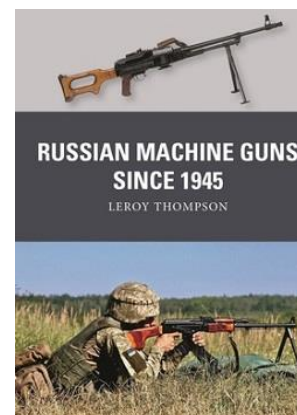
Post-WWII Soviet and Russian MGs start with WWI designs and progress through WWII and post-war development. This examines a dozen models one by one and then offers an overview of deployment to various hot spots around globe including Cold War, Vietnam, Algeria, Afghanistan, Middle East, and Ukraine.

The Soviets sent weaponry across the globe and because US forces have been sent to a multitude of countries to teach tactics, US troops are familiar with Soviet weaponry. Sidebars showcase author's experience with firing the various models in the booklet.

An interesting tidbit: During the Vietnam War, special forces would find a VC or NVA weapons and ammo cache and not blow it up. Instead, they'd drop in a few "Eldest Son" rounds into the cache. These were special rounds designed to blow up when being fired, injuring the firer and perhaps those around and making VC and NVA troops suspicious of their arms (p38-39).

The booklet contains eight black and white photos, 65 color photos, two color two-page cutaway diagrams (RPK and PKM guns), two color one-page action illustrations, and one color two-page action illustration.

Enjoyed it.



Real Weathering: Vol. 2. by Dick Taylor and Andy Brend. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 152 pages. 2025.

This book is a collection of 521 color photos of vehicles, mostly modern armor but with some WWII and Cold War vehicles, that show the effects of Mother Nature. The close-ups of various spots can help military modelers create that realistic-looking model by showing the effect of vehicles picking up dirt, dust, mud, rust, and all sorts of wear and tear.

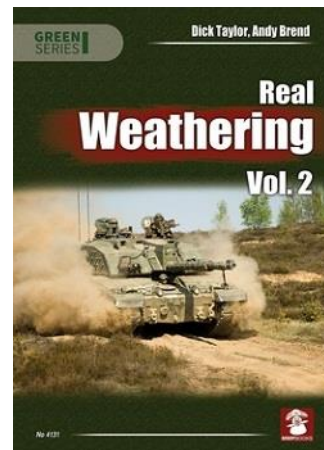
It is NOT a book about weathering techniques. You won't find a single tip about brushwork, paint mixing, plastic scraping, or any other technique designed to age a model or show it in less than pristine condition.

In fact, the photos have NO captions at all. It's all about the look.

The photos are divided into topics: Introduction (13 photos); Dirt and Dust (84); Wheels and Wheeled Chassis (88); Engines, Electrical Equipment, and Instruments (89); Engineer and Plant Vehicles (44); Glass and Sights (48); Exterior Rust (55); and Miscellaneous (100). All are sharp and the include lots of subsystem close-ups.

Consider this a primer on what vehicles that drive around battlefields should look like.

Enjoyed it.



The Hump 1942-1945: Air Campaign 58. by Mark Lardas. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *America's First Massive Military Airlift*

The US agreed to provide arms, ammo, and equipment to China during WWII and there were two ways to get it there: The Burma Road and The Hump. The latter was an air route, the main southern path over jungle and the main northern path over the hills of the Himalayas. Either route was dangerous and this booklet concentrates on the northern route.

The strengths and weaknesses of the cargo aircraft, converted bomber aircraft, and fighters used by the US and Japan are discussed, as is the weather. Although Japanese fighter interception was rare, bad weather was not. Some of the planes were new and had teething problems -- some aircraft were never found, lost presumably from mechanical failure. One plane didn't have wing ventilation and could explode in mid air.

The primitive facilities and airfield infrastructure are also discussed. The US upgraded throughout the war. The Japanese not so much. While both sides believed the China-Burma-India theater a backwater, US logistics were better than the Japanese logistics.

One typo: "helped plots find airfield" (p59) should be pilots.

The booklet contains 54 black and white photos, 10 color photos, one black and white illustration, one black and white map, five color maps, three color diagrams, and three color two-page action illustrations.

