

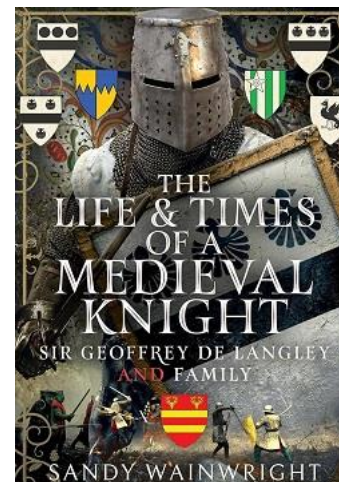
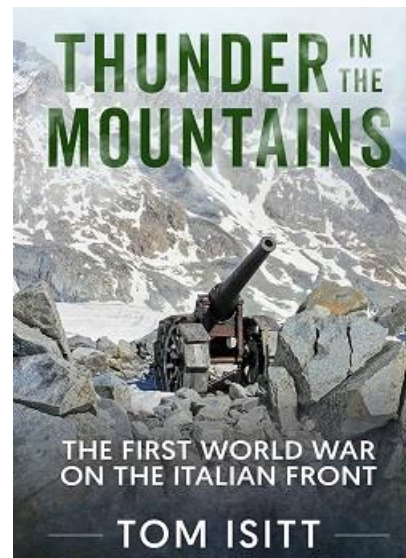
WWII British Attack: Italy 1944
The Thin Block Line: Saladin at Arsuf
Crusader Kingdoms: Castle Bashing
Battletech Campaign: Lancers Mercenary Co.
Shiny! *Giant Killer Robots*
StrattonCon 2026: Euro Gaming Afternoon
StarCraft Risk: Speedy Play
Rallyman GT: Car Race Dice
Rohan vs. Rhun: Middle Earth *RUSE*
Indian Ocean Raid: Double-Blind WWII
Indian Ocean Raid: Umpire View
HMGS Next Gen: Inspiration for History
HMGS Outreach: Spring Offensive 2026 Recap
News: Products, links and events



A panzershrek takes out a Churchill.

Books I've Read

Thunder In The Mountains: WWI Italy
Battle of Tewkesbury: 4 May 1471
Machine Gunner's War: Normandy to Victory
Japanese Military Uniforms 1841-1929
WWII British AA Cruisers: ShipCraft 35
18th C Moldavia Wallachia: RTR No. 160
STuG IV Assault Gun: TankCraft 47
Life & Times of a Medieval Knight
US Soldier Versus Japanese Inf: Combat 85
Kings Mountain 1780: Campaign 427
Battle for Brittany 1944: Then and Now
Nagato-Class Battleships 1920-46: NV 346
Iraq 2003: Air Campaign 60
Beaufighter vs German Flak Ships: Duel 151
Coalition Aircraft vs Iraqi SAMs: Duel 148
Italian MAS & MS Boats 1915-49: New Van 347
Renaissance Polish Armies 1492-1569: MAA 568
French Navy 1939-42: Fleet 16
D-Day Fleet 1944 British Sector: Fleet 17
North Africa 1941: Rommel's War Machine
North Africa 1942: The Turning Point
Bad War Stories: Iraq and Afghanistan
Star Voyager Academy (sci-fi novel)
Star Dragon (sci-fi novel)
The Space Barbarians (sci-fi novel)
Armed Forces of North Korea: Vol. 3 Navy
British Amphibious Operations of WWI
Raiders on the Anglo-Scottish Border
Titus: Conqueror of Jerusalem
Who Is Government? Public Service





The field of battle in Italy, 1944. British come from the right.

WWII British Attack: Italy 1944

by Russ Lockwood

It felt like a special presentation of *Command Decision (CD)* just for me. One by one, gamers couldn't make it, so that when I arrived at Marc's, I was the only one. So, it was a one-on-one game. I was the British driving northward in Italy in 1944 and Marc was the defending Germans.

My goal? Cross the river in front of me and hopefully cross with enough to move troops off the north side of the battlefield.

Hmmm. I didn't seem to have much infantry, and the companies seemed short a platoon. I did have a trio of Churchill tank platoons, albeit one was a bridging tank, a pair of M-10 tank destroyer platoons, and a combo Sherman and Churchill company. And some artillery.

Opposing me was a lot of German infantry in prepared positions and in villages, a STuG, some AT guns, and artillery. All of this was hidden from view, which meant some platoon was going to have to recon ahead. That's usually a dead platoon.

German Marc watches my British forces advance.



I swung an infantry company of three platoons to my left to capture a town. German artillery came in exactly at its most vulnerable point wading the river and wiped out two of the three platoons. Morale held, but combat power was essentially obliterated. I was forced to send another infantry company to cover the left flank. They made it intact.

I attack the unnamed hamlet. To capture or not to capture, that is the question.

My main attack ran up the road on my fight to the first unnamed hamlet. Tank fire, artillery fire, and infantry fire winkled out the defending Germans with some cost. A second infantry company used the slight ridgeline to flank the hamlet.

Oddly enough, taking this hamlet scared the oil out of the Sherman-Churchill company (bad d10 morale roll) and it pinned for a turn.

I sent the pure Churchill company up the middle because I had no more infantry.

Clearing the no name hamlet. Notice the Pin marker between the tanks. Middle of Turn 3.

The Fog of War

At this point, I confronted the first set of German earthworks stretching across a central slight ridge. It was exposed, for a second line stretched from the village of Besangio on my side of the river through central entrenchments along the river to a left flank village on my side of the river. I figured the central entrenchment and the initial left entrenchments were dummies meant to slow me down by ruse, not combat.

Hamlet taken in Turn 4 and the flanking movement to the town of Besangio. Alas, the panzershrek made short work of my Churchill. Man, I thought the infantry were just dummies meant to fake me out. Turns out I was the dummy and the Churchill paid for it.



So, I picked the closest entrenchment and ran the now unpinned Churchill platoon with the Sherman in support into one German platoon's position. That's when a panzershrek fired and ripped the heart out of my Churchill platoon. The Sherman could only respond with killer MG and tank fire that knocked off the German platoon.

MG retribution nails the panzershrek. Then Marc started rolling 10s for morale, causing the infantry to flee back to Besangio.

Well, that was a bad decision. Obviously, when intel said we were chasing the panicked Germans up the boot, they didn't mean this particular spot. Oddly enough, destruction of the Churchill didn't faze the Sherman.



Crazy 10s

And then Marc rolled for German morale -- and rolled lots of 10s. I mean a lot of 10s. So much so, I began rolling up the right and central positions because the German infantry ran for the river.

The Achilles heel of *Command Decision* is the roll of 10 on a morale roll. Sure, it's a 10% chance, but as I've said before, *CD* seems a game of 10s. Well, it's one way for a front line to melt away or an attack to turn around.

By the way, the calculation is a starting German veteran morale of 9, up 2 for being in cover makes it a 11, minus 2 for eliminated platoon makes it a 9, and then minus 2 for being within 12 inches of an enemy tank makes it a 7. So, on a d10 roll of 1-7, pass morale, no problem. On an 8-9, pin in place for a turn. On a 10, run back to new cover as best the stands can.

On the plus side, green troops run away a lot. Human wave attacks across open ground against prepared defenses should suffer extreme casualties (the open ground part) and then survivors will usually run away -- unless they roll 1s for morale.

Alas, no sooner had the German bolted from Besangio that I rolled 10s for morale and pinned just as I was taking the village. Turnabout is fair play, of course.

On The Left Flank

I sent my pure Churchill tank company across a bridge to push the left flank and the ultimate prize of the bridge and exiting the battlefield. The lack of infantry was troubling. I used artillery smoke to shield my tanks from any panzershreks.

The pure Churchill company heads up the middle, then turns left across the bridge to hit the left flank. My infantry head into the town (left).

What I couldn't defeat was the Panther platoon that rolled across the bridge and fired at my Churchills. One brewed up. My return shots pinged.

I tried an infantry assault on the entrenched German infantry with my one company. It was shot up and fell back to the town.



No way I could force the left. I needed the M-10s to counter the Panther, but they were on the right. I probably should have switched the tank companies, but that was in hindsight. I should have taken notice of the STuG as a clue the M-10s were needed on the left, but didn't.

The Panther (upper left) brews up a Churchill platoon.

Ended

And that's how it ended: a slew of 10s for morale and a stalemate on the left until I could switch the M-10s that way.

I didn't get across the objective river, although in taking Besangio I came close. I really lost too much infantry to carry on. If I had not rolled a pair of 10s to pin my infantry in Besangio, I might have been able to bounce across the river. Without them, the Germans could rearrange their fleeing troops into a line and I didn't think I had the strength to push across. I called a halt to the attack.

I did make a mistake in the laying smoke in front of the German entrenchments. It turns out my lads storming out of the smoke made for better targets. I should have laid smoke on the German entrenchments so the German platoons couldn't shoot, then advance my infantry to within an inch of them (thus spotting them) and wait for the smoke to clear at the beginning of the next turn. That would leave my stands within spotting range and allow them (and the tanks) to trade fire during the Opportunity Fire phase. Learn a little more with every game.

Thanks Marc for the special presentation game just for me.

The assault of Besangio is a success. The Germans flee from the town, opening the way for me to cross the objective river.



The end of the game on my right flank: Besangio – the town full of 10s. All my infantry Pin from rolling 10s for morale. Obviously, it must be tea time.



Sherwood Foresters: 2nd Battalion

The 2nd Battalion, Sherwood Foresters, was serving in the 3rd Infantry Brigade, part of the 1st Infantry Division, with which the battalion would remain with throughout the war. The division was sent to France in September 1939 shortly after the outbreak of the war, joining the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). The battalion remained in France until May 1940 when the Germans invaded the Low Countries. They took part in the short but bitter fighting and were forced to be evacuated at Dunkirk as the BEF was in danger of being surrounded and overrun.

The Sherwood Foresters infantry accompanied by a M-10 advance towards the Gothic Line in Italy. Image from web.



They were evacuated to England and spent the next two years on home defense and in preparation for a German invasion which never arrived. In early 1943 the division was sent to North Africa where it became part of the British First Army and took part in the final stages of the Tunisian Campaign.

In January 1944, they took part in the landings at Anzio, under command of U.S. Fifth Army, where they suffered serious casualties in some of the fiercest fighting of the Italian Campaign so far, and later fighting during Operation Diadem and on the Gothic Line. They fought in Italy until January 1945 when they were sent to Palestine and remained there until the end of the war.

-- From Wikipedia.

Got the Historicon fever yet?

A collage of four historical battle scenes in a hexagonal grid. The top-left scene shows soldiers in a trench. The top-right scene shows soldiers on a battlefield. The bottom-left scene shows soldiers on horseback. The bottom-right scene shows soldiers in a field.

HISTORICON[®] 2026
250th Anniversary of the American War of Independence
July 15-19, 2026
Lancaster County Convention Center • Lancaster, PA
www.historicon.org #HISTORICON2026



Arsuf at start. Each card corresponds to one of my units on the map.

The Thin Block Line: Saladin at Arsuf

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud brought over *Saladin*, a medieval wargame that uses wooden rectangles as units with the idea that once deployment has been done, the battle plays without maneuvering. The same company had released a Waterloo game years ago.

By random selection, I was Richard the Lionhearted (I should have put on my lion jupon -- i.e. an Australian Footie jersey of the Brisbane Lions) and Renaud was Saladin.

Renaud contemplates which unit will receive an order in the middle of the game. Notice that my left-hand unit has but one hit (rectangle) left before being destroyed. Other units are being worn down. Renaud's units are in better shape.

The Mechanics of Arsuf

Set up is fixed -- each wooden rectangle fits in a corresponding spot on the board. Each unit consists of two to six columns of rectangles, with each column consisting of from two to four rectangles.

The crusader force "moves" to a certain extent -- from original starting position to a position adjacent to Islamic troops. The decision to move forward or back are up to the players, but the moves are fixed. Indeed, the targets of charges are fixed.

Each side starts with a number of Orders. Each



unit card contains a number of command options (charge, skirmish, withdraw, arrow fire, react, shield wall, reinforce, etc.) that cost a certain number of Orders. The Orders change if Crusader units are in their starting positions, or, have advanced to being adjacent to Islamic troops. Likewise, the number of combat dice tossed per player changes depending on the Order selected.

Combat

Each special combat die contains two "misses," two "hits" for one damage, one "hit" for two damage, and one "hit" on an enemy Order die. The latter can be important because when you run out of Order dice, the units have a default "0" order cost Order: usually Rout. Now, Rout does not mean remove the unit. It means the opponent gets a free roll of a number of combat dice. It is possible, and happened, that Routs got away scot-free of damage because of rolling misses on all dice.

Order use and Order losses from combat dice are temporary and become available at the top of a turn.

Troop losses are taken from left to right, from the bottom of the column to the top. When all rectangles of a column are eliminated, the unit requires an extra Order to perform an order. As a result, the cost of not Routing becomes higher and higher and the cost of throwing combat dice also goes up. Unit performance degrades. Clever, that.

As a double whammy, when a player loses six rectangles, the rectangles are removed permanently from the game and one Order is also removed permanently from the game. Richard and Saladin have an option to return one of these rectangles to the board -- think of it as a Rally.

When you run out of Orders, you lose the game. You cannot regain permanently removed Orders, although Richard and Saladin have an option to restore one temporarily used or lost Order during the turn.

Arsuf The Wargame

As Richard, one of the first things I learned was that big, bad, initial knight charges hit nothing but air against fresh Islamic cavalry. In a clever mechanic that simulates Islamic horse skirmishing tactics, the Islamic cavalry units have a React option (for a cost of one Order) that turns a three-die Crusader charge into a one-die Crusader die versus a one-die Islamic response. Yet, that only works once per turn, and only if the Islamic unit did not already commit to skirmishing or other action during the turn.

My full-strength unit Sable charges, expecting to toss three attack dice. Alas, Renaud played a reaction order and it was a one die on one die mele.



Think about it. The timing of the Crusader charge matters more than the Crusader charge.

Likewise, on the Islamic side, the timing of rather destructive cavalry skirmishing fire matters quite a bit because the cavalry does not want to be hit by a Crusader charge without its React option. Decisions, decisions.

I learned this the hard way on my left flank with Naplouse. Renaud took advantage of the tactic and eventually hammered Naplouse's knights into oblivion.

Islamic arrows slashed Henri's foot soldiers. My lads have a special Shieldwall Order to eliminate one die from an Islamic attack. If I paid attention more, I'd enact the Shieldwall first and then trade shots. Alas, I didn't realize Shieldwall was only available on the initial side of the unit. Once I used an Order for Henri to Loose (i.e. attack) and flipped over the card, the Shieldwall Order option was gone, just the same way the Islamic React Order was gone if an Order was given. Less decisions, decisions and more attentions, attentions.

Siege of Arsurf

One Crusader unit, Lusignan, could attack the town of Arsurf, which contained two Islamic rectangles. The prize was a free Order when taken. I attacked it Turn 1. Lusignan's card noted that attacking Arsurf costs one Order and each side gets a combat die. So I did. Amazingly, I rolled the 1 in 6 chance of two hits and thus Arsurf fell.

My luck seemed to wane after that to a certain extent. Nullified charges and excellent skirmishing attacks by Renaud whittled down my troops. Henri's troops finally figured out Shieldwall first, Loose second.

Then Naplouse's final rectangle was lost to yet another Suleyman skirmish. Now what? I did have Bourgoigne in reserve on the left flank, but his only legal target was Aln al Din troops opposite. In a miniature game, the reserve would intercept.

In Saladin, the winning Suleyman unit enjoyed a picnic. It stood down and was no longer in the battle. The plus side was it no longer required Orders. The negative side was neither did Naplouse.

On my right flank, after learning how and when to charge, my Sable unit eliminated Renaud's Saphadin unit. Likewise, Sable's troopers sat down and had a picnic, too.

Richard's Charge

As the number of Orders decreased on both sides due to losses, I figured out the sequence of charge, withdraw, and charge again for Richard. It proved devastating against the infantry of Aln Aldol, helped by Richard's late-game smashing roll of five hits on three combat dice.

That roll, incidentally, made up for last turn's three combat dice roll of three Orders (a 1-in-216 toss). Ordinarily, this would be a good thing -- temporarily removing three Islamic Orders in a turn usually means more Routs. Alas, it was the last roll of the turn and so was the equivalent of misses. Hmmm. Waiting too long to charge can be just as bad as charging too soon. Decisions, decisions.

End of Game

By this time, Renaud was running out of Orders and his remaining troops required more and more Orders to avoid Rout. He retreated his army to fight another day.

Yet it was touch and go there for a while. I think we both learned a bit about the strengths and weaknesses of our armies -- the game possesses some rather clever mechanics to simulate Crusader versus Islamic warfare.

One nit was the loss of the flank units. We felt like defeating the opponent on the flank didn't give the victor as much a benefit as would occur in just about any other wargame. Renaud thought about it and came up with the victor gains one Order back from the dead pile. That sounds like a good benefit.

With that, we packed up this excellent little game that took a couple hours or so to complete.

Crusader Kingdoms: Castle Bashing

by *Russ Lockwood*

With a little time remaining, Renaud and I continued the medieval Crusader theme with *Crusader Kingdoms*. It's always good to tear off the shrink wrap.

This game can either be a one-on-one as we played, or, a one-on-one-on-one game, with two players being Christian and the third "player" being a Muslim bot. You can also play this as a four-player game with two Christian and two Muslim players.

We played the one-on-one game and by random selection, I was the Christians (as my deck of cards said) and Renaud was the Muslims (as his deck of cards said).

Set Up

We placed four castles each according to the rules. The shields in the areas were the number of defense combat dice -- the castles were only ownership markers. Each capture of an area allowed the "building" of a castle and the option for a garrison (worth one combat die) or an increase in the Card Bonus draw.

We each drew eight cards from our respective decks. The cards mostly had troops (number of dice), but also events and special abilities (extra dice, steal a card from the opponent, add a garrison, etc.). All cards, including those played in a turn, are reshuffled into the deck at the beginning of the turn and a player draws a number of cards so the hand equals eight plus or minus the Card Bonus.

A turn consists of playing all your cards, or properly, playing all the cards you could play or wished to play. You could attack an adjacent area, playing multiple troop cards and rolling combat dice to capture an area, or just launch a one-card incursion to whittle down the enemy. We mostly launched attacks, for the number of castles determined the winner of the game.

The game at start. It only has 15 spaces.



Oooops...

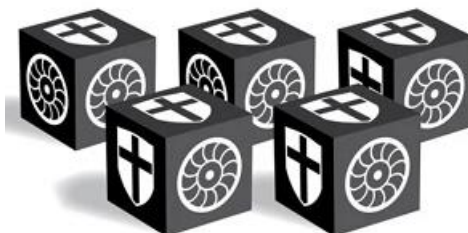
So our card battle began, punctuated by combat die rolling.

We actually stumbled on the combat dice at first. Each d6 has half the faces as Christian and half Muslim. When we tossed, we counted up all the sides and whichever side got the most won the battle.

Not exactly.

You only counted your die faces and ignored enemy die faces on your rolls. Then you compared the totals and the most faces wins, with defender winning ties.

To our credit, 'count all faces' was the mechanic in the *Battle of Britain* game (see the March AAR for a recap of that game). Just goes to show you have to read the rules, not assume the same mechanic applies to different games even when the dice are similar.



Whose Land Is My Land?

With combat straightened out, we really got down to card playing and dice tossing. I tried to grab Ahamant a couple times and failed. I was able to take Damascus and Homs, but Renaud countered with Marah and Antioch. The Muslim tide rolled forward and after three turns, we both ended up with six castles, with the tie breaker being the Card Bonus, which had Renaud ahead by one. So, a win for Renaud.

With reshuffling cards, each game will be different, although we saw the same cards pop out on all three turns.



An interesting replayable game that can go either way, which is excellent for play balance. I can also see this serving as a miniatures campaign game, with shields being units and units being raised via card draw. Castles would need a more prominent role, considering how long they held out with relatively few troops as garrisons.

Thanks for the medieval games, Renaud.

