

Fighting Sail: Fleet Actions 1775–1815

36 Seconds: Escape the Hindenburg

What A Tanker: WWII Yahtzee

A&A Stalingrad: Cracking Shrinkwrap

Axis & Allies Stalingrad: 2025

Indian Ocean Raid: Double-Blind Wargame

Indian Ocean Raid: Umpire View

Galactic Emperor: Twilight Imperium Lite

Renaissance Shipping: Serenissima

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Burlington, VT: Quick Getaway



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Berlin: Endgame 1945

Giuseppe Garibaldi: Army of the Vosges

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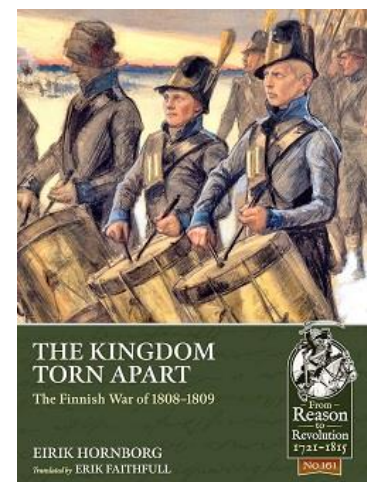
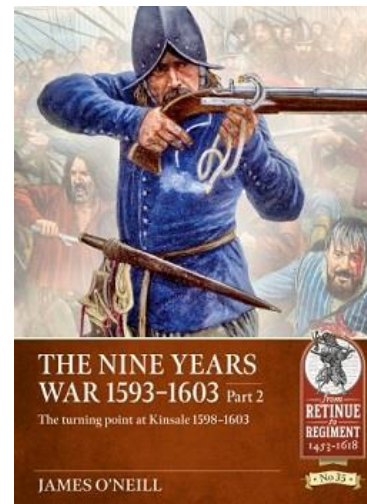
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British Sails of Glory ships confront the French at the Battle of Armageddon Archipelago.

Fighting Sail: Fleet Actions 1775–1815

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud picked up the *Fighting Sail* rules, but found them too much a game and not enough a wargame. So, he tweaked them. By how much, I'm not sure because I never read the original rules, only Renaud's version.

Admiral Renaud and his French fleet face off against my British fleet.

Anyway, each ship has a point value and Admirals have a point value for particular attributes. As British, I selected “Gunner” for Admiral Drench. That added +1 to all combat die rolls. Renaud, I believe, picked Architect, which added +1 to all saves. As long as the Admiral's ship is still fighting, the attribute applies to all ships.

Then, I picked ships, the 100-gun was the flagship, followed by four 74s, and being led by a 32-gun frigate. Each captain was given an attribute. Three of the 74s has Marksman (re-roll cannon d6 rolls of 1) and the last one has Authoritarian (re-roll Discipline d6 rolls of 1). The flagship had no attribute and the frigate also had Marksman. All of this had to equal 400 points.

Renaud picked 400 points of his own: a 100-gun flagship, three 74s, and three 32-gun frigates.

All ships were from the *Sails of Glory* boxed game, but the rules were modified *Fighting Sail*.

Sailing



The wind starts from a random direction and each turn 2d6 are rolled: doubles changes the direction or strength. Your speed depends on your attitude towards the wind. A template allows for a 2-inch move forward and a 30-degree turn. As broad reach allows up to 5 move segments, that's $5 \times 2 = 10$ inches plus up to five 30-degree turns. You can also do a 90-degree turn that costs a lot of sailing points. That's the basics, although turning into irons (facing the wind, is a bad idea and a ship receives significant penalties for ending movement that way.

Constraints: You may increase or reduce base speed by 1, but whether the number is the original or altered, the ship must move the full distance. No “up to” here -- if a ship moves at speed four, it must perform four sailing actions. Furthermore, if it turns, it must turn the full 30 degrees. No “up to 30 degrees” here. It's a turn of 30 degrees or no turning at all.

Combat

Each ship tosses a number of d6s. The closer to the target, the higher the percentage to hit. If a die roll hit, odd die rolls were hull hits and even die rolls were sail and rigging hits. The target ship then rolls a number of saving dice commensurate with the size of the ship: frigates rolled 3d6 and 74s rolled 7d6, all looking for 5+ to cancel one hit.

There is a little bit more to it, including speed (which we completely forgot about -- obviously, an optional rule), but that's the gist.

When hits that were not saved exceeded limits per ship, the ship strikes (surrenders in landlubber terms). The ship does get a Discipline die roll to not strike and more rolls to repair damage. We kept track of speed and hits with tiny dice. A roster could be used as well.

The Battle of Armageddon Archipelago

Renaud set up a fog bank (divider), so we could set up in secret. I set up near the fog bank and Renaud set up far away. To be fair, I had a line of islands -- the Armageddon Archipelago -- in the middle of my set-up area, so I chose to be close.

The French had the weather gauge, which means they were upwind of me. Order of movement is the squadron most to the rear and upwind of any other squadron. Furthermore, the lead ship of the squadron moves first with the others following the lead ship. Ships are allowed to deviate, but must pass a Discipline test first.



The end of Turn 1. I was almost crossing the T, but the French had the initial move of the next turn.

Renaud's frigates went first and one pulled directly behind my last ship and delivered a broadside. He stayed out my arc of fire (all ships have 30 degrees off the side) and so unloaded on me -- and then Renaud rolled no hits. Whew!

Then his main ships plowed ahead and we traded fire. Ships may opportunity fire if they pass a Discipline die roll test.

Crossing the T

I managed to cut off the front of his sailing column, although I didn't quite have a rake (a broadside to the prow or stern). I did some damage and Turn 1 ended.

Dismasted

Renaud's ships, moving first, curled inside my arc, and we unleashed broadsides. At one point, due to a ship being dismasted, his next ship had to swerve, putting its bow to my broadside. The French ship took tremendous damage and fired one last time, dismasting my ship.

I should point out that even numbers on the combat die rolls were hits to masts, rigging, and sails while odd numbers were hits to the hull. We were rolling a lot of even numbered hits.



End of Turn 2.

Meanwhile, his frigate squadron maneuvered to put a bow rake on my last 74 in the line. That wasn't as bad as it sounds -- his dice were not too warm. My 74s left the frantically maneuvering frigates behind.

Alas, the three turns of battle ended with almost a virtual tie: Both our 100-gun flagships were crippled and two 74s each had struck. It came down to a Repair check. The luck of the dice rolls favored the French flagship with a phenomenal roll. The sails were mended and the rigging rehung. Renaud and the tricolor had triumphed.

Thoughts

After an hour explanation of the rules and picking 400 points worth of ships and attributes, the three turns took about two hours. In retrospect, die rolling odds say that's about right although I thought it would take another turn. A 74 could give a full broadside (14d6) every other turn or a half broadside (7d6) every turn. If you're figuring 50% hits and 33% saves, and two ships often combined on one, it's a lot of dice. Get hot every once in a while, and with the caveat that 6s often score a hit and re-roll, and the damage can accrue fast.

End of Turn 3 and end of game.



Movement consists of 30 degree turns and only 30 degree turns, so it's a bit of regimented angles. This is not unusual if coming from the 60-degree hex-based game world, like *Wooden Ships and Iron Men* and the better *Close Action*. *Fire as She Bears* uses squares and 45-degree turns. *As Per Margin* offers more flexible angling. I'm not sure about original *Fighting Sail* or any other rule sets I have not played. I'll remind you that *Fighting Sail* served as inspiration and Renaud modified the mechanics.

That said, it was great to break out Age of Sail ships for a rollicking trading of shot. Thanks for the game, Renaud.



Oh the humanity! Clockwise from upper right corner: Dan moves his figure as Renaud, Dennis, and Umpire Mark plot moves.

36 Seconds: Escape the Hindenburg

by Russ Lockwood

Mark came by bearing a new game and so he umpired (he's running this at Historicon) while Dennis, Renaud, Dan, and me sat down for a game of *36 Seconds*. That, sez Mark, is the time it took for the dirigible to perform it's final "oh the humanity" moments.

Flip-Flip-Flip

Normally, when I use that term, it means flipping through the rules set to try and figure out what the designer meant. Not so in *36 Seconds*. Each turn started with Mark flipping a loose-leaf page with a photo taken from the Hindenburg video of the historic crash and burn. So, you really see how the 12 Rounds of play relate to the disaster -- kudos on that idea. Each page also contained special rules for that turn, such as angle of the deck, which sections were on fire, and so on.

The disaster started unfolding upon us players. Each turn represented three seconds.

Players

In this basic game, all of us play the part of passengers. We each controlled two characters (the miniatures on the map) because there were only four of us. If eight played, we'd each have one passenger character.

Now, without telling me nuthin' 'bout nuthin', Mark had me shuffle cards, lay out chips in the cabin area, and place my two figures: a husband and wife on a nice vacation trip to America. In my case, husband Heinrich was at a dining area table while Hilda was on the promenade looking out the window and writing down her thoughts in her diary. She wrote, "It was a dark and stormy day..."

Warning: this recap contains some spoiler info -- minimal as it is.

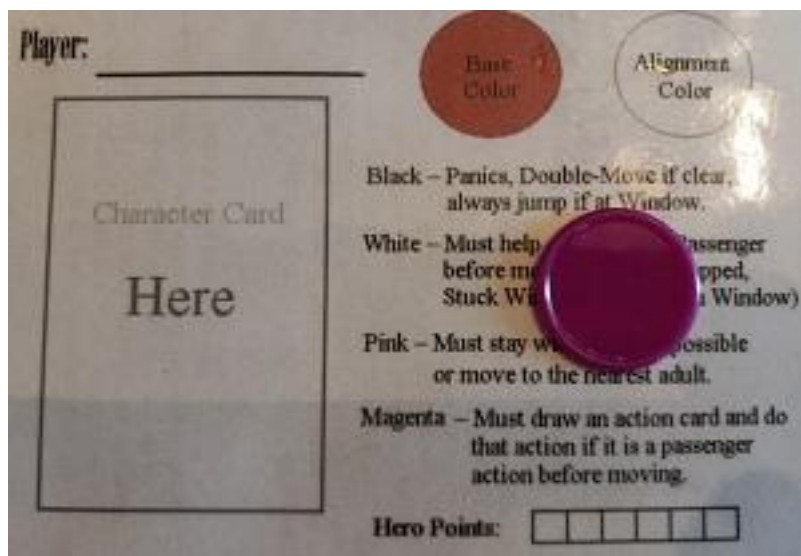
Flippin' Out

The colored chips represented other passengers (pink children and white, black, and magenta adults) with various "alignments" -- although "motivations" might be a more accurate term. Each character had a card with an alignment color that was determined randomly at start.

Hilda's card, with magenta alignment.

Each player's turn consists of performing whatever the alignment color says. For example, magenta draws a card, pink stays with an adult, white helps another passenger, and black is panic!

After that, the player gets a choice: draw a card that may or may not help in a specific situation, choose a color and move all those-colored chips (passengers) on the map as per their alignment, or move their own figure.



Pushy Passengers

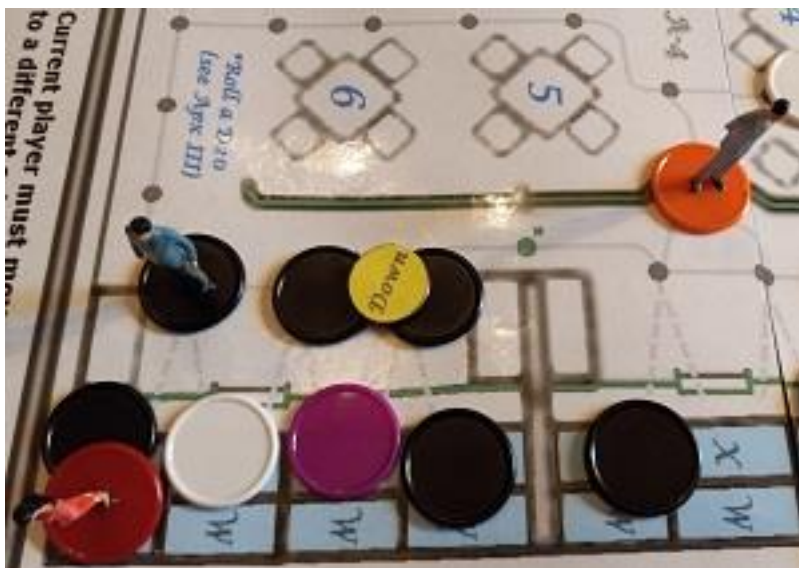
Here was the bugaboo that took us a while to figure out: when a player passenger meets a Non-Player Character (NPC) in a passageway, what happens to the NPC passenger? Likewise, what happens when a NPC passenger meets another NPC passenger? The rules are unclear whether NPCs are knocked down, pushed backwards one space, or places exchanged -- same with a player passenger.

We went 'round and 'round a bit, but came up with the panicked passengers (black) knock down anyone they meet, the helpful passengers (white) switch places or help a passenger stand up, the kids (pink) stop next to an adult, and the rest (magenta) move through. At least I think that's what we did as we changed these interactions as we read and re-read more rules. Mark is going to ask the designer.

To The Windows!

As the windows are the only means of escape for the player and NPC passengers in this basic game, every NPC passenger heads for the windows. Players may decide to head there or not. However, on Round 1, the cabin is 140 feet above ground and any height of 80 feet or higher is instant death. So, there's a nice bit of tension as the flip cards slowly decrease the altitude but increase the angle of the cabin deck.

Hilda's at the open window, calming a panicked (black chip) passenger with Heinrich just behind them. Other passengers (chips) try to get out. Another player (orange based-figure) is approaching the windows. The dots represent spaces to move into while 5 and 6 are tables.



Did I mention that the windows had to be opened? We were wondering if opening a window (d6 roll) was part of a move or was the end of the move. We considered it part of the move. Maybe we shouldn't have - the panicked NPC passengers that started near the windows ran over, opened 'em up, and jumped - altitude be damned.

As I mentioned, Heinrich's lovely wife Hilda was already looking out the window when she opened it. A panicked NPC passenger later shoved her from behind, but a previously drawn and saved card prevented her from the knock down and the panicked passenger from a jump. The panicked NPC passenger later knocked her down and leapt to his demise.

Heinrich made his way to her side, which is a good thing, because furniture started to slide as the angle of the deck increases. When the cabin deck reached 20 feet off the ground, both jumped (d6 for landing). Hilda made it unscathed and pulled another passenger to safety. Heinrich twisted an ankle and had to wait before dragging himself away. He was the last player passenger to get to safety.

Beginning of Turn 4. Yellow counters indicate a passenger has been knocked down.



Of note, one of Dennis' two passengers leapt to her death at around 120 feet. We later found this was a rules interpretation error on our part.

At the end of Round 12, the Hindenburg crashed to the ground and all passengers in the cabin or under the footprint of the dirigible got fried.

Winning and Losing

Whenever a player helps a NPC passenger, he gets a gold star (Hero Point in the game's vernacular). The player with the most gold stars at the end of the game (surviving or not) is the MVP. The group wins if 12 or fewer passengers are killed. It's a historical tie if 13 get killed. As for 14 and over, it's a group loss. Sadly, although we personally survived, it was a group loss.

Clockwise from lower left corner: Renaud, Russ, Dennis, and Umpire Mark. Photo by Dan.



So, to an extent, the players have to work cooperatively to make sure the most NPCs get to the windows, but do NOT jump until the Hindenburg's cabin deck is 80 feet or less off the ground. Lower is obviously better.

One additional marker set is needed: "open window." We couldn't keep track of which window was open and which was closed. The approach was fine because there were half spaces marked "X" (window closed) and a "W" (open), so when a NPC chip showed up, its location was clear. Once it jumped, that distinction disappeared. We had a time remembering if windows were open or closed.

Renaud noted this could be a start of a series of escape games: such as *Escape the Titanic* and *Escape the Towering Inferno*. I added *Escape the Death Star*. Plenty of others...

Thanks, Mark, for running an entertaining game, and to Dennis, Dan, and Renaud for spreading panic when panic was needed.



What a gorgeous tabletop battlefield, although my photo does not do it justice.

What A Tanker: WWII Yahtzee

by Russ Lockwood

Back in March 2020, we tried the d6 rules set *What a Tanker* (WaT) at OMM. At the time, we had more problems with obscuring modifiers than anything else, although I had noted in the AAR that die rolling for icons can get frustrating. But as we had only played two games, I also noted it was worth another try. Well, the try came more than six years later on Dave's tabletop.

This rule set is similar to *Chain of Command* and *What a Cowboy!*, in that you roll d6s to find out what you can (and cannot!) do. Hence the comment about frustration. But I get ahead of myself.

Master architect Dave (right) and AT fire magnet Rich (left) at start.

Gorgeous Table

Dave set up a most excellent table, including a chateau on fire as well as a US RR depot with barrels, boxes, and trucks. Very nice.

That said, as each player only had one tank, we ended up not using half the table. Three US Shermans of varying types (Marc, Sam, and me) faced off against two German tanks (Rich with Pz IV and Dave with Tiger). Mike served as umpire.

The following is an excerpt from my March 2020 AAR write up of two games of WaT. Note that the original rules used regular d6s with



pips. Note: Our intrepid umpire Mike pasted helpful icons onto d6s, which aided recognition far more than the number of pips on a face.

Fellow American tankers Sam (left) and Marc. German Rich's PzIV at lower left corner.

6d6 Actions

Basically, you roll 6d6 for each tank, and the pips showing allow you to do certain actions: 1: Move 2d6 inches; 2: Acquire Target; 3: Aim at Target; 4: Fire; 5: Reload; and 6: Wild die -- pick any of the above. Incidentally, John had the roll of the day: a single 4 and quintet of 6s!

The good news: Rolls like John's mean you can do anything, and often two of anything. The bad news: Quite often you have wasted dice and sometimes can't do much of anything, or at least anything useful.

Unlike *Chain of Command*, where you can add dice together to get a number, you cannot add dice together in *WaT* -- what you roll is what you get. The wild-die 6s obviously help, but even then, the designers knew they had to goose the system with special attributes. For example, *Fast Tanks* (like the Stuart) can change any one die to a 1: Move. Low tanks, like the turretless STuG III and JgPz IV, require the opponent to spend an extra die for target acquisition.

I should also note that each tank has its own status sheet with spots for all the dice and markers to indicate whether a target has been acquired, aimed at, etc.

Mike also handed out quick reference sheet version 1.3.



Back to the Game

Our tanks entered fairly opposite each other across the six-foot-wide table. Firing range is unlimited, but a die modifier occurs at over 48 inches.

To fire, a tank needs to acquire the target with one acquire icon. However, if an obstacle is in the way (low hedgerows in our game), you need an extra acquire icon. More obstacles, more icons.

Dave's Tiger escapes with light damage while Rich's PzIV shelters behind hedgerow at bridge.



In addition, you can specify whether the tank is buttoned up, requiring another acquire icon, but better protection for crew if you get hit. There's more about angles and such, but that's the basic idea.