Nice and succinct as an Osprey should be.

Enjoyed it.

Barbarossa Victims: Camera On 35. by Tomasz J. Kopanski. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 96 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Luftwaffe Kills in the East Vol. 2*

This oversized photo booklet carries on the *Camera On* excellence with unusual photos of the topic at hand -- in this case, shot up and partially destroyed WWII Soviet aircraft mostly from the initial attack in 1941. Some aircraft pictured were captured as the Heer overran airfields.

The list of aircraft types is impressive: Yak-1, Yak-2, Yak-4, Polikarpov R-5, Polikarpov R-ZET, Polikarpov UT-1, Polikarpov U2, Neman R-10, Petlakov PE-2, Lisunov PS-84, Sukhoi SU-2, Iliushin IL-2, Ilyushin DB-3, Tupolev SB, Tupolev TB-3, Tupolev R-6, and the Arkhangelskiy AR-2.

Note that "Iliushin" is spelled with an i and "Ilyushin" with a y. This seems like a typo to me, but I don't know enough about Russian spelling for specific aircraft to definitely pick one.

A number of aircraft on the list were new to me, like the Arkhangelskiy AR-2. A number of aircraft reminded me of counters in GDW's *Drang Nach Osten/Fire in the East* wargame.

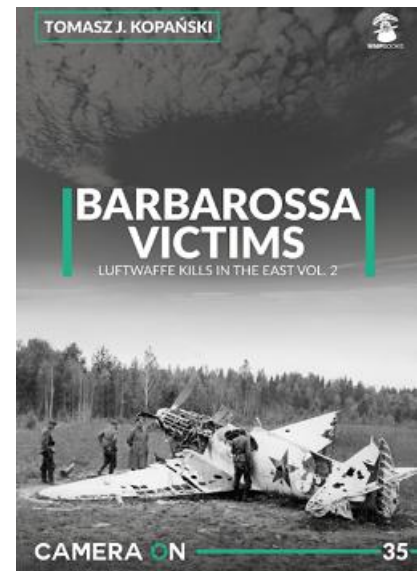
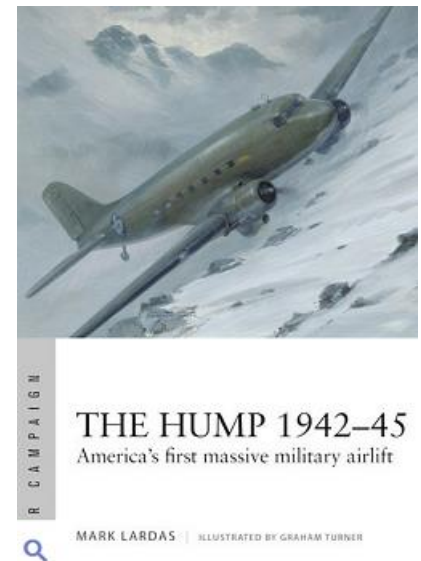
The photos, mostly two to a page, are generally sharp and include various aircraft and German personnel in all types of weather, from summer heat to winter snow.

Favorite photo for me 0out of the 164 black and white photos? An obsolete, but still used, Tupolev TB-3 abandoned with a dusting of snow at the edge of a forest (p85). It's a nice, moody shot. Runner up: Arkhangelskiy AR-2 (p58), just because I never heard of the plane before.

Bonus Info: An extensive June 1941 Soviet OOB (p91-95), complete with a listing of all aircraft (not just the ones listed above) available in various districts (Baltic, Leningrad, Western, etc.) at the time of the invasion. The listing includes readiness states per aircraft type (although the I through IV column heads are not explained -- presumably, but I don't know, that I and II are ready to fly, III needs minor repairs, and IV are write-offs or major repairs?). Also, 1941 production figures are included in a separate table.

With the tabular info, MMP stepped up its already excellent volume in the *Camera On* series.

Enjoyed it.



Fiat G.55 Centauro: Orange Series. by Przemyslaw Skutski. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 128 pages. 2025.