Battletech Campaign: Lancers Mercenary Company

by Eric

The Lancers Mercenary Company successfully defended the Shelby City drop-port and nearby supply depot. Then it chased down a withdrawing lance of three medium Pirate mechs, leaving just one to escape and limp back to their hideout while the heroes stalked behind outside of radar range. This led the Lancers to discover that the Pirates had occupied an abandoned SLDF-era fort in the wilds around Shelby City as their operations center.

One scenario for the LMC. Photo by Eric.



The team executed a daring night raid while the majority of the Pirates were out on operations, led by Red Cinema (Ed) and Steve who pincerd the lone Pirate mech defending outside the fort, while Doctor (Sean) and Fred provided long range support before advancing with jump jets towards and into the fort to dispatch the garrison of missile tanks and final Urbanmech guardian.

Once the armored and mech elements were taken out, marines from the Lancers were rapidly deployed to storm the buildings, and they discovered that the pirates were in fact members of Zulu Company, another MRB (Mercenary Review Board) licensed unit that had also been hired by Lord Stephenson to create the impression of unrest on his planet as some sort of false flag operation relating to Davion court politics that are quite frankly, above our paygrade.

Fred considers his options defending the hills. Photo by Eric.



Lord Stephenson hadn't wanted the Lancers to pursue the pirates to their base, and we now believe that he knows that we know about his subterfuge. We just picked up a news report from the capital, and it seems that he's declared our company as outlaws who have banded together with the pirates, and has dispatched his own mixed lance of mechs and armor to our position in order to get rid of us and dispose of any evidence of his plot. It's time to defend the castle, then go pull Lord Stephenson out of his mansion for some accounting!

The hills are alive...with the sound of lasers...

What Went Where?

After the FASA Corporation closed in 2000, Wizkids bought the rights to the game in January 2001. They reworked the IP to launch their *MechWarrior: Dark Age* collectible miniatures game, but licensed the rights to continue to publish products for the old game to FanPro (itself a subsidiary of Fantasy Productions). Topps bought Wizkids in 2003, but this did not change any publishing agreements at that time. FanPro held the license to the original tabletop game (which they rebranded as *Classic BattleTech*) until 2007. At that point Catalyst Game Labs (CGL) acquired the license from Topps.

In 2019 Catalyst Game Labs launched the *Battletech: Clan Invasion* crowdfunding campaign on Kickstarter. To match its modernization effort around the rules of *Battletech*, with the *Clan Invasion* campaign Catalyst Game Labs aimed to update the designs and physical models of a number of classic Battlemechs with modern, plastic kits. While initially the campaign sought only a minimum of \$30,000 in funding, over its 30-day funding period \$2,586,421 was raised. This success led to Catalyst Game Labs launching a second crowdfunding campaign in 2023. The *Battletech: Mercenaries* campaign focused on combined arms, updating a number of vehicle designs with plastic models in addition to more Battlemechs. The second campaign nearly tripled the amount raised by its predecessor, totaling \$7,549,241 pledged in its 30-day funding period.



Shiny! Giant Killer Robots

by Russ Lockwood

Being a fan of giant robots since watching the TV show *Gigantor* as a kid, Renaud pulling out a game about big robots made my eyes pop open wide and a drooling "Oooooooooo, shiny!" escape me. Yeah, I know, "shiny" isn't a part of *Gigantor* or any other robot show, but the sentiment seemed apt when I gazed at *Giant Killer Robots: Heavy Hitters*.

The GKR at right with facing on the base. The other three are support robots: Recon (bottom with rotor), Combat (left), and Repair. Their facing is 360 degrees and no flanks.



Across a hexgrid arena containing a number of skyscrapers, the background is some sort of corporate fight for advertising. The companies each send one giant killer robot and up to three smaller robots into the arena that tag a building like some graffiti vandal. Each tag allows you to insert a plastic smiley face marker atop a building. Four tags wins the building, which is then destroyed. Four destroyed buildings wins the game.

What sort of wimpy-ass pablum of a background is this? What's the point of tagging a building with advertising if your spray-painting robot "kills" it?

You also win the game if you destroy the opponent's giant robot.

Set Up

Although the small robots are different in figure, they are identical to each other in capability. The giant spray-painting robots are different in figure and different in capabilities.

At Start: My yellow Heavy Hitter robot stares at Renaud's blue Heavy Hitter robot across the arena wasteland.

It all has to do with each player's deck of 60 cards. You pick your robot -- I chose Yellow because it was nearest me -- and then select one primary weapon system out of the three or four available. That gives you a



mandatory five cards. Then you select two types of secondary weapon systems of the four or five available at five cards each. So that's 15 cards in total so far. Each of the weapon cards contains an energy expenditure, range, damage, and any special capability, like multiple hits.

A Primary Weapon card noting the amount of energy needed to fire it, the range in hexes, and the damage inflicted if it hits. A target gets d6 save rolls equal to the damage. The text in the colored box notes special weapon effects. The number in the upper left is weapon speed: higher speed weapons fire first and do damage.



Then you look through the deck and pick any 10 cards (Deploy, Maneuver, Firing, etc.) for a total of 25 cards. That is the number of hits a giant robot can take. Shuffle them up and draw six.

Each player has a dashboard that holds the draw deck, discard pile, and damage discards. A slider on the right tracks energy usage, usually one or two needed to fire a weapon and one needed to move one hex.

The giant robots start on the board. The small robots can be brought in with a Deploy card, usually by expending two energy, or without a card at four energy. As for the latter, when you only have five energy total, spending four is mostly giant robot paralysis for a turn.

I'm not sure why you need to expend giant robot energy to bring on smaller robots, which subsequently do not need any energy to move, shoot, and tag. Don't think too hard...just play the robots, man, just play the robots.

Finally, each giant robot gets a pilot with special abilities. I selected, um, whoever, because he had a "Hapsi" logo in his illustration. Clever name, that.

Combat

So the battle began and I immediately realized that I had no Deploy cards in my hand, nor drew any in the first few turns. Renaud did and I soon was outnumbered as each robot was allowed to tag a building. I spent the four energy to bring out a small robot.

Mid-game combat with my GKR against Renaud's GKR and two support robots. Notice the advertising smiley faces tagging that occurred: I have three on one building. Renaud had already put four on a building, which is destroyed with one smiley face on the pile denoting ownership.



So, Renaud concentrated on tagging buildings and I concentrated on tagging his giant robot with missile and gunfire.

In combat, if your 2d6 attack roll versus a giant robot is 5+, you hit. Now, you can immediately recognize that 5 or higher on 2d6 is a 5 in 6 chance of a hit, or, a 1 in 6 chance of a miss. Some cards increase armor by two, so you need a 7+ to hit. That's still about a 60% chance of a hit. If hit, the damage can be saved by a giant robot with a 5+ on 1d6 (a 6 on a d6 saves versus hits on a small robot).

If you roll boxcars (12) on 2d6, it's a critical hit -- no saves. Sure enough, my first shot versus his giant robot was boxcars: 5 damage thank you very much.

Damage is either cards from your hand or cards from the top of the draw deck. Renaud shifted five cards to his damage spot. One of the smaller robots is a repair robot that gives a die roll to retrieve cards from the damage spot to be put back in your active draw deck.

My second shot was another amazing roll of boxcars: three more damage, thank you very much. That meant eight cards of his original 25 were now lost. One-third of his giant robot was gone in two turns.

That's when we both started to closely calculate energy usage, for you could launch more than one attack per turn.

As for the attacks, each weapon has a speed number. The fastest weapon fires before the slowest weapon. I kinda like that idea for layered firing. And yes, it is possible to destroy a small robot (each can take from one to three hits to destroy) before it fires.

Battle Ho!

Thanks to deployment cards, Renaud had all three small robots out. I barely got the first small robot out with the outrageous expenditure of four energy when Renaud blew it away. Fortunately, a special card, which is obtained from tagging, allowed me a free deployment. Still, it was four on two and Renaud destroyed three buildings to my one.

To get to the fourth building required moving across the board. That's also when he noticed that my constant chipping away at his giant robot, despite repairs, was drawing down his available cards.

So, he switched from tagging to targeting. He had Chain Guns that gave six damage each. Half my deck disappeared in one turn as I couldn't save much. His small robots added in more firepower. Uh-oh.

Bitter End

So it came down to the last turn. First things first: I had a card that removed his special cards from the tagging deck. I had to roll a 1d6: 1-3 made him discard one card, 4-5 two cards, and a 6 three cards. I rolled a 6! He had three cards that he was saving and no card that cancelled my roll. All three were gone.

In a bit of luck, I managed to put the finishing damage onto Renaud's GKR. Notice that he had three buildings tagged and destroyed. Close!

Yet, he had been saving high speed weapons for the last and in the trading of shots and saves, I was down to one card: one slow weapon left to play. He was down to two cards, one of which was a weapon card that was faster than my last weapon card.

He rolled 2d6, looking for 5+.

Amazingly, he rolled a 4! He had no special cards for re-rolls or pluses to his roll. He missed.

Now it was my turn. I needed a 5+, but I also had a special card that added +3 to my roll. I didn't need the card and rolled a 7. My slow weapon caused two damage, which is exactly what was needed to exhaust his giant robot cards. But he had two 1d6 saves at 5+. All he needed was one save to keep his robot alive.

The cubes tumbled across the table.

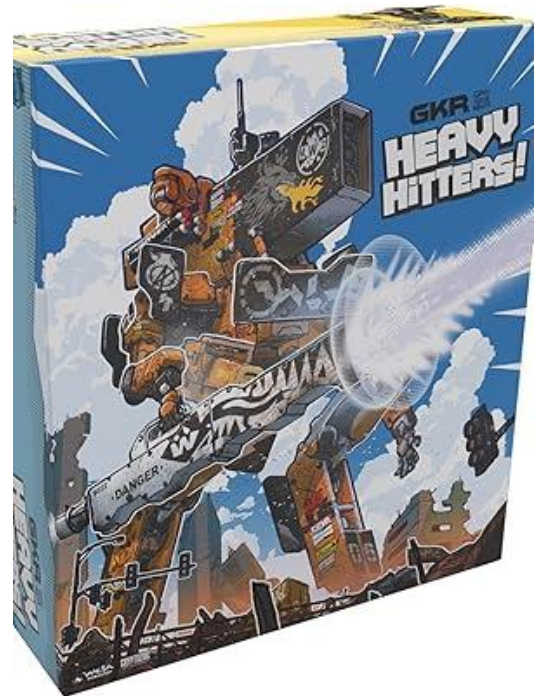
They slowed to a stop.

We peered at the pips.

No saves!

His giant robot exploded in a shower of sparks and parts.

What a close game. And certainly an exciting last exchange of shots. Thanks for the game, Renaud.





Settlers of Catan in foreground (l to r: Barr, Ed, Fred, and Mike). Kingsburg in background (Dennis, John, and Steve).

StrattonCon 2026: Euro Gaming Afternoon

by Russ Lockwood

I missed last year's StrattonCon, which is a grand name for a bunch of us gathering in Fred's basement for a day of gaming. The year before was a 15-player *D&D* melee with three GMs and tables. This year, it was Eurogaming. No schedule. Just pick up games as the mood took you.

Sorry for blurry photo of Sean's 3D tchotchke.

Sean Stratton presented all attendees with a 3D-printed, multicolor "challenge coin." Game winners got a 3D thumbs up. Last place gamers got a 3D star with "You Tried" on it.



SpaceBase in progress (l to r): Dennis, Sean, Steve.

SpaceBase

An old favorite was first up with four players: Sean, Steve, Dennis, and me. It's a double luck type of game: the first luck is what cards come up to build your space trucking empire. The second luck is what you roll on 2d6 to pick up resources AND what 2d6 result the other players roll to help you pick up more resources. Yes, this clever cards and dice game lets you plot and scheme while the other players are performing their resource gathering and



spending. The object is to get 40 victory points.

Since rolls of 2d6 mean 7 is the most rolled number, followed by 6 and 8, it usually means buying cards that fit on those three slots. That said, since the 2d6 roll can be treated as a single sum or as two individual results, there's a strategy of filling in all the 1 through 6 slots. Yet the real high resource cards are at the top end of the 2d6 spectrum, so another strategy is to go high in the 10, 11, and 12 slots. I've seen all of them win big and lose big. Hence the two luck facets I mentioned.

By dint of card displays, I settled on the 8 and 9 slots. The kicker was that I eventually paid for "arrow cards" that allowed me to receive resources on both slots. Since a couple VP cards were in those slots, I soon found myself leading in VPs. As I developed the 8 and 9 slots, I also added in basic income cards whenever I could. That meant I eventually built up income that allowed me to buy any card available.



My winning combo in the 8 and 9 slots.

Credit Steve with reminding me that I could buy VP cards direct. "Good idea, Steve!" I ended up buying three fairly high VP cards that pushed me past 40 VPs.

The final score was me with 44 VPs, Steve with 18 VPs, Sean with 8 VPs, and Dennis with 7 VPs.

I will, of course, claim my genius strategy propelled me to victory. Double luck had nothing to do with it. Not at all. Really. Honest.

I can confirm that because Sean presented me with a 3D-printed major award. No, not a leg-shaped lamp, but a thumbs up. Dennis received a "At Least You Tried" 3D-printed star as a consolation prize.

Good game.

Sky Team

At another table, Scott taught Fred how to play *Sky Team*, which is a cooperative game where one player is the pilot, the other the co-pilot, and both are needed to land the plane.

I don't know how it plays, for I was in the middle of my own game, but I recall Fred said they crashed the first time and landed the second.

Fred (l) and Scott cooperatively fly a plane.



Kingsburg

Another favorite of mine and another die-propelled resource management game.

Each player rolls 3d6 and places a die or dice on various King's counselors to gain resources, which the player uses to construct buildings. Buildings provide different benefits, from extra die rolls, VPs, soldiers, and so on.

Again, you can use the total of all three dice, the total of two dice and then the third die separately, or use each die separately. The kicker is that players take turns placing dice and the first player to place a die or dice on a counselor claims that counselor. No other player can then place a die or dice on that counselor (unless they have the special King's Envoy).

The Kingsburg brain trust (l to r): Fred (background, not playing), Dennis (cap), Steve, and John.



So, part of it is rolling well, for the higher the roll the more resources you get, and part of it is claiming a counselor before another player does.

The game lasts five turns, at the end of each is a monster invasion phase where 1d6 plus your soldiers needs to equal the monster's strength points. If not, you lose resources, buildings, and/or VPs depending on the monster. If you win, you gain a benefit of resources, VPs, and so on.

For this game, it was me, Steve, Dennis, and John.

I can honestly say I was in the lead ... on Turn 1. After that, well, ummm, I flirted with last place. This I blame entirely, and with some accuracy, on the low dice rolls. For two-thirds of the game, I didn't roll higher than 11 on 3d6. In a couple of late game turns, I scored big with 16s and 17s, but otherwise, I was always playing catch-up.

Dennis was on a more bell-shaped curve, with a number of nice rolls of 15, 16, and 17. As you can imagine, especially with 17 being the Queen and her 3 VP plus resources. Dennis raced ahead.

John was right behind him throughout by a couple points, indeed tying him once and coming within 1 VP on a few turns.

This played rather close all game long as we tried to figure out which buildings to build and the order in which they should be built to gather the most resources. I should point out that all players used the same common building card. Sadly, only a small cardboard token symbolized a building that was constructed. It would have been cool to have an actual plastic building to mark the completion of construction.

In the end, it was Dennis with 38 VPs, John with 35 VPs, I in third place with 33 VPs, and Steve just missing the tie for third with 32 VPs.

Another good game.

Settlers of Catan

While I was playing *Kingsburg*, *Settlers of Catan* was going on another table with Barr, Ed, Fred, and Mike. I don't know who won, but I sometimes heard encouragement from one player to another where to place a road.

Strike

This is a clever variation of *Yahtzee*. If it takes 10 minutes, you're overthinking the game.

Scott showed Sean.

Scott (right) teaches the game to Sean.



And then the game migrated over to the five of us: Scott, Sean, Steve, Dennis, and me.

You start with a number of d6s -- I think five or six. The usual pips are on each die except for the 1-pip side: this has an "X".

When the Arena game box, shaped like a stepped gladiatorial colosseum, comes your way, you roll 1d6 in an effort to match faces with the die or dice in the

Arena. If you do, you take all matching dice out of the Arena and place in your hand. The turn passes to the next player. If not, that die remains in the Arena.

Strike became popular. Clockwise from bottom left corner: Fred, Mike, Sean, Scott, Barr, and Ed.

You can choose to pass the Arena to the next player or roll another 1d6 to see if you match. In fact, you can roll all your dice (one at a time) to see if you match.

The "X" means an automatic fail and the die is removed from the game.

Now, on the off chance that all the dice are gone from the Arena, the player has to roll all his dice looking for matches.

Just about everyone played Strike. Left to right: Dennis, Steve, Scott, and Sean.

So, this requires a little strategy about how many dice to roll and a lot of luck about the matches (if any) you roll.

In my case, I was out early. The game continued until, ummm, someone won. I don't remember. Fast game you can introduce to kids as well as us big kids.

Far Away

Steve taught Dennis and me how to play this French import. It's a little involved in the beginning, especially when calculating VPs. I'll try to remember correctly. The exploration veneer is thin as a Eurogame usually is.

A pretty game, even if Dennis (left) and I reversed the scoring tiles to fall far behind Steve.

Four tiles are placed in the middle of the table and each player gets three tiles for their hand. You pick one tile from your hand to bid on selecting a center tile. Lowest number (upper left hand corner of a tile) picks first. The tile you bid becomes the first tile in a chain of eight tiles.



Each tile contains icons and/or VPs if you get so many icons in your chain. The kicker is that while you place tiles left to right, you calculate VPs from right to left.

That last nuance was lost on me. I built icons and VP tiles with the idea of left to right. So did Dennis.

In addition, a higher numbered tile than your last one as well as map icons on tiles got you treasure cards which added icons and VPs.

However, since Dennis and I were building our chain from left to right, I can assure you that when we tallied up VPs, we were woefully short of Steve's total.

To Steve's credit, he explained the scoring at the start, but I didn't get it.

If you explain this game to someone, say "Resources to the right, VP tallies to the left." That may be a bit hard to anticipate when building the chain left to right, but that's kinda the point of the mechanics.

Good to try a new game. Dennis and I would play better at some future game.

Take Time

I have no idea how this played. Scott taught Matt and Isabel how to play. It seemed like a quick game.

Scott (left) teaches Matt and Isabel how to play the game.



Tumbling Dice

I played this decades ago. This is a finger flicking game that requires dexterity. You flick a d6 and it lands on multiplier scoring spaces. The trick is that the higher the multiplier, the farther the dice drops down tiers. The highest multiplier consists of three small platforms.

Think of it as d6 shuffleboard.

Mike and Fred gave it a whirl.

Then Dennis and I gave it a few finger flicks for fun. Sadly, we both needed to practice more, although I was humming the Rolling Stones song.



And Away We Go

The gaming day continued, but it was time for me to go. Thanks, Sean, for setting it all up and hosting and to all the gamers for a fine afternoon of playing some favorites and learning some new games.

What's a Eurogame?

According to Wikipedia:

“A Eurogame, also called a German-style board game, German game, or Euro-style game (generally only referred to as board games in Europe), is a class of tabletop games which generally feature indirect player interaction and lack of player elimination, while providing multiple ways to score points and win. Euro-style games are sometimes contrasted with American-style board games, which generally involve more luck, conflict, and drama. They are less abstract than games like *Chess* or *Go* and more focused on economic competition than wargames. At the same time, they generally require more thought and planning than party games like *Pictionary* and *Trivial Pursuit*.”

“Eurogames also emphasize the mechanical challenges of their systems over having the systems match the theme of the game. They are generally simpler than the wargames which flourished in the 1970s and 1980s from publishers such as SPI and Avalon Hill, but still often have a considerable depth of play.”

To me, the last paragraph is a good summary. The spreadsheet-like mechanics often have no relation to the theme, or, the theme is interchangeable. While I find most to be spreadsheet exercises, um, er, resource management, some are quite interesting, replayable, and challenging... and can serve as a lead-in to said wargames and miniatures.



Set up for a three-player game. Hard to tell from the photo, but Blue is Terran, Purple is Zerg, and Yellow is Protoss.