Rolling 6d6 often means not rolling what you need for a complete firing process: acquire, aim, and fire icons. All of us had the same "bad" rolls at times when we couldn't do what we wanted. Dave famously rolled five move icons when he needed the firing process icons. I needed to edge around a hill, had the move icon, and rolled snake eyes on the 2d6 movement dice, being one inch short of being able to peek around the hill for a shot. Hence, frustrating.

Our tanks crews must have been the greenest graduates of tank school in the entire European Theater. Eventually, I managed to load, acquire, and aim at Rich's PzIV's rear -- for he had turned away, but since tank order is random, I managed to go before him. All I needed was a fire icon.

Mid game: Rich (left) survives shot after shot. Dave's Tiger can't roll the right icons. Umpire Mike (right) ponders scenario design.



Tiger to the Rescue?

But Dave and his Tiger moved before me and turned behind the PzIV. Now I went and had a perfect rear shot on a Tiger and I got the fire icon.

Now came the rules conundrum.

"It's a new target, you need to acquire and aim again."

"It's directly behind the original target, so it falls under the same firing solution."

"No, new target."

"No, the gunner pulls the trigger and another target happens to be in the way."

On and on for a bit. Umpire Mike ultimately ruled that I could shoot at the rear of the Tiger because it was exactly the same trajectory. I hit and dinged the Tiger for a die.

Damage

Basically, you roll to hit and if so, the firer rolls a number of d6s (called Strikes) looking for 5s and 6s (4s, 5s, and 6s for a flank shot, 3s through 6s for a rear shot). The Sherman had a 76mm so rolled 8d6. The Tiger had 10d6 save roll defense, looking for 5s and 6s. A table notes loss of die or dice depending on equaling or exceeding saves.

Damage is by losing dice: Temporary losing (can be brought back with a roll and spending of a wild die) or Permanent loss (die gone from the game). If, however, the firer's hits exceed saves by three or more, it's an instant brew up.

PzIV Target Practice

So we went, rolling for icons and mostly not getting them, or, in the case of Rich's PzIV, leading a charmed life of saves.

Rich's charmed PzIV finally brews up...

Sam hit it. I hit it. Marc hit it. And I mean multiple times each. At one point, I hit the tank and rolled four hits. Rich rolled four saves. Othertimes it was two hits and two saves. So it went, Rich mostly saving, although we eventually whittled him down to a couple dice until finally Sam put that tank out of our misery.

It took two hours of game play to kill one tank.

That's an awful lot of effort for not a lot of payoff.

No worries, Mike gave Rich another PzIV, which came back into play.



One Shot Wonder

Fresh from helping pummel the PzIV into scrap metal, I backed up, pivoted, and drove forward to face Rich's next PzIV. Amazingly, I got the acquire, aim, and fire trio on the roll and hit him, this time rolling 8d6 for damage and getting five, count 'em five, hits. Rich rolled only one save.

Instant brew up.

It amazed us all. Two hours for the first PzIV and two minutes for the second.

...but his second PzIV didn't survive my first shot.

Umpire Mike gave him a Panther.

By now, our three hours was about over, so we did one last turn. Dave finally got his Tiger to move out, pivot, and get the right acquire, aim, and fire icons. He targeted my Sherman.

The big 88mm barked, and I failed to save on two hits. I was alive, but lost two dice.

That's when we remembered the "unbutton" rule: if the target is unbuttoned (the commander's head is poking out of the tank), the firer gets an extra die.

Dave rolled a hit, putting three hits over my saves and brewed up my tank. It took him three hours, albeit with ultra-conservative play based on icon rolling, but he got his tank ring on the barrel.



Thoughts

We had the rules down by the end, but the five of us faced more frustration than triumph. Except for me and Dave's last turn-ish one-shot icon heroics, it's a lot of work to kill off a tank.

Random move distance wasn't enough for my tank(lower right corner) to escape the Wrath of the Tiger.

Many was the time when one of us said something to the effect: "But I've acquired and aimed at it for two turns!"

"Sorry. No Fire icon means no firing."

And that's the boon and bane of icon rolling. In a five-person tank, each will do their job when needed. A green crew may hesitate longer than a veteran crew. Some tanks have special abilities to turn a die to get a particular icon. That helps.



Otherwise, our game was an example of extremes: two hours to pepper one tank into submission and two minutes to brew up another.

It's *Yahtzee* with miniature tanks.

Fun Google AI “Fact”

While poking around the web for info about temporary vs permanent loss, Google AI gave this precious information. Remember that in the official rules, they use regular d6s with pips and a “6” is a Wild Die”:

*Spend Wild Dice to Recover: To keep your Command Dice total healthy after taking temporary hits, **prioritize rolling a natural 6** and using it as a Wild Die to repair the temporary damage during your turn.*

I added the boldface, but see that... AI sez to maximize die rolling, prioritize rolling a 6 -- as if you have any control over that (barring loaded dice or telekinesis).

Thanks

Thanks to Dave hosting and setting up a gorgeous table, to Umpire Mike for working through the rules, and to all of us for another Friday night at the fights.

Rail depot eye candy for the table.



Suggestions: *WaT*

by Rich

Thank you Dave and Mike for your efforts on last night's game. As usual the terrain was quite good. And the tanks looked just like tanks ought to look.

I have some unsolicited suggestions that may help playability and help to move the game along faster.

Regarding initiative dice: Try rolling 2d6 per player rather than just 1d6. There will be fewer ties and roll-offs.

I found the “action” dice to be somewhat frustrating. I like the “?” die option. It worked well, but perhaps a player may be allowed also to “trade in” two or three dice for a specific action.

I think that there ought to be some sort of simple shooting modifiers for distance. Perhaps a +1 at 24 inches and a +2 at 12 inches ranges? Again keep it simple.

Rolling to Hit: Percentages

by Russ Lockwood

In *WaT*, the base roll to hit a tank in the open is 6+ on 2d6. Each obstacle is a -1 die roll modifier. I added in Rich's suggested +1 and +2 for closer range band die roll modifiers.

I think I have the math right (famous last words).

Roll of 4+ (target tank in open at under 12 inches) on 2d6: 91.7%

Roll of 5+ (target tank in open at under 24 inches) on 2d6: 83.3%

Base roll of 6+ (target tank in open at under 48 inches) on 2d6: 72.2%

Roll of 7+ (target tank across one obstacle or in open over 48 inches) on 2d6: 58.3%

Roll of 8+ (target tank across two obstacles or across one obstacle in open over 48 inches) on 2d6: 41.7%

A&A Stalingrad: Tearing Shrinkwrap

by Russ Lockwood

As I noted in the past, I generally like the *Axis and Allies* (A&A) system -- a complexity step up from *Risk* and a step below most hex-based wargames -- but any relation to WWII is coincidental. That said, I received *A&A Stalingrad* as a gift and it was time to tear the shrinkwrap on this two-player game.

Two mapboards: a Regional one and a City one. Two scenarios: Race to Stalingrad (13 turns) and Operation Uranus (seven-turn Soviet counterattack). Lots of plastic pieces, but not as many as you'd think -- per usual, plastic poker chips augment the numbers. I recall it was pricier than normal -- tariffs and increased cost of plastics and shipping, I suspect. Rules are generally A&A, but with some significant changes.

Dan and I set up the game and by random selection, I was Axis. We started with the full Race to Stalingrad scenario.

The two mapboards at start: Stalingrad city (bottom) and operational area around the city.

The Axis Drive

We battered each other in the opening turns and I managed to get to the edge of Stalingrad at about the same time as historic German forces did.

Soviet reinforcements were based on Reinforcement Points (RPs), which are printed on the maps. Both boards contain a total of 20 RPs. Germans get them, too, but can't spend them until Operation Winter Storm (historic German relief effort to batter their way to trapped force in Stalingrad) occurs three turns after the Soviets launch Operation Uranus (historic turn 7).

The Soviets could place one and only one unit on the regional map in certain spaces. The costs will be familiar to A&A players.

The Soviets have a new figure: Katusha rocket trucks. They bombard one zone over, but have no in zone defense or attack. The new German figure is the PzIII, which is a little tough to tell versus the STuG III figure.

A deck of cards, ala *A&A D-Day*, governs who does what when. Combat is one round only, so zones could be contested. Some attacks by certain pieces may target a specific unit: for example, a STuG III hit may demand the Soviets remove a T-34 tank unit.

Axis attack Turn 1.



A Mistake Of Sorts

I saw a growing force of Soviets on my northern flank, so I moved in some forces to deal with it. The mistake was not remembering that this particular zone allows more than one Soviet reinforcement figure if Axis units occupy the zone. A horde of Soviets took advantage to drive into my northern flank just as I'm trying to enter the City board.

End of Turn 1.

A desperate situation called for desperate measures. I gathered what I could and used just about all the Luftwaffe to pound the Soviets into oblivion without losing a unit. It cost time and I never entered one of those reinforcement zones again.

Dan considers which reinforcements to buy with his production RP bucks.

Supply Conundrum

This turned out to be the bugaboo of our first game. We assumed that as long as you had a supply line back to the Regional board edges, the units were in supply. That one single zone of Germans started with an Unsupplied marker added to this. Supply Tokens also added to this.

Then re-reading the rules, we had a rethink...

Supply tokens only move via air or Soviet ferries/ice bridges. Otherwise, they remain off board and unable to be tapped. As far as we can tell from the Set Up card, the Germans don't start with any Tokens in the Race to Stalingrad scenario. They get one Token every other turn. The Soviets have to use RPs to buy Supply Tokens.

As attacks can be Supplied or Unsupplied, the Germans now face a slew of Unsupplied attacks -- and all units have a -1 die modifier when attacking Unsupplied.

And that means that German infantry, normally needing a 1 on a d6 to inflict a hit, now cannot inflict any hits. And in *A&A Stalingrad*, artillery does NOT give a +1 bonus to infantry.



A Supply Token provides supply to units in one zone only and only in that one combat phase (not the full round). So how do the Germans get anywhere near Stalingrad without Supply Tokens?

Dan and I have been up and down the internet looking for an answer to the Supply Token question.

End Turn 2: Closing in on the city.

Mind you, the Soviets are in the same boat, but since they are on defense and can buy Tokens, it's less of an issue. And also, artillery, which does double duty as AA, does not need any Tokens to fire at Luftwaffe units in the same zone.

So, Dan asked the Facebook group and the designer responded that our initial interpretation proved correct. In our game, we just never had to use Supply Tokens because we were always making sure our supply lines were intact.

My units infiltrate into the southern part of the city. Orange burst "spaces" are Ambush zones.

So, playing correctly after all, I managed to push a little into the city, but since the Soviet Tractor Factory turns out a tank every other turn and another factory churns out an artillery unit every other turn, by the time I entered the City board on turn 4, two free tanks and two free artillery units were part of the starting defense and supplemented by RP-bought units.

End of Turn 6: Hard going for the Germans.

City Kluge

No, not the Field Marshal, but the old computer term for haphazard solutions to technical problems.

Apparently, too few German units survived in playtests to actually enter the city, so there is this rule that says when a German



infantry and mechanized infantry units enter a City zone, it gets a doppelganger figure. That's right, like an amoeba, that figure splits into two figures. Only Germans, not Soviets or Axis Allies.

The City map contains Ambush spots that allow a Soviet infantry (not any other type) to launch a free attack on an Axis units in an adjacent zone.

The only way to kill said ambushing unit is to capture all surrounding zones -- immediate and automatic kill. Then an Axis infantry can occupy the Ambush spot.

A number of the city regions contain pillboxes (circles), which make it exceptionally tough to root out Soviet units. I managed to take one zone with a pillbox. I was subsequently surrounded. Even with the extra infantry, too few units to try and capture much.

Operation Uranus

Starting on Turn 3, the Soviet player gets two Operation Uranus cards face down. Neither player knows what's on the card other than it's the forces available at the start of Operation Uranus. One card goes in the northwestern corner and other just to the south of Stalingrad. Silly me, I thought they were one unit cards -- I should have paid more attention to the example in the rules.

End Turn 7: The Romanians (yellow) help, but Operation Uranus tanks begin to appear (lower right corner).



The longer the Soviets wait to launch Operation Uranus, the more cards -- i.e. units -- they get. It must launch on Turn 7. Dan waited until Turn 7 because I didn't have enough troops to push deeper into the city. Two hordes collapsed my flanks and raced westward.

In the South, for example, the Soviets had 16 units to my four or five. Only some abysmal die rolling by the Soviets for two turns, allowed my one Axis Ally infantry unit to hold up the main drive. The rest went around.

In the North, I had a couple zones with four units each, but those collapsed under the weight of the Soviet attack.

As per the rules, three turns later, on Turn 10, I launched Operation Winter Storm. I spent my 28 or so RPs for about eight or so units. I didn't make much of a dent. I conceded.

End Turn 8. Notice lack of Axis units...



Thoughts

With the Supply Token conundrum seemingly resolved, I look forward to another game.

Rulebook (pdf):

https://renegadegamestudios.com/content/File%20Storage%20for%20site/Axis%20%26%20Allies%20Stalingrad/A%26A_Stalingrad_Rulebook_Web_112624.pdf

Axis & Allies Stalingrad: 2025

By Dan

Russ brought over his brandy new *A&A Stalingrad* game (unpunched) for both of us to try out for the first time. I had a chance to read a few pages of the rules online, but Russ went over the rules from front to back as we set-up the boards.

By random selection, I would play the “Allies” (meaning the USSR). Lots of new sculptured pieces I’ve not seen previously: German Pz-III tanks, StuG-III assault guns, 150mm artillery, Rumanian 75mm infantry guns, and Russian rocket launchers.



Russ reviews the Unit Characteristics chart for his units as we finish setting-up. The Regional Map is on the right and the Stalingrad City Map is on the left to represent that square seen on the lower right corner of the Regional Map. Photo by Dan.

We played the “Race to Stalingrad” scenario, which is the full 13 turn game. After setting up (using the appropriate scenario cards), we went over the terrain features and got out the Sequence-of-play deck, declining to use the Optional Rule cards.

Up to eight ground units may occupy an area (Regional Map or City Map). Up to 4 air units may be at an air base, but don’t count against the ground unit limit when “in flight”. The German, Rumanian, and Russian units have some functional differences that are important to remember during play. Many German units have rail/road movement capability and “Force Multiplier” capability that applies when moving onto the Stalingrad City Map (providing an additional infantry or mechanized infantry per model when they enter the city map).

The Sequence-of-Play deck is very similar to what is used in *A&A D-Day* and especially useful for 1st time players. Each card instructs what to do and who is to do it, which minimizes accidentally skipping something.

Russ would have the burden of attack, starting in August 1942. The Russian forces have a special movement restriction for the first two turns called “Not One Step Back”: Any Russian unit that is at an area adjacent to an enemy-occupied area may stay put, but if it chooses to move, it *must* enter an enemy-occupied area. Opposing units occupying the same area can’t move (“Battle” markers are used to represent those situations). Units entering an area occupied by only opposing units are marked with an “Assault” marker (significant as air units can only support Assaults and not Battles).

Both sides can collect “Replacement Points”, but the Russians can spend them as soon as they get them, while the Germans have to save them for Operation Winter Storm (Manstein’s attack to relieve Paulus’ army after it was encircled). The Germans get a free infantry or supply token each turn, while the Russians get a free artillery or tank if the factories in Stalingrad are intact.

On turns 3-7, the Russians draw two “Operation Uranus” cards (one for the north wing, one for the south wing). It’s up to the Russian player to decide when to launch the operation, but it automatically goes off on Turn 7.

The Overall “Campaign”

During the first two turns the Germans and Rumanians strike across the Don River and from the south edge towards Stalingrad. Combat is one round only, so survivors tie up the area by keeping the “Battle” marker in place. This happened often in most engagements with 4+ units per side, but sometimes a lone unit held out against superior numbers (and this *is* a dice-based combat game).

By end of Turn 2, some Germans had reached the outskirts of Stalingrad, but the Russians kept pressure on one unsupplied group of Germans that started on the south edge, trying to grind them down while in an unsupplied state. The Russians in Stalingrad repositioned to anticipate where the Germans would advance from as the factories pump out one artillery or a tank unit each turn (representing a significant amount of reinforcements over time as otherwise infantry can only reach Stalingrad by ferry over the Volga).

The northernmost German advance makes a rash attack at the north edge to eliminate the remnants of the Russians beyond the Don River, but it’s in a Russian Deployment zone that triggers an option for the Russians to bring in more than one reinforcement and the Russians commit 5 new units to counterattack, eventually eliminating the northern German force by Turn 4 or 5. Emboldened, this Russian force moves towards Stalingrad and is attacked by a

weak 3-unit German force with support of 5 air units. AA fails to knock out any aircraft and the ensuing combat is a stunning German victory with no casualties.

The Germans start to enter Stalingrad by around Turn 4-5, starting with a 5-unit force from the north that avoids the Russian-held fortified sectors. Another 6-unit force arrives from the south a turn later and a final force of 6 units arrives from the west by turn 7. German air attacks are largely successful against the ferry sites, preventing 4 Russian infantry from crossing over the course of 4 turns (plus having to rebuilt the ferry points). As more Russian artillery become present in Stalingrad, AA reaction fire against the aircraft attacking the southern ferry eliminated 2 bombers and kept it open to supply the southern part of the city and allow infantry to reinforce Stalingrad.

The Germans captured some suburbs worth 2-3 replacement points and reached the southern ferry point, but most of Stalingrad is successfully defended - bringing in 16 (initially) to 12 replacement points each turn. On Turns 6 and 7, “Bad Weather” is rolled, freezing the Don and then the Volga.

Operation Uranus

Operation Uranus triggers on Turn 7 and both of us were surprised at how large the Russian forces were. Each wing overwhelmed the Axis forces on both flanks and rapidly started to reclaim lost ground. Stalingrad was surrounded by Turn 9, but the remaining Axis forces had already exited the city and were trapped in the outskirts at Pitomnik.

Operation Uranus North (top) and South.

Operation Winter Storm launches on Turn 10. Russ has 27-28 Replacement points to assemble this force, which amounts to an 8-unit group (versus the 30 units that showed up for Operation Uranus). By end of Turn 11, there are about 10 Axis units on the Regional Map and none in Stalingrad. The Russians have about half their armies (20+ units) west of the Don River and Manstein decides it's time to exit as there is no more 6th Army to save, so Russ concedes the game at this point after 5 hours of set-up and play.

After Russ had left, I re-read the online rules and ended up doing a triple-take on the Supply Rules (how to trace a valid supply line and the rules for supply tokens).

Supply Line Rulings

At one point, I was thinking we may have played the game wrong and that Supply Tokens are *necessary* to supply combat (ie: tracing a supply line doesn't mean you are automatically supplied for combat, but that you *have the option to commit a supply token* for combat). I finally found the defining rules under “Supply Tokens” that indicated they are a form of “emergency supply” and can be used to supply a combat if the force is currently unsupplied but can trace a valid pathway to a Supply Token. Otherwise, if any force in combat can trace a valid supply line to a supply source, that force is “supplied” for combat.

That makes much more sense, as both sides don't have any Supply Tokens at the start of the “Race to Stalingrad” scenario. Nice to know we played the game correctly the first time.