The G.55 served in mid to late WWII in limited numbers, in part because of Italian manufacturing problems and in part because the USAAF bombed the factory rather effectively. Only 161 of the fighters were produced, of which 107 were delivered (p11).

Engine problems delayed development and the first aircraft only showed up in June 1943. It took about 15,000 man hours to produce (versus 6,000 for a ME-109) and maintaining it was difficult. Yet, when it flew, it had potential against Allied fighters. You can pull a couple scenarios from the combat operations text.

All the technical specs and explanations are there for the serious buffs, including 36 black and white drawings of various subsystems.

For the modelers, no original G.55 survived, although one version, converted back from postwar variant G.59, is on display at the Museo Storico dell'Aeronautica in Vigna de Valle (Italy). An 80-color photo section captures the aircraft, including close-ups of various subsystems.

In addition to the above, the book contains 93 black and white photos, four other color photos, three other black and white illustrations, 14 black and white 1/72-scale drawings, and 36 color camouflage aircraft profile illustrations.

It's another excellent volume in the *Orange* series.

Enjoyed it.

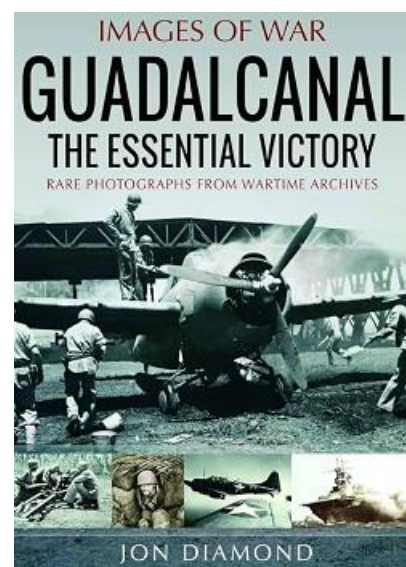


Guadalcanal: The Essential Victory -- Images of War. by Jon Diamond. Softcover (6.8x9.7 inches). 248 pages. 2025.

This next volume in the well-regarded series offers 288 black and white photos and four black and white illustrations centering around US forces at Guadalcanal. Most of them offer exceptional views of men and uniforms in the jungle, in the rear areas, and around Henderson Airfield. There are a few photos of Japanese, mostly after the battle casualties, and a few of the terrain. I would have liked to see more of Alligator Creek and Edson's Ridge, but I don't know if more exist.

My favorite photo shows sea-skimming Betty bombers on a torpedo attack run amidst a multitude of flak (p191). My second favorite is a series showing Japanese camouflaged pillboxes and MG nests (p73 to p78) that offer up ideas for modelers and tabletop terrain buffs.

Enjoyed it.



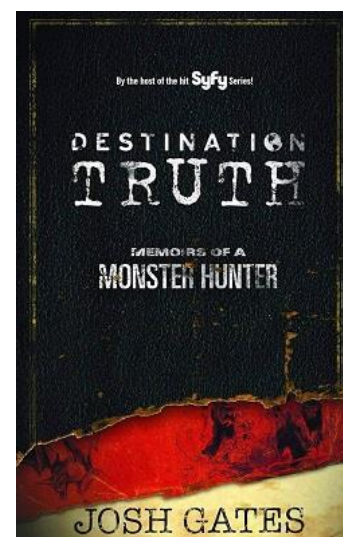
Destination Truth: Memoirs of a Monster Hunter. by Josh Gates. Softcover (5.3x8.2 inches). 257 pages. 2011.

Josh Gates, Indiana Jones-like archeologist and supernatural searcher, is known for his *Expedition Unknown* TV program, which started in 2015. Before that, he did his monster- and paranormal-hunting act on the TV show *Destination Truth*.

I catch his *Expedition Unknown* show from time to time and while I'm sure he's "found" some stuff, most of the time, he finds nothing, or at least nothing that hasn't been found before. The secret of the show is that his team talks with real explorers and searchers first, then swoops in at the last moment to film -- if not an actual artifact or monster, then at least some location that might hold them. Not that he doesn't scuba dive or squirm through caves or endure scenes from a movie that might be called, "If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Some Fourth-World Place That's Part of a Third-World Country."