StarCraft Risk: **Speedy Play**

by Russ Lockwood

I broke the shrink wrap on another *Risk* variation, this one *StarCraft Risk*, based on the popular real-time computer game. We played the heck outta the computer game back in the day, including installing it on a pseudo-LAN for three of us -- Tibor, Bill, and me -- to play cooperatively.

Plastic pieces, including blue minerals.

Converting it to plain generic *Risk* only meant coming up with a colorful sci-fi board and creating molded plastic pieces of the game. The good news is that the



plastic pieces are nicely done. The bad news is each of the three races -- Terran (humans), Zerg (bugs), and Protoss (elves) -- have four types: Base, Hero, small "soldier" worth one army, and a large vehicle worth three armies.

As I gamed with the multitude of the original unit types, it's a bit disappointing. Understandable to an extent about production (12 different mold types).

The game also contains minerals. However, players do not mine them like the computer game, but instead a territory with a mineral pile gets counted as if it was two territories. Since you gain one army per three territories, these can be important. To my sorrow, I was a bit confused about this, so we didn't count the mineral pile as anything but a mission objective.

Nonetheless, we set out a three-player game according to the set up in the book. The game contains two armies per race: Purple Zerg and Brown Zerg, Red Terran and Blue Terran, and Yellow Protoss and Orange Protoss.

Bases

Basically, you need to hold onto your base in order to win. It also gives a one-army bonus at the beginning of your turn.

Heroes

Each player gets one Hero, which add 1 to the highest attack or defense die roll. This figure can teleport to any friendly territory at the start of your turn.

Cards

The *Risk* cards are divided into three separate decks for the three races. Each card contains one or two stars for army trade-in purposes (the chart is printed on the board), one location, and one special action. We believe that the card can be used for either the action or the armies, but not both.

Per typical *Risk*, you gain a card when you conquer at least one territory.

Medals and Missions

The game contains four Silver Medals and four Gold Medals, each presenting some mission to complete, such as capture an entire planet, or hold eight mineral piles, or hold 18 territories. First person to complete the mission gains a random benefit.

Winning

A player needs to complete three missions and hold onto his base.

Renaud (left) and Dennis plot their first moves.

The Game

Randomly, Dennis was Zerg, Renaud was Terran, and I was Protoss. Oddly enough, despite counting and recounting multiple times, we believe all players do not start with equal territories and forces.

The turn order is



fixed: Zerg - Protoss - Terran. Going first is a big advantage. Dennis conquered a planet on Turn 1 and gained a Mission Objective that gave him two extra armies per turn. Dennis came up two territories short of conquering Charn and one territory short of holding 18 territories.

Going First

Think about that. Dennis almost won the game before any of us moved. If he had been a tad more judicious in initial army placement (and had the same die roll results), the game would be over before it started.

Protoss Turn

I conquered a planet and tried for the eight mineral piles, but came up short. About the only notable accomplishment was that I conquered Renaud's base. I also maneuvered (the end-of-turn free move for old Risk players like me) the heck outta there because I expected retribution.

Terran Turn

Renaud grabbed the eight mineral piles. He also grabbed another mission objective and realized that he could win the game with a long-ish shot.

Well, the game is called *Risk*.

He strove, but came up short.

Zerg Win

That left Dennis free to conquer Charn and hold 10 mineral piles at the end of the turn.

Thoughts

The realization that the Zerg could win on the first turn was surprising. We may have misinterpreted such, but multiple re-readings seem to confirm it. Maybe you can only gain one mission per turn -- have to check that.

Now, four other missions (12 total) are available, but since you only use eight in a game, it is possible that a different mission mix wouldn't win so quick.

I've played a number of *Risk* versions and while all maintain the core *Risk* system, the use of cards and objectives adds a little variation, but not that much.

For a standalone one-game version, I think the original *Star Wars Risk* is the best of the lot -- basically, three different tracks for the win or loss. In terms of a multiple-game version, *Legacy Risk* is the best of the group, although after you play once, the tearing up of cards, sticker placing on cards and map, and other alterations (or defacing) make the game unplayable again.

In any case, thanks Dennis and Renaud for indulging me to crack open another shrink-wrap *Risk* version.

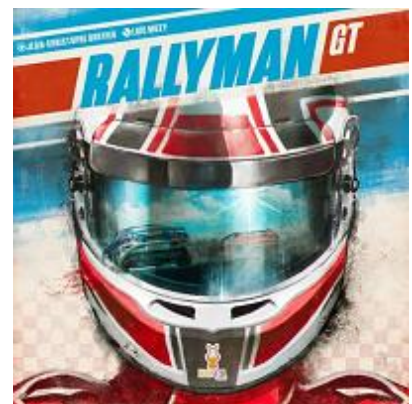
Rallyman GT: Car Race Dice

by Russ Lockwood

With time left over thanks to an early *StarCraft Risk* exit, Renaud brought out *Rallyman GT*, a car race game based on dice plotting and then dice rolling to move your car around the track.

The 4.5-inch hexes provide a two-lane speedway that can be rearranged for a multitude of track layouts. Each player-driver gets a car and two car game boards that are used depending on the weather (sunny or rainy) and the car tire type (good in sun or good in rain).

One set of plotting d6 dice -- six gears, three brake, and two "coast" -- are used by all players in turn. Speed determines player order, with fastest plotting and moving first, then next fastest, etc. If tied, the car at that speed in front goes first. One d6 die goes in each space of your plotted route.



Gear Changes

We were a bit confused by the gear dice, labeled one to six, that represent upshifts or downshifts. I originally thought you can use any one to do either, but not true.

The track layout and the opening couple of moves. Renaud (left) is ahead in the light blue car, I'm in third with the orange car, and Dennis is in second with the hard to see purple car located in the hex in between us.



The gear dice must be laid out in ascending or descending sequence. So at start, when you are at 0 speed, the only die you can use is the 1 gear, which would then be followed by the 2 gear, and then 3 etc. In between, you can include a coast die, which maintains the same speed, or a brake die, which drops your speed by 1.

The key to all this resides in the turns, which have an upper speed limit. You can never exceed that speed limit, else you spin out and often lose a turn. Note that you never crash per say, but every spin-out results in the random drawing of tokens from a bag that reduce your dice pool. The fewer dice in your dice pool, the fewer options you have to run the race. I don't know if there is a crash token in the bag -- should be, but euro games often don't have such a fatal result.

Once we figured out the gear mechanics, we found that a bit of judicious die placement could mimic the speed up and slow down of a real race car.

Hazards

Each die you plot must be rolled: either all at once or one at a time. The cars can take two hazards and be fine. On the third, you spin out and draw tokens from the bag.

You can roll your plot dice one at a time. If you get to two hazards, you can stop, ignoring any other dice on your plot. Of course, you don't travel as far down the track.

If you roll all at once and roll two hazards or fewer, you move through your entire plot and gain a number of Focus Tokens equal to the number of dice rolled.

These focus tokens can be used in subsequent turns to not roll a die and thus avoid any chance of a hazard icon on the roll.

If I recall, gear dice numbered 1 through 3 have one hazard icon, gear dice numbered 4 through 6 have two hazard icons, all coast dice have one hazard icon, and all brake die have two hazard icons. So, your aggressiveness in placing many dice affects the chance of rolling hazard icons.

Passing

One quirk of passing is that the passing car must be at a speed equal to or greater than the car being passed. Otherwise, it can come along side, but not pass. In our game, it happened only once. I passed Dennis, who was at speed 1, and me at speed 6 so I passed and pulled ahead. Dennis could only play gear 2, but that was way below my speed 6 and so he did not move -- an odd occurrence on a track where everyone is moving.

Start Your Engines

By random roll, Renaud was in the pole position, Dennis second, and me in third. Renaud plotted his dice (tougher than you might think, especially trying to maintain the ascending/descending nature. Indeed, in later turns, we often didn't use all the dice due to hairpin turns and other turns that placed a speed limit on certain spaces.

Renaud caught on to the gear manipulation faster than Dennis and me and so was a goodly distance ahead. I started taking chances with pushing the speed and rolling all the dice at once.

That caught up to me on the rough straightaway crossing the start line of the race. I rolled three hazard icons and poof, I was spinning around and slid off the track with a "00" result.

I pulled three tokens from the bag: I lost one red brake die, one white coast die, and pulled a yellow flag that would keep cars in the same relative position.

My orange car spun out with three hazard icons on the roll. That matched the spin-out number (upper right on card). Car is off the track with speed "00" (the teardrop marker). The track color was orange diamond and I was going 6 spaces at the time, so I had to pull three damage tokens from the bag – yellow flag (on track), -1 red die (on card), and -1 white die (on card). So instead of six black gear dice, two white coast dice, and three red brake dice, I could only use six black gear dice, one white coast die, and two red brake dice.



Having spun out, I had to wait out my next turn. I changed the 00 to 0 and only the turn after could I place gear 1 and then 2 and 3 and so on to try and get back in the race.

We called it. Dennis in second and I in third could not realistically catch Renaud barring he gets really unlucky with hazard icons.

Thoughts

As Renaud remarked during the game, the gear mechanic is the limiting factor in the game. If the gear dice represent shifting, then following an ascending or descending numerical sequence seems contrived.

The brake dice mechanic is the equalizer to gear dice. Here you can play with the dice numbers to shuffle down and then ascend back up. If you have enough Focus Tokens, it's a no-risk tactic.

Oddly, speed does not represent a faster time around the track. A speed car at 1 speed and a car at speed 6 both move one space. You'd think a speed 6 car would move six times the number of spaces as a speed 1 car. Doesn't seem so. Distance is based on progressive dice manipulation, not the actual speed.

That said, once you got the hang of ascending and descending gear dice, you started to go around the track more efficiently. As there were only three of use racing, the track was basically wide open except that one turn when I passed Dennis' car.

Well worth a second try, especially with more cars. Thanks for bringing the game over, Renaud, and a good game by all.



Turn 2: Rohan cavalry charge Rhunatic infantry.

Rohan vs. Rhun: Middle Earth *RUSE*

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud's refinement of the *RUSE* rules continued with a slight tweak of the combat system. As befitting the universal aspect of the system, this time Renaud set up a *Lord of the Rings* Middle Earth scenario pitting the men of Rohan against the men of Rhun. By random die roll, I was the Rhunatics.

Oh my lads were in fine form. They clashed swords upon shields, gnashed their teeth, and bashed themselves on the head in pre-battle rituals. They wailed and screamed and burbled their lips while flashing rude gestures and vowing anatomically impossible feats of valor.

The map. The Rhunatics on the right.

The Tweak

To get a better scattering of results, Renaud started with six dice, increasing or decreasing the number of d6 dice depending on terrain and tactical situation. In its basic sense, defense rolls of 4, 5, and 6 were counted up as the number of blocks. Weapon versus armor values usually increased that number by 1, although heavier armor increased that by 2. This all distilled down to a single defense value. The number rolled by each attack die was compared to the defense value. If higher, the attack went through and scored one wound (so to speak), with wounds assigned to figures. Most humans took one wound and were eliminated. Cavalry usually took two. A hero or bigger creature like an ogre or dragon would be more.



I should mention the number of figures in a unit determines how many attack dice are tossed. As losses occur and figures removed, a unit becomes more and more combat ineffective. But that's what the commander and a Rally command is for...

The Deployment

Inspired by last month's War of the Roses' "fog" (i.e. a screen across the middle of the table to provide for secret deployment), we set up behind screens. I had a relatively balanced force and set up the infantry in the center with cavalry at the ends. I added a strong infantry unit with long thrusting spears (in Warrior lingo) and a bow infantry unit to the left flank just to add some secret sauce to the deployment. Weapon reach is part of the RUSE system and it's nice to get in a first strike.

Renaud upgraded his seven-day command and control pill box with numbers from one to six and icons for all seven compartments. In RUSE, you get a bead per unit and place them in the six numbered compartments as you wish, with the fewest number of beads determining which player activates units first within each number.

So, if I put two beads in the number four compartment and Renaud puts in three beads in his number four compartment, I would perform my pair of number four unit activations (offensive actions) before Renaud's trio of offensive actions.

This is a clever part of determining when you want to perform actions. A bead activates any unit, but a unit can only activate once per turn. So, you plan to do something with certain units, but sometimes battlefield emergencies convince you to activate a different unit. By the end of the turn, all units will activate, but which ones and when add to the uncertainty without random die rolls for activation.

Errr, let me modify that thought: all units will activate...if they are not obliterated by the enemy before their number allows them to actually activate...

The bead of an eliminated unit goes in the seventh compartment. Since the pill box compartments snap open and shut, it's easy to pop open a compartment, pour out the beads (if any), and see about activations.

The Battle

When the fog lifted, my left was imperiled by Rohan cavalry. As you might expect, cavalry dominated the Rohan force. I shuffled my central infantry forward, keeping the line of spear, sword, and bow intact.

Turn 2 in the center. Notice Renaud putting beads in the pillbox compartments.

The bows of both sides twanged away with lesser and greater damage. I fared better firing at cavalry than infantry and was able to deal out damage with some nifty die rolls. My main line bent, but units, as small as they became, still held the line.

Note that cavalry units with four stands rated at two attack dice and two wounds per figure, possess the same attack dice and staying power as the eight-man infantry units at one attack die and one wound per figure.

On the left, my bow unit softened up opposing cavalry. That led my cavalry to a decisive advantage, driving back Renaud's cavalry. I followed up with a pair of reserve cavalry and swept my left flank of all his cavalry.

Well, swept all -- except for his horse archers that snuck around a rock formation and twanged away at my long thrusting spear (LTS) unit that formed my flank guard. Unfortunately, I couldn't quite get my bow to reposition fast enough and my LTS unit was whittled down in fine fashion.

My LTS lads hopped up and down in anger. They stuck out their tongues, gave the horse archers the stink eye, and pantomimed mumak noses, all the while shouting insults like, "Your horses snort like gerbils!" and "Real men fight on foot!" and "You ride like a dwarf!"

I was down to two LTS figures of the original eight, rallied, and faced the bowfire music once more. The Rohan horse archers must have wondered what was needed to get rid of my stalwart lads. Well, after successful rolls to stick around, the last volley nailed 'em. With confidence that my die rolling would save me yet again, I proceeded to roll snake-eyes and they fell like the last Spartans defending the hill at Thermopylae.



The LTS lads bought me enough time to swing my bow around and I emptied half the Rohan horse archer saddles. The unit, dropping to 50%, performed its mandatory retreat for a turn.

In the Center

With a bit of luck, I was able to flank a cavalry unit locked in continuing melee with my center-left infantry. I sent it packing and was in a race to reform my line before two fresh Rohan infantry units could attack. I was only partially successful.

On the Right

Rohan bow fire and cavalry disintegrated my regular sword infantry and a Rohan cavalry charge blew away a pair of my infantry units and continued to charge them in the back.

The Rohan charge puts some gaps in the ranks.



My bow was able to shoot away a couple units into almost obliteration, but they were in turn banged up by the Rohan cavalry and fled. I tossed in my cavalry reserve to hold the line abandoned by my fleeing troops. That opened up space for a flanking charge by my boss leader.

Then Renaud's boss unit charged my boss in the back. Oh what a wonderful melee this was, as melees are performed in chronological sequence. So, first my head-on reserve cavalry charge, then my boss' flanking attack charge, and then Renaud's boss' hit me in the rear charge.

Rhunic cavalry hit the front of a Rohan cavalry unit while my boss charges it in the flank. And then the Rohan leader charges me in the back.



The head on and flank charges vaporized the Rohan cavalry unit. As for Renaud's boss, he must have had considerable trepidation seeing the Rohan units die. He muffed his die rolls and in quite the turn of events, he lost half his bodyguard and had to perform a mandatory retreat.

Called

At this point, we called the game. Renaud had a pair of intact infantry in the center, one intact infantry unit and a half a horse archer unit on the left (my right flank), and one intact cavalry unit behind my line in the center right. However, his right side (my left flank) was shattered with almost nothing left. His boss was down to half and fleeing. Other units desperately tried to rally.

On my left, two intact cavalry units and a bow unit were busy riding down the remnants of the Rohan. In the center, it was a tossup among intact units. On the right, I was slowly driving forward, with only his remnants remaining but with that intact Rohan cavalry in my backyard. And my boss' bodyguard suffered only one wound from eight and so was almost intact.

A narrow victory for the Rhunatics. Thanks, Renaud for the game.



My Japanese co-commanders: Steve (left) and Garth. Our task force ships are laid out nicely. The aircraft are off photo to right.

Indian Ocean Raid: Double-Blind WWII

by Russ Lockwood

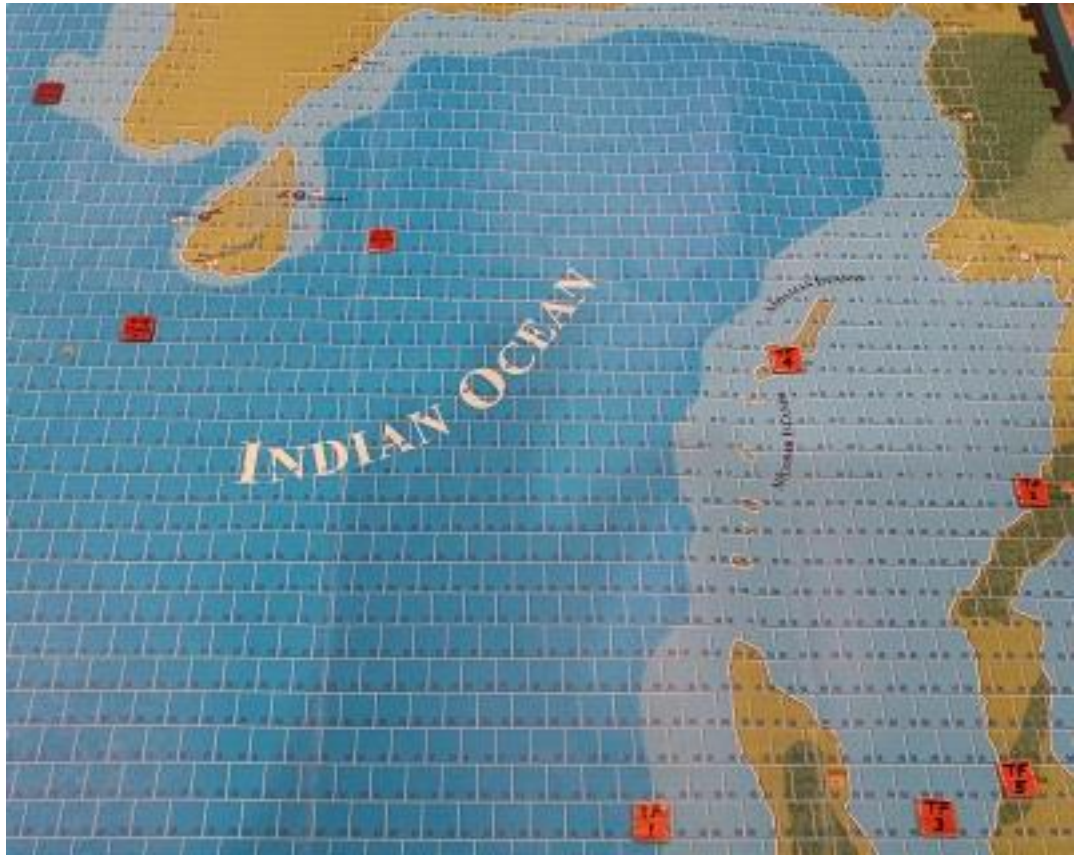
Long-time AAR readers know I enjoy Bruce's double-blind system of WWII naval games. Coral Sea was my first and others included Wake Island, Malta (Operation Pedestal), and Norway. I suggested Japan's raid in the Indian Ocean as a possible future scenario. Happily, using the Osprey *Campaign* booklet, the *Helion at War* booklets, and other books, Bruce created a cracking good one.

The British commanders (l to r): John, Steve, and Eric. Note the clever photographer's image (hey, that's me, Russ) in the mirror.



So far, the game lasted two sessions, of which I was only able to attend the first one. By now, he runs his well-played double-blind system like a well-oiled machine. Each side sat on opposite sides of the room with a map, counters for the various Task Forces (TF), and all the 1:1200 scale plastic ships and aircraft (well, mostly counters for the aircraft) available. Each ship model represented an individual ship. Each aircraft counter represented nine aircraft.