The Axis seem to have quite the challenge in attacking and taking Stalingrad. The initial attacks on turns 1 & 2 seemed “normal” (the Russians can't do much with the restrictions on Turns 1 & 2). Turns 3-6 seem to be the critical turns of the game for the Axis. What surprised me was the state of the Axis forces at the time *Operation Uranus* triggered on Turn 7. The force in Stalingrad was less than 10 units, outnumbered, and had not captured much of the city (and they started leaving Turn 7). The flanking forces outside Stalingrad were about 5-6 units between both flanks. The northern flanking forces along the Don River were about 12-13 units. The bad weather on the first two turns it could possibly happen was unlikely and worked against the Axis as well. It was apparent to both of us on Turn 7 that the Axis was in real trouble.

The *Axis & Allies* “system” has been successfully applied to several specific battles/campaigns in my opinion (*D-Day*, *Guadalcanal*) and I would add *Stalingrad* to that list. I look forward to playing it again.



Indian Ocean Raid: Double-Blind Wargame

by Russ Lockwood

You'll find my write-up of Session 1 in the May AAR. As I could not make Session 2, the May AAR contained Umpire Bruce's write-up of both sessions. Alas, I could not make Session 3, but I did make Session 4. Bruce's recap of the last two sessions is below. The game ended with Session 4.

It's lonely at the top: Garth plots ship locations and search patterns on the IJN map. Double-blind means the IJN and RN have no idea of each other's positions.

The Raid: Session 2 and 3

Alas, I could not make either session, so I am not sure exactly what happened. I later learned that:

The IJN Rangoon convoy arrived intact.

I found out that the IJN found a good section of the Royal Navy outside Trincomalee and sent everything with wings and an engine against the British TF.

I don't know the exact results, but many Royal Navy ships, including a light carrier, were sunk.

A few cargo ships were caught by IJN surface warships and quickly sent to the bottom.

During one night, IJN battleships and other ships bombarded the port of Columbo into oblivion.

The Raid: Session 4

I was able to make the final session. Garth and I were Japanese. John, Steve, and Phil were British.

The IJN had drifted eastward, but we were having no luck finding any RN ships. Or cargo ships. Or even a rowboat. All we were doing was burning oil.

Maybe we can pound a minor airfield and encourage the RN to come out and play? We were in the neighborhood of Akyab, so we picked it.

The Japanese air attack on Akyab.

No CAP. Only four AA dice. We sent about two-thirds of our aircraft and put seven hits on it of the 10 we needed. One was repaired at the end of the turn, so we sent the other one-third of our planes as a follow-up. We pounded it for four more hits and scratch one small airfield.



As for the Royal Navy, crickets. We did find a RN sub, but left it alone. In fact, we moved out of the way. Searching failed to find anything on either side. As Garth noted, we're searching nine squares out of about 1550.

What I couldn't figure out is how we could miss the cargo ships. We had parked a TF outside Calcutta and had submarines and a long-range scout plane along the coast towards Madras.

Our next minor airfield was Cuttack, even closer to Calcutta than Akyab. We sent the entire complement of planes and destroyed it in one attack.

There was Koggala minor airfield at the south end of Ceylon, but given the search locations, I figured discretion was the better part of valor and headed for the Andaman Islands in a long sweeping movement away from the searches. We figured to sweep west again and then hit Koggala.

Alas, the game ended as we had to vacate the clubhouse.

End of Game

Bruce keeps a tally of points awarded for various accomplishments during the game. In general, the points follow A&ANM rules, but with differences. Japanese ships sunk got double points for the Allies. A hit on an airbase or port was worth 1 point, with complete destruction gaining bonus points. Each cargo ship that made it to port was worth from one to three points.

Well, imagine all our surprised faces when we discovered that the game ended in a 218 to 218 tie. The last three cargo ships docked and gave the Allies the three points needed to tie it up. Up until the time we pounded Cuttack airfield into oblivion, the IJN was behind in points.

Where were the Allied warships? Way, way west of Ceylon. Where were the cargo ships? They had used the beginning of the game to hot foot it to Madras -- 39 of them to be exact. Incidentally, Bruce noted that if we did an air raid on them, they were so packed together, it would be a wall of AA like you never saw before.

Thoughts

Bruce is the master of double blind naval games. It's always a blast to play hide and seek with carrier forces. Great game, folks.

Indian Ocean Raid: Umpire View

Recap and photos by Bruce

Session 3

As darkness settled on April 3, 1942, several Japanese Surface Action Groups were disbursed across the Bay of Bengal. Just before dawn on the 4th, IJN DD Hatsuyuki discovered a lone merchantman proceeding NW. She made quick work of the hapless victim.

IJN Hatsuyuki finds and sinks a British merchantman in the Indian Ocean.

On April 4, the sun rose on a clear day. Overnight the IJN had cast a wide net to catch Allied steamers, and another was caught 300 miles SE of Trincomalee, Ceylon. Blenheim bombers scrambled to support the lone merchantman, but their bombs missed the DD Asagiri. Asagiri and Yuguri then teamed up to sink the merchantman. Meanwhile, four merchantmen arrived at Trincomalee from Addu Atoll, and the IJN delivered the 18th Infantry Division to Rangoon.



The rest of the day passed uneventfully except for the arrival at Madras of 10 merchantmen from Calcutta. The weather turned cloudy as a front came in. By nightfall the rain intensified to numerous squalls and then worsened to storms. Under the cover of the weather, four merchantmen arrived at Calcutta from Madras.

The storms continued throughout the next day. IJN DD Arare was spotted and attacked by RAF Trincomalee Blenheims about 250 miles SE of their base. She attempted to hide, unsuccessfully, in a squall and was crippled.

IJN Arare hides from Blenheim bombers in a squall, but is found anyway.

Late in the day a single merchantman arrived at Calcutta, but another was caught despite the stormy weather, and sunk at the mouth of the Hooghly River.

IJN destroyers catch and sink British merchantman at the mouth of the Hooley River near Calcutta.

The third session ended with point totals of 177 for IJN and 210 for RN.

Session 4

The fourth session began with Turn 29: 1800 hrs on April 5. The storms continued until the morning of the 7th of April. Over 36 hours both sides frantically, and unsuccessfully, searched for the other. The only event was the arrival of a single ship at Madras from Colombo.

As the Allied team savvily avoided contact, the IJN Team decided to eliminate what they could strike -- airbases! Over the next two days, in gradually clearing weather, the Kudo Butai systematically destroyed the installations at Akyab and Cuttack. The arrivals of the last merchant steamers in safe ports were the only Allied point accruals.

Game End

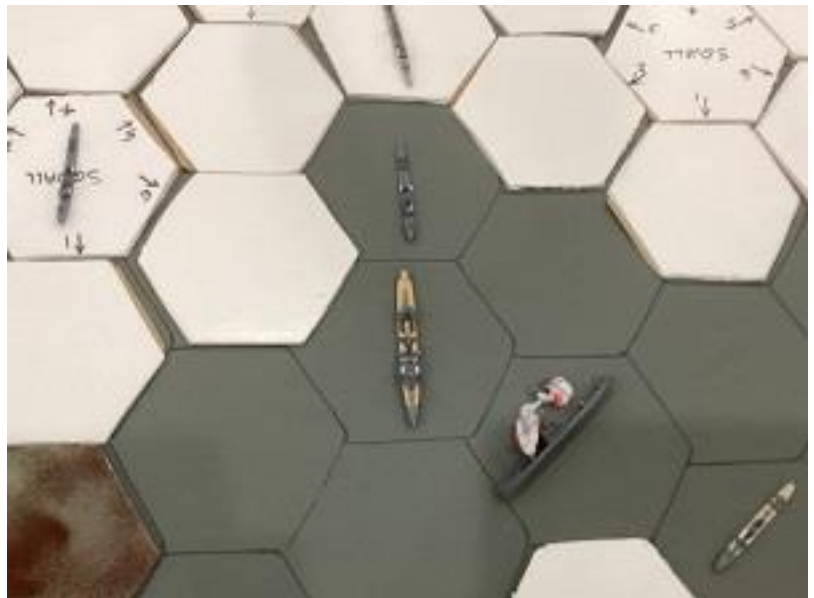
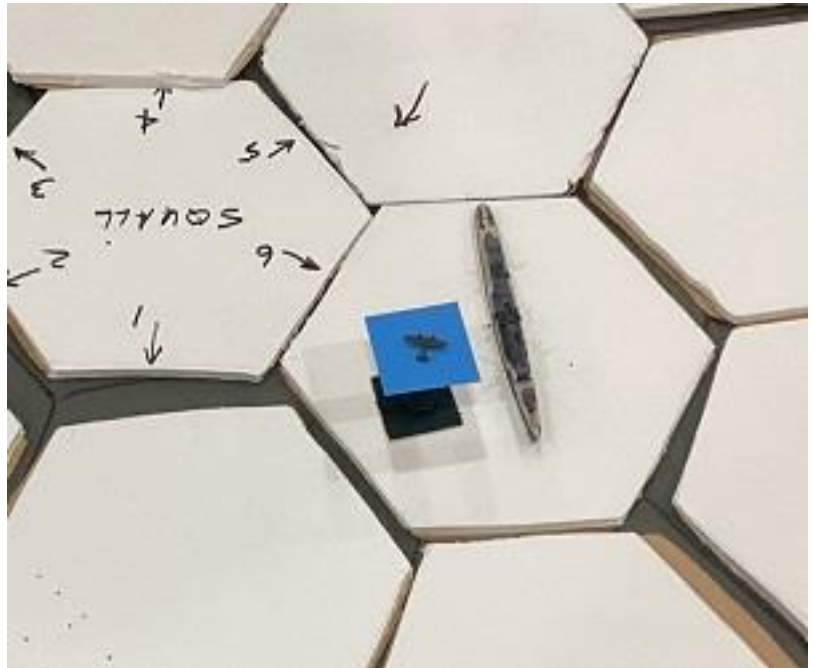
The game ended by mutual agreement with the conclusion of Turn 45: 1000 hrs on April 8. As the umpire tallied up the points, the totals confirmed that the decision was the best for all concerned: IJN: 218 and RN: 218. A tie! Good play by both teams!

How Points Are Scored

For the Allies: Full points for destroyed IJN aircraft units; Double points for destroyed IJN naval units; Variable points, (1-3), per merchant ship completing transit between selected ports. See merchant shipping schedule.

For the Japanese: Half points for destroyed Allied aircraft units; Full points for destroyed Allied naval units; One point per transport ship completing the reinforcement mission to Rangoon; Points for each Allied airfield/port destroyed.

Points are taken from the *Axis & Allies Naval Miniatures* game. Combat is also using *A&ANM* game.



Galactic Emperor: Twilight Imperium Lite

by Russ Lockwood

Man, it's great to be emperor. Invited to the wildest parties. Fawning sycophants. Always a prime parking space. It's great...

...except when other emperors try to crush you, drive you before them, and you've got to hear the lamentations of the women.

And that's just an ordinary Wednesday with Dennis and Renaud.

The game begins with Renaud (left) and Dennis (right) building out from their starting positions.



It Ain't the Years, It's the Tilage

Twilight Imperium is a fine, interactive, intensive game, but even in its fourth edition, it is a long, long game. Going back to the first edition, I have yet to be in one that finished in under six hours.

Consider *Galactic Emperor* a lite version -- same hex tile grid of a galaxy, same selection of roles, same building of fleets, and same battles to be emperor, but in half the time. But I get ahead of myself. First, we tore the shrinkwrap off and cracked open the box to set up the game.

The central hex tile is a sun (to be changed at some point for a black hole) and each player's starting "home" tile gets placed just so on the map -- where depends on the number of players.

A Turn 1 Glitch

As we played Turn 1, we tripped up over the steps to play a full round -- we went through all seven character roles instead of just three (one per player). The wording was a bit muddled, but we figured it out. The idea is that the Regent goes first and picks one of the seven roles (Merchant, Scientist, Warrior, etc.) and performs the attributes, followed by all the other players using that role. Then the next player picks a role from what's left and all three of us perform the attributes. Finally, the third player picks a role from what's left and all three of us perform the attributes. As you surmise, some aspects were zero sum -- for example, one player does something (like pick a technology) and the tech isn't available to any other player.

We consulted the role rules quite a bit as we cycled through rounds. The rounds went faster as we became familiar with each role.

Smooth Sailing

I might not go that far, but three veteran gamers can figure just about any rule conundrum out.

Yet, we placed and claimed tiles (mostly planets) for our own little fiefdoms. A black hole appeared in the middle of the board and provided instant transport to any hex, used by both me and Renaud at times.

Middle of the game. Renaud (blue), Russ (yellow), and Dennis (green) face off.



Let the record show that Renodious Rex the Ruthless started the war against the peace-loving residents of the Restful Russ Realm by fomenting insurrection. I could just not stand for such perfidy and

vengeance was swift...except the part about rolling for firing. The Restful Russ Realm was so restful, apparently few crews even bothered to load the weapons and not much happened when the crew pressed the big red button labeled "Fire At Enemy!"

It's enough to make an emperor comment, "There's something wrong with our bloody ships today!"

Dreadnoughts and fighters clash at the Battle of the Black Hole. Green cubes are agriculture resources, solid yellow counters indicate control, and counters with yellow icons show control by space stations.



The ships of Renodious Rex were powered by a pair of techs that proved very effective: the first boosted saving rolls and the second negated an opposing tech. Apparently, though my weapons were super-targeted (+1 on the d6 firing rolls), the negating tech shorted out my targeting arrays and what few shots came in were negated by superior shielding, or armor, or maneuver, or whatever the better save tech represented.

It's enough to make an emperor comment, "The Guard dies. It does not surrender!"

Well, the Royal Russ Restful Fleet spiraled away into a billion little pieces and the Royal Rex Ravaging Fleet grabbed a frontier sector tile and subjected its planet to pillage, oppression, and elevator muzak.

Counting Victory Points

Battles continued as much as possible, although Indifferent Denizens of Dennistopia refused to be drawn into the fray. Dennistopia's massive fleet grew and grew and stayed in spacedock as their crews practiced karaoke.

At the end of play, planet-wise, I owned 13 planets, Renaud had 10, and Dennis 9. Renaud was the richest player with 22 space bucks, good for two Victory Points (VPs). Full warehouses were worth 1 point. And so on and so on.

The ending positions for all the emperor wannabes.

In the end, Dennis had 35 VPs and amazingly, Renaud and I tied at 44 VPs each.

We looked up the tie-breaker: largest fleet.

Well, I had a billion spaceships. I mean really, isn't a piece of ship wreckage just a really, really small spaceship?

No? Tough crowd.

In fact, I had no ships left. Zero. Nil. Nada. Renaud had more ships than me and that's what counted. Even with the rules look-ups, it was all done in about three hours or so.

An exciting finish to a fast-moving game. Good job, gentlemen! Enjoyed it.



Renaissance Shipping: *Serenissima*

by Russ Lockwood

Ships, multicolored cubes, and cities for the basis of this resource management boardgame across the Mediterranean Sea. Renaud cracked open the second edition game, which he noted was the same as the first edition game, only with a smaller board. Shrinkflation hits boardgames just as much as grocery items.

*Renaud sets up *Serenissima* outside.*

Starting with a single city that produces wood, you build a trading empire by selling wood to other cities and buying their resources -- marble, spice, wine, and gold -- to sell in still other cities. Each sale generates ducats (cash) and the later sales generate more ducats than early sales. Spice gets you a two-ducat bonus, which doesn't seem like much, but helps a lot. Restrictions apply, like not being able to sell a resource to a city that already has one. Trade monopoly, I guess. Each city accepts a limited number of resources/trade monopolies.

You can also buy/recruit sailors which defend your ships against other ships with sailors, or, capture cities using a d6 combat system. Also, the number of sailors on a ship also determines how fast the ship travels across the areas. As each ship holds a total of five resources/sailors, you have to balance speed and defense with sales prospects.

If a player captures a city, certain combinations of trade monopolies allow for the purchase of a fort (extra defense dice) or a basilica (extra VPs). Otherwise, VPs are based on ownership and the number of trade monopolies existing within that city. The VPs are tallied in specific turns and a running tally kept.

As there were only two of us, some cities were off limits. These we marked with cards. Larger multiplayer games open up some or all of those cities.

Sea Spray

As it was a glorious day, we set up outside under an awning. And then the wind came and then a quick 10-minute rain. Ah...the wind in your hair and the sea spray on your face...is nice if you're sailing, but a chase after cards and cubes if you're on a patio during a squall. We moved the table to get out of the spray. No harm, no foul as the components survived intact.

I started in Valencia and Renaud started as Genoa. So the trading began with three resources and two sailors being the general cargo of each ship. We sailed around, bought and sold resources, and gradually extended our reach across the Med. I built a Basilica in Tripoli.

First stop and capture: Tripoli. The basilica came later.

At one point, when just about the entire board was filled with trade goods and under the control of one of us, Renaud muttered that it might be time for piracy and bought a ship loaded with sailors. Of course, I responded with my own ship. Now trading gave way to raiding.

I must say that Renaud's initial 3d6 dice roll generated three 1s, which is horrible. After that, I also rolled all 1s on 3d6 for an equally lopsided loss. And after that, my dice proved as cold as the bottom of the Med. I lost sailors. I lost



ships. I lost cities. I even lost Tripoli and my Basilica. Even when I had a three dice to two advantage or a two dice to one advantage, Renaud fed the sea with Valencian corpses.

In the end, being kind to myself, it was still a relatively close game, although losing Tripoli and its Basilica proved too big a VP swing to overcome.

Just about the end.

Thoughts

As the game played out, finding that sweet spot when raiding becomes the better strategy than trading is a key. Ducat churn is another important consideration and trading Spice helps in the early game. With some planning, it probably would have been prudent to build a Fortress first and then a Basilica. Giving my rolling, it may not have mattered, but more rolls means better odds of success.

It also dawned on me towards the end of the game, during one particular combat, that I might have played this game -- or something similar -- in the 1990s at a convention. Odd why one die roll out of all others would trigger some fragment of a memory. Well, it might actually be a delusion. Man, I should've started writing AARs way back when, then I could check.

Hang on...memory flash. I did a compilation of all my *MWAN Historicon* Recaps. Where to find it....one sec.

Eureka! Word doc, so I can search... Nuts! No mention. The meter is leaning in the direction of delusion...

In any case, thanks Renaud for a nice afternoon of trading and raiding.



Giant Killer Robots: Quartet of Destruction

by Russ Lockwood

I was introduced to the game *Giant Killer Robots* last month and the May 2026 AAR contains my adventures in graffiti, building destruction, and laser, gun, and missile exchanges.

Robots controlled by actual humans: Renaud (upper left corner and clockwise), David and Michelle.

This time, David and Michelle joined in for a two-on-two game of *Giant Killer Robots*. By random draw, David and I were on one side and Renaud and Michelle on the other. Unlike most wargames, the teams were not on the same side of the map, but diagonal to each other. The faster to pound the other robots into scrap metal, methinks.

