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Artillery phase on Turn 1. Bad guy Austrians on left. Good guy Prussians on the right.
 From lower left corner: GM Jay, Austrians Phil, Michael, Larry, and Chris, and Prussians Sam, Pat, and Dave.

War of Austrian Succession: *Tricorn*

by Russ Lockwood

Seeing Prussians on the table made me think this was a Seven Years War game, but it actually was a War of Austrian Succession game. Knowing so little about the war except for the name, I was intrigued to discover this came before the Seven Years War. It was before Freddy became great.

Historically, the Austrians managed to put an army athwart Prussian supply lines and take up a strong position atop hills. The Prussians had to punch a hole in the Austrian defense in order to escape.

At start: The Austrians at right lined a hill. The Prussians, at left, needed to break through to the right.

Per usual, random rolls selected our sides. I became a Prussian and we four Prussians strategized about how to overcome the odds and terrain. The units started where sat on the table, so no fiddle-diddling units around. Our rules were called *Tricorn*, some sort of *Shako* variant as I understand it.

Artillery was minimal, but GM Jay threw us a curve ball -- almost all the infantry battalions possessed battalion guns that fired like regular field artillery, albeit with a shorter range. We thought



that a bit odd, but as units had them historically, GM Jay said would have them tabletop-ically.

The only units that shunned those battalion guns were the grenadiers.

My Prussians on the left, Pat's Prussians on the right. In the distance, the Austrian line atop the hill.

The Prussian Plan

The Austrians lined the hill in a rough U-shape with the flanks forward and the center fading to a concave shape. Seeing much of the Prussian infantry deployed in the center certainly suggested a course of action. Seeing how the victory conditions for us Prussians was to punch a two-foot wide hole in the Austrian line reinforced that suggestion.

Turn 1 maneuvering.

That said, frontal assaults needed to be avoided. Given the movement rate of the troops, shifting to the right or left to hit the forward part of the flanks would take a considerable number of turns that the Prussians did not have.

Sam on the Prussian right flank had a good little force of infantry facing the forward edge of the Austrian infantry deployment. He also had some cavalry that faced off against Austrian cavalry.

Turn 2. Pat hops the table to advance the Prussians. He could only lean so far over the table. On the right, Larry had placed a range stick marking the distance those battalion guns fired.

In the center, Pat and I split the Prussian infantry force



that was arrayed in two ranks, plus a third rank of exactly two grenadier regiments. On the left, Dave had only a few units of cavalry plus another few units of cavalry in the center as a reserve. We were really thin on the left flank.

The Austrians seemed to have numbers. They certainly had favorable terrain. This whole thing was a big 1:1 attack.

So, best we could come up with was Pat would slide a little to the right and hit the rough curvature where the flank hit the base. I would be to his left and hit the rest of the base plus a central artillery position. On the right, Sam would slide slightly leftward to hit the top of the U and the inner edge next to Pat. And Dave, ah, what to do with Dave? He would demonstrate against a combined infantry-cavalry-skirmisher force about five times his size. If things got dicey, he could use the reserve cavalry.

The idea was to punch through the bottom-right part of that Austrian U.

Such was the Prussian plan.

As it turned out, the command figure for Prince Leopold was with Sam. That probably should have told us something...

Leo Attacks

Right off the bat, we Prussians advanced and soon everyone's battalion guns were firing fast and furious, or hot and heavy, or any trite expression you'd like to use. We all knew this would happen, we just didn't figure on the carnage battalion guns would effect.

On the right, Prussian Sam's troops attack the point of the Austrian line with everything he has. The idea of sliding left to support Pat in the center was lost in the heat of battle. Leo is at the bottom right corner.

When firing, you roll a d6 and generally, a 1-2-3 misses, a 4 staggers (disorganized), a 5 inflicts one kill, and a 6 inflicts two kills and a stagger. Red rings of death popped on units supplemented with blue rings of stagger.

I have no idea why my opposite number, Austrian commander von Michael the Planted, would roll so many of his 5s and 6s against me and then leave Pat unscathed. My stalwart Prussian infantry endured three shots before they could get to grips with the Austrians.

It was bad...

How bad was it?

It was so bad, red rings of death sprouted on Prussian lapels like red poppies on Remembrance Day.

It was so bad, even the grenadiers wished they were in the supply trains.

It was so bad, the battalion guns were renamed Viennaschaftenmir Guns (VGs).

My left-most unit disintegrated, so I sent one of the grenadier reserve units. I mean, my left flank was hanging in the breeze. Dave was doing his best, but he soon figured out to keep his distance from all those units with battalion guns.