Japanese map. Submarines searching around Ceylon, Task Forces coming up from the South.



Individual pages laid out the TFs, the airfields, turn sheet, and various rules reminders.

TF movement depended on the slowest ship within. Transports, oilers, tankers, and cargo ships moved 1 zone per turn. Royal Navy R-class battleships, submarines, sloops, corvettes, minesweepers, and monitors move up to two zones per turn. All others move up to three zones per turn.

Turns represent four hours of time and include movement, search, and any air strikes or surface combat. Three turns of daylight are followed by three turns of night. Aircraft sent out on strikes require one full turn to rearm and become ready to fly again. Fighters on CAP over the fleet or an airfield can go up each turn.

Our fleet advances, screening the Rangoon convoy (lower right corner). Searching continues with little result for both sides.



Combat generally uses the *Axis & Allies Naval Miniatures* game system where each unit gets a certain number of d6 attack dice. Rolls of 1, 2 and 3 are misses, while 4 and 5 score one hit and a 6 scores two hits. Each unit needs a certain number of hits to suffer one damage. Put enough damage into a ship and it sinks and enough damage into an aircraft and it is aborted. In addition, each unit also has a "Vital Armor" number of hits -- score that many in one attack roll and the unit is immediately destroyed.

Torpedoes are handled slightly different. Only 6s hit, but they immediately do two damage (not hits).

Along with regular gamer Garth and new double-blind gamer Steve, I was on the Japanese side. On the Allied side was John, Eric, and Steve.

Situation

The Japanese sent its carrier fleet into the Indian Ocean to raid the British colonies of India and Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka). If it could sink a few warships and cargo ships, so much the better. It would mean the deep western flank would be secure. In addition, a convoy of IJA troops needed to be delivered to Rangoon.

On the Allied side, I had no idea what they were tasked to do beyond generic sink IJA ships, shoot down Japanese planes, and shuttle merchant ships between ports. Which ports? How many ships? Where are they? I don't know. That's what the search function is for in this double-blind system.

The Raid: Session 1

Our initial IJA priority was to deliver the cargo ships to Rangoon. We assigned a scouting group to lead and flush out any Royal Navy submarines.

In the meantime, we maneuvered the carrier TFs to south of Ceylon. We never found much, so we decided to hit the airfields at Colombo and Trincomalee.

Steve sends aircraft to bomb Cuttack airfield as Garth records the strike results.

We ran into a buzzsaw of CAP and AA - more than we ever expected. We also ran into Eric, who was too "six-y" in his white Royal Navy shorts. We figured on about four or five d6s, but not on eight. A roll of eight dice meant, odds-wise, a roll of 4 (one hit), 5 (one hit), 6 (two hits), and then add another hit. Five hits aborts Japanese planes. Seven or eight hits kills them outright. You can tell what happened: Most Japanese planes were aborted and a goodly number were shot down in flames. We scored a couple hits on the airfield, but at what cost?

I even sent a Betty bomber over the harbor at Trincomalee. Shot down in flames.

Hmmmm. Maybe we need a plan B.

Meanwhile, Steve's TF bombed a minor airfield, only four d6s of AA, scoring three or four hits. It takes 10 hits to destroy a minor airfield and 20 to destroy a large airfield like at Trincomalee and Colombo.

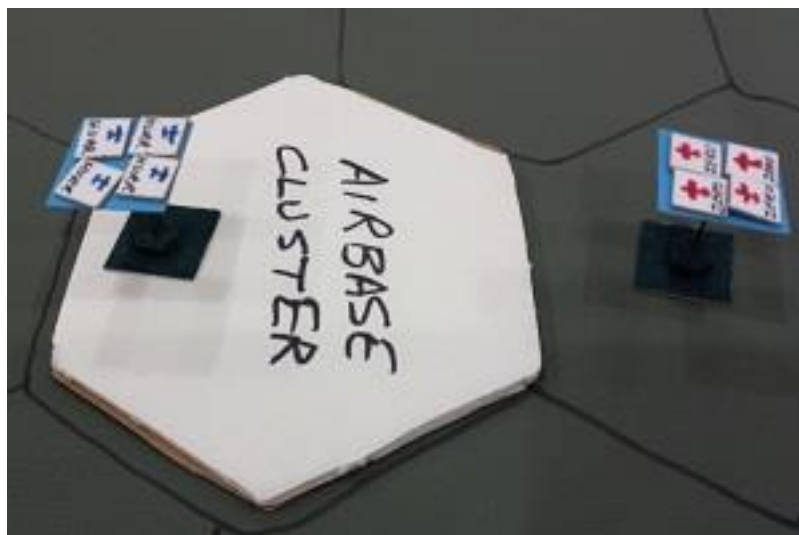
Zeros (right) lead the way into a massive dogfight over Colombo airfield.

We regrouped and decided to go all out against the Colombo airfield at dusk. A furious dogfight saw downed Zeros, Hurricanes, and Fulmars. The bombers went in and did better. The airfield was still in operation, but at least we had Kates and Vals left for the next day.

I should point out that neither side was having any luck finding enemy ships.

The Raid: Session 2

Alas, I could not make the session, so I am not sure what happened. I'll leave the write-up to Bruce.



Indian Ocean Raid: Umpire View

by Bruce



The operational map of the Indian Ocean includes three “attackable” ports: Trincomalee, Colombo, and Madras. One aircraft model/counter represents nine aircraft. If you divide the number of aircraft listed by nine, you will get the number of models/counters used.

*IJN (top) and RN tables.
Photos by Bruce.*

Session 1

The 1st of April 1942 found several Japanese and Royal Navy task forces at sea in the Indian Ocean south and east of Ceylon. The Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) was hoping to execute another Pearl

Harbor-type attack on the Royal Navy (RN) in Ceylon while sending reinforcements by sea to Rangoon. Forewarned, the Allied command emptied ports of commercial shipping and naval forces. The only sighting of enemy was “Two Light Cruisers” in Trincomalee at 0600. Subsequent searches found the port empty.

The rest of the day was spent in moving and fruitless searches by both sides. The night also passed quietly. The weather remained clear and calm.

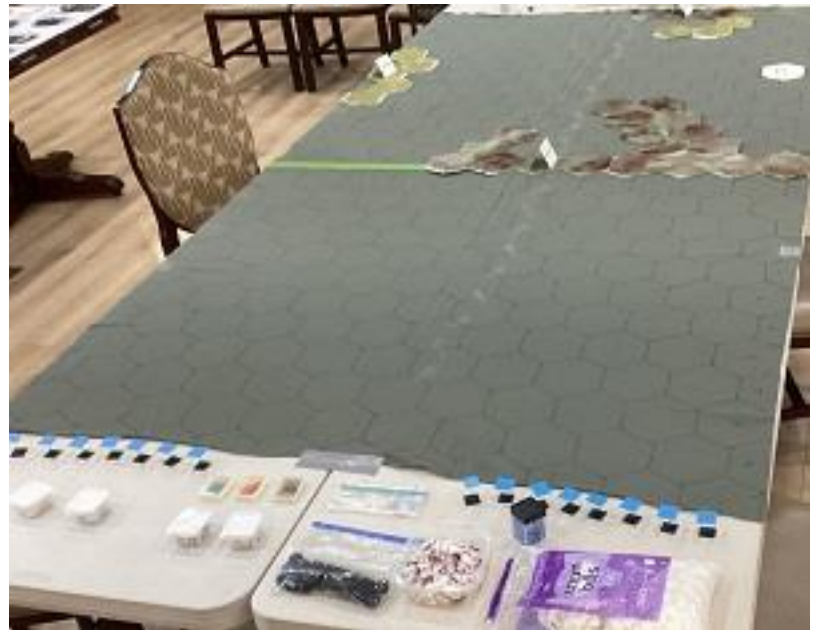
The tactical table in the middle of the room between the IJN and RN tables. Photo by Bruce.

At Dawn They Were Awake

At dawn on the 2nd of April, unable to find any targets at sea, the IJN decided to launch attacks at three airfields and the port of Trincomalee.

The first attack was on the Cuttack Airfield, on the subcontinent, by 18 B5N Kates escorted by 9 A6M Zeros. Finding no CAP, they penetrated the AAA and scored three hits.

The next attack, by 18 Zeros, 27 D3A Vals, and 9 Kates, was on the Trincomalee Airfield complex. This attack was met by a ferocious CAP resistance of 9 Martlets, 18 Hurricanes, and 18 Fulmars. The bombers not destroyed by CAP were downed by AAA. There was no damage to the airfields. Simultaneously, a group of 9 Betty bombers attempted to hit the nearby port, only to be blasted by AAA.



The next attack, by 18 Zeros, 27 Vals, and 27 Kates, was on the Colombo Airfield complex. While also met with a large CAP, this attack was more successful, achieving two hits for the loss of 9 Vals and 9 Kates.

At Dusk, They Were Also Awake

Movements and searches continued throughout the day, yielding no results for either side. At dusk, the end of 1400 turn, another IJN attack on the Colombo airfields was mounted, this time by 90 Zeros, 54 Vals and 72 Kates. They were met by a CAP of 36 Hurricanes and 18 Fulmars. The furious fighter dogfighting led to the loss of 9 Fulmars and 9 Zeros. The bombers pressed the attack and scored nine hits for the loss of 9 Kates. Additionally, 9 Hurricanes and 9 Fulmars were destroyed on the ground having aborted as a result of the fighter melee.

As the attacking aircraft disappeared over the horizon and the defenders landed on the damaged airfields, the sun was setting on the day and 1st gaming session. Play will restart with the 1800 game turn, night.

Point Standing

The IJN scored 9 Points for eliminating 1 Hurricane and 2 Fulmar aircraft units. (Total: 9 Points)

The RN scored 91 points for eliminating 1 Zero, 1 Betty, 4 Val, and 3 Kate aircraft units, plus 20 Points for merchant shipping traffic arriving safely. (Total: 111 Points)

Session 2

As darkness settled on April 2, 1942, a Japanese surface action group approached the port of Colombo. Closing to within five miles of the harbor, three *Kongo*-class battlecruisers, two heavy cruisers, and five destroyers unleashed their gunfire, causing 12 hits.

The Japanese bombard Colombo. Photo by Bruce.



Around midnight, a night-time strike

force of 36 Albacores and 18 Swordfish armed with torpedoes made an attack on the Colombo bombardment group. The Japanese were surprised by the sudden appearance of the slow-flying aircraft in the darkness. One group of Albacores was aborted due to AA fire while the other three achieved four torpedo hits on the battlecruiser *Haruna*, which then sank.



British bombers attack the Japanese fleet at night. Photo by Bruce. Note: John rolled 6d6 and scored an amazing four "6s" to sink Haruna with torpedoes.

The Swordfish attack on a screening destroyer was unsuccessful. The bombardment of Colombo continued and inflicted five more hits.

The bombardment group remained at Colombo until dawn in order to obtain 3 more hits, achieving the port's destruction. The port cannot be used for the duration of the game.

Meanwhile, far away to the northeast near the coast, a lone merchant ship ran afoul of patrolling Japanese surface forces 250 NM east of Madras. The chase was short and destruction assured.

The IJN run down the merchant ship. The dice show that all nine shots hit – overkill indeed. Photo by Bruce.

Trincomalee Air Strike

April 3 dawned clear and uneventful until mid-afternoon. The sky became cloudy and the RN's Eastern Fleet "Slow Task Force" was spotted outside the port of Trincomalee by two patrolling Japanese I-Class submarines.

The force, four R-class battleships, light carrier *HMS Hermes*, three light cruisers, and eight destroyers, was cruising northwest about ten miles off the coast. Over the next two hours, five waves of IJN carrier airstrikes and subsurface attacks by the I-Boats hit the STF. A total of 18 Hurricane and 18 Fulmar fighters from Trincomalee provided CAP.

The first wave of Zero fighters shot down 9 Hurricanes and aborted the rest of the CAP, clearing the way for the following bombers.

The IJN aircraft commence the attack on the RN Slow Task Force. Photo by Bruce.

The second wave of 36 Vals targeted the carrier *HMS Hermes*, sinking her, and hitting the battleship *HMS Resolution*.

The third wave of 18 Vals and 18 Kates sank *HMS Resolution* with bombs and torpedoes.

The fourth wave of 36 Kates had nine aborts before crippling the Dutch AA light cruiser *Van Heemskerk* with a torpedo hit.

The final wave of 27 Kates had 9 aborts before sinking the *van Heemskerk* with another torpedo.



Trincomalee Submarine Strike

Next, the IJN submarines approached the task force. One I-Boat was detected and sunk before firing any torpedoes.

During the next half hour, the other submarine fired two spreads. The destroyers *HMS Arrow* and *HMS Decoy* were both sunk and *HMS Scout* was crippled. Those losses were avenged by the Dutch destroyer *HMNS Sweers* by sinking the other I-Boat.

Point Standing

The IJN scored 8 Points for destroying 9 Hurricane and 9 Swordfish when *HMS Hermes* sunk, 40 Points for damage and destruction of the Port of Colombo, 74 Points for sunk shipping (*HMS Hermes*, *HMS Resolution*, *HMNS Van Heemskerck*, *HMS Arrow*, *HMS Decoy*, and a merchant ship) for 122 Points. Added to 23 Points from the previous session equals a total of 145 Points.

The RN scored 24 Points for sinking two I-Boats and 35 Points for sinking the battlecruiser *Haruna* for 59 Points. Added to 111 Points from the previous session equals a total of 170 Points.

To be continued...RL



Korean War action.

HMGS Next Gen: Inspiration for History

by John Spiess

Korean War: Larchmont

We put on a Korean War game based on the Outpost War period in 1952. At this point, the war was a stalemate with American Marines defending trench lines on a series of hills. One of them was actually called Bunker Hill.

This game was also advertised for adults, and about six wandered in, but they mostly just watched and listened to my historical summary at the end. It's a little sad that a lot of people have never even heard of the Korean War. It's barely taught in schools now except for perhaps a slight mention.

Battle of Monmouth: Rye

We played a portion of the Battle of Monmouth at the Rye Free Reading Room. Rye continues to be one of my favorite locations since kids just jump in and out of the game. This week, a nice girl named Sophia took part for the whole game and will definitely be back.

Battle of Monmouth.



Battle of Ridgefield: Lewisboro

Next, we hosted our first game at the Lewisboro Library. This was advertised for both adults and teens, so we had a really nice group. We played the Battle of Ridgefield, which is always very popular in this area. Given that Saturday was April 25, it worked out well since that was the anniversary of the British landing on Compo Beach.



Battle of Ridgefield for teens and grown-up teens.

Two sides to battle of Asculum.

Battle of Asculum: Weston

Once again, we set up the Battle of Asculum. Since I'm running this scenario at Historicon, I want to keep playtesting it a few more times. This time, I had my Roman war wagons finished, so we made up some quick rules to get them in the game.



Castle Siege: Rye

We played a castle siege game in Rye for the younger 4th and 5th graders, but for the first time, I literally forgot to take pictures. The siege was so close and those little kids were getting pretty excited, I just didn't think of it. We ran a bit long, so all the parents were there when I gave the historical summary, which was pretty cool. Rye is turning out to be one of our best locations with 2 scheduled events per month.

WWI attack at Rye.



WWI Battle of Belleau Wood: Rye

We also put on the WWI Battle of Belleau Wood at Rye, NY. Here, I was better at taking photos.

WWI attack at New Canaan.



WWI Battle of Belleau Wood: New Canaan

The Belleau Wood scenario that we played in New Canaan continues to be a favorite. I was pretty happy when about half way through the game we had a walk-in who turned out to be one of the Stamford Sea Cadets that had played in the past.

Simsbury commanders.

Romans and Pyrrhus: Simsbury



Simsbury was one of Next Gen's first libraries and the kids are really just great. Most of them are now about to finish high school, and Adam also came back from college for the game.

This was basically one of my final playtests since I'll be running this scenario at Historicon. I'm pretty happy with my tweaked rules for Roman War Wagons. These are just great models from Tofers Miniatures, so I just had to put them on the board to counter the elephants. The kids also had some suggestions, which shows a nice level of maturity. A lot of them do play *Warhammer* as well, and some paint figures, so like I said, this is a good crowd that will be around going forward.



Pyrrhus' elephants charge.

We ran a bit long, so a few of the librarians stopped by to listen to the historical summary along with some of the parents. Maybe it's me, but I really thought more people would have heard the expression "Pyrrhic Victory." This is the battle where the phrase originated, so I thought I would get some nice smiles of acknowledgement. Instead, I had blank stares basically saying, "I never heard that before."

HMGS Outreach: Spring Offensive 2026 Convention Recap

by Convention Organizer Bruce Schaper and photos by Keith Miles

The Triangle Simulation Society's Spring Offensive 2026 convention in Burlington, NC, saw 70 gamers gather, meeting the goal of 60, with 46 players signed on for both days and about 10 kids in attendance, smashing the old record of zero.

We had guys from all over: Petersburg, Richmond, southern Virginia, Virginia Beach, Williamsburg, Wilmington, Sanford, Charlotte, and even one (Sam) from Kentucky (5.5 hours). It was also good to see Ed kicking around.

We had about a dozen onlookers -- guys who just wanted to see what was going on, which is encouraging. Another four guys showed up, cold turkey, paid, and I lost them in the maelstrom. That's a real good thing. They might know another couple of guys.

The quality of the games laid down was fantastic. We certainly want to keep that standard as high as we can. The reactions of the non-gamers walking in either on purpose or by accident were positive.

We had eight cancellations and one GM was a no show -- hope nothing tragic happened. I played with the table layout this year and thought the layout worked well, as it dispersed the concentration of voices. So, it was a bit quieter and we all could hear better.

The chair auction went for \$85 (not quitting my day job). TSO donated \$100 and the Operation Arbor turnout was good. I didn't count, but I bet we collected 15 or more trees for the new Club in Dunn, NC -- Tabletop Pathfinders.

The staff and accommodations were pleasant in both respects. Many thanks to Pat Walthers, for a captain is only as good as his XO.

I think we're gonna get some more folks from Williamsburg next year. I got word that in 2027, Charlotte's Carolina CONquest will be April 30 and May 1st. I'll see if I can get our convention secured earlier in April or deeper into May.

I want to thank everyone who attended this year's event. Without your own dedication to the hobby, cons either don't succeed or even happen at all.



Top down: Rorke's Drift, WWII artillery defensive barrage, and ships at dock.

NEWS

HMGS Election Results: Board

by Dale Zartman, HMGS Secretary



Congratulations to the returning HMGS board members, Kevin Carroll and Patrick Devine. Congratulations to the new HMGS board member, Steve Robertson. Congratulations to the new Board Alternate, Mark Klein. There were no Referenda items this election cycle.

Thanks to the Election Committee: John Snead (Chair), Cliff Brunken, and Tom Cusa. Please join the Board in welcoming our new and returning Board members.

Results

Name	Votes	% of total
Steve Robertson	323	75.6%
Kevin Carroll	306	71.7%
Pat Devine	298	69.8%
Mark Klein	219	51.3%

Summary of Ballots Received or Returned

Vote-Now.com LLC conducted the HMGS election process for 2026. Vote-Now.com delivered ballots to all 1,448 people who were HMGS members as of Tuesday, 31 March 2026. Polls opened April 16, 2026, and closed May 8, 2026. Vote-Now.com had to receive all ballots by midnight on the 8th to be counted.

Each ballot was uniquely coded for both security and confidentiality. Of emails sent, according to VoteNow's data, the total emails opened was 1,052 (73.2% of the total).

There were 1,437 ballots sent out by email and 11 members who don't have valid email addresses in our system. Of the 1,448 members, 56 requested hard copy ballots. Those who were sent both email and paper ballots were only allowed to submit one ballot.

Vote-Now.com received ballots from 427 voters (29.5% of members; 40.6% of opened emails), compared to 448 (29.3%) in 2025. Of the ballots received, 421 were e-ballots, and 6 were cast by mail.

Officer Appointments

In the May Board Meeting, the board selected the following as Officers:

Jon Lundberg: President

Dave Allnutt: Vice President

Dale Zartman: Secretary

American Revolution Events: NJ 250th

by Russ Lockwood

A list of events at New Jersey's state parks, forests, and historic sites is available at the state web site.