My full rules recap is in the May 2026 AAR, found at hmgs.org under News/Blogs and then AARs. In short, all giant robots use 25 cards for weaponry, special abilities, and hit points. Weapon cards show energy cost to deploy, speed, and number of dice. Faster weapons fire first and damage -- removing cards from the 25-card deck -- is immediately taken. When the giant robot has no more cards in play, it is destroyed.

Up to three supporting small robots can be brought into play, usually via a card from the 25-card deck or by expending four energy. As each giant robot only has five energy, that's a lot -- although deficit spending energy is allowed at the expense of removing cards from the 25-card deck. Decisions, decisions.

Tagging a building four times turns it into a rubble and VPs for the "owner." Extra special event cards are awarded for tagging, which extends the life of a giant robot. Giant and small robots can tag a building as long as the



hexside used has not been previously tagged. It is possible, although did not happen, that a player could use all four robots and tag and destroy a building in one turn.

The Green (Renaud) and Blue (Michelle) meanies try to pound Orange (Russ) Crush, but the Yellow (David) Generalissimo finds the range on Green.

The Battle

I generally kept my energy usage to five per turn, only dipping for an extra one or two a couple of times as I battled Michelle's giant blue robot. David burned lots of energy early and often, inflicting damage on Renaud's giant green robot. This game, I kept my repair robot adjacent to my giant robot -- and got back a card each turn.

My tagging was going well until Renaud played a special event card that changed a tag of mine to one of his. I believe Michelle blew up a building with her tags, or got close. Drone footage of her accomplishments went missing.

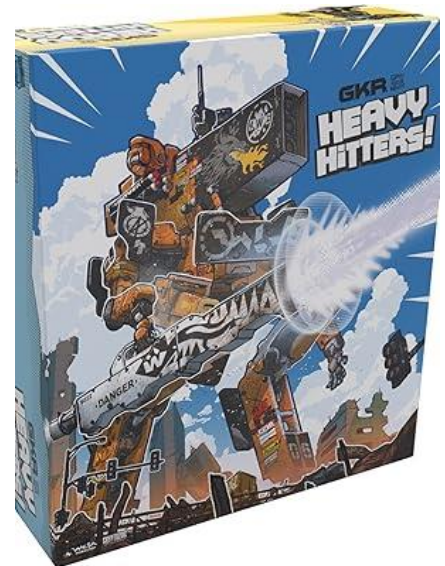
The Generalissimo says "Tag, you're split!" and stands over the big green scrap pile.

My big bug-a-boo was that Renaud's giant green robot came up and along with Michelle's giant blue robot started tag team shooting at my giant orange robot. This was more than just scratching the paint. My 25 cards began disappearing too quickly for my taste.

Yet, David's relentless pursuit and deficit energy spending pounded Renaud's giant green robot while I added in a shot or two of small robot fire. In the end, the jolly green giant robot blew apart first, generating a win by team Yellow and Orange.

Thanks to Renaud for hosting and David and Michelle for a quip-filled game of battlin' bots.

Heavy hitters: A box full of giant killer robots.



Tiny Epic Game of Thrones: Quartet

by Russ Lockwood

With giant robots back in the garage for repairs, Renaud brought out *Tiny Epic Game of Thrones*. I first played the sci-fi version, which I found quite good, but the fantasy version not as much. The company has others. This particular *Tiny Epic Game* is based on the *Game of Thrones* (GoT) books and TV series.

Tiny Epic GoT start.

Six cards form the area map of Westeros, which is populated with castle and soldier meeples. Plastic figures represent the houses, with each house having a specific “power” they can use during the game. Cards provide the strengths and other benefits.

Dice selection provides everyone with a specific action. However, only the chooser of the die gets the action's special benefit. The biggest problem was figuring out the placement of the die for which action all performed versus a House's special action. Sheesh...we're all veteran gamers, right?

Battles are by cards and meeples: a strength number or a special battle action via card plus friendly meeples in the area. High number wins. Gain a VP and the area.

Our Game

I'm not that familiar with *Game of Thrones* -- read the first book, watched at least part of the TV series. In this game, I was the Lannister clan. I recall “We always pay our bills.” Wait, that doesn't sound right. One sec...: “A Lannister always pays his debts.”

Nonetheless, we each expanded into neutral territories as well as sometimes battling the big neutral territories. I expanded up through Ashmark and Riverton and then took the Eyrie, but that was the high water mark. I could never quite recruit enough meeples to keep the momentum going and Michelle and David began to roll the Lannister tide back.

The other clans didn't sit still and so the battles wore on. Card play, and sometimes the interpretations of the card text, produced an ebb and flow of areas changing hands. Michelle took King's Landing, but was kicked out. Forces from the same clan were often separated far away from each other.

As everything is by die selection for actions, you made the best selection you could at the time and must live with the other selections. They may not be in the optimal order, either.

The game lasts three turns. Most VPs wins.

In the end, David was in first with 9 VPs, I was in second with 7, and Renaud and Michelle tied for third with 6.

This one is a tight little *Tiny Epic* game. A couple wobbles with card text, but that's often standard. It'll probably resonate better with fans of the show, but from a game standpoint, quite the brain teaser.

Thanks for hosting, Renaud.



Deadwood: Desperado Development

by Russ Lockwood

Well, pard'ner, welcome to Deadwood, home to the combination cowboy-construction worker. Seems a might strange combo, but developing Deadwood into a thriving town with train service proved entertaining.

Taking a mosey into town, tweren't many buildings: Town Hall, Sheriff's Office, and a Church. Maybe some stakes in the ground for possible train routes. But that would all change, cause you either grow, git, reach for the gun, or reach for the sky.

End of Turn 1.



Calling All Desperados

Gangs need cash, but the untouchable Sheriff guards three buildings at a time. You pull a random building tile and place it in the town, but can run into any building and shakedown the owner. Each time you land on a building, you get cash. It's more protection money than robbery. Then you turn the cash into gunfighters, from greenhorns to grizzled gunslingers. They pop in and out of the hideout, bringing in the cash.

That is, unless another gang objects and sends a gunfighter after one of yours. Then it's dice time. Don't look to me for tips. While Renaud's gunslingers were masters in the art of showdowns, all my quick draw artists were basically fingerpainting. The high noon gunfights saw my gang sink lower than a rattlesnake in a wagon rut. Boot Hill cemetery called again and again. I was running out of gang-pokes. And my lunch money was being taken.

And even-up die roll gunfight in the saloon as both high-noon gunfighters were rated as 2s.



I changed tactics and lived up to the slogan: "Make Cash, Not War!" I concentrated on placing new buildings and gathering cash -- and a fair bit of hiding alongside the Sheriff. Nobody, but nobody shot the Sheriff.

I did rob the bank a number of times. Easy money, but you get yer face on a Wanted Dead or Alive poster. Each poster subtracts a VP at the end of the game. Not to worry, you can bribe your way off a poster. You also pick up a poster when you start a gunfight. Renaud did that a lot. That's how my gang-pokes were put in the ground.

Choo Choo

One of the buildings, and I forget which, allowed the placement of a section of train track. When all tracks were placed, the game ended.

As we played, I did quick calculations in my head of the victory points. I didn't know exactly, but I had a guess that I was ahead. So I took a chance and placed the last railroad track segment.

Then came the VP tallies. Sure enough, I squeaked by with a couple VPs for the win.

Interesting. Better with more players, I think, but to figure out how it plays, a two-player game is just fine.

I really got to work on my quick-draw dice technique. Makes me wanna saddle up and play *Desperado*, *Gunfighter's Ball*, or *What a Cowboy!*



The tabletop battle of the Battle of Monmouth at the Rye, NY, library was followed by a history recap.

HMGS Next Generation: Events

Text and photos by John Spiess

Battle of Monmouth: Rye

The Rye, NY, library currently offers two programs, one for teens (middle and high school) and one the younger 4th and 5th graders. This game was for the younger crowd.

We had 12 players: six British and six Continental. You might also notice an older gentleman in a pink shirt with a walker. He has an aide behind him that you probably can't see. In any case, he served in Korea with the Marines. He just likes to watch the games.

Some of you might also notice the small stand of three figures with an American flag. This is actually the 2026 Historicon special figure pack. I had painted it for HMGS advertising, so it's getting a bit of use before the convention as well. One of the kids asked what it could do. So we just made up some rules on the spot and made them heroes. Any unit they were attached to get an extra firing die and a +1 in morale.

Unfortunately, it didn't help the Continentals today, as the British volleys were just too much to handle. The post-game historical discussion was pretty cool, since all the parents were now on hand, listening intently. I also pitched Historicon, so we might have some extra folks from this group.



Belleau Wood: Mamaroneck

The Larchmont library is now closed on Sunday's for the summer, so this month we moved to a beach club in Mamaroneck for a birthday party. The kids had voted to play WWI, so we set up a scenario based on Belleau Wood in June, 1918. As always, it was a great time. I took some historical liberty and gave everyone a FT-17. Kids just love tanks.

WWI cooperative game.



Battle of Trenton: Mendham

by Mike

We had six young players (ages 9-13) refight the Battle of Trenton, 1776, at the Mendham, NJ, Township Library. The scenario tweaked history a bit to give both sides a shot at victory. We used a bespoke 6x10-foot battle-mat of Trenton anno 1776. Sam provided the 15mm AWI figures, and we used some home brewed rules.

Pregame, using a Smart TV and a smart librarian, the players were shown images of a New Jersey map from about 1776, a map of the 13 colonies and Leutze's painting of George Washington crossing the Delaware. I am happy to report that the older players had no problem pointing out on the map where Trenton and Mendham were located, and they all knew who the commander standing in the Durham boat was. They also got a snap briefing on the two armies on December 25, 1776. Post-game the players and parents got a quick comparison of the tabletop game and the historical battle.

The outcome was a minor American victory having taken possession of Trenton. The majority of two of the three Hessian regiments made their escape over the Assunpink Creek, enabled through, no doubt, the sacrifice of Colonel von Knyphausen (enacted by Elliot) who had had enough of tactical withdrawals, so he ordered his regiment to charge head-on the masses of American battalions streaming into Trenton. He and his brave men died with glory!

Elliot presents his Hessian battle plan



NEWS

Historicon

by Scott Landis Historicon 2026
Convention Director

We have a full plate of over 950 events including some tremendous games, published experts on the American War of Independence at our War College, more Hobby U classes than ever, and a full Dealer Hall of Exhibitors. This is just a quick reminder to get your selection of Events complete (a number of them are already sold out), and to pre-order your Convention Merchandise.

Info: hmsg.org



54mm American Revolution: 3D Figures

by Russ Lockwood

Chris Parker Games sent around a couple of photos of its 54mm American Revolution figures painted by a customer. I figured you might want to see figs even grognard eyes like mine can see. Note that the 3D files are designed by BattleCat Miniatures and licensed to CPG to print and sell. Note that the miniatures are gray plastic and the heads need attaching. Six 54mm figures cost \$36, six 40mm figures cost \$22, and six 28mm figures cost \$16. Note that the line includes nine figures in total, so you can pick the ones you want or let Chris pick them for you. CPG uses a storefront on eBay.



CPG also noted some policy changes: "Due to the downturn of the economy, we have made a number of changes to help you with your purchases: Free Shipping over \$20.00 (down from \$30.00), and if under \$20, shipping is a flat rate of \$4.99 (down from \$8.50), and, the 10% Army Builder Discount applies to orders of \$50.00 or more (down from \$60 or more).

Info: <https://www.dayofbattlegames.com/>

YouTube Wargaming: Quick Watch

by Russ Lockwood

I watched a couple of YouTube videos of note:

The Die is Cocked

<https://www.youtube.com/@TheDieisCocked>

At 5:45, the cavalry figures coming off the stands to charge is rather cool! What AI did that?

The cavalry begin to charge off the stands.



Two Wargamers Talking

<https://www.youtube.com/@PerryGray8918>

Chats with long time gamers and authors.

Perry also has a Substack:

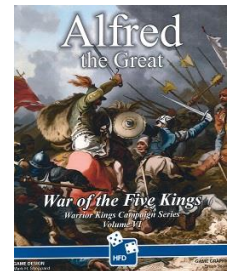
<https://substack.com/@perrygray>

Alfred the Great: Wargame

by Russ Lockwood

High Flying Dice Games released *Alfred the Great vol. 6: War of the Five Kings, 892 AD*. Covers the Saxon-Welsh-Viking war that involved five kings and stretched across most of middle and southern Britain. Designed by Mark Sheppard, developed by Paul Rohrbaugh, and graphics by Bruce Yearian.

Includes: 653 un-mounted, single-sided counters; six Player Aid cards; three 11x17-inch map sheets; and rule book. Note: Players will need at least one six-sided die. \$24.95 plus sales tax (where applicable), shipping and handling. Mounted counters can be had for an additional \$8.00.



Info:

<http://www.hfdgames.com/5Kings.html>

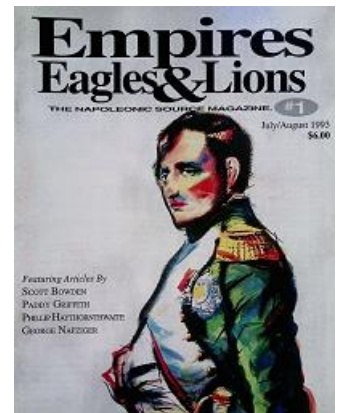
EE&L: Wargames Vault

by Russ Lockwood

Lombardy Studios announces that *Empires, Eagles & Lions* magazine issues 1 through 14 are now available in pdf versions on Wargames Vault.

Note: These are the "new" versions, 8.5x11-inch and glossy, not the "original" booklet sized black and white versions. Each is \$5.95 with a bundle of all 14 for \$49.98.

Info: <https://www.wargamevault.com/en/product/571068/empires-eagles-lions-magazine-1>



A Royal Pain: Card Set Supplement

by Russ Lockwood

High Flying Dice Games released a custom card set for the *Against the Odds* 2024 Annual mini-wargame: *A Royal Pain: The Siege of Boston, 1775-1776*. This custom card set replaces the standard deck of playing cards needed to run play the game. \$11.00 plus sales tax (where applicable), shipping and handling.

MHWA Game Day: July 25

by Russ Lockwood

The Maine Historical Wargamers Association (MHWA) will hold a Game Day on Saturday, July 25, in the Sebago room at the Doubletree hotel in South Portland, MA.

Info and sign up: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/20F0F4FABAC2BAAF94-62344083-mhwa#/>

'65 Strategy Guide: KS

by Russ Lockwood

'65: *Strategy Guide* from Flying Pig Games offers an 84-page rules explanation, examples of play, and tactical game tips for its Vietnam squad-level game. It launches on KS on June 30, 2026.

Info: <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/markhwalker/65-strategy-guide>

Devil Dogs: WWI Wargame

by Russ Lockwood

Avalanche Press announced its upcoming *Infantry Attacks: Devil Dogs*, an introductory game for AP's *Infantry Attacks* series. The WWI wargame comes in Playbook format with 24 scenarios pitting the Marines against the Germans, two map boards, and 317 die-cut and silky-smooth playing pieces. Includes gas attacks, advanced artillery rules, tanks, and more. Price: \$65.99. The web site says "Use coupon code DANA for 20-off. Please allow an extra six weeks for delivery."

Devil Dogs opens in March 1918, as the first Marine rifle companies filter into the line in a "quiet" sector near Verdun for their first taste of combat. But the real action begins in late May, when the Marines move to Chateau-Thierry to stem a German offensive. Following that came a summer of intense action at Belleau Wood and Soissons; the 4th Marine Brigade suffered over 9,000 casualties at Belleau Wood (over 100 percent of its authorized strength) and another 50 percent at Soissons.

The Marines swiftly gained a reputation for their fighting ability, assisted by a much longer training period than that afforded U.S. Army units and an unmatched esprit de corps. They began to call themselves "Devil Dogs," a name supposedly given them by their German enemies.

Info: <https://www.avalanchepress.com/DevilDogPublisher.php>



Custom Token Design: Litko

by Russ Lockwood

Litko announces that it will offer a Custom Token Designer will be (as website sez) the "only token maker we've found that lets you design freely — place text, drop in icons, stack lines, choose fonts — watch it come together live, and get a real token made to order. No design degree. No back-and-forth emails. Just your idea, made real. See exactly what you'll get. The designer is fully WYSIWYG — what you see on screen is the real token, so what arrives matches your design.

Custom Token Designer is a full design studio right in your browser. It gives you the kind of creative freedom you'd expect from an online design tool, then delivers it as a real, laser-engraved and laser-cut acrylic token you can hold. As far as we can tell, no one else in tabletop is doing this."

More as I learn more.

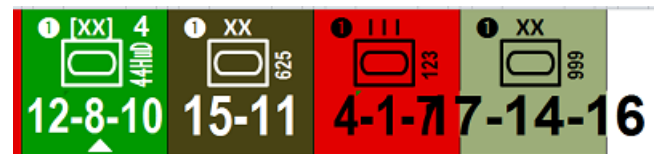
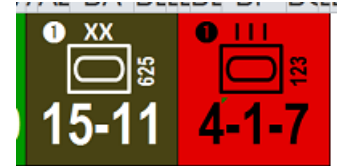
Europa Counter Generator: Excel Savvy

by Russ Lockwood

If you have Excel and a hankering for creating *Europa* counters, you can find a great macro-enhanced counter creator on the Europa IO site. Credit Ralph with the creation and my initial effort to create one worked like a charm. Then I pushed it with three double-digit factors. Oops. My bad. Need to play with the fonts.

Ground, Navy, and Air macros. Note that this is set for *Europa* games only, not a design your own counter. So, unit icons are fixed (although extensive) and the colors are slugged to Europa.

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



ATO: Upcoming Wargames

by Russ Lockwood

Against the Odds magazine announced that its next (and major) release of the year, *Tiger Wings*, is well in hand with various parts pouring into the warehouse. The *Fighting Wings* series of games was designed by J.D. Webster and covers air combat in World War II. The series goes into great detail in attempting to model all aspects of the air war as realistically as possible, which results in a fair amount of complexity.) *Tiger Wings* is a stand-alone game and also an expansion module of tactical air combat in the Far East in WWII between the Japanese and the Allies from 1941 to the end of 1942. \$74.95 includes shipping to USA and \$124.95 includes shipping to outside USA.

Info: <https://www.atomagazine.com/Details.cfm?ProdID=198>

Sharpsburg: Landscape Turned Red in ATO issue #64 is a two-player area-impulse game simulating the great battle of Antietam as it was called in the north, or Sharpsburg as called in the south. One player takes command of the Union Army under General George B. McClellan and the other, the Army of the Confederate States of America under Robert E Lee. \$34.95 includes shipping to USA and \$54.95 includes shipping to outside USA. WWII Bonus Game: *Tunisgrad: The End in North Africa*.

Info: <https://www.atomagazine.com/Details.cfm?ProdID=202>

Hard to Swallow, in the next *ATO Annual* edition, is a two-game package that looks at the initial Russian assaults on Kyiv. *A Road to Ruin* is an operational solitaire design on the Russian attempt to capture Kyiv outright in the first chaotic and brutal month of the war. The second game, *A Terminal Illness*, is a two-player low to moderate level simulation of the battle for the Antonov Airport. \$64.95 includes shipping to USA and \$114.95 includes shipping to outside USA.