The grenadier unit, gathering casualties, soon faced a dilemma of charging or dying. It charged. The VGs boomed, and the grenadier unit fled off the field of battle.

No worries, these two had soaked up the fire so that the rest of my units could grapple with the enemy atop the hill.



To My Right

Prussian Pat took his units and steadily advanced, trading battalion gun shots with von Michael and von Larry the White Knight to King's Bishop 3.

Dave's Prussian cavalry defeat and chase away Austrian Larry's cavalry. The pink bands represent blown cavalry.

On our right, under the watchful eye of Leo the Not-Quite-Great, Sam plunged straight ahead with his infantry directly at the top of the Austrian U. Apparently, he didn't see the need to shift left to support Pat. Von Larry had cavalry and there was enough of a starting gap between Pat and Sam to cause some trouble.

Turn 3: The Prussians get closer...

Sam did a fine job stonewalling von Chris and his Austrian Nag cavalry, which was indeed a nagging problem on the far right.

To My Left

Dave danced and dipped and shook his backside at von Phil the Calliope, who seemed to be huffing and puffing and doing very little.

Nonetheless, Dave turned round his cavalry and retreated as Austrian skirmishers popped out of a village and took a few pot shots until Dave turned and ran them down...and then ran.

Still, Dave performed admirably by showcasing his twerking skills.

It was at this time, I suggested that the Prussians had fulfilled their victory condition of creating a two-foot gap in the front line. The distance was exactly 24 inches between my left-most unit and Dave's right-most unit...pa dum bum.

Amid the guffaws, GM Jay reminded us all that we needed a two-foot gap in the *Austrian* lines.

Details. Details.

Von Michael points to his big bad grenadiers and orders them to fire their battalion guns. Alas, grenadiers don't need no stinkin' battalion guns.



The Big Charge

Finally, I began to get to grips with von Michael's units. Despite the casualties, I closed on his central cannon and overran it.

Prussians press the attack with some mutual destruction opening up holes in both lines.

Von Michael's supporting units also felt the wrath of the Prussians. As von Michael's units began to rout, he wheeled some from the right to try and flank my attack. Cheeky buckeroo -- it was enough for me to turn my left-most second line unit a full 90 degrees to face. We traded artillery and small arms fire shots.

Prussian Sam's initial good news soon turns bad as Larry's Austrians hold and one battalion flanks the chargers...

Still, I mostly ground forward, sometimes losing a unit and sometimes routing a von Michael unit. Pat also charged in, blowing a small hole in von Michael's line while engaging von Larry.

We four, me, Pat, von Michael and von Larry, hammered at each other. Sometimes the charges went in. Sometimes they were stopped with a stagger. All efforts ratcheted up the carnage. The victory hole widened, but not quite enough...yet?

I See Your Gap and Raise You Another

Dave saw a danger to our right center -- the initial gap between Pat and Sam. I had sent my last remaining grenadier unit down the road to try and fill it before disaster struck. Too slow.

Dave adroitly moved up the reserve cavalry units for a loose filling. It was a smart move.

Von Larry saw his chance and all three of his cavalry moved off the hill onto the plains below. Dave charged.

Here, Dave rolled well enough to repel all three units. All the cavalry was exhausted and would have to sit for a turn to recover, but the gap was filled with glory.



But not so fast. Von Michael's two cavalry units spurred through the porous Prussian line, with one of them slamming into the flank of Dave's left-most cavalry unit. It looked like curtains and a trip to the rear for Dave's cavalry.

Then fate took effect. What a time for Dave to roll a 6 and von Michael a 1. The Austrian unit was not only defeated, but swept from the field.

Dave's Yellowjackets sting the Austrians by winning the melee despite Von Michael's flank attack.

That loss, plus all the other losses, took von Michael's losses to 75% and that's an automatic rout (von Michael called it a withdrawal to the rear, but we all knew it was a rout).

And that left a real two-foot hole in the Austrian line, a Prussian victory, and obviously our efforts gave Leo a shot at "the Great" nickname.



The Real Battle

Wikipedia sez: The Battle of Kesselsdorf was fought on 15 December 1745, between the Kingdom of Prussia and the combined forces of the Archduchy of Austria and the Electorate of Saxony during the part of the War of the Austrian Succession known as the Second Silesian War. The Prussians were slightly outnumbered 35,000 to 32,000. Additionally, the Saxons and Austrians had the advantage of the ground.

That's all well and good, but what the heck was von Phil doing with about a third of the Austrian Army?

GM Jay explained that he could only move on certain die rolls, which explains why he moved sometimes and not at all on other turns.

According to Wikipedia: During the battle, the Austrians on the right never fired a shot.