Info: <https://dep.nj.gov/parksandforests/discover-history/united-states-250/>



NJ Re-Enactments: Haddonfield and Monmouth

by Russ Lockwood

American Revolution re-enactment are scheduled for Saturday, June 6, 2026, at the Indian King Tavern Museum, 233 Kings Highway, Haddonfield, NJ, 08033.

Info: <https://haddonfieldskirmish.com/>

Another re-enactment is scheduled for June 20-21, 2026, at Monmouth Battlefield State Park, 20 NJ-33 Business, Manalapan Township, NJ 07726

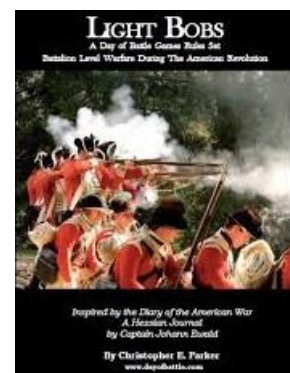
Info: <https://dep.nj.gov/event/annual-reenactment-of-the-battle-of-monmouth/>

Battle of Cowpens: Light Bobs

by Russ Lockwood

Chris Parker Games released a slideshow game recap about the 1781 Battle of Cowpens using its *Light Bobs 250 Anniversary* American Revolution miniatures rules.

Recap: <https://www.dayofbattlegames.com/cowpens-batrep/>



Europa Series Briefing: Number 1

by Russ Lockwood

The relaunch of *Europa* continues, says the website, with an emphasis on making the out-of-print *Europa* games available in digital format. As a first step, great progress has been made on the GDW-era *Europa* games plus some surprise/bonus material. There's no release date yet.

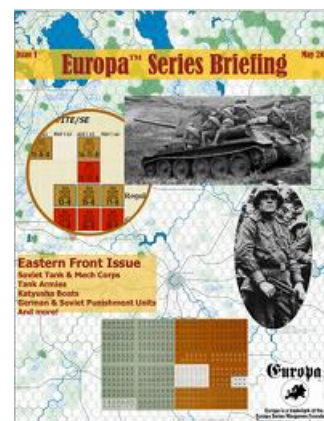
Europa Series Briefing (ESB) Issue 1 pdf is complete and available to \$1.00 on Wargames Vault. It contains 48 pages (plus a four-page cover overlay) with a main focus on the Eastern Front but with some Second Front material as well.

ESB will be published on no set schedule at first, but a major article on rocket artillery for Issue 2 is already in first draft form. It includes how to update the rocket artillery units in all the published *Europa* games. American rocket artillery units make their first ever appear for *Second Front* based on information unavailable when *Second Front* was released. The US gets a maximum of just two rocket battalions before the end of the war.

The Soviet rocket artillery will receive a much improved treatment, based on Russian-language works that simply were not available when *Scorched Earth* was published.

Obviously, most of this will appeal to *Europa* gamers, but some of it will interest non-*Europa* gamers.

Info: <https://europaseries.com/>



Wheels of Liberation: WWII Showcase

by Russ Lockwood

On Saturday June 27 and Sunday June 28, 2026, the Wheels of Liberation Collection will hold an open house at 1045 Barlow Two Taverns Rd., Gettysburg, PA 17325. No time was specified on the web site.

The collection contains Allied WWII military tanks, self-propelled guns, tankettes, halftracks, armored cars, personnel carriers, field, anti-tank, and anti-aircraft artillery, gun tractors, trucks, jeeps, staff cars, motorcycles, small arms, uniforms, and related militaria with a special emphasis on the Polish Armed Forces 1939-45.

Prices: Adult 19 and older: 1-day \$20 and 2-day \$30; Seniors aged 65 and up as well as children aged 12-18: 1-day \$15 and 2-day \$20; Veterans, Service Members, and First Responders, as well as children aged 7-11: 1-day \$10 and 2-day \$15; and Children 6 years old and younger: free entry.

Info: <https://wheelsofliberation.org/>

Gettysburg Militaria Show: 26th Anniversary

by Russ Lockwood

The Autumn Gettysburg Civil War & Militaria Show celebrates its 26th year on October 24-25, 2026, from 9am to 5pm (Saturday) and 9am to 2pm (Sunday) at the Eisenhower Inn & Conference Center, AllStar Sports Complex, 2638 Emmitsburg Road, Gettysburg, PA 17325. Dealers man over 400 tables of military artifacts from the Revolutionary War to the end of World War II.

Admission: \$12 per person. Children under 12 free with paying adult

Info: <https://gburgshow.com>

Game Fest: Flemington

by Russ Lockwood

Preliminary info is that the Hunterdon County Library located on Rte 12 in Flemington, NJ, will hold Games Fest on October 17, 2026, from 11am to 3pm. More info as the event draws nearer.

Inkwell Ideas: Creatures That Rock & Roar

by Russ Lockwood

Inkwell Ideas noted its Rock & Roar project -- creatures inspired by classic rock/pop/metal song titles and band names -- finished crowdfunding, but interested gamers can still make a late pledge.

The project will have two books, one with stats for *Shadowdark* and the other *Old-School Essentials* (OSE -- very close to B/X D&D). There will be 54 creatures like Twisted Sisters (corrupted nuns/acolytes) and War Pigs (pig-like golem-tanks); a setting map, several mini-quests, and 16 magic items. Inkwell Ideas said it's about done writing the *Shadowdark* version and then will edit and playtest while porting to the OSE version.

One of the example monsters is below: Cranberries. I'm not sure why they are not zombies, but that's probably just in my head.

Another six monsters on the KS page:

<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/inkwellideas/rock-and-roar>

Lydia Darragh: A Heroine of the American Revolution

by Russ Lockwood

The Washington Crossing American Revolution Round Table will meet via Zoom on Monday, June 8th from 7:30 to 9:00pm. There is no charge to attend.

The topic will be Robert N. Fanelli's new book *Lydia's Tale: The Mystery of Lydia Darragh, Irish Quaker, Patriot Spy*. She is famed for eavesdropping on British General William Howe's staff as they planned a surprise attack, then sneaking through the lines to give warning to American soldiers. Her actions are said to have saved George Washington's army from a devastating ambush as it lay starving and freezing on the barren hills of Whitemarsh at the end of 1777.

Drawing on genealogical sources, legal documents, unknown records, and correspondence, her biography examines the activities of women in Revolutionary Philadelphia, reveals the complex issues faced by pacifist Quakers in a time of war, and brings to light the contributions of Irish immigrants in securing America's freedom.

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

Nursery of the Rebellion: Lecture

by Russ Lockwood

On June 18, 2026, Dr. Michael A. Blaakman will deliver a lecture as part of the Princeton Battlefield Society's Cadwalader Lecture Series at 6pm at The Nassau Club in Princeton, NJ, about Princeton and the American Revolution.

Dr. Blaakman is an historian of revolutionary and early national America and was the creative force behind the highly acclaimed exhibit of the same name at Princeton University. Tickets: \$50 at <https://pbs1777.org/event/rebellion>

Cranberries



These cute and peaceful creatures stand two to three feet tall as adults. They live in villages of 20 to 100 individuals in secluded glades and forests. Their homes are usually partially hollowed out, but living, trees.

They do not eat, but may get "hungry" and starve if they aren't exposed to natural light for four hours a day (even a window on a cloudy day counts) or touch grass/dirt for four hours of a day. Either option is enough sustenance.

Friendly with most humanoids, they trade rare plants that they cultivate for other necessities and luxuries.

Their charisma comes from their near inability to speak ill of others. "Different strokes..." is as negative as they get.

They speak common and sylvan.

Typical Cranberry

AC 13, HP 4, ATK 1 punch +3 (1), MV Near, S -2, D +3, C +1, I +2, W +0, Ch +2, AL N, LV 1

Blend. They have advantage to sneak in forested areas.

Cranberry Druid

Each village is lead by an older and wiser cranberry druid who speaks for the village, settles the few minor squabbles, and decides the village's major policies. He or she has the following statistics and spells:

AC 13, HP 13, ATK 1 punch +3 (1), MV Near, S -2, D +3, C +1, I +2, W +0, Ch +2, AL N, LV 3

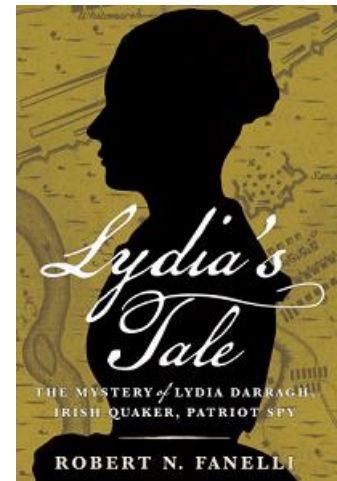
Bloom (WIS Spell). DC 11. Make a flower blossom, a seed pod open, or a leaf bud bloom when touched.

Entangle (WIS Spell). Plants grow and grab at all enemies in a near-sized cube within far distance of the cranberry. Those within the area or who move into it during the next 1d4+1 rounds: DC 12 DEX or be unable to move until the spell ends.

Healing Touch (WIS Spell). DC 11. Heal one creature within close for 2d4 HP

Predict Weather (WIS Spell). DC 11. Know the next day's weather.

Rock & Roar! Shadowdark

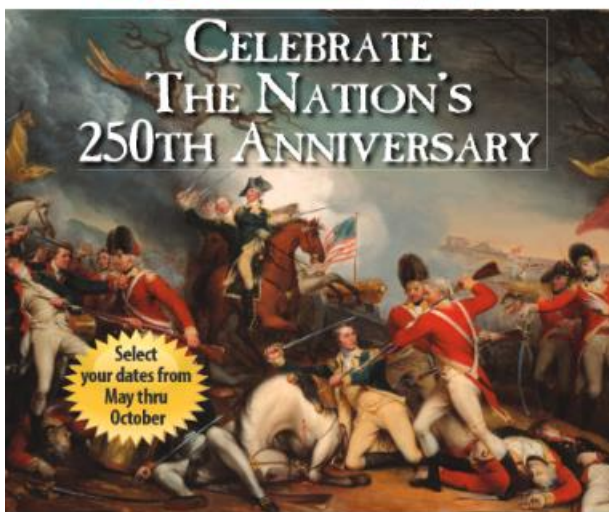


Princeton Battlefield Society: 2026 Events

By Russ Lockwood

In the spirit of full disclosure, I am a trustee of the Princeton Battlefield Society, which announced events to help explain the 1777 Battle of Princeton. They are also fundraisers to help restore the battlefield and the original Clarke house, which still stands on the site. Some of the projects being undertaken, some with partners such as the American Battlefield Trust, include restoring the Memorial site, including the medallion in the middle that honors unknown British and American soldiers who were buried in a mass grave after the battle; restoration of an Apple orchard present at the battle, restoration of the road used by troops to enter the battlefield; ongoing repairs to the Clarke house; re-enactment; and a few smaller projects. The long-term project is to fundraise for a full Visitor's Center.

Visit the PBS website for more info: <https://pbs1777.org/>



Experience the American Revolution at the Princeton Battlefield State Park

Explore the Ten Crucial Days of 1776-77, the Battle of Princeton, and the people involved.

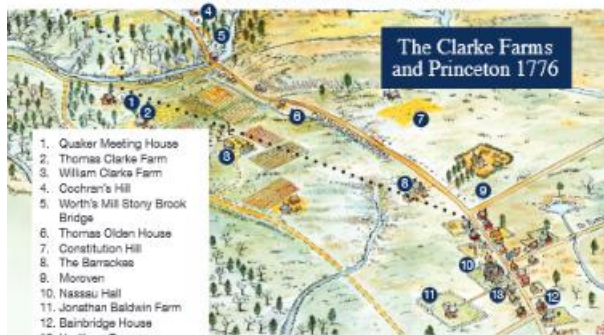
Sundays, May to October

- Guided Tour of the Thomas Clarke House
- Battlefield Talks and Demonstrations
 - Walking Tours
- Musket & Flintlock Programs

★★★★★★★★★★★★★★
(See dates for programs on back)

You must register at www.pbs1777.org
Adults - \$10
Walking Tour - \$20 per adult
Children under 13 - Free
Active Military - Free
(Not recommended for children under 8 years)

May 17	Presentation <i>Princeton: A Battle and A Community</i>
May 24	The Battle of Princeton
June 7	Presentation <i>Battle of Princeton: Why here?</i>
June 14	"Black Powder, White Smoke" <i>Care & Feeding of Revolutionary War Flintlocks and The Battle of Princeton</i>
June 21	"In Their Footsteps" <i>Walking Tour of the Entire Battlefield</i>
July 12	The Battle of Princeton
July 26	The Battle of Princeton
Aug 2	The Battle of Princeton
Aug 16	The Battle of Princeton
Sep 6	"Black Powder, White Smoke" <i>Care & Feeding of Revolutionary War Flintlocks and The Battle of Princeton</i>
Sep 13	"In Their Footsteps" <i>Walking Tour of the Entire Battlefield</i>
Sep 27	The Battle of Princeton
Oct 11	Presentation <i>Who Experienced the Battle of Princeton?</i>
Oct 18	"In Their Footsteps" <i>Walking Tour of the Entire Battlefield</i>



The dotted line overlay represents the general path of modern Mercer Street



Princeton Battlefield Society
 P. O. Box 7645
 Princeton, New Jersey 08543
 More information at www.pbs1777.org

BOOKS I'VE READ

By Russ Lockwood

Thunder In The Mountains. by Tom Isitt. Softcover (6.6x9.7 inches). 334 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The First World War on the Italian Front*

What a delightful change of pace for a war history. The author bicycled what was the entire WWI front in Italy, with a goodly portion of that in the mountains. And when I say mountains, I mean the Dolomites and the Alps and some of the most insane spots for Italian and Austro-Hungarian troops to shoot at each other.

As he pedals from the top of the Adriatic Sea to the border of Italy and Switzerland, he takes side trips to visit the battlefields -- battlefields that were sometimes mere ledges hacked out of the rock. The cabins and other structures were often anchored to the sides of mountains, logistics started with hacking tunnels through rock and glacier, and small-unit raids ruled the days.

Throughout his journey, or should I say journeys for he has visited multiple times, he snaps photos of beautiful snow-capped mountains, awkward mountainside buildings, and various memorials and monuments.

Apparently, when he wasn't biking along roads paved or abandoned, he was taking side hikes up the side of the mountains and staying in rifugio -- public cabins with facilities. Apparently, Italy has a whole network of them along hiking trails.

And then there were his excursions along ferrata trails -- trails being a bit of a misnomer. Ferrata consists of either lots of U-shaped iron bars hammered into the rock to create a ladder, or, cables strung along the face of a mountain that you clip on a safety line and inch your way across the rockface. If you fall, the theory is the safety line will save you from a fall of hundreds to thousands of feet. If you want to gain the summits of various mountains, which contain WWI trenches, tunnels, and other positions, you need to "hike" the ferrata trails. A couple of illustrative photos (p114) illustrate the precarious nature of ferrata hiking.

Now, this is interesting enough as a travelogue, but every spot he visits contains a history of the men and units at that spot, often in the context of division- and corp-level offensives. The photos of where these soldiers fought elicit awe for their beauty and the wonder how anyone fought at those altitudes and conditions. When troops weren't sniping, raiding, or tunneling and counter-mining versus each other, they were battling the bitter cold of winter and the privations of lack of provisions. It's not like there's a railroad or road leading to the tops of the peaks.

A tidbit: Italy declared war of Austria-Hungary on May 24, 1915, but only on Germany on August 28, 1916 (pg. x).

A typo: The declaration of war date in the text is May 23, 1915 (p29), so one or the other is right. Also, "thegarrison" (p127) needs a space.

The book contains 71 black and white photos, 88 color photos, four black and white maps with color overlays, and 26 color OpenStreetMaps maps with overlays of the front lines and the main offensives. QRS codes at the start of most chapters provide further photos online.

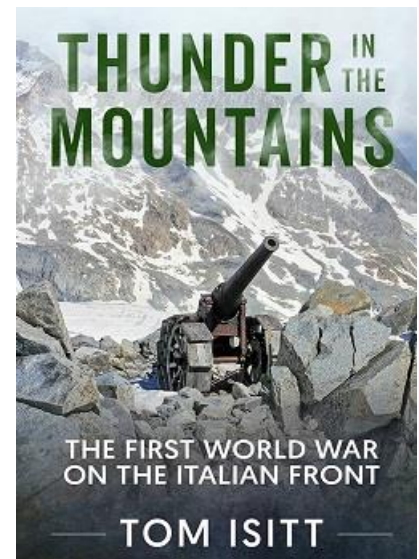
Mountain warfare in Italy, except for the Caporetto offensive, is little-covered. This a delightful read with the war history interspersed with travel observations. I'm not sure how you'd craft a skirmish scenario among the peaks, but this book will offer all the examples you'd need to craft your own WWI mountain warfare rules. Well done.

Enjoyed it.

The Battle of Tewkesbury: 4 May 1471. by Steven Goodchild and Dilip Sarkar. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 266 pages. 2026.

Ah, now there's a second reason to celebrate the 4th of May: anniversary of the War of the Roses battle and Star Wars Day.

Despite the title, the book starts with Henry V in 1415 and marches through the internecine history of aristocratic plotting and maneuvering leading up to the War of the Roses. This contains a considerable amount of shifting alliances, rebellions, and foreign interventions -- not to mention a bewildering array of names and family connections. The only leaders that have higher Roman numerals after their names are the popes.



The campaign swings into action with an excellent analysis of the maneuvers of both sides that led to Tewkesbury. The paths are somewhat well documented, although period commentary gets vague at times -- hence the analysis of the march and the intention of the route.

One aspect I enjoy is the comparison of various period commentaries. For example, King Edward IV returned from exile with a force of either: 2,000 troops, 1,500 troops, 2,400 troops, 2,000 troops (again), or 900 English plus 300 Flemish troops (p71), depending on the source.

Chapter 13 (p96-p111) covers the actual battle. However, like the troops numbers, the disposition and progress of the battle remain vague in the period commentaries. These are presented one after another and the contradictory nature of the commentaries is readily apparent. Certainly the maps do an excellent job of presenting the various courses of battle.*

I put an asterisk at the end of that sentence because none of the maps have a scale. Some miles and yardage is within the text, but all maps always need a scale. I have little idea the frontages of the units, the depth of the units, the distances covered, and so on. Same with all the other maps. Kudos for including maps, but a map need a scale. Pity. A lack of a scale also presents difficulties in crafting a tabletop scenario.

The book contains 60 black and white photos, 12 black and white illustrations, and 29 black and white maps. Kudos for the maps, which actually show little towns along the march routes and hedges and hillocks of the battlefield, but they do need a scale.

I especially enjoyed an Appendix that presented a number of dispositions and courses of the tactical battle offered by historians over the last two hundred or so years. When you have vague period commentaries and almost no archeological evidence, these represent interesting opinions about the battle.

Part I is the history and Part II is a battlefield guide along with several appendices. It's all nicely written and analyzed. Well done.

Enjoyed it.

A Machine Gunner's War. by Ernest Albert "Andy" Andrews, jr with David B. Hurt. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 364 pages. 2026 reprint of 2022 book.