Info: <https://www.atomagazine.com/Details.cfm?ProdID=2207&category=18>

Full Disclosure Note: I am the Staff Developer for ATO.

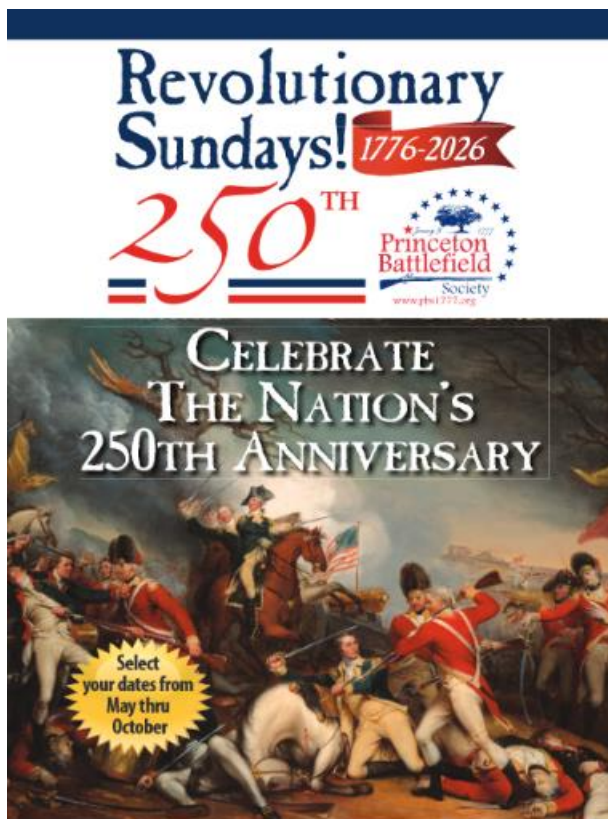


Princeton Battlefield Society: 2026 Events

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

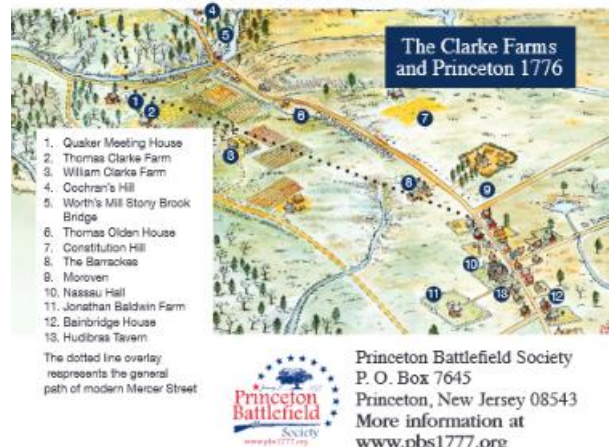
Walking Tour - \$20 per adult

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>



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

BattleField Visit: Princeton

by Russ Lockwood

One low humidity, sunny day, my wife and I drove out to Princeton Battlefield Park, run by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection, for a quick walk around the battlefield proper and the network of trails behind the battlefield. We were last there during its *Experience the Battle of Princeton* re-enactment that brought 3,500 people and over 350 re-enactors together on a sunny, but 25-degree Fahrenheit January 3, 2026. Temperature in the low 70s F seems a nice contrast.

A route marker at the side of a trail.

For full disclosure, I'm a trustee of the Princeton Battlefield Society (PBS), a long-running advocacy group for the preservation of the battlefield land. American Battlefield Trust funded the purchase of a good part of Maxwell Field that contained part of the battle. PBS keeps the battle alive via the re-enactment as well as helping to fund ongoing projects all around the park: memorial plaza to unknown soldiers, restoration of the apple orchard, restoration of a section of the original road the American forces marched upon, improved signage, overall maintenance, and so on. With the land secured, the next project is a Visitor's Center.

PBS also runs the Cadwalader Lecture series, Revolutionary Sunday battlefield tours, and Young Patriots Day for kids. See the PBS website for details and registration.

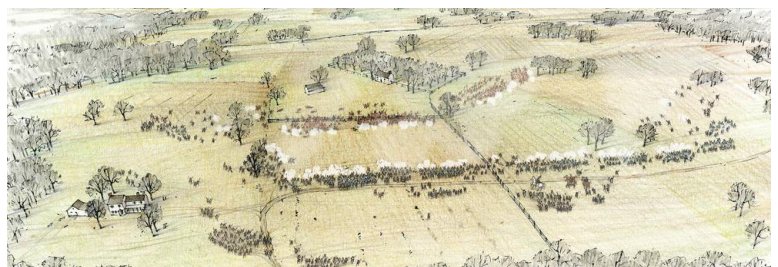
The battle. Image from PBS website.

A Walk In The Park

After parking, we walked up to the Clarke House, an original farmhouse from before the Revolution. It was open this Saturday, so we walked into its ground floor rooms with artifacts and maps. A docent was explaining some of the artifacts in the kitchen to visitors.

The Clarke House. Image from PBS website.

We wandered out the back and onto the trails. Technically, most of the trails run through the Institute Woods, so these were well shaded. Part of a trail served as the road during the American Revolution.



We popped out back at the Clarke House and walked to the hillock overlooking the battlefield. Here was a clever new sign of plexiglass with an illustration. If you line it up properly, you can see a representation of the battle superimposed on the terrain.

Admittedly, my photo is quite a bit off. I lost the grounding line through the viewfinder. Sorry. You'll just have to go and look for yourself.

So close...the line should be at the bottom of the photo to line up the images with the battlefield terrain.



Then it was down the slope where the battle raged around the Mercer Oak tree, so named where a wounded Gen. Hugh Mercer refused to surrender to the British and leaned against its trunk. That's the legend anyway. Mercer was bayoneted for his resistance and taken to Clarke House, where he died.

The original Mercer Oak stood until it collapsed on March 3, 2000. It was about 300 years old. In May 2000, an eight-foot sapling grown from one of its acorns was planted inside the stump of the former tree. The tree you see today is that sapling turned tree.

The Mercer Oak. The hillock is in the distance. Clarke House is off photo to right.



And after an hour or so of wonderful walking, we headed back to the car.

Links

Princeton Battlefield Park is at 500 Mercer St., Princeton, NJ 08540.

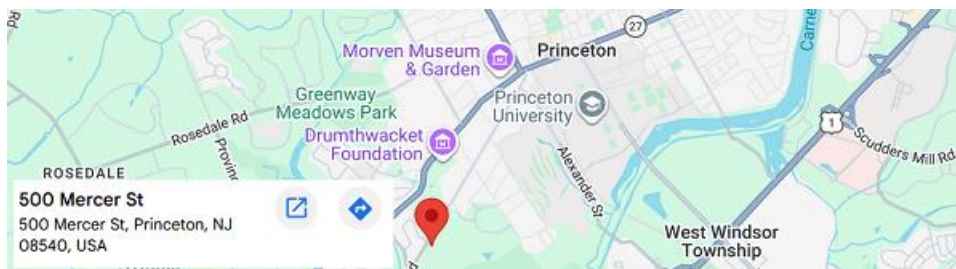
Info: <https://dep.nj.gov/parksandforests/state-park/princeton-battlefield-state-park/>

Princeton Battlefield Society Info: www.pbs1777.org

PBS' Young Patriots Day is September 20, 2026.

Info: <https://pbs1777.org/event/youngpatriotsday/>

Map to Princeton Battlefield Park (the red marker).



Morven used to be the NJ Governor's Mansion before Drumthwacket. Info: <https://www.morven.org/>

If you drive 4 miles north through Princeton on Route 27, you will come to Kingston, which has Rockingham -- George Washington's Final Wartime Headquarters -- about 1 mile north of 27. Info: <https://www.rockingham.net/>

Burlington, VT: Quick Getaway

by Russ Lockwood

The deal is, if I bring my wife to a battlefield, she brings me to a quilt exhibit. In this case, it was off to the Vermont Quilt Show in Burlington, VT. Held at the Doubletree, it was two ballrooms' worth of vendors, several smaller rooms of classes (with rows and rows of sewing machines), and outer hallways lined with 19th century vintage quilts. I took one look and immediately regretted I had not brought several books -- she was going to be hours in here. I mean, this show is akin to wargamers going to Historicon for gaming.

So, with understanding, I hopped back in the car and went...to Google maps. Nearby I found a game store.

Vermont Gaming Academy

Getting to the store proved a bit difficult due to traffic, rain, and unfamiliarity with the area. Short version: It's located in University Mall between a Target and Kohl's.

Just inside VGA's door.

To my surprise, it's a large store, not the narrow single storefront I was expecting. I wandered around and found a lot of *Magic* and card-related items, video games, and even a few old coin-operated arcade games.

A small *Warhammer* cabinet display was towards the back, along with another display of fantasy miniatures. A good selection of paints, tools, and other accessories were available. RPGs were on a wall display. A small shelf of euro games were in the middle of the store.

Alas, no historicals -- miniatures or boardgames. It's not surprising as that category is less popular than fantasy and sci-fi.

What is surprising is that VGA must be doing quite well. Across the hall of the mall is The Expansion -- another VGA storefront that serves as a gaming area as well as a retail expansion.

Even more surprising is down the hall is The Vault, yet another VGA storefront that serves as a gaming area as well as a retail expansion. While I was there, about a dozen players were gaming *Warhammer 40K First Strike* -- a smaller format *W40K* game with a dozen or so miniatures and a lot of cards. One gamer said, and I'm not sure if he was joking or not, that he drove three hours to play. Being polite, I almost replied, "That's OK, I drove seven hours just to watch you play *First Strike*."

So, great game complex for the gamer, although limited for the miniature and historical gamer.

In the center of the mall was a Hot Wheels expo with tables of



dealers selling the little cars, most for a couple bucks, but at least one at \$185. No, I don't know the collector's side of Hot Wheels. As a kid I had a few Matchbox and Hot Wheels vehicles along with a Hot Wheels set with orange track that could make a loop-the-loop. Long gone in some landfill, I imagine.

Years ago, I bought a Hot Wheels Mystery Machine van for my Scooby Doo-mad wife. We use it as an Xmas ornament, so I went looking for another, but no luck.

VGA's The Vault.

Downtown Burlington

With that, I was back in the car for a trip to downtown Burlington -- Google maps said there was a game store somewhere around there. If I thought traffic around University Mall was tough, I was in a right proper Jersey jamarama heading downtown around noon-ish. I finally just turned off down a side street and promptly went nowhere. Enough of this. After multiple light changes, I finally got through an intersection and popped down another street heading away from downtown.

I ended up driving through the University of Vermont campus and eventually led to another road that ended me back at the Doubletree. I had noticed a Barnes & Noble opposite the University Mall and headed back there through saner traffic.

Milton Historical Society museum.

Barnes & Noble

This B&N is like other B&Ns near my NJ home with one difference: it has a large room for used books and clearance items. Used books? In a B&N? I didn't find any books I wanted to buy, but I did find the wall and shelves of discounted games.

The first thing that caught my eye was *Scooby Doo Operation*. It's the old *Operation* game where you try and lift body parts out of the patient with tweezers, but with Scooby Doo motif. I have no idea whether it works or not, but for \$15, worth a go. I picked up a couple other discounted euro games, which you will likely read about in future AARs as I crack the shrinkwrap.

I also wandered around the store and looked through the small sci-fi section. Picked up a novel which will find its way into the review section in the future.

I headed back to the hotel for a sit down.

Inside the Milton Historical Society museum.

Milton Historical Society

I poked around and discovered that the Milton Historical Society in nearby Milton, VT, was open. As I had a little time, I drove up and found the converted church that serves as its HQ and museum.

I spoke to Lou and Charlie, trustees of the Society and guardians of Milton history. A lot of the original Milton had been washed away in a flood and of course rebuilt. The town was known for auto racing, with an oval track as well as a dragstrip -- the former redeveloped and the latter about to be redeveloped.



Of immediate notice, and rather clever, is a quilt showcasing the history of the town and a computer screen where you can isolate and learn about the various panels with headphones supplying commentary.

I spent a rather delightful hour talking about local history.

And with that it was back to the quilt show to pick up my wife and off for an early dinner as we had skipped lunch.

Entry fee: Free, although donations accepted.

Info: miltonvthistory.org



Restaurants

As we had three nights in Burlington, we went to three fine restaurants: Vietnamese (Pho Tang), Italian (Jr's), and a burger-bar (Spanked Puppy). All three are recommended and we'd go back to all of them.

The Birds of Vermont Museum.

Birds of Vermont Museum

About a half-hour southeast of Burlington sits the Birds of Vermont Museum. It's in the foothills and showcases the work of Bob Spear, who decided to carve all the birds of Vermont, including migratory species. According to the docent, over 500 carvings are on display on two floors. A short seven-minute video describes the man and the mission.

The ground floor contains a long coastal scene, a small room of extinct species, and a heckuva big turkey. An observation window overlooks bird feeders, including one being used by a hummingbird during our visit.

A section of the coastal display.



Upstairs is a raptors room and then comes a darkened room filled with cases of individual carvings along with carved habitat. I never knew there were so many warbler species, but then again, I'm not an ornithologist. The leaves are made of aluminum and individually cut and etched.

The museum's 100 acres of hilly land contains walking trails, but sadly, a recent storm dislodged a boulder that cracked into the support for the wooden bridge to the start of the main trail, so it is closed until fixed.

However, the trails across the road were open, so we headed uphill to the observation blind by the pond and decided, since the sun was shining for the first time all weekend, to take the 1.5-mile loop trail up the hill.

The mirror turns this shot into a selfie.



You'd think a trail on the hillside would be well drained, but we soon ran into soggy ground, the puddles, and then waterlogged trail sections. Some detours onto higher and drier ground were necessary, but hiking boots or not, we were water logged, too.

Still, it was a nice, albeit squishy, hike for an hour or so. As we headed back to Burlington, the rain returned.

Entry fee: \$6 per person for seniors -- not sure if I should be pleased that I'm finally eligible for senior pricing or sad that I'm old enough to actually be in the senior class. Usual adult rate is \$9 per person and \$4.50 kid ages 3 to 17.

Info: birdsofvermont.org



One aisle of the three upstairs.

Ethan Allen Homestead

Just north of the city, we ventured out to the Ethan Allen Homestead, which consists of his original house and a barn-turned-lecture hall and gift shop. By fluke of timing, the site waived the \$15 per person entry fee for out-of-towners. As it was the end of the day, a docent led us on a shortened version of the tour. The rain thankfully dropped to a sprinkle while we walked from barn to house. When we walked back to the car, it was back to rain.

Ethan Allen was a land speculator in the area with his brothers. The English king granted the land now known as Vermont to New Hampshire, which sold it to the Allen clan. Alas, a different English king granted the same land to New York, which attempted to exert its rights and toss out the "NH" settlers. The Green Mountain Boys were created to enforce settler rights. It was a right brouhaha that took a while to settle.

Anyway, the house was built by his brother, who owned a saw mill, and Ethan and family moved in. Over the centuries, it was added onto, but in the 1980s, the house was renovated back to its original American colonial form and its additions removed. The interior is as Ethan would have lived.

Apparently, flax was a cash crop. These long strands of grass were broken and the innards combed out and refined with additional combings and spinning to create the raw material used to weave into clothing. Learn something new every day.

So ended a pleasant tour, although I didn't snap a single photo.

Info: ethanallenhomestead.org

Great Warship Designs

*Sometimes, AI creates unique warship designs...
Sorry, I didn't record who brought this to my attention, but thanks for the chuckle.*



World's Tallest Filing Cabinet

I'm a sucker for this Americana world's biggest this and first that, often to the chagrin of my wife. On the way back to the hotel, we navigated to the World's Tallest Filing Cabinet. Lo and behold, the clouds parted just for my visit.

This attraction is in Burlington at the foot of the new I-189 on-ramp (to be opened next day that we were there).

The 38-drawer spire and was created in 2002 to satirize bureaucracy of the I-189 road project, proposed in 1965. The web is all over the place in terms of height, with various entries saying it's 38 feet high, over 40 feet tall, and 50 feet tall. Take your pick. I have no idea if it is the actual tallest, for the web says Napa, CA, has a 65-foot tall filing cabinet.

The Burlington version sits in a parking lot, empty on a Sunday afternoon.

Yep. It's a tall stack of filing cabinets. Ahhhh, another bucket list item I never knew existed now checked off.



Homeward Bound

And with that, our quick foray into Vermont came to an end -- although we drove through a monsoon to get back home.



BOOKS I'VE READ

By Russ Lockwood

Nine Years War 1593-1603: Part 2. by James O'Neill. Softcover (7.2x9.8 inches). 203 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Turning Point at Kinsale 1598-1603*

Subtitle: *From Retinue to Regiment No. 35*

Well-written account of the Irish rebellion against England complete with a multitude of skirmishes that ultimately led to the Battle of Kinsale as the English defeated an uncoordinated Irish-Spanish force.

The Irish fielded 500 men and fewer in just about all the skirmishes, but they made extensive use of their mobility and knowledge of the land to ambush English raids. The English commanders appointed by Elizabeth I proved mostly inept until Mountjoy, who took pains to shore up his logistics before launching raids, capturing and fortifying castles, slaughtering the Irish they found, and burning Irish crops and homes. A little bribery didn't hurt, either.

The Irish finally convinced the Spanish to send a fleet and army, but storms scattered the fleet and only a few thousand troops landed in and around Kinsale in southern Ireland. The English sealed in the Spanish and the Irish marched to break the siege. The big battle of the campaign pitted less than 5,000 troops per side.

Of note, England's debasement of its own coinage served to reduce Irish purchases of overseas weapons and munitions (p97-98) -- an unusual, if effective strategy.

The book contains 10 black and white photos, 21 black and white illustrations, eight color uniform illustrations, and 41 black and white maps -- the vast majority being period maps. Bravo for supplying so many maps, admittedly somewhat hard to read and often without a scale, but an excellent starting point for laying out a tabletop for a skirmish.

Filled with details, this Part 2 offers a fine look at the back half of the English campaign to suppress the Irish revolt. Despite the size and resource difference, the campaign could have gone either way. Well done.

From *Retinue to Regiment No. 29* is *Part 1* of the *Nine Years War*. A number of the *From Retinue to Regiment* series volumes covers Elizabethan warfare, notably the three volumes of *The Tudor Arte of Warre*.

Enjoyed it.