That said, the journey is the reward of his travels around the globe. It's Rick Steves Roughing It if Rick Steves ever ventured out of civilization. Finding anything is always second. It's full of humor, from snickers to laugh out loud parts as he navigates to and from places where most travelers never go.

His story started as guy who dual-majored in drama and archeology and headed to Hollywood for fame and fortune -- waiting tables like most of the actors and actresses. His good fortune was living in the same building as a



producer who sold a supernatural search show to SyFy and bombed as the host of the show. Gates was just back climbing Mt. Kilimanjaro with his buddies and showed up dirty, stinking, and in muddy clothes. The producer told him not to change or even shower. The other three auditioners wore suits. He got the part and hit it big on the first try in Malaysia finding a local Bigfoot footprint.

The stories seem a bit exaggerated and he even notes he made one of them up because it "sounded very adventurous in my head." (Foreword, no page number). Maybe the book should be titled Destination Lie.

The book contains 23 black and white photos.

He later starred in the show *Expedition Unknown*, where he continued his globe-trotting ways to find bits and bobs. When you're looking for King Arthur's grave, Yeti, a variety of cryptozoids, and Blackbeard's Treasure, you have to expect some disappointment. You won't be disappointed in the prose.

Enjoyed it.

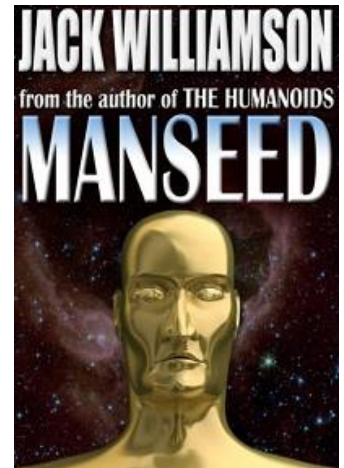
Manseed. by Jack Williamson. Paperback (4.2x6.8 inches). 217 pages. 1982.

The premise was interesting: A super rich fellow sets up the Raven Foundation to develop technology that transforms human genes into computer code and then transfers the genes back into a growing pod that can make a few dozen humans. Then put these pods in spacecraft and shoot them all over the galaxy to colonize Earth-like planets. In addition, one solar-powered cyborg called a Defender is created in each ship for defense and labor. And off went the ships.

Alas, a micrometeorite punched through the hull of one, destroying the central computer core but triggering the cyborg. Landing needed some improvisation, especially because automated defenses of the targeted planet tried to intercept the spaceship.

All this would be fine, except, the prose moves forwards and backwards in time, from the creation of the Foundation to the landing of the crippled spaceship on the planet. I'm guessing someone suggested that the creation process was dull and the plot needed action and conflict.

The switching back and forth didn't work for me. I kept having to re-read sections to keep the timeline straight. The discovery of the long abandoned city and its robot tenders was conveniently ignored by placing the Grand Canyon between the cyborg and the city. This could be much better than it was.



Guards! Guards! by Terry Pratchett. Paperback (4.2x6.7 inches). 355 pages. 2001 reprint of 1989 book.

Subtitle: *An uproarious tale of magic, mayhem, and a marauding dragon*

I usually steer clear of books with such breathless subtitles, usually paired with equally breathless platitudes from other authors. I never quite got the marketing angle about having other authors provide such breathless praise. Of course they do -- so they can get breathless praise for their books. It's a breathless praise factory complex, er, network.

Then again, I'm a reviewer providing commentary about a book. I indeed offer praise or damnation and then defend it by explaining why I came to such conclusions. "Enjoyed it" will likely never make a book cover like a quote about Wodehouse.

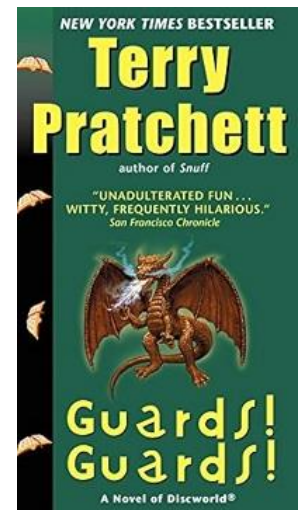
Anyway, in this case, my gaming buddy loaned me this book and suggested I read it. I had never read a Pratchett book despite seeing a multitude of his titles in bookstores. Unfortunately, publishers are taking fewer and fewer chances on new authors, hiring fewer editors to help develop talent, and as a result bookstores stock fewer and fewer authors. No wonder self-publishing is expanding.