Subtitle: *From Normandy to Victory with the 1st Infantry Division in World War II*

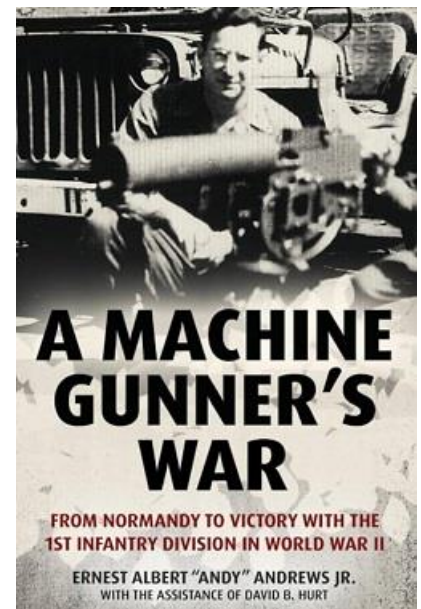
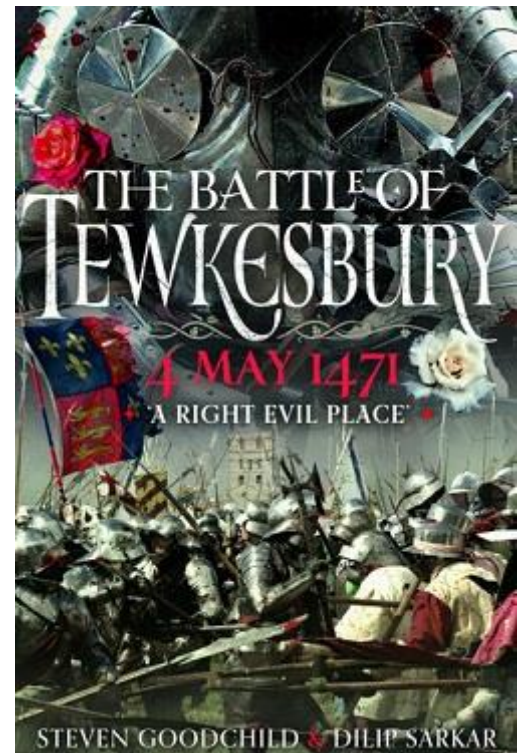
This memoir by a member of a machine gun squad covers all the nitty gritty details of WWII combat in Europe. He landed with the 1st Infantry Division, 16th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Battalion, H company on Omaha Beach late in the day and moved up with the division as it crossed Europe.

Along the way, he was involved in various battles, was wounded numerous times from bullet and shrapnel, and earned a Bronze Star for traversing a minefield twice to bring back ammo -- although that was far from his most harrowing experience in small-unit combat. He almost lost his hand from frostbite in the Battle of the Bulge and was there all the way to VE Day and then some. He was rotated home and discharged back into civilian life.

Of note, at least to me, was that his mother, born in 1888, was Margarette Rebecca Lockwood (p33) -- probably a relative.

Of note to gamers is that in the post-Falaise race across France, his unit carried by jeeps raced 23 miles in three hours against no opposition (p140) and the next day only got 15 miles. Other rates of movement against no German opposition were 85 miles in five days (p141) and 35 miles in nine hours (p151). Think about that when moving across the tabletop with no opposition versus having to stop and deploy against any opposition.

Tactically, the two MGs of his squad were often placed 30 or 40 yards apart for crossfire purposes. He also picked up the habit of sighting down the underside of the barrel to make himself as small a target as possible (p184). Watching other gunners getting hit in the head encourage him to keep doing so.



The book contains 16 black and white photos, seven color photos, and six black and white maps of the towns he mentions in the text, albeit without a scale.

It's all quite colorful and a smooth read from his foxhole -- operational plans were far above his pay grade of PFC. He never knew why he was going to this place or that, only that he had to. He went through several pairs of glasses since they often seemed to be getting shot off his face. A good memoir.

Enjoyed it.

Japanese Military Uniforms 1841-1929: Asia at War 59. by Ritta Nakanishi. Softcover (8.2x11.7 inches). 88 pages. 2025 reprint of 2023 Japanese reprint of 1985 book.

Subtitle: *From the Fall of the Shogunate to the Russo-Japanese War*

I'm not sure 1929 would qualify for the Russo-Japanese War circa 1905, but I suspect the uniforms used in the Russo-Japanese War continued on to 1929. The 1930s mark the beginning of the uniforms illustrated in the sequel to this book.

In any case, this is a figure painter's paradise with two pages of intricate color illustrations followed by two pages of intricate black and white illustrations, followed by color and then black and white and so on throughout the book. There's not much text beyond the tiny font of the captions.

By intricate, I mean individual illustrations of designs on cuffs, collars, sleeves, hats and so on. Individual weapon illustrations show the evolution of firearms used. Lots and lots of Army and Navy uniforms -- the lineup of 10 uniforms is typical of the information within.

I counted 792 black and white illustrations, 631 color illustrations, two colorized black and white photos, three black and white photos, and one color photo. My totals may be off, but I think you get the idea this book has a lot of illustrations.

For example, I counted 24 illustrations on page 40: six peaked caps, one cap badge, one trouser, four tunics, three buttons, one rifle, one bullet, and two soldiers. Another reviewer might count that as six, with all caps as one illustration, all uniforms as one illustration, etc.

If you are interested in painting up a Japanese Imperial army to fight samurai in a tabletop battle out of the movie *The Last Samurai*, this is a great one-volume resource.

Enjoyed it.

British Anti-Aircraft Cruisers: ShipCraft 35. by Les Brown. Softcover (8.25x11.7 inches). 64 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *C Class, D Class and Mercantile Conversions*

As WWII progressed, the British increased the anti-aircraft armament on their ships in the face of Luftwaffe attacks. They eventually modified certain ships into AA-intensive ships to help protect convoys.

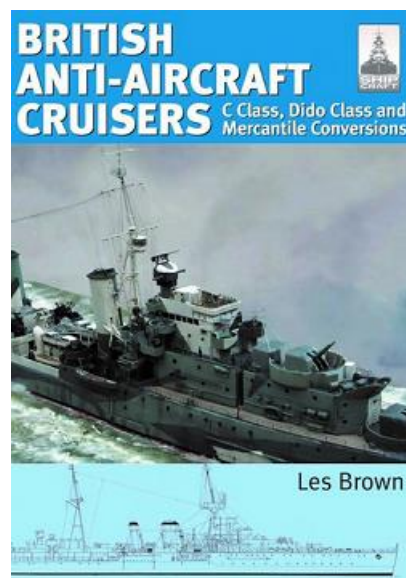
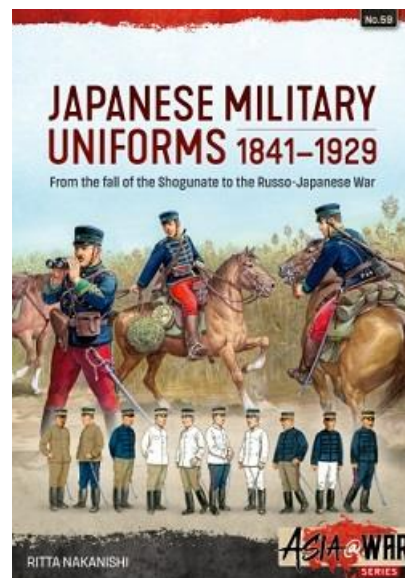
The C Class were mostly cruisers built during WWI and modified to support more AA guns. Each of the ship gets a short history, including refits and fate. Indeed, a lot of C Class cruisers were sunk.

The D Class and merchant ship conversions were part of interwar and WWII construction, with WWII AA modifications. Those also receive a short history and fate.

As usual in the series, pages 1 to 16 and 49 to 55 offer history and the rest is given over to modeling. Pages 17 to 24 cover model products, including lots of 3D-printed items. Pages 25 to 44 show eight finished plastic models created by masters with serious patience and skill sets. Four are in 1:350 scale and four in 1:700 scale.

Pages 44 to 48 provide color camouflage profiles for specific ships, pages 56 to 58 provide text descriptions of color camouflage patterns for specific ships, pages 59 to 63 provide top and side profile drawings for specific ships, although without listing a scale, and page 64 lists manufacturer web sites and the bibliography.

Now, to be clear, this is not a step-by-step instruction to make great models. It showcases what can be achieved with plastic model kits and aftermarket options.



The booklet contains 37 black and white photos, 43 color photos of model products and box art, 69 color photos of eight models completed by master craftsmen, 18 historical color camouflage patterns, and 28 black and white drawings of the tops and sides of various ships.

It's another fine addition to the series, and more so if you put together plastic WWII ship models. Enjoyed it.

The Military Organization of Moldavia & Wallachia in the Phanariot Era

1709-1821. by Claudiu-Ion Neagoe. Translated by Laura-Ionela Ionica.

Softcover (6.1x9.2 inches). 220 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *From Reason to Revolution 1721-1815 No. 160*

I don't know if it is only this book or the series in general, but the format shrunk, from 6.7x9.7 inches to 6.1x9.2 inches. Size shrinkflation probably goes along with the trend towards smaller fonts in the book industry. Then again, sometimes the 19th century books I read contain smaller fonts than current sizes. Maybe it's a case of what goes around comes around?

In any case, your word for the day is "phanariot" -- essentially an Ottoman-appointed governor of the regions of Moldavia and Wallachia. For a time, these governors were selected from among the Greeks inhabiting the Pharrar district of Istanbul. Man, I love reading history -- you learn something new every day.

Said phanariots were sometimes conscientious, sometimes licentious, sometimes brutal, and sometimes incompetent, but they made sure these provinces toed the Ottoman line. It wasn't always easy. The Moldavians and Wallachians were independence minded and their soldiers often defected to Ottoman enemies. Apparently, it happened so often, the Ottomans took away their weaponry and turned them into construction troops.

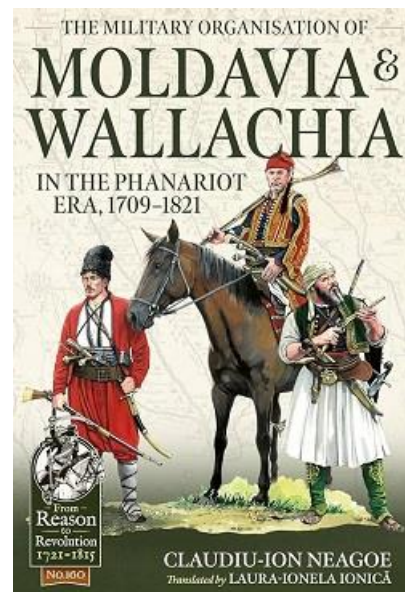
In any case, the book offers short unit histories of an awful lot of units -- all with terms, names, and other spelling designed to make the heads spin of English-centric readers like me. Most of these units, one chapter of Moldavian and one of Wallachian, numbered no more than 50 troopers or infantry, but the unit histories cover a multitude of types, including OOBs and uniform colors.

The book contains 36 black and white illustrations, three black and white photos, and two black and white maps. A center section contains seven infantry and three cavalry color uniform illustrations.

I can't say I read every word on every page. After 50 or 75 units, the words started to blur. It's great information if you are building a Moldavian or Wallachian army and want to see how specific unit types fit into the whole, but it's a tad dry. It's more resource than page turner, although the beginning chapter tracing the history of the phanariots and their units reads much smoother than the later short unit histories.

If 18th century Moldavia and Wallachia is your area of interest, this book covers the military angle. And for that, ties go to the author.

Enjoyed it.



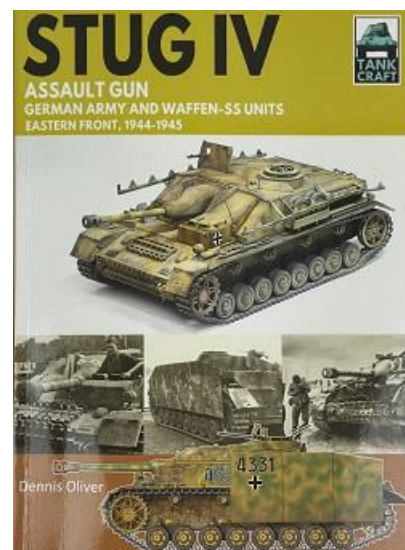
STuG IV Assault Gun: TankCraft 47. by Dennis Oliver. Softcover (8.25x11.7 inches). 64 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *German Army and Waffen-SS Units, Eastern Front 1944-1945*

Long-time readers know of my enthusiasm for *TankCraft* booklets -- a marvelous combination of history, modeling resource, painting guide, and inspiration. Sure, most of the modeling info applies to 1:35 scale and 1:72 scale modeling, but painting guide is useful even down to 6mm (1:285 scale) models.

The format is well-replicated: History (pages 1-16 and 49-60), color camouflage painting guide (pages 17-27), 1:35 scale showcase of three expert model makers (pages 28-40), modeling products (pages 41-48, visual company-level OOB (pages 61-63), and manufacturer web pages and research sources (page 64). Sure, some page variations occur between the volumes, but the format is the format.

As this is somewhat of a companion volume to previous STuG books, Oliver avoids repetition. The initial history is a unit-by-unit chart of divisional batteries, number of vehicles assigned, and fate. The visual OOB shows a



company organization within a larger unit.

The booklet contains 45 black and white photos, 49 color photos of model products and box art, 42 color photos of eight models completed by master craftsmen, 22 historical color camouflage patterns, seven black and white side profile drawings, and eight color insignia illustrations.

It's another excellent volume.

Enjoyed it.

The Life & Times of a Medieval Knight. by Sandy Wainwright. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 254 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Sir Geoffrey de Langley and Family*

If your name is Langley, or connected to a Langley, and you want to know about the Langley (de Langley) family in medieval times, then here is your book. This is not a battle book as much as it is a family history revolving around Sir Geoffrey, who was fortuitous enough to be born into minor nobility and hitched his star to Henry III, who became King. Langleys down the line hewed to royal fealty throughout the turbulent times of rebellions and civil wars, picking the winning side for the most part and having enough leverage on the losing side to avoid the worst of fates from the 12th century to the 15th century.

Insomnia, the internet, an ancestry site, and an "aha!" moment regarding Isabella de la Pole led Wainwright down the rabbit hole of genealogy. As she unearthed more and more digital and paper records, helped by initial Langley research by a couple of professors, she pieced together the family tree (she on the Knowlton branch).

This is not easy, with all the same-named sons and cousins floating around medieval records. Indeed, my brain sometimes melted at trying to keep all the names straight -- there's only so much naming differentiation, but that certainly helped with the main Langleys.

One interesting point: "Fitz" was sometimes, but not always, used to denote illegitimate birth. "Fitz" was also used to mean "son of." So, the pair of FitzAlan sons were the sons of Alan, but may also have been illegitimate. Not to worry all you Fitz(names) out there -- even illegitimate ("bastard") sons within the medieval social structure could be highly placed and trusted, including within royal circles. "Bastard" stigma apparently increased into our modern times.

The book contains 26 black and white photos, 17 black and white illustrations, seven black and white maps, and 10 family trees of the various main and branches of the de Langley family.

For our purposes, almost no use for a tabletop battle, some use for understanding how family connections contributed to recruitment for campaigns, and exceptional use on how a knight spent his time increasing and managing his land -- and his social power. This latter point would make excellent background for a RPG NPC family ensconced in a city and/or county. A successful History check of this NPC or one of his family offers up the genealogical chart. A successful inquiry within the city generates a map of the family holdings. And so on. All the family, noble, and royal connections are already created and based on history. Yes, it's that extensive.

Enjoyed it.

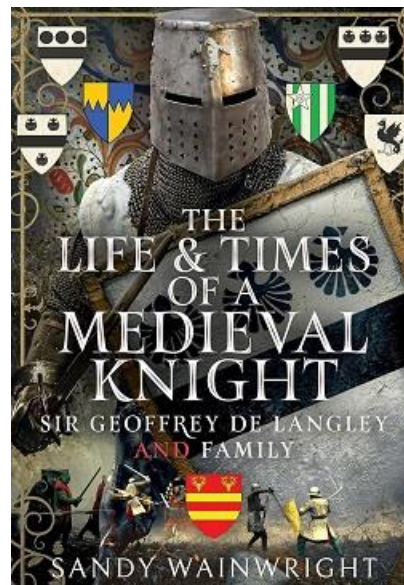
US Soldier Versus Japanese Infantry: Combat 85. by Gregg Adams. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Philippines 1944-45*

By this time in the war, the US material advantage was so overwhelming, the Japanese had little hope for even a negotiated settlement. Still, on a small-unit tactical scale, Japanese adapted and used their experience in defensive operations to slow down the US troops as much as possible. This overview describes US and Japanese troop weapons, equipment, training, and tactics.

One aspect of interest for tabletop scenarios: a Japanese Type A regiment (5,687 men in three battalions) held two-three miles of frontage while two US battalions (871 soldiers each) would attack across a 900-yard (half-mile)*. I put an asterisk by these statements because paper strength, field reorganizations, and different Japanese types of divisions would alter those troop and frontage numbers.

Per usual, three battles are highlighted: Breakneck Ridge (Nov 5-15, 1944), Zig-Zag Pass (Feb 1-15, 1945), and IPO Dam (May 6-21, 1945). Each



contains a Background, Timeline, Map (thankfully a 2D map with scale and contours), and battle description. Zig-Zag includes short bios of commanders.

The booklet contains 49 black and white illustrations, one color photo, four color uniform illustrations (two of US soldier and two of Japanese soldier), four color maps, and three color two-page action illustrations.

Enjoyed it.

Kings Mountain 1780: Campaign 427. by David Smith. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Tide Turns in the South*

On vacation a decade or so ago, my wife and I have a deal: a visit to one military museum also means a visit to one quilting shop. One battlefield equals one natural park or wildlife preserve. Fair enough, until she brought me to Congaree National Park. Sounds lovely, right? The US National Park Service notes "Congaree National Park Wilderness holds a sophisticated beauty within its old-growth forest and along the meandering waterways."

Don't believe a word of it -- it's a Lowland swamp. A swamp with a boardwalk through the worst of it. It was literally 95 degrees, dew point at 70+, and the insect life took one sniff of our deet-infused insect repellent and said, "oooo, energy drink!"

The things we must suffer to visit the Upland American Revolution battle sites. On the way back home, just over the border in North Carolina, we stopped at King's Mountain National Military Park. Now, the path around an up to the battle site is a proper workaround -- sun-dappled woods, gentle breeze, and a lack of kamikaze bugs on a lovely fall day.

This long preamble down memory lane was prompted by this Osprey booklet. All the usual *Campaign* elements are here: commanders, troops, weaponry, training, plans, the battle, and the consequences. It's well written, hits the high points, and contains one of the best OOBs (p17-21) ever. It drills down to individually named officers (lot of officers to men ratio -- at least one unit has more captains than enlisted). This will help you set up a tabletop battle.

Alas, the 3D battle map is again a useless waste of two pages (p72-73) for setting up the battle. I know, I know: 3D might be useful, but usually not and definitely this one -- a personal cartography peccadillo of mine. I am less impressed with how a map looks as a marketing check-off box than functionality. Rant over.

The old map (p68) is better, but for the important contour information within the wooded combat area, you'll need to go to the internet. This map's got the contour lines you'll need: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/maps/kings-mountain-oct-7-1780>

Other maps can help, too, but pair the booklet's OOB with a good map and you've got a nifty scenario. The photos taken in the battlefield showcase the woods surrounding the mountain. Other pre-battle skirmishes are in the book for additional scenarios.

The booklet contains 28 black and white illustrations, 22 color photos, 12 color illustrations, six color maps, four black and white maps, three color two-page action illustrations, and the color 3D map.

Enjoyed it.

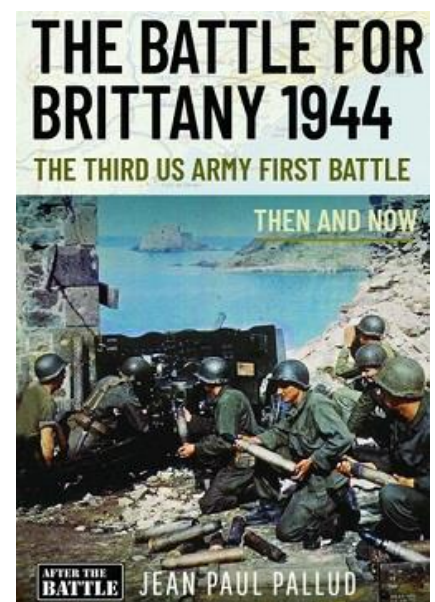
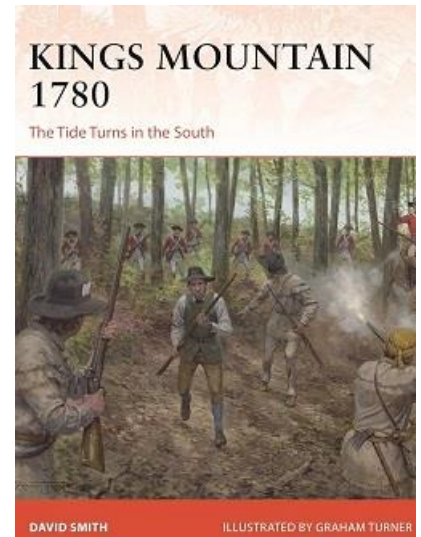
The Battle for Brittany 1944: Then and Now. by Jean-Paul Pallud. Hardback (7.0x10.0 inches). 120 pages. 2025 reprint and revision of 1981 magazine.