So, it was a scenario rule to reflect history that helped pin Phil in place. Had he succeeded in rolling whatever numbers he needed, the march of the Austrian right against out minimal left would have crushed the Prussian center. As it turned out, Phil fired just enough for Dave to back away.

Battalion Guns

We all brainstormed about how to reflect use of battalion guns by the infantry. They were not that numerous, but the game effect was that each battalion fired as if they had a full field artillery battery (Jay noted the real artillery gun stands represented 10-12 guns each). The only difference was a shorter range for the battalion guns. It was like one big artillery duel.

I don't recall all the suggestions, but one that caught my ear was hit only on a 6 for a stagger, and if the target unit was already staggered when hit, then a casualty would be placed on the targeted unit. We'll see.

Thanks, Jay, for setting up a battle from a different war than usual, and for letting us try a different rules set. And thanks all for the usual great three-hour evening of gaming.

The Prussians bash a two-foot gap in the Austrian lines for the victory.





Starting set-up for Axis and Allies D-Day. Red arrows indicate eligible blockhouse targets. White circles = VP cities.

D-Day: Axis & Allies

by Russ Lockwood

I can't remember the last time Dan and I played the Axis & Allies (A&A) D-Day game. I also don't remember the game at all other than it was entertaining. With a few spare hours on a Tuesday night, Dan set it up and by random pick, I was the Allies and Dan the Germans.

Turn 1 Allied landings and at right, German counterattack against the paratroopers.



In its basic form, it plays like the original A&A: area map, move into an area to attack, attacking Infantry hit on 1s (on a d6) and defending infantry hit on 1s and 2s (on a d6), and so on. However, the *D-Day* version differs significantly in other mechanics.

The end of Turn 1. The Allies are ashore to stay.



The unit types and numbers are fixed -- you don't spend IPs to buy units. Furthermore, players roll 2d6 for the number of units arriving. Thus, roll snake-eyes and two units show up. Roll boxcars and 12 units show up. Our rolls tended to even out over the course of the game, but swings did happen.

The sequence of play is governed by a fixed deck of cards in a fixed sequence. Flip over a card and the appropriate player follows the instructions. On each phase card, the player rolls 1d6: A 1 means the player gains a benefit, a 6 means the player gets a detriment, and a 2-5 is no effect.

During Turn 4, the Allies are advancing, but the Germans have considerable reinforcements waiting to appear.

For example, on a Movement phase card, a 1 means all the player's infantry and artillery units move two areas instead of one. On a 6, the player only moves units in two areas and no others.

In addition, certain phases have one-time beneficial Tactical cards. For example, an Allied fighter is immune to AA fire, or, Allied Bombers hit on a 1 to 5 (on a d6) instead of a 1 to 3. You may play and discard it or save it for a later turn.

Turn 4: British capture Caen, but a powerful German counterattack has avoided the Spitfire and P-38 fighters and almost recovered Houlgate.

These benefits and detriments mostly never showed up, but when they did, it was greeted with cheers and groans. Of note, sometimes we rolled 1s and 6s on the same card for multiple turns.

For example, I rolled 6s (detriment) on my bomber card four times out of 10 turns. The Detriment? Roll d6 for the bomber with a 50-50 chance of the bomber being grounded and unavailable that turn. Three out of four times, my B-17 was a hanger queen and sat in Britain. The UK Lancaster bomber had been shot down by German AA fairly early -- guess the B-17 crews decided to avoid that fate by avoiding flying.

The Germans have no air units, but Allied fighters are placed in areas -- any German unit leaving or entering the area gets strafed. If I roll a 1, the German unit is eliminated. The caveat is that the fighter aircraft has to survive



the German AA. About two-thirds of the way through the game it dawned on me to place the fighters ahead of the Germans instead of in the same area to avoid AA fire. I lost a lot of fighters, but also rolled the magic 1 on the phase card for a benefit to gain back a fighter -- multiple times.

The Americans (green) push into St. Lo while Germans mass for a counterattack. Meanwhile, next area over at Caumont was a multi-turn British slaughterhouse. American reinforcements land at Omaha Beach.

Ground units only perform one roll of the attack dice during the Attack phase, with attacker and defender firing simultaneously. Both sides may end up with ground units in the same area, in which case they remain locked in place. You can move units into contested areas to the maximum of eight per side, but units cannot leave contested areas.

Victory for the Allies is capturing three cities: Caen, St. Lo, and Cherbourg. If they fall, the Germans win.

There's a bit more here and there, but those cover most of the changes. I will note that as the game progressed and the Tactical cards were used, fighters became scarce, and bombers didn't fly, and the turns went faster.