Back to Pratchett's book. I do like the point of view concept: generally following the captain of a city guard and his men trying to maintain order, score a few bribes, and stay alive. Enter a cult summoning a dragon in an attempt to take over city government.

It's all tongue in cheek, with variations of jokes by Monty Python and probably other British comic groups. There's even a Dirty Harry reference. Comedy is tough, so it's difficult to keep people chuckling through a 90,000-word novel. However, from time to time, I laughed at a reference or two and snickered at others. That's better than a lot of "hilarious" novels I've read. It also drags from time to time, trying to milk a joke that wasn't funny in the first place, but when you need 90,000 words, you need to pad a bit. The editor probably didn't dare cut anything, although a bit of tightening throughout wouldn't hurt.

So, maybe I should just say "oook" and leave it at that.*

* In this case, "oook" translates as "Enjoyed it."



1804: Time Travel and Intrigue in Napoleonic France. by Chester E. Hendrix. Softcover (6.2x9.2 inches). 677 pages. 2025 version of 2012 book.

At about a quarter million words, or roughly three regular-sized paperbacks, this novel is the equivalent of a "trilogy" in one binding. I read the Foreword after I finished the novel -- no need to spoil the unknown with author intents.

Essentially, an eclipse and an explosion sends Roman Optio Titus Hermas and WWI British Corporal George Owen through time to emerge from the same hot springs pool as French Lieutenant Bayard Legard in 1804 France. Boulogne to be precise.

Besides the surprise of finding two other naked guys in the same old Roman pool, the Lieutenant soon discovers his fellow soakers use two different languages. Fortunately, he can speak English and passable Latin and leads the three to his tent, where they see a drawing of Mrs. Legard -- who happens to look identical to their own wives. Now comes the quest to discover why they all appeared in 1804 and why each one is married to the same woman...

History buffs will know that Napoleon planned for the invasion of England, so the area is crawling with French troops and English saboteurs. Finding a way to get to Lagarde's wife in Calais requires guile and action. And away the novel takes us.

And takes us and takes us. Some of it is well written. Other parts, not so much. As a self-published book, this uneven quality is fairly typical.

On the plus side, he's got the history vibe down. It feels like you're along for the ride on the way to Calais, complete with bandits, suspicious innkeepers, and skirmishes. I liked the way he wove the three languages into the plot, passing the Roman and Englishman off as Swiss and Irish. The use of allies and enemies, including Napoleon and Fouché, with their own jigsaw pieces of motivations presents a nice puzzle of ambition that gradually comes together.

On the minus side, the Point of View switching (nicknamed headhopping) within each chapter is incredibly distracting. Several times I kept backing up to figure out who was thinking what thought. It is the hardest detail to rewrite in a novel. As for the prose, it could use tightening: again, less in some places and more in other places.

He has a number of non-fatal formatting issues, such as boldfacing 2nd and ship names -- presumably it should be italics -- and what look like tabs in the middle of paragraphs. Some typos: "ususrper" (p31) should be usurper; "vaguely ate the city" (p295) should be "at"; "orders you..." (p467) likely should be "orders you delivered"; "shadows did not prevented Colonel" (p474) should be prevent.

Some gaffes: a reference to June (p435) when the story takes place in July; Titus gets a Swiss uniform in red while George gets an Irish uniform in green (p86) but later Titus has a deep green uniform and George has deep Prussian blue (p136); and Titus uses "square" sling bullets (p74) which I suppose can be used, but round and oblong were the usual sling ammo. Also, the French 6lber cannon shot grapeshot at 600 yards (p605) -- about double to triple its effective range, I believe. And just how did three naked guys run through the rows of tents to get to Bayard's tent and stumble into "cots" (p44) at 10:15pm without running into any guards or even his roommates? A little neat that one.