Defeat at the Dnepr. by Simon Waring. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 420 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The XLVIII PanzerKorps' Counterattack at Kiev November 1943*

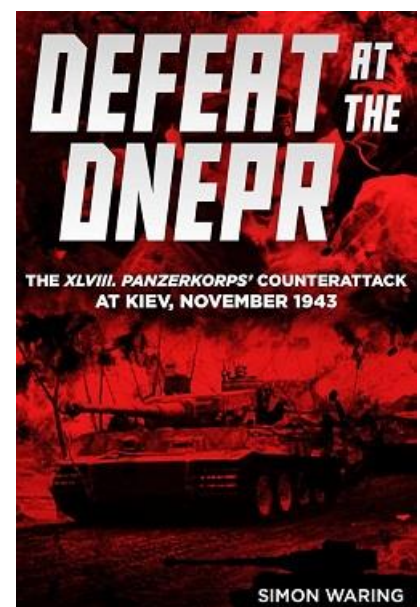
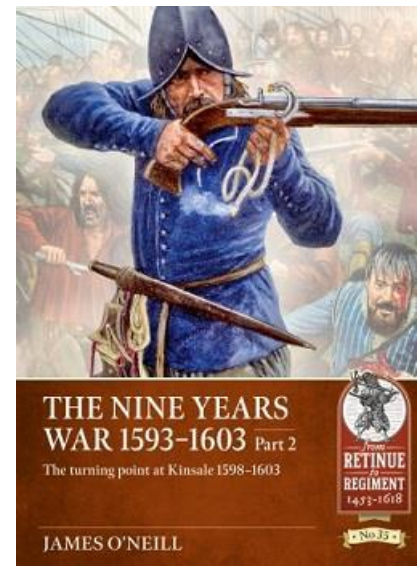
I always get this sinking feeling when a book is a converted Masters or PhD thesis. Surprisingly, and thankfully, almost all the "academia prose" was banished from the text, leaving an exceptional tactical-operation recap and analysis of an East Front German counter-attack that lasted from November 3 through November 26, 1943.

Clear descriptions of planning and execution of attacks and defense, a horde of numbers and details about such actions, and superb use of excerpts (a nice sprinkling, not the oft-used ham-handed report/memoir info dumps on every page) make this a pleasure to read and digest.

Sure, all those tiny villages and town names kinda look alike to my wooden Western eyes, but I am pleased they are included so I can follow the action. Constant referencing to higher-level units helps establish and keep unit relationships within a general map area -- that and flipping back and forth to the maps.

I am continually amazed at how panzer divisions would be ordered to attack despite having only a company worth of tanks operational -- or less. The only German division with a relatively full complement was the newly formed and never battle-tested 25th Panzer Division. It went into combat piecemeal and without adequate recon, took heavy losses around Fastov, but at least stopped the southern and westward progress of two Soviet armies. The drip-drip-drip of German and Soviet losses from fighting over them all receive constant attention.

Kudos for reconciling post-war memoirs with actual reports. As this book covers the battle on a day by day basis, some recollections match up and some do not. The "delay" at relieving the logistics and transportation hub at



Zhitomyr gets a nice discussion -- and an opportunity for a tabletop battle about what would happen if the panzers were not diverted to that town and instead used for an attack towards Kiev. Good fact checking and analysis here.

Any tabletop battle will have to deal with the incessant rain during the counter-attack. On the one hand, both sides didn't get any air support except for brief times. On the other, the mud was a disaster for movement, reflected in the importance of recapturing the Zhitomyr-Kiev paved highway.

The book contains 25 black and white photos, one black and white illustration, and 10 color maps (mix of operational and tactical). I would have liked to see the "key hills" mentioned in the text noted on the maps.

In the end, the counter-attack achieved some objectives and failed in others. Prepared Soviet defenses, aggressive recons, and constant reinforcements did more to end the counterattack than the mud. Read this book and you'll know exactly why. Superb.

Enjoyed it.

The Kingdom Torn Apart: From Reason to Revolution No. 161. by Eirik Hornborg. Translated by Erik Faithfull. Softcover (7.1x9.8 inches). 276 pages. 2026 translation of 1955 book.

Subtitle: *The Finnish War of 1808-1809*

Although 71 years old, this book offers an "annotated" version of the original text with added period illustrations, troop dispositions on the marvelous maps, and streamlined English terminology. Note that the Swedish language bibliographical references have been omitted.

A color version of the campaign map/gazetteer (p. xvii) -- based on the Finnish General Staff History account of the war -- is available for download at Helion's web site: <https://www.helion.co.uk/docs/docs/overview-map-gazetteer-1089.jpg>

Kudos for that! And more kudos for splitting the map up and inserting the appropriate sections within the text. Author and Helion editors deserve praise for this mix.

As for that readable translation of the war, the Russians wanted Swedish-owned Finland, the French wanted Sweden (a British Ally) to adopt the French Continental System to prevent trade with Britain, and at least some Finns agitated to be part of Russia. Russia invaded in 1808 and again in 1809 -- but this is not the 1812-style campaign with a cast of hundreds of thousands. This is a smaller scale invasion with only tens of thousands, including the naval forces involved. The larger tactical battles involved around 5,000 per side.

Better yet, these tactical battles have a nice map with terrain, troop deployments/movements, and scale. The text mentions the numbers. It's as if Hornborg was a wargamer.

If only you knew what Finnish uniforms looked like... In the color center section, two pages containing 25 color uniform illustrations provide a Finnish army reference guide. The kudos continue to pile up.

The book contains 43 black and white illustrations, 14 black and white photos, 23 black and white maps, 25 color Finnish Army uniform illustrations, 13 color commander illustrations, and 13 color photos.

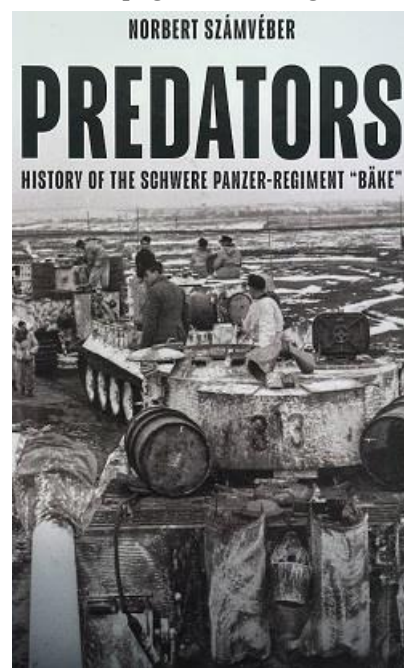
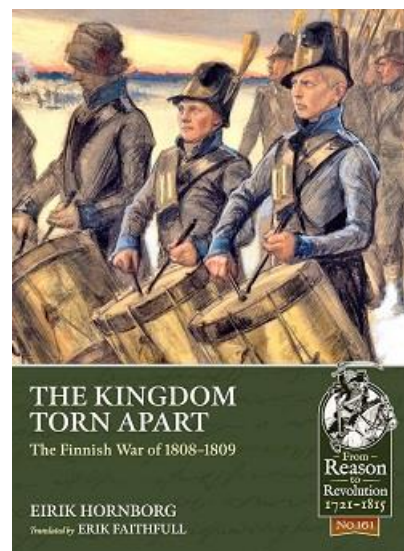
The descriptions of the tactical battles and skirmishes showcase an ebb and flow to attacks and counter-attacks, often with an outcome based more on morale than numbers. And this was true on both sides. Naval landings and battles are covered as well. Well done!

Enjoyed it.

Predators: A History of Schwere Panzer-Regiment Bake. by Norbert Szamveber. Translated by Blanka Biro. Hardback (6.3x9.5 inches). 375 pages. 2025 translation of 2021 book.

German Schwere Panzer-Regiment Bake consisted of a battalion of Tiger tanks and a battalion of Panther tanks placed under the command of Lt.Col. Dr. Franz Bake -- dentist turned talented panzer commander. In January 1944, for a period of about a month and a half, the unit was used as part of the relief force trying to punch through the Soviets to extricate the men in the Korsun Pocket.

Hence, this book is an extremely tactical look at the winter drive to the



pocket. Unlike the attempt to reach Stalingrad back in 1942-43, this effort was mostly successful, with about 3/4 of the pocket's troops able to escape.

The day-by-day account includes weather conditions at the start of each day -- kudos for that info for all us tabletop scenario designers. The mud, and there seemed to be lots of mud, caused fuel consumption to be triple normal use.

Attacks, withdrawals, tactics, logistics, successes, and failures all figure into the narrative. Lots of numerical data also gets sandwiched into the text -- and the numbers of Soviet tanks destroyed ("burned out" in Soviet nomenclature) and damaged are truly amazing. Fortunately, comparisons of German and Soviet archival reports keep the numbers honest, and where there are discrepancies, a thoughtful analysis helps us understand likely outcomes.

Notably, German heavy tank losses from Soviet fire were low, but from mechanical failure were high (p150). Appendix 2 Losses and Casualties (p251) notes that the Soviets lost 268 tanks, 156 AT/Artillery guns, and 112 trucks from Jan. 24 to Jan. 31, 1944. Regiment Bake started with 34 Tigers and 47 Panthers and came out with 18 Tigers and 15 Panthers -- of which four Tigers and four Panthers were lost due to enemy fire and the rest to mechanical issues (p256).



Likewise, every little Soviet village attacked or bypassed is within the text. Two reworked operational maps (plus the hard to read originals) are in the back of the book -- more kudos, but I have to take one away because these two maps have no scale. The detailed small tactical maps don't have scales either. Some yardage is mentioned within the text. And sometimes, you have to watch the spelling discrepancies between the text and map. Frankovka (text) is named Shrankovka (map 6).

It doesn't help that German battlegroups' frontage is "from 1,000 to 12,000 meters wide" (p19), which might be 1,200m? Depth is 1,200m. Diagram 3 of a German Tiger heavy panzer company of three platoons of four tanks each (two platoons wide with the third trailing) is listed at 700m across and 400m deep. Diagram 4 shows a five-tank Panther platoon in wedge formation being 400 to 500 meters across. Gunners would take main gun shots at up to 2,000 to 2,500m (p30), although distances cited in the text were generally around 500m or less. Gunners would open up MG fire at 400m (p31).

The book contains 66 black and white photos, two black and white maps, two black and white tank formations, five black and white period visual German OOBs, and 12 color maps.

Also, let's give Blanka Biro a standing ovation for the translation. This is a most readable unit history, even with all the numerical details. Detailed. Smooth prose. Tabletop-worthy scenarios. Excellent.

Enjoyed it.

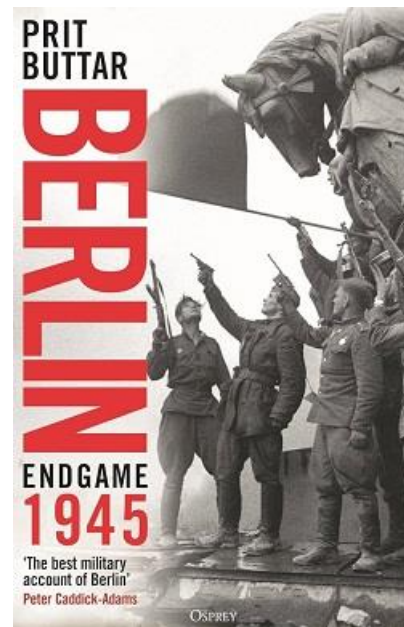
Berlin: Endgame 1945. by Prit Buttar. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 456 pages. 2026.

Starting with the opening of Barbarossa -- and thankfully brief recap of the Eastern Front to the end of 1944 -- the action picks up in January 1945 as the Soviets pushed into Germany proper. By this point, German resources are far lower than what's needed to stem the Soviet Army.

Starting April 16, it's day by day narrative of the Soviet offensive to surround and capture Berlin. Desperate defenses amidst urban fighting took a toll on Soviet forces even as fewer and fewer German troops remained. Hitler ordered imaginary formations to relieve Berlin to no effect. Himmler tried to negotiate via neutral country contacts. German commanders and troops tried to head west to surrender to the Western Allies.

Soviet front commanders vied with each other to push the offensive the fastest and furthest. Zhukov, facing the toughest terrain, was particularly keen to capture Berlin, even ignoring front boundaries to do so, before Konev.

The key day is April 22, 1945. Why? After a particularly nasty Hitler tirade about the Army failing him, the Fuhrer stared at the map and said, "Der



Krieg ist verloren" (the war is lost). After that, he said to the assembled commanders, "Do whatever you want. I'm not giving any more orders." (p262)

Buttar uses a lot of long excerpts. He's done his research, but after a while, all the combat descriptions tend to be similar and in the back half of the book, I tended to skim through the long excerpts. His prose is quite readable -- and preferable to combat reports, memoirs, and such. To me, his prose conjures up the complimentary phrase "like butter." Only I am tempted to replace that with "like Buttar." To me, that pun is a high compliment and should be taken as such for such a smooth read.

The book contains 16 black and white photos and 17 black and white maps (just to be clear: with scales).

This is an excellent read, explaining and analyzing the tension among Soviet commanders, the operational maneuvers, and the tactical details for the troops in the foxholes. Well done.

Enjoyed it.



Giuseppe Garibaldi and the Army of the Vosges. by Mark Lause.
Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 282 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Volunteer Forces of the Franco-Prussian War 1870-1871*

While Garibaldi is generally well known for his efforts at unifying Italy in the mid 19th century, I had no idea that this advocate for a Universal Republic was commander of the French Army of the Vosges during the Franco-Prussian War. He arrived in Marseilles after Napoleon III surrendered and a republican government was declared in Paris.

Previously bouncing around the world trying to help local forces in South America set up Republics, he found his way to France to become commander of the French Army of the Vosges. However, "Army" is a bit of a misnomer because his collection of international adventurers and assigned French troops could barely be called a regiment, although it grew to be four brigades and thus a small division of about 5,000 to 8,000. Army is an optimistic term. The numbers may be a bit optimistic, too.

It had little in the way of uniforms, arms, and logistics. The new French Army of old Imperial officers sent little his way -- not even intelligence reports. Yet Garibaldi's Army fought in three battles: a loss at Dijon, a successful defense of Autun, and a successful capture of Dijon.

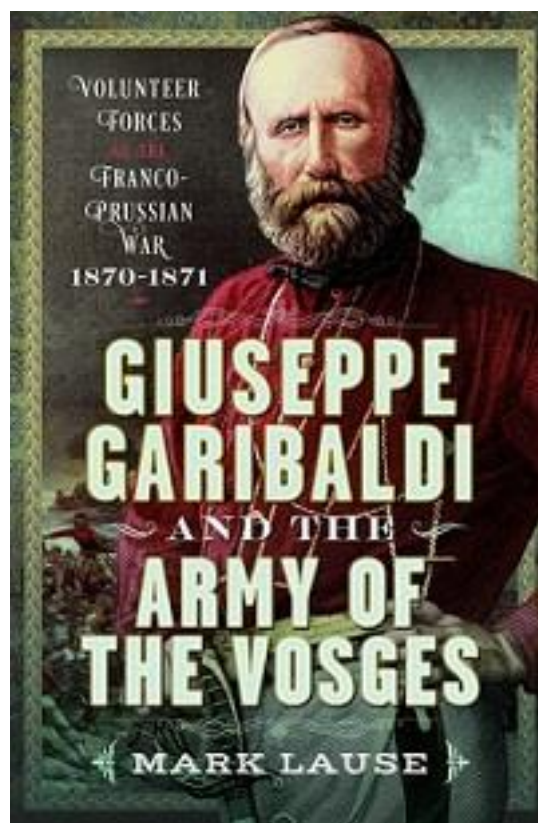
In the end, his numbers were too small to make much more of a local difference. The large French armies surrendered, the new republican government signed an armistice, and most amazingly of all, the armistice did NOT cover the areas in and around the Army of the Vosges. Think about that. Most of the country was done with fighting, but not the areas around Dijon. The Baden troops were not that keen on continuing the fighting -- no one wants to be the last death in a war already with an armistice.

A few typos, mostly concerning lack of commas or spaces, although footnote 35 notes "the fenders" which should be "the defenders" (p153) and Prussians "surrendered" should be "surrounded" (p116).

The book contains 13 black and white photos, 15 black and white illustrations, and seven black and white maps -- without scales. You'll find some distances within the text. What is it with a rash of books with scale-less maps? An appendix contains a nice Vosges Army OOB with numbers. That almost makes up for the lack of scales. You'll need to look up numbers for the Badeners and Prussians.

It's a last campaign for Garibaldi and a nice slice of the Franco-Prussian War for readers.

Enjoyed it.



The Thin Khaki Line. by Brian E. Walter. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 351 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *An Operational History of the British and Commonwealth Armies During World War II*

This overview of the British Army, including Commonwealth forces, examines its strategic positionings along with operational failures and successes in WWII. Everything is placed within the context of Allied efforts to defend, survive, and then attack the Axis in Europe and Pacific theaters.

The text contains aggregate numerical data of forces, battles, and campaigns: troops, tanks, losses, equipment, POWs, and so on. This rarely goes below division level, so "operational history" is the operative phrase.

The boon contains 40 black and white photos and nine black and white large-scale maps (with scales). I really shouldn't have to keep mentioning scales. That should be the default on any map.

Anyway, this is a well-written introduction to the WWII British Army and its accomplishments as well as charting the ebb and flow of Allied fortunes during the war.

Enjoyed it.

Ancient British & Irish Celts in Greek and Roman Sources. by Raoul McLaughlin. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 201 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *500 BC to AD 60*

Another nice consolidation of ancient sources translated into English, this time centering on ancient Britain and Ireland. The usual main suspects are represented -- Julius Caesar, Tacitus, Strabo, and Cassius Dio, for example -- but more obscure references are included as well.

I rather enjoyed the voyage of Pytheus of Massalia (modern day Marseilles) from 325BS to 324 BC, who dodged Carthaginian ships on his way past the Pillars of Hercules (Gibraltar) and sailed up the Celtic (French) coast and out to Britannia's south coast and around modern-day Cornwall. Then, he went up the west coast of Britain (facing Ireland) and around the northern top to Thule.

Thule seems still a bit of a conundrum -- it could be the modern-day Orkneys, Faroe Islands, or even Iceland. In any case, he completed the circumnavigation of Britain and headed east along the coast, up and around modern-day Denmark and perhaps as far as the Eastern Baltic around Lithuania or Latvia. Then he returned to Massalia.

The rest will depend on how much you've read the classics of ancient sources. If you've read the main suspects, little will be new. If not, then much will be new.

A note on pay: average unskilled laborer in Imperial Roman times received four sesterces for a day's work (p56). A Roman legion cost 11 million sesterces per year (p39). With 30 to 33 legions, that's a lot of sesterces as a defense expenditure (not to mention the navy).