The Germans throw the Americans out of St. Lo and cripple the British at Caumont.

The Game

The invasion, including paratroopers, proved variable in effectiveness. Some areas were relatively easy -- although all were contested -- and some like Omaha Beach proved deadly. Some of the German blockhouses (coastal guns) proved quite adept at picking off British tanks before they could land.

A big German counterattack behind Utah Beach on turn 1 bogged down, but added to the pressure. I had concentrated all my fighters to strafing German reinforcement entry areas. My British troops managed to enter into Caen and turn it into a contested area.

By Turn 4, Caen was fully captured and the British were fanning out to protect it -- although significant German reinforcements were massing nearby. My fighters gave them pause.

In the center, US and UK troops pushed adjacent to St. Lo in two areas: the US in St. Jean and the UK in Caumont. The latter proved to be a massive British graveyard. I lost a dozen British units in that one area over three turns.

Turn 8. It's crunch time. The Americans close on Cherbourg while reinforcements race to St. Lo.



That said, my own attacks were sometimes streaky. I took St. Lo with equally impressive die rolling, only to lose it to an energetic German counterattack.

I began placing three fighters atop a German mass of troops near St. Lo. When the Germans started moving, I rolled 3d6 five times and killed off a unit with each roll. One got through before Dan called a halt to his counterattack.

Down in Cherbourg, I had isolated it by Turn 4. By Turn 8, I was contesting the city.

End Game

Believing a good offense was essential for a good defense of Caen, I attacked the two remaining German areas, wiping out one area and attriting and contesting the second. As contested areas prevent movement, that meant I locked up the only German troops in the area. Putting a massive garrison of five infantry units inside Caen also helped feed units into this adjacent contested area. So, I had captured Caen.

The initial battle for Cherbourg.



In Cherbourg, the battle raged for three turns. I fed in as much as I could and slowly began to attrit the German defenders. On the last turn, the numbers finally told and the last German defender fell. So, I had captured Caen and Cherbourg, two of the three cities.

That left St. Lo. Here, I got lucky with rolling a 1 on the movement card -- my infantry and artillery could move two spaces instead of one, so I was able to race units into St. Lo. Another lucky die roll allowed my infantry to hit on 1s and 2s. That was quite helpful.

End of Game. I took Caen and Cherbourg, but one Panzer unit foiled me taking St. Lo.



Dan braved the fighters and kept feeding in units. In a last gasp effort, control of the city came down to the last turn and last die rolls. When the dust settled, one German panzer unit remained in St. Lo as well as two Shermans and a British artillery unit. Alack and alas...I was foiled by one panzer unit.

You can't get a much closer game than that. Granted, the Allies had a grand total of 13 units remaining versus six German units, so it was carnage incarnate out of proportion to history, but A&A is a game, not a simulation.

Any Lessons?

Other than quantity generally wins, so many variables occurred due to rolling 1s and 6s on the Phase cards that it's hard to pinpoint something that would work better (or worse) due to the "timing" of those benefits and detriments.

The victors at Cherbourg.



About the only thing that I could take away is the placement of Allied fighters. As they strafe when German units enter or leave, it is not necessarily a good idea to place them in the same area as German AA guns. You don't get extra shots, so you might as well, if you can, avoid the AA. That said, sometimes you have to put the fighters in the same area as AA, as I did during the end game around St. Lo.

On the German side, Dan often managed to fine tune his eight-unit maximum mix to three panzer units, three artillery/AA units, and two infantry units, so 3D6 versus each fighter looking for 1s happened often enough.

As always, luck is luck. Hot dice early reduce the number of combat units available for later turns. Given the eight unit limit per area, hot dice later can even up the odds at the point of attack. Both of us had good and bad runs at times.

The victors at Caen. Could have used a couple at St. Lo.



All 10 turns were finished within three hours. Thanks, Dan, for the game.

A&A D-Day: Wild Game

by Dan

What a wild A&A D-Day game that featured a strong allied landing, wiping out most of the beach defenders in two turns. Thought I was toast, but then saw how many reinforcements would come on board and realized there was a lot of game left. The Turn 9 extra movement for the Allies made the battle for St. Lo possible and the roll that allowed Allied Infantry to hit on 1-2 instead of just 1 granted the US paratroopers and Utah Beach veterans enough of an edge to capture Cherbourg.

The last panzer holds St. Lo, denying the Allies the victory. You really can't get much closer than this...



HMGS Next Gen: Gaming Goodness

by John Spiess

Vikings: Stamford, CT

Jim Stanton and I ran a Dark Age Viking game for the Dealeys Division of Sea Cadets in Stamford. Kareena, one of our best regular players at the Greenwich library, is also a member of the cadets. Her mother is one of the training officers and contacted us to host a game.