Yes, I read the entire novel, although later in the book when the headhopping got too distracting, I shuffled forward a few pages to the next chapter. One point of view per chapter is the golden rule. It's hard to write 250,000 words into a coherent whole without some goofs and gaffes. And yes, the text can be tightened up by dropping some of the more repetitive aspects of "conference room planning" and different parties concluding the same thing at different times. I also wasn't a fan of the dozen prologues -- info dumps, so to speak.

This book is long and needs trimming, for it will drag as much as thrill. It's not easy to write a novel, or the equivalent of three of them. I'm still hanging a "ties go to the author" label on an ambitious work.

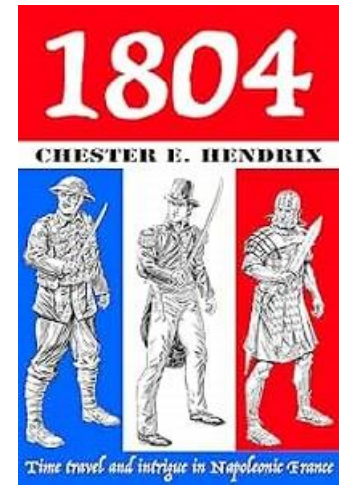
Enjoyed it.

Fallen Aces. by M. J. Finn. Softcover (5.5x8.5 inches). 385 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *Barnstorming Detective Series*

This is the opening self-published volume in a series of novels about T. J. O'Connell. I really like the concept of a barnstorming private investigator (PI), for he can fly to take cases anywhere. Better yet, he's his own mechanic, so he can fix what he flies. The atmosphere and possibilities are endless.

Imagine my surprise when TJ turns out to be a 17 or 18 year old instead of your typical PI aged in the 30s. Worse, he possesses a hair-trigger temper and is not afraid to release it. It's actually quite painful to read about the main character ignoring all sorts of



advice, from Jimmy Doolittle no less, that amplifies his troubles.

On the plus side, the atmosphere is spot on. I am at that airfield amid all the hoopla of an Air Race outside Chicago. Tremendous detail.

On the minus side, the bugaboo of mixing points of view (called headhopping) within the same chapter confuses me at times -- I have to flip back a page or two to figure out whose head I'm in. An example of that bugaboo is the crash that sets the plot a ticking. I'm in two cockpits at once: TJ's and that of WWI ace Peter Rice, not to mention the bookies on the ground. It continues off and on.

The plot rolls along with twists and turns aplenty to keep TJ hopping, although he seems to attract an unusual assortment of allies who mitigate his temper while working out the motivations of his enemies.

It's a good start to a series. Uneven for sure, so I'm hanging the "ties go to the author" label on it, but a good start.

Enjoyed it.

Defeating the Japanese Zeros. by R. J. Gorman. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 232 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Lieutenant Commander John S. "Jimmie" Thach: One U.S. Navy Pilot and His Part in the Victory in the Pacific*

Thach was a US Naval Academy graduate who when from communications on battleships to an aviator best known for inventing the Thach Weave as a way for two F4F Wildcats to defend against faster and more maneuverable Japanese Zeros. It's basically a leader and wingman flying roughly parallel and switching places from time to time -- especially if a Zero was on a tail. That way, as they switched, they lined up shots on Japanese Zeros tailing the other plane. Thach drilled his squadron in deflection shooting so well, they took the USN's annual marksman award just prior to the war.

His squadron was at Midway, contributing to the US victory, and he later was sent to teach gunnery and the Thach Weave to new pilots. He was later transferred to run fighter operations just after the Marianas Turkey Shoot and helped set up defensive tactics versus kamikazes. This was called delousing where Hellcats stationed over picket ships would try and pick off the kamikazes before they reached the main US fleet.

These are the strongpoints of the book. The rest is mighty weak. To be kind, the prose is rudimentary at best. And while I might acknowledge the context, the descriptions of the Pacific War never lift above the mundane. Sorry, but because most HMGS members know WWII, this seems too general. If you've never read a book about the Pacific War, I'll rescind that point. Yes, that's harsh, but to my mind accurate.