Subtitle: *The Third US Army First Battle*

After the Battle continues to recycle 1980s magazine articles that took modern photos of locations in WWII photos while recounting the history of the battle in and around the old photos. The back cover showcases the theory, although understand that no color photos are in the book -- period and modern photos are in black and white.

This book is the first volume of US advance into Brittany (France) in an effort to take St. Malo, Brest, St. Nazaire, and other ports. Despite the breakneck speed of advance, the dash was unsuccessful and the peninsula became a backwater siege operation as Patton's main force headed east towards Germany.

Of the 100,000 German troops in Brittany, roughly two-thirds of them were sent to Normandy to fight in the bocage (p47). That left about 30,000



Germany army along with 50,000 naval and service personnel to defend the ports (p49).

I will note this volume seems to have more "Then" (WWII period) photos than "Now" (modern, aka circa 1980 photos) than I've seen in previous volumes. One spectacular photo is of a roadblock (p112) of barbed-wire wrapped obstacles. Another shows the US "Monuments Men" rescuing the damaged Calvary of Plougastel (p109), which was restored in 1949. Finally, an aerial photo of the port of Brest and surrounding bocage (p25) might inspire a tabletop battlefield.

The book contains 193 black and white photos and four black and white maps. Some of the modern photos have GPS coordinates in case you want to visit the remains of bunkers, fortifications, and other spots.

I'm not sure why *Brittany* is split into two volumes, especially because this first volume is only 120 pages long, and recycling 1980s photos is certainly stretching the "now" part, but I suspect, without actually being in France, that most of the "now" photos are likely the same, although some locations may have been further developed or renovated. Enjoyed it.

Nagato-Class Battleships 1920-46: New Vanguard 346. by Stefan Draminski. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Imperial Japanese Navy's Super-Dreadnoughts*

The IJN's *Nagato* class consisted of the *Nagato* and the *Mutsu* and never the two had a more different fate in WWII. The *Mutsu* blew up in the harbor in 1943, possibly due to a suicidal crewman facing disciplinary action. The *Nagato* served throughout WWII and ended up as one of the ships used in the atom bomb test at Bikini Atoll in 1946.

The design and specs, including modernizations, are included, as well as participation in combat ops. Neither ship participated in surface action against other ships per se, although the *Nagato* was at Leyte Gulf and had to turn away from torpedoes launched by a US destroyer -- so I guess that sorta counts.

The booklet contains two color photos, 38 black and white photos, 10 color camouflage illustrations, three color one-page action illustrations, and one color two-page cutaway illustration of the *Nagato*.

While the remains of the *Nagato* are still around Bikini Atoll, some older parts are in museums and displays. The *Mutsu* was salvaged in the 1970s and some parts are also in museums.

Enjoyed it.

Iraq 2003: Air Campaign 60. by Michael Napier. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Precision Warfare Comes of Age*

It's been over 20 years since the winning of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the losing of the peace to ISIS and the winning of the war against ISIS and the withdrawal of most combat units from Iraq. Quite the rollercoaster.

In any case, winning the conventional war versus Iraq was never quite in dispute. Saddam often taunted the US using SAMs against aircraft patrolling the No Fly Zone before being smacked and then complying with US and UN requirements.

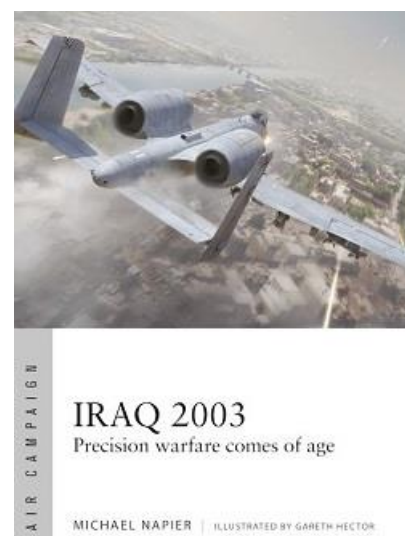
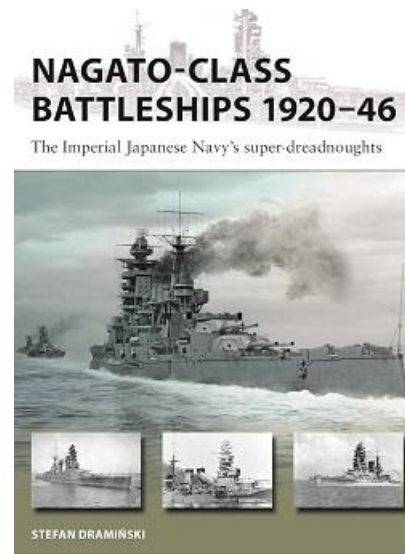
Not being a modern wargamer per se, the text contained a number of new to me and interesting info: the taunting being the main one. You can only poke a bear (ummmm, eagle?) so many times.

Air mobile ops have been around since the Vietnam War, but I had no idea the 173rd Airborne Brigade did a par-drop on Bashur airbase (p59). I also didn't know modern weapons had a shelf life and if not used by the expiry date, had to be removed and disposed of (p56).

Friendly fire incidents are not new -- Patriot missile batteries shot at and occasionally scored a shoot down of a US aircraft. Likewise, aircraft sometimes misidentified ground units. Fog of war exists even in the ultra-modern period.

The booklet contains 65 color photos, one black and white photo, six color maps, one color diagram, and three color two-page action illustrations. A glossary of acronyms (p94) will be especially helpful in understanding the text.

Enjoyed it.



Beaufighter vs German Flak Ships: Duel 151. by Matthew Willis. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: North Sea and Mediterranean 1941-45

While not much as a pure WWII fighter, the twin-engined Beaufighter proved better against German naval convoys operating mostly along the Dutch and Norwegian coastlines. It took time, for some strikes proved useless while others proved devastating, but air superiority allowed them the time to set up an attack. On the other side, the Germans weaponed up the ships with more AA guns, including the flak ships purely for AA.

As with other volumes in the series, the design and development of the titles weapons receive ample explanation, followed by crew training and combat deployments.

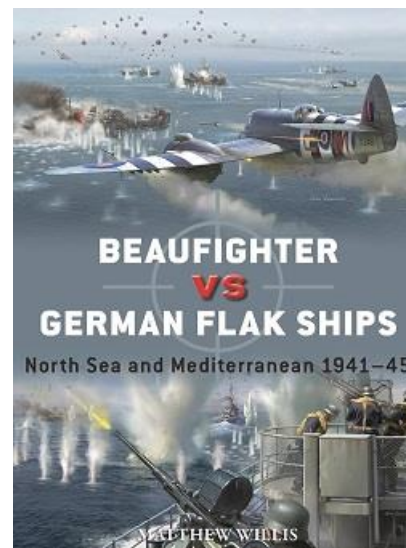
Of interest: the British calculated that one and possibly two torpedo hits were registered when 10 to 12 aircraft attacked a moving target during daylight (p16).

The booklet contains 54 black and white photos, three black and white illustrations, one color photo, one color map, one color diagram, one color cockpit diagram, one color two-page action illustration (oddly enough, this is different than the cover illustrations), and 10 color camouflage illustrations (three Beaufighter, two Sperrbracher 14 flak ship, one barrage balloon, and four weapons).

One printing glitch: Blurry text and caption (p36) looking like slightly off-kilter double printing. Don't know if it's only this particular booklet or endemic. The rest of the booklet is the usual quality.

It's all well written and you can pull a few scenarios from the pages.

Enjoyed it.



Coalition Aircraft vs Iraqi SAMs: Duel 148. by Peter E. Davies. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Operation Desert Storm 1991*

Saddam's real problem started when he failed to conquer Iran in the late 1980s and thought he could annex Kuwait in 1990. That was poor judgement and the Coalition's air war commenced against Iraq's rather sophisticated air defense network of surface-to-air missiles (SAMs) ahead of the ground attack.

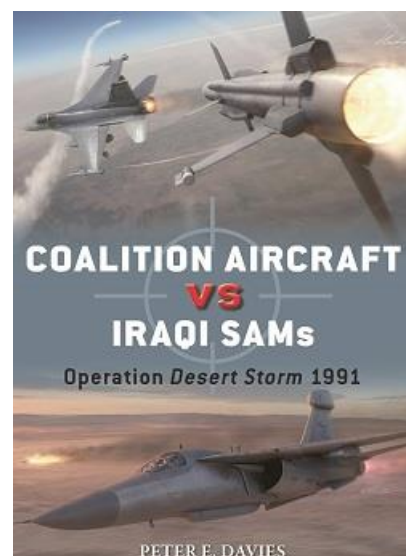
I have to admit to a little bit of tech overload at the design, development, and deployment of aircraft and missiles. Doctrine and training in the weapons was a little smoother reading for me.

As for the combat, the electronic cat-and-mouse game between hunting aircraft and defending missiles and radar sites was interesting. Put simple, the Iraqis got smarter with their efforts. More Coalition aircraft were shot down and damaged than I had thought. Yet superior training of Coalition aircraft crew reflected in the results of the aerial attacks.

The booklet contains 46 color photos, four black and white photos, two color maps, one black and white map, two color diagrams, one color two-page action illustration, and 16 color camouflage illustrations (eight aircraft, five missiles, one cockpit, and two vehicles).

Other books go into far more detailed examinations of the various aspects of air warfare during Operation Desert Storm, but this overview was sufficient for me.

Enjoyed it.

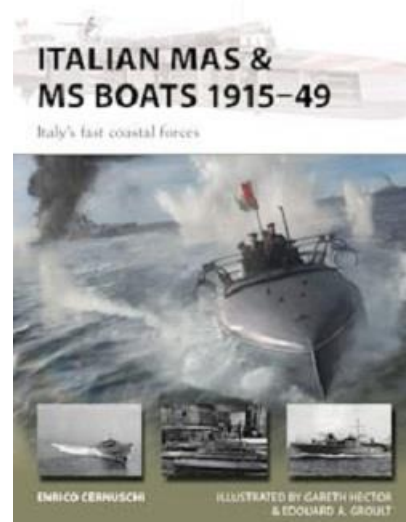


Italian MAS & MS Boats 1915-49: New Vanguard 347. by Enrico Cernuschi. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Italy's Fast Coastal Forces*

The Italian Navy used small, fast-moving boats to attack capital ships in both World Wars. Here it is 2026 and the Iranian Navy is also using such weapons and tactics to control the Strait of Hormuz.

Design, development, and combat deployments figure heavily in the text. Although some successes were achieved in WWI, the boats did not live up to the



propaganda. Better boat designs in WWII, especially copying much of the German schnellboot (seized from Yugoslavia), improved combat results, but again, results versus propaganda remained slight.

Notably, some of these boats served in the Black Sea (p35) and on Lake Ladoga (p28) as part of the Italian contribution to the Axis battle in the USSR.

A number of Mediterranean Sea clashes between MAS boats and British destroyers would make for interesting scenarios.

The booklet contains 38 black and white photos, one color illustration, one color two-page cut-away illustration of the MA 500 series boat, two color two-page action illustrations, and 10 color camouflage illustrations.

Many histories mention large-scale attacks of MAS boats. This does, too, but also offers a number of smaller coastal battles I didn't know existed.

Enjoyed it.

Renaissance Polish Armies 1492-1569: Men-At-Arms 568. by Adrian Jamka. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 56 pages. 2026.

It didn't take long for me to learn a new word when I ran across "rota was lustrated" (p6). A rota is a unit, but I looked up lustrated: Oxford Languages dictionary sez: "purify by expiatory sacrifice, ceremonial washing, or some other ritual action." Learn something new every day.

The usual excellent *MAA* overview examines the selected Polish troops, starting with organization -- the rota, for example. Then comes weapons, armor, and equipment of the various infantry and cavalry units. Finally, a look at the tactics and strategy of their use, and how well they did in battles and campaigns, concludes the overview.

During this time, firearms began to be more common, although the crossbow seemed to retain its popularity. A mounted crossbowman could span and reload in 15 seconds using a goat's foot lever (p20). The text does not specify the reloading time of an arquebusier soldier, but does not an infantry unit would use a type of volley fire so the front rank would presumably be reloaded by the time the rear-most rank fired.

It took up to three months to mobilize an army (p37), which would march 10 km to 25 km per day, depending on the type of terrain (p38).

Per usual, the center section color illustration plates will certainly help anyone painting up a Polish Renaissance army. The eight pages of color plates contain 10 infantry and 15 cavalry figures.

The booklet also contains 21 color photos, one black and white illustration, 11 color illustrations, one color map, and the uniform illustrations.

It's another excellent *MAA* volume.

Enjoyed it.

French Navy 1939-42: Fleet 16. by Hughes Canuel. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Marine Nationale in World War II*

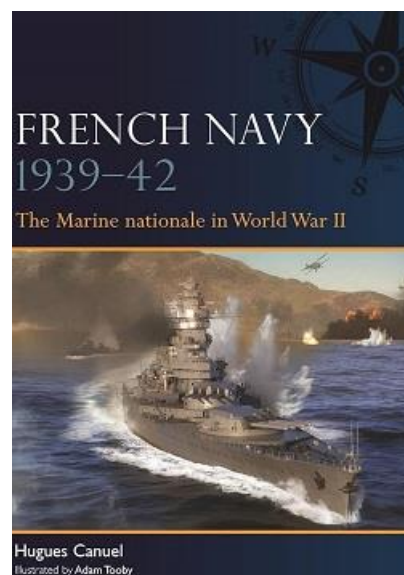
This overview covers pre-war and early-war ships of the French Navy, including how interwar naval treaties affected planning and construction. All the types are represented: specs and technology of the battleships, heavy and light cruisers, destroyers, submarines, and the sole aircraft carrier.

Combats cover U-boat sweeps, Norway campaign versus the Germans, the Mers-el-Kabir battle versus the British, and a few other spots versus the UK, like Dakar. The Vichy ships resisted the US at Casablanca during Operation Torch and in the category of obscure naval battles (at least to me), the Battle of Ko Chang: Vichy warships versus a Thai flotilla (p65).

The booklet contains 35 black and white photos, one color illustration, three color maps, four color battle diagrams, and three color two-page action illustrations.

With the formation of Vichy, the French Navy mostly kept in port, other than battling British ships and scuttling when the Germans occupied Vichy. It's a good overview.

Enjoyed it.



D-Day Fleet 1944 British Sector: Fleet 17. by Nick Hewitt. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Royal Navy's Eastern Task Force*

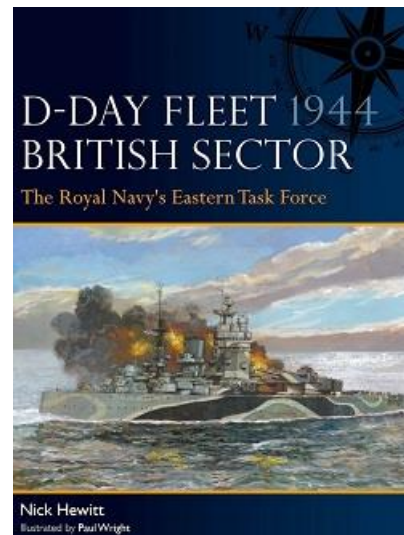
This is an adaptation of a previous full-size book, which helps explain the denser-than-usual info within the usual overview. Of note is an expansive naval OOB table with seemingly every single ship (with names) and associated landing craft in the UK fleet (p18-23). There's a wargamer's delight for scenario building.

Bombardment plans, Mulberries, logistics, and all sorts of combat details populate the text. Also included: a nice explanation of opposing German regular and special forces which occasionally penetrated the Allied defenses.

The booklet contains 35 black and white photos, three color photos, two color maps, six color diagrams, and two color two-page action illustrations.

Despite the overwhelming coverage of D-Day over the decades, a nice encapsulation like this can entice those with less of an interest to read more expansive books.

Enjoyed it.



North Africa 1941: Rommel's War Machine. by Philip Jowett. Softcover (7.0x10.0 inches). 128 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Casemate Illustrated*

I had the nagging feeling I had read this before. I was partially right.

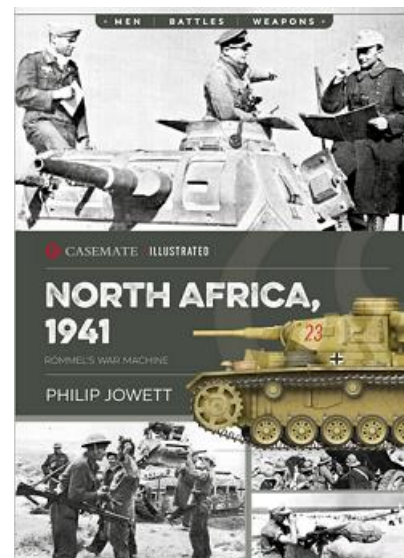
In the March 2026 AAR, I reviewed *AfrikaKorps at War 1941-1943: Casemate Illustrated Special*. So, a lot of the information was not quite deleted from my immediate brain RAM. You'll find the review up on HMGS.org. Note the 2026 booklet was revised from its original 1978 text.

That said, one volume per year of WWII North African German battles offers even more information about the formation, transfer, and combat operations of Rommel's War Machine. It's a chronological account, with Operations Battleaxe, Brevity, and Crusader gaining their own chapters. The timeline up front provides a good feel for the ebb and flow of desert operations. Various unit histories and ancillary operations receive sidebars.

Per usual, the Casemate Illustrated volumes offer a nicely curated group of illustrations showcasing German, Italian, and British forces. The booklet contains 138 black and white photos, seven color photos, five color maps, six color illustrations, and 10 color camouflage illustrations (four aircraft and six vehicles).

For those who missed *AfrikaKorps at War 1941-1943*, here's a slightly more detailed look at the coming of the Deutsches Afrika Korp.

Enjoyed it.



North Africa 1942: The Turning Point. by Philip Jowett. Softcover (7.0x10.0 inches). 128 pages. 2026.

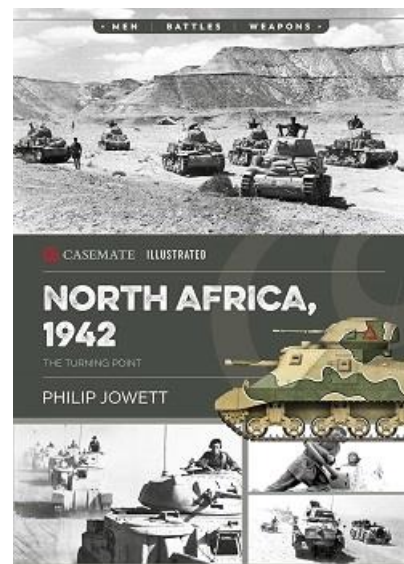
Subtitle: *Casemate Illustrated*

In most respects, this second volume outlining German participation in the North Africa campaign mimics the strengths of the previous volume. Again, a lot of the information I gleaned from *AfrikaKorps at War 1941-1943: Casemate Illustrated Special* (reviewed in the March 2026 AAR and up on hmgs.org) was not quite deleted from my immediate brain RAM.

And again, the volume is another well-illustrated and well-written overview of WWII North African warfare. Besides main combat operations, mini-bios of commanders, weapon sidebars, and other ancillary aspects are in sidebars. The one on mines is particularly good (p89-91).

One typo: "points defenses" needs an "" (p47).

Again, the *Casemate Illustrated* volumes offer a nicely curated group of illustrations showcasing German, Italian, and British forces -- man, I should just



say "ditto" to the other review. The booklet contains 138 black and white photos, 12 color photos, four color maps, two color illustrations, and 11 color camouflage illustrations (four aircraft and seven vehicles).

Ditto. I mean...

Enjoyed it.

Bad War Stories. by Ben Zweibelson. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 248 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Unvarnished Truths About War's Messy Residue*

The author spent four combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003 to 2014, so these war stories are often what he witnessed. The one about stopping a truck full of allegedly gold bars is a personal account -- he has a photo to showcase it.