The older cadets (high school seniors) took the team captain roles, issuing orders to the younger players in charge of the various warbands. Since there were so many kids, and the gaming table was a little small, I tried something new with having off-board reserves in three zones. Each side could use their initiative chips to move troops on the table, or move off table troops to different zones and enter the battlefield where they were most needed. This worked out really well, so I'm probably going to make this a regular part of this rule system.

I think Jim will agree that this was one of the most satisfying events we have hosted to date. I can't count the number of times I was called "Sir." They helped with everything, from unloading the car, setting up the figures, cleaning up, and carrying everything back to the car. The words polite and respectful does not do them enough justice.

It was a great game and the kids kept asking about what other periods we could play. I spoke with the commanders after the game and they will probably take a vote at the next meeting to pick a period. It sounds like they were leaning towards WWII, so I'm not surprised. One of the officers also gave Jim and I his Challenge Coin. I thought that was pretty cool.



WWI Verdun: Rye, NY

I GMed a WWI trench game at the Rye (NY) Free Reading Room. The library printed up a nice flyer, so the game was well attended. About 40 to 50 kids hung out, either waiting for pickup, or just socializing. I'm not even sure how many kids played in the game since everyone was walking over at some point and asking questions, rolling dice, or moving figures of their friends' forces.

The Verdun gamers...



More Taylor Swift fans -- “Swifties” -- showed up, but one person asked where was Emily Blunt, the “Angel of Verdun” from the *Edge of Tomorrow* movie.

One funny part in the game was when the French off board artillery was called in to try and destroy the German tank that was getting close to the center bunker. The tank was destroyed, but a few shots fell short and landed right on the bunker and the trench line as well. You can see the German players reacting below. Well, that’s what happens when you have a spinner for deviation in the game.

As always, everyone came over for the historical discussion afterwards, which was pretty good since they are studying WWI right now. I actually knew that since the librarian clued me in beforehand and had requested a WWI game to coordinate. This is a pretty popular program, so they have signed up for monthly events through June. One final note is that these kids always help to clean up and haul stuff to the car. Even the Swifties. Nice friendly bunch.

The Super Bowl of WWI aerial dogfights.

WWI Air Game: Larchmont, NY

I GMed a quick WWI Wings of Glory air game at the Larchmont, NY library on Super Bowl Sunday. It was a quick event, running from 1pm to 3pm, and drew a few kids and their parents, too. It was a “jump in and out” event, so gamers could enter the game and leave the game at any time.

Viking gamers.

Viking Naval Battle: Greenwich, CT

This Viking naval game was loosely based on the Battle of Svolder, but modified to make it a much more even game. The Greenwich schools are on winter break, but we had two new kids who were pretty enthusiastic. They brought all of their WWII figures to show, so we decided to do a WWII event next month since everyone likes that period.

The game had all the usual mechanics of ramming, grappling, and boarding parties. I even threw in a few small catapults and bolt throwers just for fun.

At one point, King Olaf looked like he might pull off a victory, but he was cut down by a lowly archer and a really bad die roll.

Once again, I tried to coax a parent into playing for a bit. After all, the parents are the ones who drive, and we need a way to get some kids to our conventions.

*A little tough to read, but it says, “We Surrender.”
Humor and style...*





Starting tabletop and troops. British to come in on right. Germans on left. White and black poker chips are JOPs.

Normandy 1944: A Skirmish *RUSE*

by Russ Lockwood

Last time Renaud and I tried a Normandy 1944 skirmish game (see the 10/28/2024 AAR), we used Renaud's variation of the *Ancients One Hour Wargames* rules. He developed it a little bit more, noting that he enjoyed playing *Bolt Action* and *Chain of Command* and wanted to slice and dice the best aspects of each into a consolidated version. Better yet, he wanted the basic mechanics to apply to eras outside WWII, calling it: *Rules for a Universal Skirmish Experience (RUSE)*.

British "armor" arrives at bottom right and top right corners.



Well, I liked the name, so let's see how this meeting engagement playtest would go. By random pick, I was the British and Renaud was the Germans.

The Set Up

We each had a squad of 10. My Brits consisted of four riflemen, a two-man PIAT team, a two-man Bren gun team, a rifleman with grenades, and a NCO. The Germans had four riflemen, a two-man LMG team, two riflemen with panzerfausts, a rifleman with grenades, and a NCO. Even up.

Of note, grenades seem to be the sticking point in skirmish games. In my head, every soldier always seemed to carry one or two. Game systems often ration them per squad, which is how Renaud went.