Other bugaboos: Admiral Yamamoto wasn't arrogant to attack the US at Pearl Harbor (p80), he made the best plan he could in a gamble to fulfil the Japanese strategy of causing enough US casualties to eventually negotiate the end of the war -- before Japan ran out of oil and other natural resources.

The B-25 "could fly further than any plane designed to take off and land on an aircraft carrier" (p84). Er, no. It was modified for the Doolittle Raid to take off from a carrier, but never designed for that task and certainly not to land on a CV.

At Midway, the Japanese loaded "100lb torpedoes" (p120)? That's probably some sort of typo. As I didn't know what a torpedo weighed, I looked it up via several sources -- about 1700-1800 pounds for Japanese Type 91 torpedoes delivered by air in 1941 and 1942.

The book contains 16 black and white photos.

So, this contains an excellent explanation of the two Thach tactics, and reproduces the original Midway report by Thach and Lt. Commander Best, but the rest seems rather general. No bibliography, but the footnotes makes it seem cobbled from mostly secondary source books.

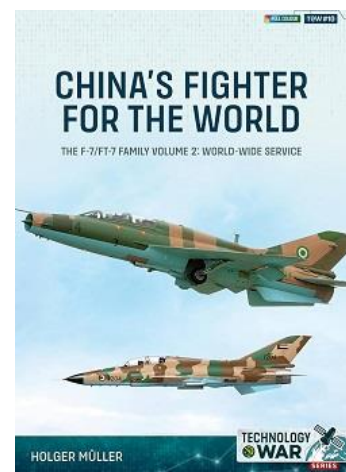
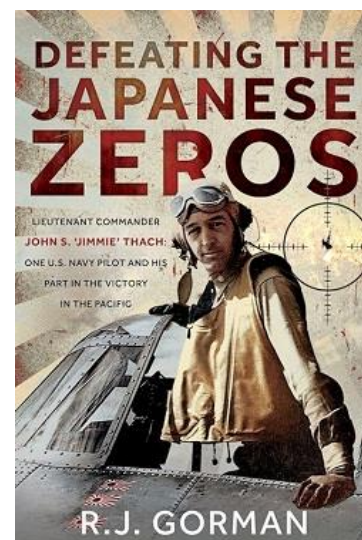
China's Fighter for the World: Volume 2. by Holger Muller. Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 78 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: Technology at War 10

Subtitle: *The F-7/FT-7 Family Volume 2: World-Wide Service*

Volume 1 covers design and development, but *Volume 2* covers deployment with various air forces around the world.

Country by country, F-7 and variant purchases and deployments receive



scrutiny. Modifications to the plane itself as well as later additions of equipment are covered in detail.

A limited amount of use is also included. As few wars broke out -- the Arab-Israeli Wars being the most notable for the F-7, most countries used the aircraft for training. Sometimes, rebel forces would grab and fly a F-7 during a civil war. Note that this book is not a combat record of the F-7, only deployments.

The book contains 120 color photos -- modelers will enjoy selecting a color scheme from among them, four black and white photos, three color unit insignia illustrations, 21 color camouflage illustrations of the aircraft, two partial color camouflage illustrations, and one color advert for the F-7 from Chngdu Aircraft Corp.

For a while, the MiG-21 was a front-line Soviet fighter. The F-7 was the Chinese derivative that provided similar performance.

Enjoyed it.

Operation Power Pack: Volume 1. by Helio Higuchi and Antonio Luis Sapienza Fracchia. Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 80 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Civil War in the Dominican Republic 1965*

Subtitle: *Latin America at War 49*

Lt. Col. Rafael Trujillio launched a successful coup and ruled the Dominican Republic as your typical dictator through the 1950s until assassinated in 1961. After four years of instability, the Loyalists and the Constitutionals squared off in a civil war using a lot of WWII-era US equipment. In the air: P-38, P-47, P-51, DC-3, B-17, B-25, and B-26 prowled the skies. On the ground: Stuarts and M3 halftracks provided the armor support. Warehouses of weaponry were turned over to civilians as the fighting intensified.