Others, I wonder how he would know unless he was directly told. Otherwise, some sound like rumors. The one about the officer who screwed up too much is partially a witnessed account, but I don't know how he would know about that officer's almost suicide in a bathroom stall.

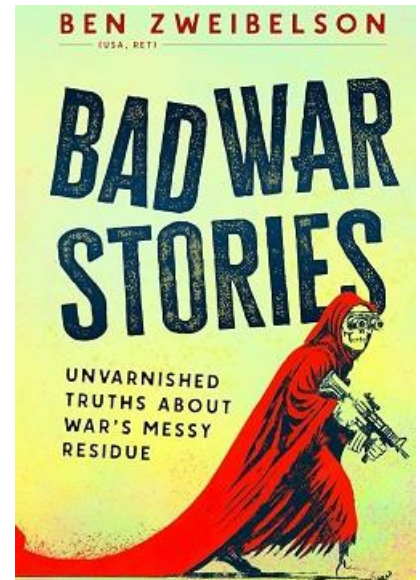
It's written almost as a fiction novel, a trend I'm not fond of.

One typo: "dual-tasked tasked" (p73) has one too many "tasked."

So, while it's nice prose, and quite often seems to ring true, especially Afghan corruption and indifferent Afghan attitudes to training, sometimes I wonder what was observed and what wasn't.

Ties go to the author.

Enjoyed it.



Star Voyager Academy. by William R. Forstchen. Paperback (4.1x6.7 inches). 274 pages. 1994.

I've read quite a few Forstchen novels and this is a good space opera one: teenagers at the equivalent of Star Fleet Academy. Or, within the context of our solar system 125 years in the future, West Point on the eve of the American Civil War.

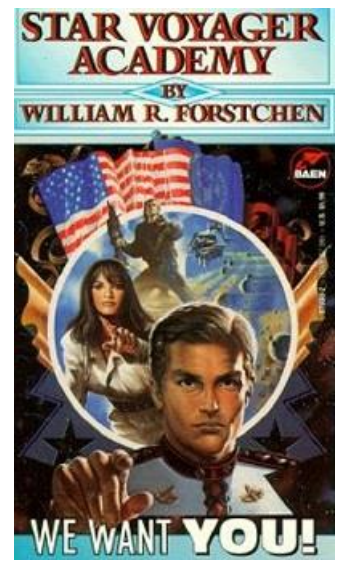
You see, Mars and the other colonies chafe under United Nations taxation and are ready to secede. This divides the student body, as one rather long and involved discussion in the middle of the novel explains. As you might expect, the main character and his best friend seem to be on opposite sides of the debate.

You can almost smell the sci-fi version of the novel North and South. Forstchen wrote *The Lost Regiment* series.

Somewhat amusingly, the book notes that the Earth was still overpopulated with 5 billion inhabitants (p102). Here it is 2026 and the Earth population is about 8 billion.

I don't know if he wrote a sequel to this book or not, but it's a good start if he did.

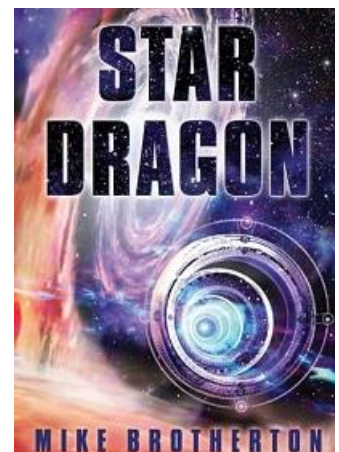
Enjoyed it.



Star Dragon. by Mike Brotherton. Paperback (4.2x6.7 inches). 352 pages. 2003.

I abandoned this novel after about 100 pages, defeated by a lack of interest in the two-year mission to observe and if possible capture a hypothetical star dragon spotted in a stellar stew. It didn't help that the font was tiny compared to the "normal" sized font as used in *Star Voyager Academy*.

The hard science aspect explains all sorts the theoretical underpinning of the physics of the universe. Most of it seemed overkill, as the author, a professor of astronomy, seemed intent on sharing every bit of his knowledge like this was a scientific paper. And yet, five-person crew and spaceship versus nature forms a key element of the story. Individual motivations, of which you have to wonder about the screening processes of the Space Service, work at cross purposes.



The Space Barbarians. by Tom Godwin. Paperback (4.2x7.0 inches). 169 pages. 1964.

A quick read about Vikings in space helping to defeat a big empire, but another bigger empire raided their planet and took some women. The warriors get back in their spaceship and head off after them. They find the remains of a different empire and so begin the mind games of which empire is lying about taking the women.

The use of telepathic "hypnosis" versus high-tech "drugs" is especially well done in confusing our heroic Vikings. One advanced "third-level" spaceship owned by one of the empires plays havoc with the Vikings' "second-level" technology.

All in all, the psychological battle is more important than the technological battle. Nicely done.

Enjoyed it.

The Armed Forces of North Korea: Asia at War 63. by Stijn Mitzer & Joost Oliemans. Softcover (8.2x11.7 inches). 80 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Volume 3: The Korean People's Army Navy*

The third volume moves on to North Korea's Navy. Like the previous two volumes, it contains an overview of the topic, complete with a considerable amount of tech and specs. I can't say I read every word about engines, radar, missiles, and other subsystems, but I appreciated the comparisons and analysis of what all those specs meant to North Korean Navy capabilities.

North Korea concentrated on developing mostly gunboats and fast attack craft, but also small warships up to corvette and frigate size. They paired a wide variety of missiles to the hulls and have expanded their shipbuilding to include ballistic missile submarines and possibly a nuclear-powered submarine.

North Korea also invested heavily in hovercraft troop carrier construction, apparently fielding the world's largest number of military hovercrafts.

The book contains 130 color photos, 12 black and white photos, two color maps, and 28 color camouflage illustrations (22 ships and boats, four submarines, one hovercraft, and one missile-launching vehicle).

As you might imagine, most of the information comes from internet searches and other public information. For those interested in ultramodern naval topics, this volume consolidates a considerable amount of information about the North Korean Navy into one volume.

Enjoyed it.

A Wrinkle in Time. by Madeline L'Engle. Paperback (4.1x6.8 inches). 200 pages. 1976 reprint of 1962 book.

When I saw this classic novel in the discount sale for 25 cents, I bought it. I vaguely remember reading this as a kid and enjoying it, but couldn't remember the exact plot. It had something to do with bending time to travel, um, er, somewhere. It didn't take me long to read, or, re-read it.

Meg Murry's dad had been gone for two years when she wakes up on a "dark and stormy night."

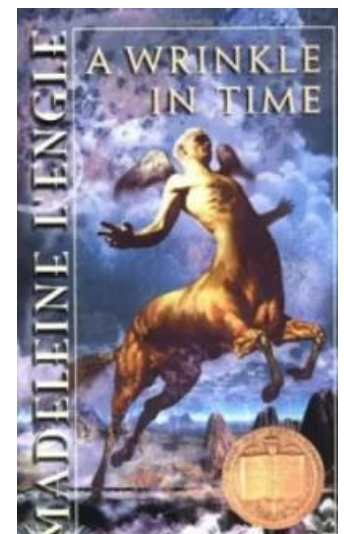
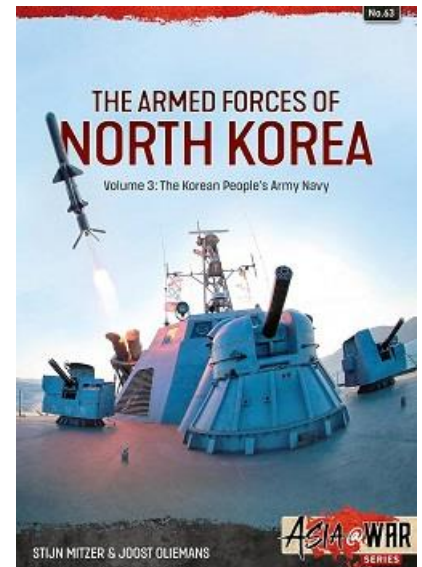
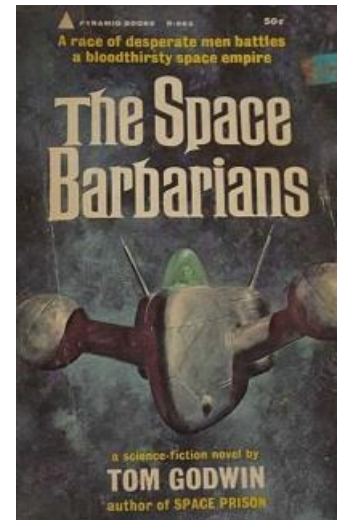
Literally, "It was a dark and stormy night" is the first sentence of the book. I thought the joke of using such a starting sentence was in the Peanuts comic strip.

Digression: A web search turned up a first usage in the 1830 novel *Paul Clifford* by Edward Bulwer-Lytton as the first full sentence in Chapter 1: "It was a dark and stormy night; the rain fell in torrents, except at occasional intervals, when it was checked by a violent gust of wind which swept up the streets (for it is in London that our scene lies), rattling along the house-tops, and fiercely agitating the scanty flame of the lamps that struggled against the darkness."

The search also noted its usage in Washington Irving's 1809 *A History of New York* -- but in Chapter 10.

End of Digression.

Anyway, a mysterious old crone stops by the house during the storm and soon Meg, her brother, and a friend named Calvin go haring off to find her father.



We would call it a Young Adult sci-fi novel, for it includes travel to a distant planet and a futuristic society (such as it is). It offers a nice ring of the battle between individuality and conformity, not to mention the power of love versus hate.

Reading with relatively new eyes, the novel wears well over the last 60+ years.
Enjoyed it.

War Without Humanity. by Daniel M. Gerstein. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 328 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Conflict in the Post-Human Era*

I thought this was a non-fiction book that would look at current warfare with drones, AI, internet interconnections, and other new technologies.

Nope.

This is a novel about future warfare with drones, AI-run robots, and cyborgs (cyborgs being computer-augmented humans). Except not exactly.

I wish it had been a non-fiction book.

Gerstein, a West Point grad and former Army officer with executive stints in government tech departments, knows his facts. Novel writing is something he needs to work on. I only got about 50 pages in when all the conferences and info dumps stopped me from further reading. I skimmed through the rest, but the back cover premise of front-line year 2039 combat in Latvia escaped me in a book that starts in year 2029.

I'm sure he sat through many a conference explaining the technologies to non-tech officers and officials. I'm sure he sat through many a conference seeking approval and budget for development. I'm sure others conducted conferences to explain developments and experiments. I'm sure media briefings highlighted program successes. I'm sure these might entertain many a reader.

Just not me.

British Amphibious Operations of the First World War. by Joseph A. Moretz. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 267 pages. 2025.

This covers three operations: Mesopotamia, Tanga (German East Africa), and Gallipoli. Each receives extensive analysis of what went right, but mostly what went wrong. Much has to do with the enemy opposition, of course, but failures in logistics factored heavily into repulses and defeats.

For example, the 1914 invasion at Tanga was made with little if any intel or recon of what the British forces were up against. Although initially successful, exploiting off the coast with inexperienced troops proved difficult. Much blame goes to the local porters, who fled at the first sign of gunfire. Besides the panic generated, logistics collapsed.

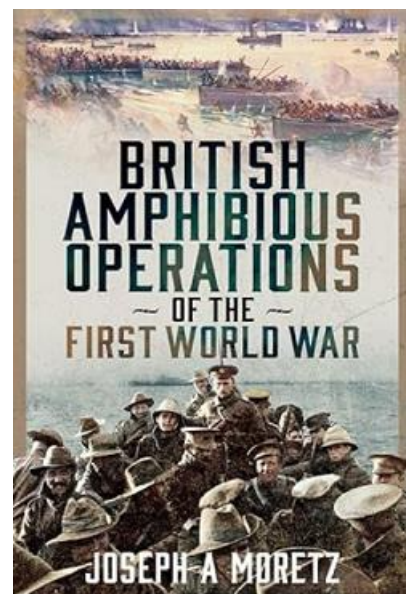
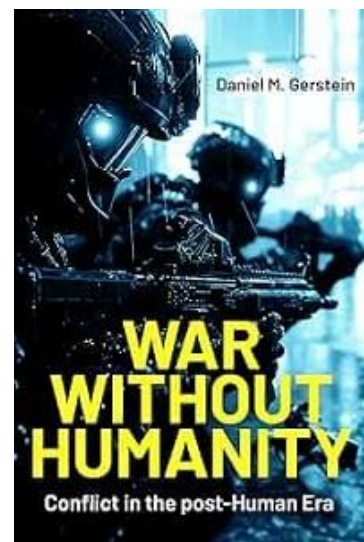
Although the British specialists in amphibious assault planning seemed proficient enough, the actual capacity of the military proved deficient. The local logistical infrastructure -- railroads, canals, roads, and so on -- was virtually non-existent in these three examples. Without such infrastructure, the troops could not exploit inland.

In Mesopotamia, for example, the river network provided a pathway towards further objectives, but the troop numbers and especially the small boats needed to move them and their supplies proved inadequate. Isolated at Kut, they withered and ultimately surrendered.

The book contains 11 black and white photos and three black and white illustrations. Alas, no maps are included. If the text mentions various towns and locations, you need maps (each with a scale) to help readers understand distances and advances.

As the British military concentrated on the Western Front in France, these peripheral operations suffered from a lack of the same level of logistical and troop support.

Enjoyed it.



Raiders on the Anglo-Scottish Border. by Jon Tait. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 221 pages. 2026.

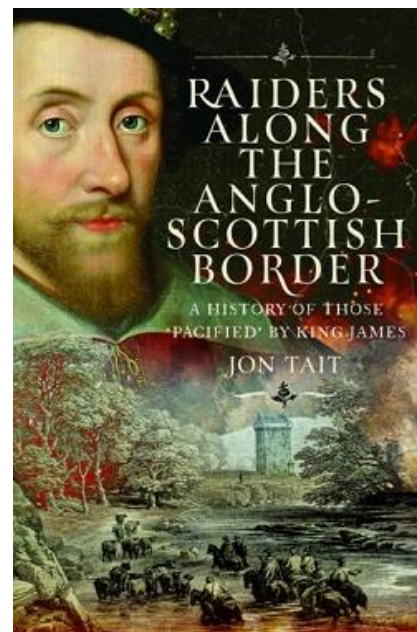
Subtitle: *A History of Those 'Pacified' by King James*

Here's a vast collection of names to make your head spin. I get the idea of making family connections among all the clans and criminal gangs, but so many pop out of the pages without much context that I lose track. The only way I can begin to explain: Think of reading the box scores of sports games without any description of the games. You get information, but the context of the stats lacks appreciation of the play.

The worst example: almost an entire page is filled with names -- 79 of them, although I may have miscounted by one (p86). This seemed to come from a list of freebooters.

The book contains 28 black and white photos and two black and white illustrations.

To be fair, sometimes the book follows a gang for a page or two, usually with individuals named as joining, being caught, and being executed. Rinse and repeat. Kudos for combining archives' worth of names, but the overall effect is better suited for genealogy (including the author's name within the text) than actually understanding border raids.



Titus: Conqueror of Jerusalem. by Nicholas Jackson. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 279 pages. 2026.

This well-written and fast reading biography of Titus, who succeeded his father Vespasian as Emperor of Rome, concentrates of his military and diplomatic service in Judea, Syria, and Egypt, first under his father's aegis and later on his own.

His training for higher command proved well spent, learning the art of command first-hand as his father held a succession of military and civilian posts. By the time of the Judean revolt, he was able to lead secondary operations.

When the Year of Four Emperors began a civil war in the Roman Empire, Titus' father entrusted him with diplomatic missions to secure support. Titus proved a successful diplomat and secured the East for his father, whose legions won the necessary battles to propel Vespasian to become Emperor.

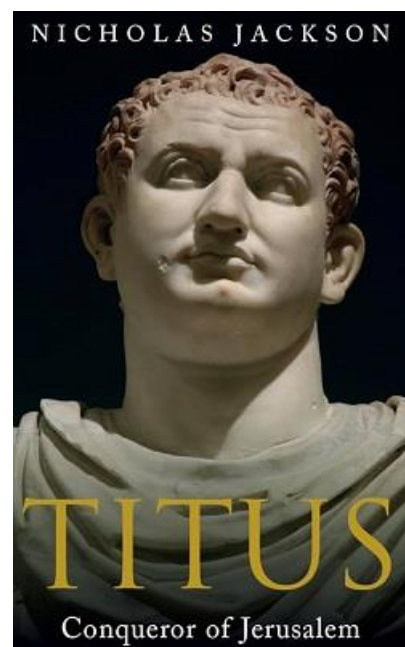
That left Titus to deal with the ongoing Judean revolt, which he suppressed with brutality and slaughter. His capture of Jerusalem is particularly well told -- the siege operation in three parts did not always go to plan and the Jews defending the city scored notable successes. These were not enough for the Romans to abandon the siege and certainly the Roman retribution was murderous.

That was a good enough showing to become the heir. When his father passed, Titus became Emperor. Among the problems he faced was the eruption of Mount Vesuvius and his efforts at disaster relief.

The book contains 25 color photos, three color illustrations, and two color maps.

Alas, Titus only reigned for two years, but his operations in the Roman tradition served the Empire well. Well done.

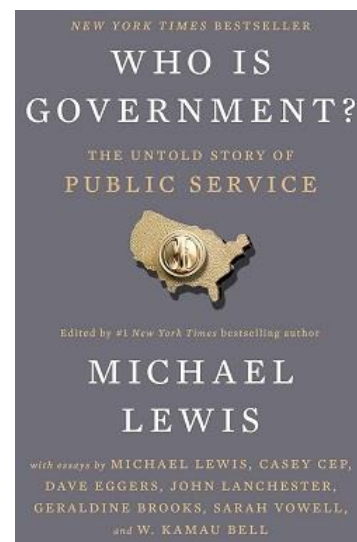
Enjoyed it.



Who Is Government? Edited by Michael Lewis. Softcover (5.2x8.0 inches). 270 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The Untold Story of Public Service*

I suspect that 10% of all large organizations, government and private sector, contain employees who could be laid off or fired and efficiency would improve. I also suspect that 33% of said large organizations are staffed with dedicated stellar professionals who are critical to the success of the organization. The rest are competent professionals who do their work, no more, no less, to keep the organization functioning.



This book celebrates eight dedicated federal government employees who embody the smarts and the drive to go above and beyond to improve services. These profiles, all exceptionally well written and tight, explain not only what they did, but how they persevered to accomplish a goal.

What caught my eye was the blurb about digitizing archives. I volunteer at our historical society archive, so the work of National Archives and Records Administration Chief Innovation officer Pamela Wright proved an interesting look into the idea of forming the Citizen Archivist program to help transcribe documents. So far, more than three million pages have been transcribed (p163). She also led the project to create History Hub on the NARA website where anyone can submit a query on any topic and staffers and volunteers will find an answer (p170). NARA also partnered with a variety of other academic and private organizations to digitize select historical papers, such as treaties with Native Americans.

And I should note – this is not in the book -- that as of February 13, 2026, History Hub was eliminated, ostensibly to address NARA's reduced budget and improve efficiency. So far, the e-mail service -- inquire@nara.gov -- is still operating.

The other seven are just as well written and fascinating, even if you have no interest in the topic. I know nothing about coal mining other than I once visited an abandoned coal mine that became a tourist attraction led by former miners. Yet, here was a fascinating bio about mining engineer Christopher Mark who figured out how to make coal mines safer for miners. The accident rate over the last 100 years make for chilling reading, but his checklist helped make US mines -- and those around the world which follow his recommendations -- dramatically safer.

The IRS auditor. The Administrator of National Cemeteries. The NASA scientists. The FDA Administrator. Eight career government employees with an eye for improvement and the dedication to make it happen.

The book contains eight black and white photos.

You may or may not agree with the gutting of federal departments by DOGE and executive firings. You may or may not agree that those let go are useless bureaucrats. You may or may not agree that the services provided were unnecessary.

But you owe it to yourself to understand that a significant number of dedicated career public servants exist who make our life here in the US not only safer, but better. Here are eight who do just that. Excellent.

Enjoyed it.

Plan Ahead...

July 15-19, 2026



November 6 - 8, 2026