We also had vehicles: My Brits with two universal carriers and associated Bren gun teams, and a Daimler IV armored car with 2pdr gun and coax MG. The Germans had a Puma armored car with 50mm gun and MG and a half-track, but had to put one of the squad members to operate the half-track's MG-42.

Daimler armored car. Image from web.



Each figure, vehicle, and two-man team received a generic colored activation cube (white for British and black for Germans) that went into a bag. During a turn, we would blindly pull out a cube. If it was white, the British could activate one figure, vehicle, or team. If black, the Germans would activate one figure, vehicle, or team. If the NCO was activated, then he could activate himself and all figures within 3 inches. Figures, vehicles, and teams could activate once per turn.

Three other colored cubes were added to the bag. Green meant a heavy rain shower hit the board -- the usual Line of Sight (LoS) limited only by terrain would drop to 12 inches. Rain was in effect until the Yellow cube -- sunshine -- was drawn. The purple cube was a Wound check for all figures that were hit by enemy fire that turn. When all three colored cubes were drawn, the turn was over and all figures that were hit did a wound check.

Patrol Phase

We each had two jump-off points (JOP) that represent where infantry figures come on the table. The vehicles enter the table on the friendly edge.

JOPs move 12 inches, but must stop when within 12 inches of an enemy JOP. Then, both JOPs can be moved up to 6 inches, preferably behind cover. As the table was 3 feet wide by 4 feet deep, the JOPs ran into each other quickly.

The Germans pop out a LMG team and supporting riflemen from a nearby JOP.



Salient Rules

Basic movement was 6 inches for an infantryman, 12 inches for a tracked vehicle, and 18 inches for a half-track or armored car. A figure, vehicle, or team could move and fire, or, double move and no fire, or remain in place and receive a bonus for aimed fire. You can drop into overwatch and if a figure survives a firing attack, it may fire back with a penalty if it had not been activated.

Each firing figure had an inherent 2d6 plus weapon bonus plus various 1d6 situational bonuses or penalties. The defender has an inherent 1d6 defense, plus a variety of 1d6 bonuses or penalties for terrain and situations. Roll all

dice and take the highest roll for each player. Defenders win ties. If the attacker wins, the figure is hit and out of action and must do a wound check with the drawing of the purple cube or at the end of the turn. If a vehicle, the difference indicates the severity of damage.

Of course, this is just an overview of the rules, with additional nuances involving flame weapons, reloading, tied results, and so on. Remember that *RUSE* covers all eras.

The Skirmish

We popped onto the table from the JOPs, although the Germans were a bit quicker off the mark than the Brits. Some shots were exchanged and the first soldier to suffer a hit on either side was Percy Pendragon on the right flank. Ah, Percy, you should have hugged the tree trunk instead of stepping out to take a shot.

Meanwhile, on the left flank by the road, out came the German LMG team and some supporting rifleman. I had but one or two lads in the center, so I whistled up a Universal Carrier with its Bren gun team on the road on the left flank. A Halftrack and Puma appeared on the German baseline. My other Universal Carrier appeared on the right flank. My Daimler IV appeared on the road on the left.

More firing as German and Brit hit the dirt from hits. Then the purple cube was pulled -- wound check. In the basic game, it's a 50-50 roll. Roll low and the figure is out of the battle. Roll high and he's back in the fight. Percy rolled high and popped back up next to the tree.

Gerald "Grenade" Gardner throws....

Meanwhile, amid the rain showers, other soldiers were hit. Alan Adail, on the other side of the tree from Percy, fell over from a hit, and then Percy was hit again. When the end of turn came -- wound check. Alan and Percy popped back up. That's the spirit. Alas, Roger Rainjer took one for the team and never got back up.

Seeing the huddled mass of five Germans by a hedge, including the two-man LMG team that drilled Roger, Gerald "Grenade" Gardner broke from cover towards the house, stopped, and lobbed a grenade at the group.

LMG team eliminated. Larry Leedem drops a soldaten coming around the hedge.

Grenade Deviation

To toss a grenade, you roll 2d6 with one die the direction and the other the inches from targeted impact point. In my case, I rolled short. The grenade landed two inches short, but



in line with the throw. The grenade landed directly on the two-man LMG team. A throw of the dice for each soldier and BOOM! Both were hit.

But he was not so fortunate when the halftrack came around the hedge and ran him over.

The Universal Carrier drove up the road. A German who survived the Grenade attack stepped out and aimed the Panzerfaust at the universal carrier. He depressed the trigger and in a puff of smoke, he missed. The Daimler IV armored car drove up and around and shot at the halftrack. The shot hit the vehicle and destroyed the MG, but the halftrack could still move.