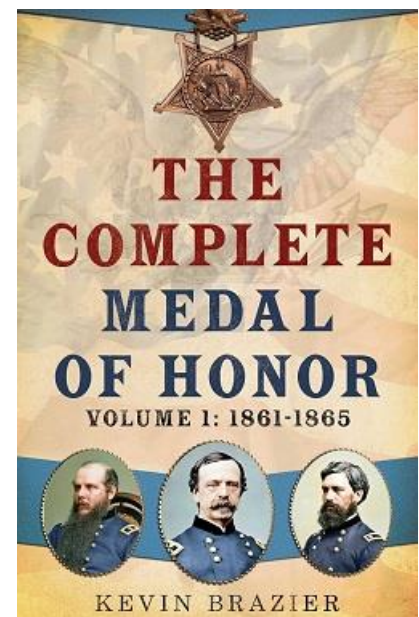
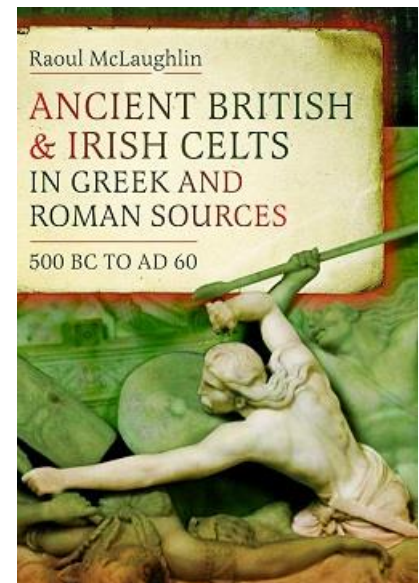
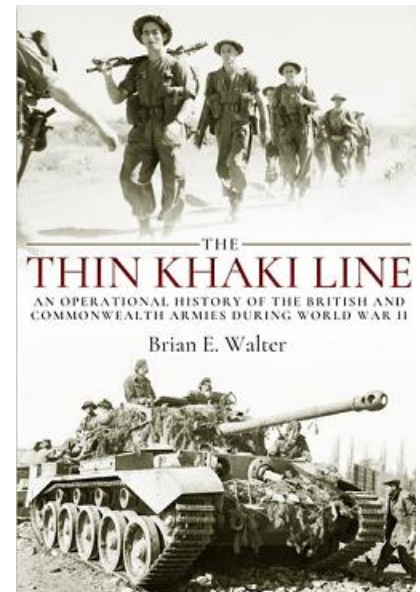
The book contains four black and white maps and 83 color photos (68 of period coins -- 34 obverse and 34 reverse sides).

I'm not quite sure what you can glean for tabletop scenarios, but it may inspire you to read the full versions of the period sources. The explorations of Pytheus might make for an interesting scenario as some sort of Eurogame. It's good to read translations about a concentrated geographic area, so ties go to the author.

Enjoyed it.

The Complete Medal of Honor: Volume 1 1861-1865. by Kevin Brazier. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 375 pages. 2026.

The first of four volumes covers the Medal of Honor recipients of the



American Civil War. Each of the 1,525 men and one woman receives a short mini-bio with date of birth, citation with event which earned them the award, death date, and location of the grave (if available).

That's pretty much it. The citations often read "at [battle] captured flag of [CSA regiment]." I noted that 21 men received the award for the same event, and 79 men received it at the same time for a different event.

The one woman recipient, Dr. Mary Walker, was a surgeon who tended wounded at Bull Run, Chickamauga, Atlanta, and a hospital in Washington DC. Interestingly, the US Army stripped her of the medal in 1917 along with 909 others in some reassessment of the awards. She refused to give the medal back. In 1977, the Army reversed itself and reinstated her award.

In the history of the medal section, the Army reinstated Buffalo Bill Cody's award and four other civilians' awards in 1989, but the other 905 (p10) remained stripped of the medal. Of note that the Army in 1918 reaffirmed that civilians could be awarded the medal, but in 1963, that was amended to exclude civilians.

The book contains 80 black and white photos.

Brazier has found a niche with award list books, including ones on Victoria Cross, Knights Cross, Blue Max, and George Cross. You might find a recipient's action that merits a special rule in a tabletop scenario or maybe in a RPG, but otherwise, it's a complete listing. The bibliography lists other books with Medal of Honor listings, but as I had not read those, I'm not sure how they differ.

For his prodigious compilation, ties go to the author.

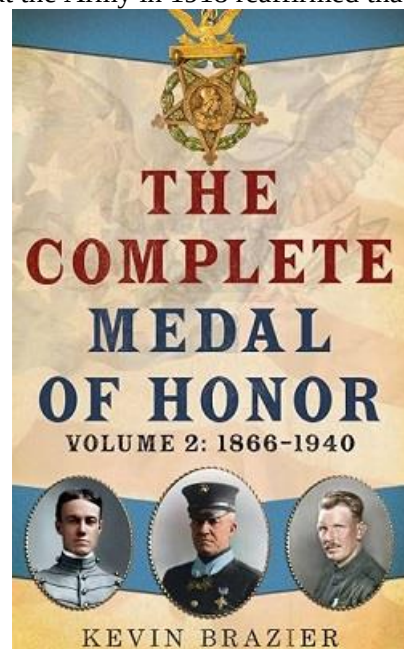
Enjoyed it.

The Complete Medal of Honor: Volume 2 1866-1940. by Kevin Brazier.
Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 288 pages. 2026.

The second of four volumes continues the mini-bios of Medal of Honor recipients. Same format as *Volume 1*: date of birth, citation with event which earned them the award, death date, and location of the grave (if available).

The book contains 114 black and white photos.

Same conclusion: For his prodigious compilation, ties go to the author.
Enjoyed it.



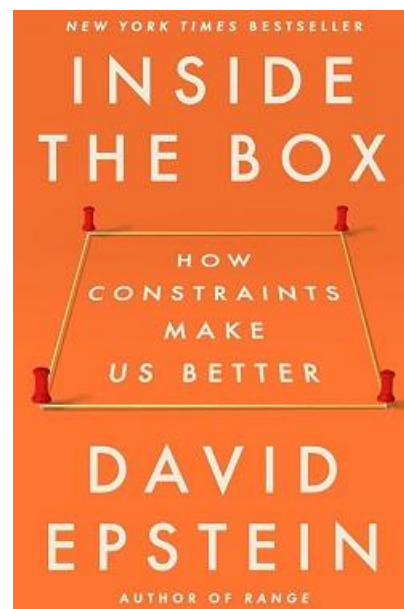
Inside the Box: How Constraints Make Us Better. by David Epstein.
Hardback (6.2x9.3 inches). 278 pages. 2026.

The premise is that limitations in resources contribute to finding efficient solutions to problems and that an overabundance of resources and time contribute to "feature-itis" that creates bloated solutions over budget and over time.

I didn't know it back in the mid-1990s, but I inadvertently discovered this premise as AT&T editorial director of consumer web division. At one point in the launch-no launch process, I exclaimed to higher ups that "You're designing for Version 8. You need to launch the beta version like Microsoft did for Windows."

As I came out of covering the personal computer industry, I knew companies launched products that were close enough to prime time in order to generate momentum and funds. Alas, 'twas not to be. As my editorial director of business web division colleague noted, "The coolest product never launched." Presumably, all the code is backed up somewhere in some vault, but at the time, AT&T needed the hard drive space, so the programming staff rigged up the delete key with a macro that deleted the entire site -- to the music of some rock & roll remake of the Underdog cartoon theme song.

Anyway, the book leads off with General Magic, who had multinational companies' investments and a concept IPO in the bank and apparently was designing for Version 8 as well. Featuritus set in and just like that, the company imploded and its alumni went on to start other companies, notably one that brought out the Palm Pilot. Part of the problem was HARKing -- Hypothesis After Results Known -- otherwise known as selective fact picking for validation. You might know it better as an adage about lies and statistics.



The essential nub of the book: Constraints shut down many possibilities but stimulate more varied and novel exploration of those that remain (p58). Or put another way, constraints show where to focus, such as shifting resources to deal with bottlenecks, assuming said bottlenecks can be segmented enough so that extra people or resources can be used and not stockpiled.

Examples of one sort or another fill the rest of the book. I can buy the concept of constraint even if some of the examples push the idea. He does mention that there is a minimum amount of resources necessary.

The book contains one black and white illustration.

Wargaming often suffers from feature-itis: whether it's the number of die roll modifiers, or the special exceptions to a general rule, many is the game where chart pondering is more important than tactics or strategy.

That said, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein opined no single feature is common to games. Philosopher Bernard Suits rebutted with game play is "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (p232-233).

Cute. James Dunnigan had about the same idea: Wargaming is a hobby for the over-educated.

For management, a little constraint might push product development along. A little more management decisiveness about locking down the development path would be even better.

Enjoyed it.

Rodolfo Graziani: Story of an Italian General. by Alessandro Cova.
Translated by James Cetrullo. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 255 pages. 2021 translation of 1987 reprint of 1987 book.

This biography jumps around in time, starting with Graziani's 1940 offensive into Egypt and subsequent devastating British counterattack. Mussolini's decision to enter WWII to get a seat at the victory table backfired for lack of a suitably equipped military. On June 10, the paper-strength "eight million bayonets" of the Italian Army was actually 1.3 million and some of the existing divisions lacked up to 92% of TO&E equipment (p14-15).

Indeed, as Graziani was chief of staff of the Army from November 1, 1939 on, he had sent a 121-page memorandum outlining all the shortcomings of the Army. Mussolini replied not to worry, the war will be a naval-aerial war and the Army won't do much (p15). Graziani's downfall after his desert debacle was swift.

For a while, he was the hero of the Italian colonies. His victorious exploits between the world wars in Libya and Ethiopia against even worse-armed natives garnered accolades and promotions. He had also served in WWI as well, surviving where others had not.

As for the book, while interesting because I knew little about Graziani, the use of page after page after page of period telegrams didn't thrill me. Sure, it showcased his mental state, but I don't need an info dump of an archive, I need an analysis of that info. To my mind, excerpts should be used sparingly to add impact to an analysis, not just show a descent into the archive.

For example, picking out telegrams and report excerpts about the use of poison gas against the natives proved to be powerful evidence against those who would deny such use.

Graziani ultimately ended up the Army chief of the RSI -- Mussolini's puppet government set up by the Nazis after freeing him from Allied capture. Like many an Axis general during the post-WWII Cold War, Marshal Graziani was tried, delayed, tried, shuffled to a military court, convicted of what he had already said he did, and sentenced to time served. In 1950, he was free to go and try and reclaim his property confiscated during the war.

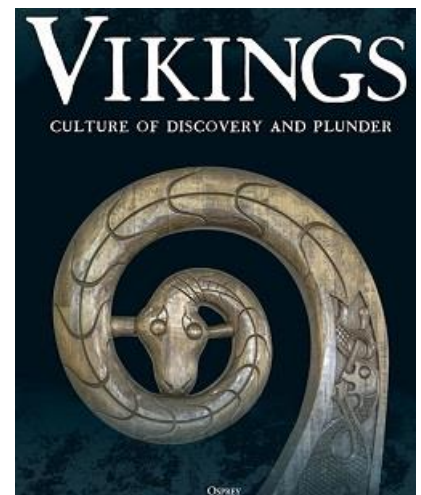
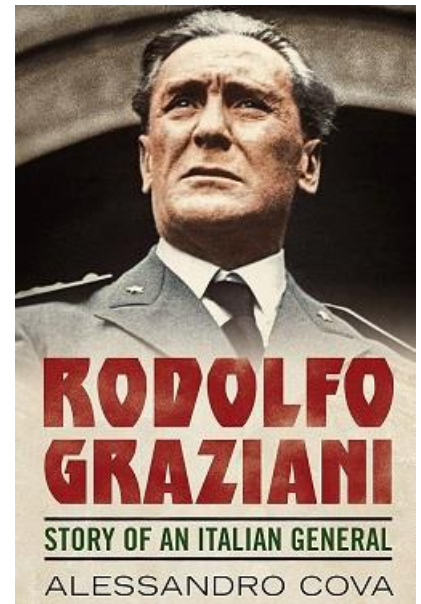
The book contains 40 black and white photos and two black and white illustrations.

Despite its excerpt-mania, it's a generally good biography, especially if, like me, you don't know much about Graziani.

Enjoyed it.

Vikings: Culture of Discovery and Plunder. by variety. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 256 pages. 2025 compilation of numerous previous Osprey booklets.

Unless most books, where the author retains copyright over the work, Osprey buys the copyrights to the text and original illustrations for one lump



sum. Whether a particular booklet sells one copy or a million, is reprinted or not, the author is paid the same. Likewise, Osprey owns all the uniform and vehicle illustrations -- you can buy the original artwork from the artist, but reproduction rights rest with Osprey.

In any case, this long pre-ambles is to let you know this book, with no author's name on the cover, is a compilation of a variety of Viking booklets: *Combat 27*, *Combat 63*, *Weapon 66*, *Elite 3*, *Warrior 3*, and *New Vanguard 47*.

In particular, I found the concise explanation of Ragnarok (p36), which was a bit different than I thought. While obliteration and battle is part of it, resurrection is also a part of it after the big final battle.

This will explain all things viking, from domestic culture to warrior weaponry and tactics. You won't find specific battles outlined in detail enough for a tabletop scenario, but for everything else, including color uniform and ship illustrations, here's a one-stop source.

The book contains nine black and white illustrations, 57 color illustrations, 80 color photos, and eight black and white photos.

If you already own the booklets, then you have little reason to buy this hardback compilation. If not, then you have an opportunity to basically obtain them all in one well-written hardback book.

Enjoyed it.

Naval Warfare Under the Byzantine Empire. by Augustine H. Kobayashi. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 201 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *From Justinian I to the Fourth Crusade*

This broad overview of Byzantine naval warfare notes a lack of period sources -- even with the impressive bibliography (p173-181) divided into period and contemporary sources -- and that "Byzantine chroniclers' use of naval terms was loose" (p173).

Nonetheless, the text concentrates on strategic aspects with some operational analysis. Tactical details of specific battles are limited, although some education speculation surrounds a few of them.

Much of the book centers around battles with the Sassanid Persians and the Avars before switching to Arab and Islamic naval warfare. Due to financial constraints, the various Byzantine emperors would build a fleet, generally do well against enemies, then disband the fleet to save funds. Piracy was a problem that waxed and waned depending on the strength of the fleet and the determination of the emperor to secure trade routes across the Mediterranean Sea.

One typo: "ageneral" needs a space (p18).

Style quirk: a tendency to include many exclamation points, or should I say many an unnecessary exclamation point. Such punctuation always makes me stop and reread the sentence when I don't quite get the emphasis. To me, let the facts or analysis cause the reader to go "Wow!"

The book contains 10 black and white illustrations, six black and white maps, and nine black and white photos.

It's a nice overview of Byzantine naval strategy.

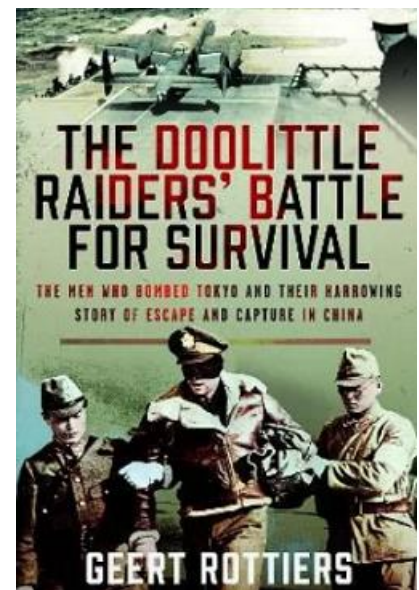
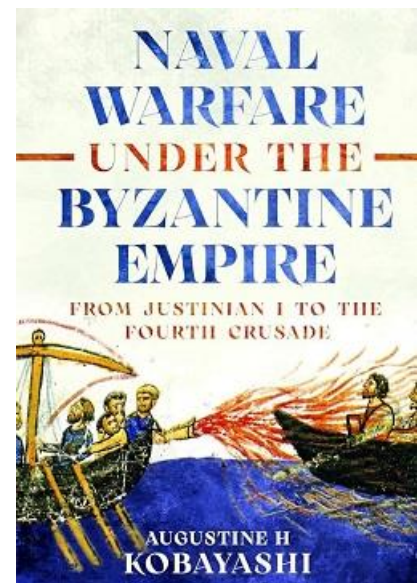
Enjoyed it.

The Doolittle Raiders' Battle for Survival. by Geert Rottiers. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 253 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Men Who Bombed Tokyo and Their Harrowing Story of Escape and Capture in China*

Plane by plane and crew by crew, each receives a chapter about the take off and approach to Japan, the bombing, and the flight to China (except for the one crew who flew to the Soviet Union). Since the planes left early, not only did they not have enough gas to reach the Chinese airfield, the Chinese had not set up radio beacons to guide the planes in. Baling out and crash landing were the only options.

Each crew member's ordeal is covered, along with tales of Japanese retribution against the Chinese peasants and guerilla forces that helped the US airmen escape. Some were captured and with executed or spent the war in a



POW camp.

Crew 6 remains a mystery, for the official account reveals some discrepancies: such as a pilot being catapulted through the navigation window, a boat ride that seems implausible, and that the officers survived but the enlisted men did not.

Of interest is the widespread Chinese opposition to the Japanese occupation. The resistance aided in the escapes with the connivance of villagers -- although sometimes the villagers thought the Americans were Japanese.

It strikes me as odd, or poor planning, that after all the years of the Flying Tigers, the Doolittle airmen were not provided with a US flag and an English-Chinese dictionary or at least a pamphlet with some phrases and a promise of reward. Crew found such a dictionary in a village (p142), which helped. It seems planners assumed a little too much of a clockwork operation. Launching early proved insurmountable friction for the plan.

A couple typos: "18 april" (p104) needs a capital A, and "pourinh" (p182) should be "pouring."

The book contains 17 black and white photos. A map of the flight paths over Japan and China, for each plane was assigned a different target, would have been helpful.

It's a fascinating account of the Doolittle raid and how the crews survived or not.

Enjoyed it.

War Birds: Diary of an Unknown Aviator. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 277 pages. 1926.

I picked up this 100-year-old book at a book sale not knowing who wrote it. It is a day-by-day diary of a US pilot in British service starting on Sept. 20, 1917. The last entry has no date, but the entry before that is dated August 27, 1918.

Entries offer matter-of-fact accounts of training, crashes, deaths, and ultimately postings to France and fights against the German aircraft. They also offer what seems to be a rather leisurely pace of training interspersed with parties, trips to the pubs, girl-chasing, and other hijinks.

Some of the entries are highly detailed recaps of aerial combat. Others are simple statements. The number of pilots killed in training accidents is rather distressing.

The book contains 20 black and white illustrations and six color illustrations.

I went to the web to find out more about the book. Wikipedia sez:

"The legal battle over *War Birds* arose because Elliott White Springs initially published the text anonymously, heavily weaving his own wartime journals with those of his late friend, John McGavock Grider.

Grider and Springs were exceptionally close friends who trained and flew together during WWI. Before Grider was shot down and killed in 1918, the two men made a pact: if one died, the survivor would compile and publish their shared experiences. True to his word, Springs edited the materials and secured a lucrative serialization deal followed by a 1926 book release.

Springs actually based a significant portion of the book on his own diaries, using Grider more as a tragic composite "hero" for the narrative.

Financial Settlement: The Grider family accepted a \$12,500 settlement, which effectively amounted to half of the total net earnings from the initial serialization and the Hollywood movie sale.

Public Credit: Moving forward, John McGavock Grider was officially credited as the primary author, transforming *War Birds* from an anonymous novelty into one of the most respected first-hand accounts of WWI aviation."