Operation Power Pack was the 1965 US invasion of the country to drive a wedge between the two warring factions and restore law and order before any more chaos could erupt in the Caribbean. Altogether, the US launched four Power Pack operations and put about 24,000 troops in country. The Organization of American States was called in to negotiate a political solution.

I rather enjoyed the section on US PsyOps designed to win the hearts and minds of the population. These included radio and TV broadcasts; newspaper, poster, pamphlet, and other printed items; and handing out \$100 bills (p64) and 13-inch black and white TV sets (p65). Imagine that.

The book contains 222 black and white photos, 12 color photos, four color posters, one black and white illustration, one color map, three color insignia, and color camouflage illustrations: 18 aircraft, two vehicles, and two helicopters.

Volume 2 will cover the Inter-American Peace Force.

Enjoyed it.

Hitler's War Against Poland's Partisans. by Antonio J. Munoz. Hardback (6.3x9.5 inches). 306 pages. 2025.

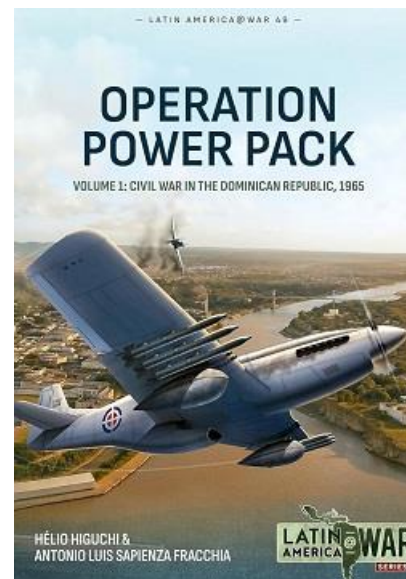
Subtitle: *The Battle Behind the Eastern Front 1939-1945*

Who knew Polish partisans were so many and so active once the country fell to the Germans in 1939...but they were and the Germans were forced to send more and more units to garrison the country.

In exquisite detail, especially with OOBs, unit personnel numbers, and commander bios, the story of the German SS garrison units and partisans play out as the war expanded to other fronts. The partisans accounted for 732 trains derailed, 979 railroad cars destroyed, 19,058 cars damaged (443 set on fire), 4,326 military vehicles destroyed and damaged, 28 planes damaged, 1,167 gas storage tanks destroyed, and 122 warehouses burned (p82). From independent units to organized camps, the Germans murdered between 5.6 million and 6 million Poles (p82).

Contrary to post-war memoirs, the German Army participated in executions and other mass murders of Jews and Poles -- it wasn't just the SS. Eyewitness accounts punctuate the text.

The Polish uprising in Warsaw dominates the back half of the book, as that was the signature uprising against the Germans. Most partisan bands remained in the forests during the war and were disarmed by the Soviets when the war ended.



The book contains 40 black and white photos, 22 black and white maps, and 22 black and white illustrations. The book examines an oft-overlooked aspect of WWII and could be used as the basis for a different type of skirmish wargame. It adds to the already impressive line-up of Munoz's well-researched partisan books. Enjoyed it.

Out-Country War: Volume 1. by Albert Grandolini and E. R. Hooton.
Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 92 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The Secret War Begins: Laos 1954-1960*

Subtitle: *Asia at War 57*

The Vietnam War is well covered, but this book examines the war in neighboring Laos, especially in the 1950s. It's a fantastic recap of the coups and counter-coups and the military effort behind each. The forces arrayed against the French and later US, Thailand, and Vietnam were miserably equipped with WWII weapons and got marginally better when the USSR, China, and US later pumped in military aid.

I can't say I remember all the Laotian names -- it's part my Western ignorance and part parade of ambitious leaders. It's all well laid out in roughly chronological order.

One typo: Pathet Loa (p54) should be Pathet Lao.

The book contains 129 black and white photos, three color maps, one black and white map, 21 color camouflage illustrations: 13 aircraft, five vehicles, and three helicopters.

During the Vietnam War, the Ho Chi Minh Trail led through Laos. Here's how Laos formed after the French left.

Enjoyed it.