At this point, the Puma had made its way across the battlefield and parked on the wall as it attempted to get on the road. The 50mm gun swiveled and fired. My Daimler went up in smoke!

Shots sprayed brave Gerald, but Gerald danced like never before and escaped harm. Alas, his luck left him as a mere rifleman's shot felled Gerald with a hit.

Meanwhile, Larry Leedum picked his way across the open ground and ended on the other side of the hedge from the three Germans. One of 'em, Jerry, went around the hedge, but reaction fire dropped Jerry with a hit. No matter, the halftrack driver Fritz gunned the engine and while Larry wasn't looking, ran him over.

Out came the purple wound check cube. The LMG team failed both saving throws, as did Jerry. Alas, Gerald and Larry failed their saving throws.

Fritz could have withdrawn the halftrack, but he spied 'Piat' Peter Pimpernel by a hedge. He gunned the engine, but Peter was on Overwatch. The shot was accurate and devastating. The halftrack brewed up, taking Fritz with it. All his comrades could say was, "They shot Fritz!"

'Piat' Peter Pimpernel foils the halftrack's efforts to run over another British infantryman.

On The Right

Percy and Alan kept up a lively fire, but German fire was better and both were dropped with a hit. That left the supporting Bren gun team a clear LoS to the German



NCO Hans Hammerz. Poor Hans was not clever enough and was riddled to the ground.

The second universal carrier was brought up and more Bren gun fire headed the German's way, taking another down.

The wound checks saw Percy and Alan both succumb as well as the Hans. Percy, we hardly knew you, but you were an inspiration to all the squad.

By now, enough damage had accumulated on both sides to check for force morale. Both would break off and withdraw at 50%. The British were at about 33%, but the Germans were at 47%. We were about to go to the next turn when Renaud found another hit German. The 50-50 wound check die bounced around and rolled to a fail. That pushed his total to 50% and a German withdrawal.

The Puma took out the Daimler with a single shot.

The Dice of Fortune and Fame

As we found out, the basics were well covered. The more dice tossed, the better the odds of rolling higher than the other fellow. Standing in the open is not as favorable as hugging terrain. NCOs can help coordinate fire.

We had relatively few different weapons. Rifle, grenade, SMG, Bren, and LMG

were all the infantry weapons. After a couple firings, we had all those dice numbers down cold.

It took longer to calculate the vehicle on vehicle firing and the PIAT/panzerfaust on vehicle firing. Although it still uses the dice procedures for a hit, the calculations of damage was an extra, if necessary step. Now, pretty much if a panzerfaust or PIAT hits a thinly armored vehicle, the vehicle will suffer some sort of damage, with a good chance of a brew up. Whether you get a hit or not is another story.

About the only conundrum is the reaction fire and whether it's simultaneous or sequential. Overwatch is interrupting fire and goes before any other fire. On the one hand, it somewhat makes sense that reaction fire is reacting to being fired upon, in which case the fire takes effect first and reaction fire may or may not be available. As reaction fire loses one die and the firer has already expended its activation, our tendency was to wait for the next cube and gain that extra "aimed" die.

That said, if a number of unactivated enemy were zeroing in on a target, the player may decide to fire before other enemy took pot shots. I've seen it played either way.

The game played out in about two hours, even with rules look up and discussion. Then again, the designer was running the game and knew the numbers off the top of his head. Like any rules, the first time you play it, it will take longer.

It took a bit from *Bolt Action*, *Chain of Command*, and *One Hour Wargames*. Quite promising. Now to see if the other eras work as smoothly as WWII.



Back to the Chateau: WWI To The Last Man

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud and I continued our WWI kick with *To The Last Man*, a strategic-level wargame of the Western Front from 1914 onwards. As recommended by the rules, we started with the Spring 1915 turn. By random draw, I was the Entente and he was the Germans.

The counters on the map represent armies, each of which has an associated card that holds small counters representing corps. Each Army card can hold a limited number of corps counters, the bottom row of infantry and the top row of auxiliary units (artillery, cavalry, aircraft, and tanks). Each corps tosses 1d6 except infantry and fortifications on defense, which tosses 2d6, looking for hits.

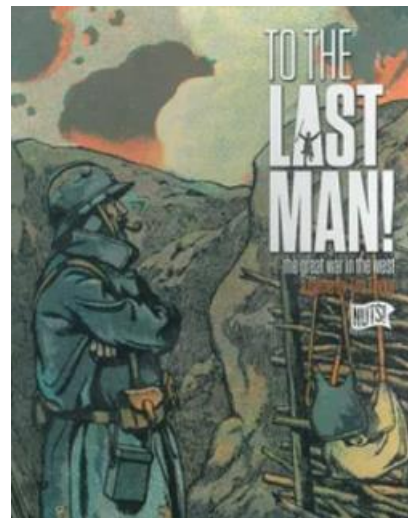
You start with a certain number of Armies and units and expand your force using a simple production system: everything costs 1 Production Point. You usually have 6 or 7 per seasonal turn. Certain units, like aircraft and tanks, are date restricted as printed on the counter and can't be bought until that date.