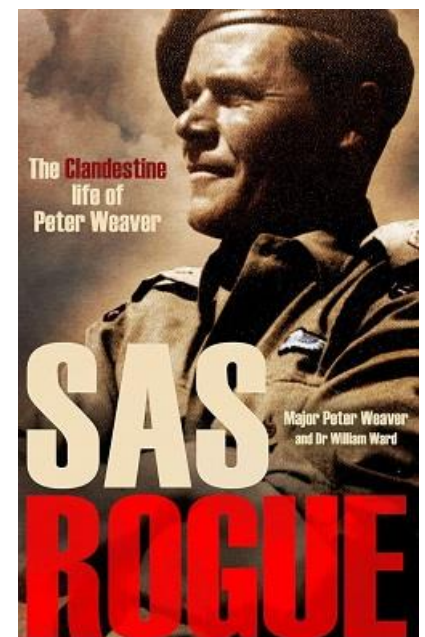
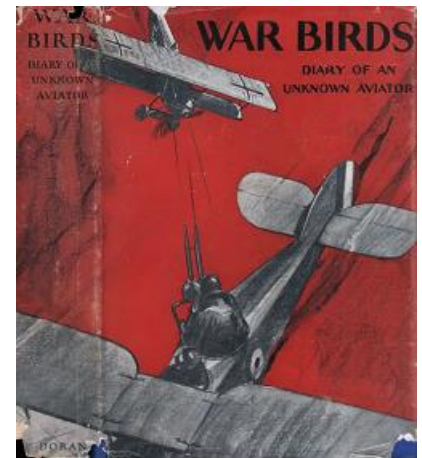
There you have it. A captivating dual-account, perhaps with a wee bit of embellishment, of WWI air warfare.

Enjoyed it.

SAS Rogue. by Major Peter Weaver and Dr. William A. Ward. Hardback (6.3x9.2 inches). 312 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Clandestine Life of Peter Weaver*

Peter Weaver was a talented cricket player and wanted to be in British Army's Sandhurst, but was rejected. Yet a chance family meeting led to his joining the Royal Tank Corps, which was supposed to provide the training and



Army First Class Education certificate good for officer training. He later joined the Royal Engineers, learning all about explosives, and then the Auxiliary Corps -- a commando-style unit expected to be overrun by a German invasion and then engage in guerrilla warfare. All of these led to becoming a lieutenant in the SAS. Much of the book concerns his training, with a focus commando, intel-gathering, and Maquis-coordination actions in 1944 German-occupied France.

Half the book is an autobiography Weaver wrote at some point, with Ward filling in details about organizations and missions, using official sources to correct misremembered facts, and extending the autobiography after WWII to Weaver's retirement and death.

Weaver's escapes proved to be the stuff of movies and he spent time with the Maquis rounding up downed Allied airmen and going on various missions. A couple successful ones involved observing where SS troops quartered and calling in a bombing run. He was later sent to Norway at the end of the war, and post-war to Greece, Sudan, and Crete.

The book contains 29 black and white photos and two color photos.

It reads quickly, although you have to get used to bouncing back and forth from italicized autobiography paragraphs to regular text commentary.

Enjoyed it.

The Battles of Hlobane & Khambula. by Adrian Greaves. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 188 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Forgotten Turning Point of the Anglo-Zulu War*

For most, the popular battle between the British and Zulus is Rorke's Drift. The more important battle is Isandlwana. Yet the premise of this book is that the British victory at Khambula just after the defeat at Hlobane turned the Anglo-Zulu War in favor of the British.

On the same day as Isandlwana, the first battle of Hlobane occurred, a minor skirmish. That was followed by the Battle of Ntombe, in which the Zulus overran a V-shaped supply wagon laager adjacent to a river.

Hlobane was a plateau where the Zulus grazed cattle and the British sent a force to grab the cattle. Yet without adequate reconnaissance, the plateau proved to be virtually impassable. While the initial two-pronged attack did make the top of the plateau, the pre-arranged retreat route turned out to be cliff-like and most British were trapped and slaughtered.

Khambula was the base camp atop a small hillock that the British had fortified. Remnants of the Hlobane force made it back and the Zulus took their time moving to surround it. Marsh, artillery, and British firepower and resolve proved a good combination for British defense.

A couple typos: duplicate sentence fragments about war wounds (p32) and "snipping at the redoubt" (p90) should be "sniping."

The book contains 21 black and white photos, six black and white illustrations, and one black and white map (Ntombe). Oddly enough, there are no maps of Hlobane and Khambula, which is a bit of a disappointment if you want to set up a tabletop scenario. The photos of the remote place help a bit. The Appendices contain original reports.

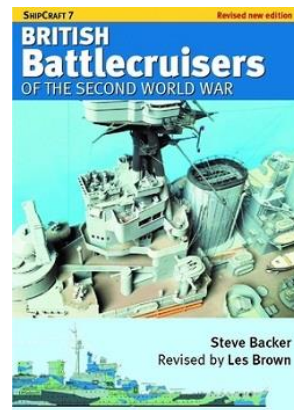
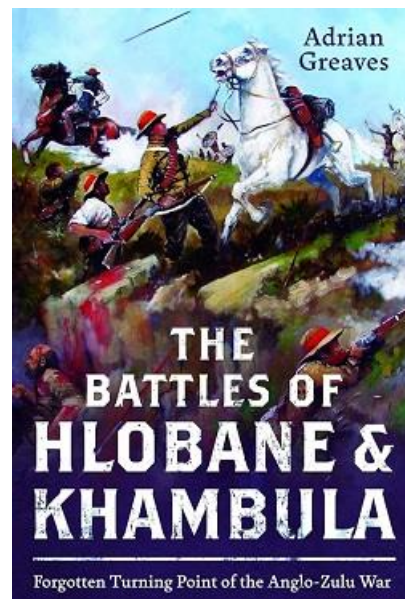
The battles are competently told and the analysis of what went wrong and right for the British is even better. Glossing over details receives an examination of the official and personal reports that are understandable from the viewpoint of career officers seeking to make British troop losses less problematic than the final correlation of casualties.

Enjoyed it.

British Battlecruisers of the Second World War: ShipCraft 7 Revised. by Steve Backer. Revised by Les Brown. Softcover (8.2x11.7 inches). 64 pages. 2026 revised version of 2007 book.

This volume in the excellent *ShipCraft* series gets an update with new model kits and accessories released since 2007 as well as featuring built versions of these new models in the Mastermodelers' Showcase.

Ships covered are *HMS Renown*, *HMS Repulse*, and *HMS Hood*. Battlecruisers were the darlings of the British navy until Jutland, when something went wrong with their bloody ships. Back to the drawing board was the reaction. In the case of the *HMS Hood*, it meant stripping her down and adding armor so she might be considered the first



fast battleship. Design and tech specs (p1 to p16) receive ample attention. Includes 21 black and white photos.

HMS Hood

Later on, Appearance and Modifications (p49-58) discusses overhauls and upgrades each ship received, including different AA guns, removal of cranes, and even new engines and armor. Includes 24 black and white photos.

Camouflage schemes (p45 to p48) shows the different paint jobs the ships sported over the years. Includes 11 color profile and overhead illustrations plus nine color aircraft (three each of Walrus, Mitsubishi G3M, and Mitsubishi G4M) illustrations.

Model Products (p17-31) provide information about plastic model kits and upgrade kits (usually photo-etched), including one card model kit. More than a listing, it includes commentary on various facets of model kit fortes and foibles. Includes 43 color product photos and 18 color photos of box art.

Next: The masters of model building showcase their skills in Mastermodelers' Showcase (p32 to p44). Five 1:700 scale models, two 1:350 scale models, one 1:600 scale model, and one 1:200 scale model are featured in 46 color photos -- both the entire model and close-up details.

Ship plans (p59 to p63) offer black and white drawings (two profile and one overhead), but no scale is indicated. Three each of 1936 HMS Repulse, 1941 HMS Repulse, 1942 HMS Renown, 1944 HMS Renown, and 1941 HMS Hood.

Finally a Reference (p64) page lists books, plans, and websites used to research the book.

A couple points: Only one of the smaller scale wargame size models, the Navis/Neptune 1:1250 scale model, are included. The GHQ 1:2400 scale models are not included. Also, one of the Mastermodelers' Showcase photos -- White Ensign Models 1:700 model -- show crew members on deck, but no crew are listed in the Model Products pages. There is a mention of a discontinued WEM kit elsewhere.

It's another triumph for the *ShipCraft* series, but I would expect no less as this volume is a revised version. For those building ship models of any scale, here's your dream series. Great photos, camouflage history, and enough ship history to fire up your naval warfare interest make this a marvelous resource.

Enjoyed it.



The Loss of HMS Hood. by Andrew Norman. Hardback (6.3x9.5 inches). 190 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Three Minutes to Save The Ship*

In WWII, the German battleship *Bismarck* sank the British battlecruiser *HMS Hood* in an eight-minute gun duel. That's the conventional wisdom, although theories about what caused the explosion that sank the ship continue to this day. That only three *HMS Hood* crew survived to live to tell the tale adds to the uncertainty. Although the Prologue asserts the book is about daily life aboard the ship and not a battle account, the bulk of the book offers an encapsulation of the battle in an almost minute-by-minute chronology.

That said, after all the tech specs of design, construction, and upgrade, I rather enjoyed the daily life chapters. The 1923-1924 world tour ports of call that traveled 38,152 miles, supplemented by memories and additional facts made for enjoyable summaries. WWII service began with mostly patrolling and convoy protection until May 24, 1941, when she was sunk.

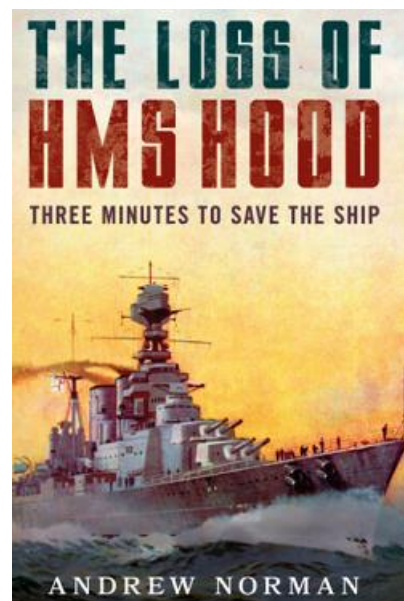
Besides a battle recap, analysis about how the ship sank receives input from a number of theories: *Bismarck* 15-inch shell, *Prinz Eugen* 8-inch shell, torpedo, and so on. I don't want to ruin the conclusion, but naval architecture comes into play as does the British cordite shell propellant and Winston Churchill. I will note that the *HMS Prince of Wales* was lucky not to join the *HMS Hood*: a 15-inch shell struck below the armored belt and failed to detonate (p86).

One typo: Footnote 1 (p165) is listed as "XXXXX".

The book contains 26 black and white photos, three black and white maps, and 11 black and white illustrations.

I don't know how much of this 2026 book duplicates Norman's 2009 book *HMS Hood: Pride of the Royal Navy*, but on its own *The Loss of the HMS Hood* offers a relatively quick take on the history of the ship via workmanlike prose and some nice analysis.

Enjoyed it.



The Real Story of the American Revolution. by Mike Wells. Hardback (6.3x9.5 inches). 198 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Separating Myth From Reality*

Pardon my skepticism about something with "real story" in the title. It sounds like one of those History Channel productions that purport to investigate history and end up tossing speculations against a screen and seeing what sticks.

But, since I find there's nothing new like history, it was worth a read. Yet as I read, this examination of "alternative perceptions of some accepted narratives" (p. vi) skipped around with few references. Indeed, this book lacks a bibliography.

And that turned my skepticism into suspicion. It seems to me like a flitting around the internet and seeing what sticks. The American mob mentality of anti-tax protests is well known: attacking tax collectors and their property being prime examples, or the Boston Massacre started by protesters threatening a single British sentry, who called for help and got a squad of Redcoats and a discharge of muskets. The British did spend a fortune defending the colonies from the French during the Seven Years War (French & Indian War in the US) and the British Parliament wanted to raise taxes. The Americans were wealthy and a small tax on stamps, tea, and such wouldn't hurt such prosperity.

One Intolerable Act I had not known much about was the Quebec Act, which guaranteed tolerance for Catholicism and extended Quebec territory down into the west of the colonies' territory. Land speculators, George Washington included, found this blockage of a colonial version of manifest destiny, not to mention being subject to British courts instead of colonial courts, intolerable.

As the Revolution unfolds, American militia joined or left as they pleased and the Continental soldiers should be considered mercenaries, for contract limits and bonuses for signing up proved greater than any patriotism. Patriots and Loyalists engaged in a un-civil war involving kidnappings, murders, and property confiscation and destruction.

I forgot to note the page with Molly Pitcher, but the book also lacks an index.

In a sense, this is less myth-busting than a shallow skip through history. I don't know if this is some sort of AI-generated smash and grab, but it is certainly one of the sloppiest text in a book I've seen in a while.

"British troops turfing honest citizens out of house and home" (p66) is likely "turning"; "instal" (p68) should be "install"; "granted or nor granted" (p73) should be "not"; "troops. faced with" (p95) should have a comma, not period; "captain" (p107) missing a period at end of sentence; "killed two British officer" (p188) needs an "s" and a period; and another missing period (p188).

The book contains eight black and white photos, 15 black and white illustrations, and one black and white map.

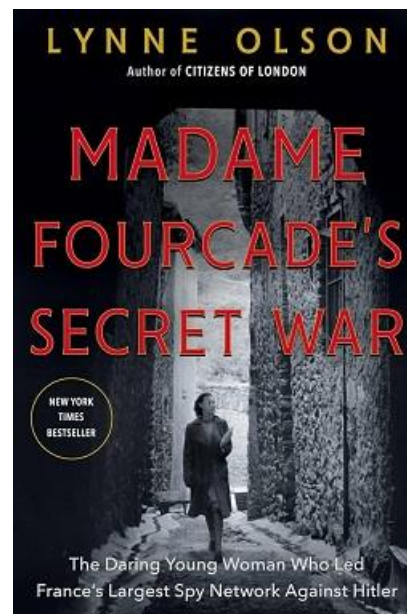
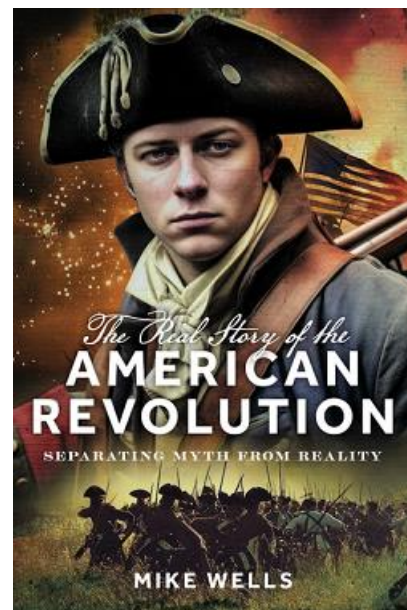
This book seems like a rushed job that was sold on a concept, "researched" via internet search or AI, and cut and pasted together with haste. We all need to learn more about our past so we can indeed separate propaganda myth from historical reality. For a general history of Revolution "myth from reality," you may be better off with a more balanced history of "eighteenth century life and attitudes" with more bibliography and less casual searching.

Madame Fourcade's Secret War. by Lynne Olson. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 429 pages. 2019.

Subtitle: *The Daring Young Woman Who Led France's Largest Spy Network Against Hitler*

The WWII French Resistance has its share of myths, but this biography of Marie-Madeleine Fourcade offers a tale of smarts, persistence, and a little personal luck as she built an intelligence network called the Alliance in German-occupied France as well as Vichy-run France. She recruited all kinds of Frenchmen, from aristocracy to common laborers, to observe, record, and transmit German military activities.

Some of the most successful intel coups came from port workers, who serviced German U-boats and gathered sailing dates for transmittal to the British MI6, which had pre-war contacts that Fourcade used to get funds, guns, and radio transmitters. Another concerned artist Robert Douin who drew a 55-foot long "map" of German bunkers, positions, and unit locations that was flown out to Britain prior to D-Day (p303). Hundreds of smaller successes are recorded



with the pages.

Failures occurred as well. The German Gestapo became better at radio direction detection and rounded up individuals and groups of the Alliance. At a few points in time, several key members and their documents were captured, leading to arrests of other members. Fourcade escaped just ahead of the raids many times, until she didn't. Fortunately, she was so thin that she could squeeze through the bars and escaped. She made her way to Spain and Britain at various times, but always went back to rebuild her network.

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

There's far more to her story of loosely managing 3,000 agents, of which 600 were arrested and 438 murdered (p356), including turf battles between de Gaulle and Giraud over who runs Free French forces and internal struggles working with MI6. It's a great read of an even more fascinating story.

Enjoyed it.

The Hunt for Hitler. by Cyril Jones. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 222 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *How I Discovered the True Story of the Fuhrer's Fate*

I thought this was some sort of extension of the story that Hitler escaped and was running a deli in Buenos Aires. Was I wrong. Instead, this is a "forensic" examination of locating the charred remains of Hitler and Mrs. Hitler (Eva Braun). It's main source is Elena Rzhevskaya, a Soviet translator who was tasked with helping find the bodies and was in Berlin and on chancellery grounds immediately after capture.

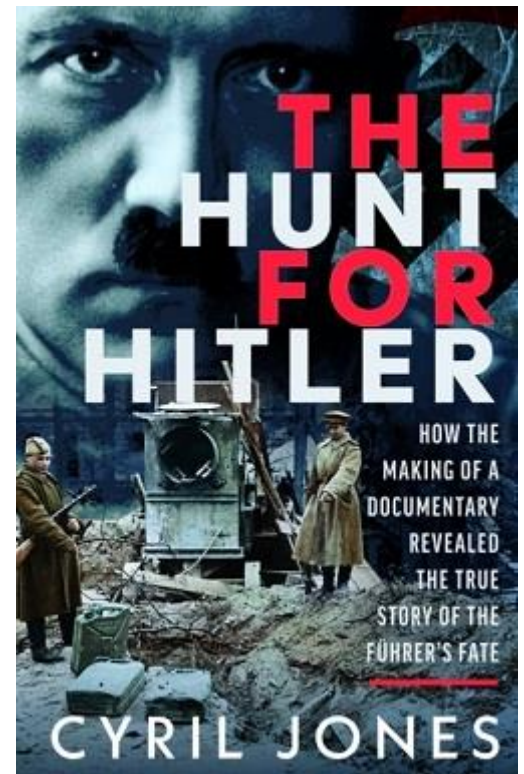
Inside the pages, you will find a conspiracy, only it was Stalin's insistence that Hitler's demise be kept secret, which led to all the TV brouhahas about escape to Spain, or South America, or the secret Nazi base in Antarctica.

Transcript passages, interrogations, and medical examinations are included, especially with Hitler's valet, chauffeur, mechanic, dentist, and various aides. Much of this was translated by Rzhevskaya, who was also a witness to various battle, escape, and medical exam events.

The book contains 24 black and white photos.

Getting through the extensive excerpts required some fortitude, for this is not the smooth prose of fiction, but the harsh details of reality. How Hitler and Braun were identified and what happened to their remains proved fascinating.

Enjoyed it.



Coming Soon....

July 15-19, 2026