Beyond units, a common deck of cards offers the usual twists and turns that random shuffled cards can provide. One handy card limits the number of attacks. Another handy one allows you to shift an Army anywhere on the board as long as it moves through friendly areas before reaching a Friendly or Contested area. An Army only moves one area per turn. I believe there is a three-army limit per area, regardless whether the army contains one unit or is filled up.

A key card is the Offensive card -- you need to play one in order to attack. If you don't have one, as happened to me one turn, you cannot attack. The Entente has a hand limit of seven cards and the Germans eight cards. Since you have to pay for cards as well as units, production becomes a bit of a juggling effort.

Combat is simple. Hits translate into units lost...but, all cards have a units line at the bottom. You can discard a card to satisfy some or all of the losses. This is another nicely done decision point.

Most times we were tossing a half dozen dice, but as the war went on, the forces on the ground increased and so did hits and losses. A VP track indicated how well or poorly each side was doing.



Set up for 1915 game.



The Game

We bashed about up and down the line, usually between one and three attacks per turn. For example, on the first turn, Spring 1915, we fought over Flanders, Artois, and Verdun. Flanders generated one hit each while Verdun stood firm and generated two hits on the Germans. Artois fizzled for both of us.

The 1916 Spring Turn.

In the summer, I went after Champagne and the Germans took a hit. In the fall, attacks in Champagne generated a hit each and in Verdun another hit each.

Losses were about even as we usually discarded cards to satisfy losses. Every once in a while a Yahtzee roll would generate two, three, and even four hits, so a corps might have to be removed. The Spring 1916 attack in Artois saw the Entente inflict four, count 'em four, hits on the Germans. Renaud discarded a couple of cards. The Fall of 1916 and the Spring of 1917 also saw four hits on the Germans in the Somme on both turns. Talk about revising history!

Dice being dice, sometimes bupkus happens even though you toss 8d6. In the Winter of 1916, we both passed.



Southern Strike (Out)

I used a Strategic Move card to send the BEF 1st Army way south to strike at a weakly-defended area. It didn't work too well. I used another Strategic Move card to bring the BEF back.

The French Army cards with individual corps on the cards.



I repulsed German attacks in Flanders and elsewhere. Renaud repulsed attacks in Champagne, where I started with three French armies (although one only had a single infantry corps). In the meantime, I settled on a balanced production strategy, albeit I built up the British a lot, the French a bit by bit, and only a couple cards per turn.

We continued our stalemate through 1916, but I finally hit upon a better strategy in 1917: create a huge Army attack force out of the two BEF armies and shuffle both around to hit the Germans with 14d6 instead of the half dozen dice. The above four-hit attacks showed its viability. In the Spring of 1917, I managed to inflict a whopping six hits on the Germans at Verdun. The Black Day of the German Army came early!

That strategy worked pretty well, albeit with a bit of odds-defying, die-rolling razzle dazzle. If the Germans reinforced that area, I'd shift the BEF armies one over and pick on another area. A few French pinning attacks of the old 6d6 and 7d6 variety kept the Germans stretched.

Lo and behold, by the Fall of 1917, I had punched a hole in the German line at Nancy and drew down German strength in the north and center. Better yet, more and more of my armies were at maximum strength and I tended to

have more cards in my hand. Indeed, I forgot about the seven-card limit for the Entente and was up to nine. Oops. I had Renaud randomly pick two of them to bury in the common deck.

Nicely Done

The game offers an interesting take on WWI warfare on the Western Front. Most of the game is static by nature, with the occasional Yahtzee providing the surprise. This view is tempered by what the dice do and what cards show up in which player's hand.

Production and the cards vs. units for losses provides the best decision-making aspect of the game. The Entente started to see movement by the end of 1917. I imagine starting the game with the fall 1914 turn would see move movement across the map.

The game moved quickly despite our consulting the rules from time to time and discussing one aspect or another. Obviously, not much movement, but enough decision points and die rolling to keep it interesting. I'm not quite sure there's replay value in the strategy, only in the dice throws.

Thanks for the game, Renaud.

Snappy Nappy: A Quick Try

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud had heard about *Snappy Nappy* and expressed an interest in taking the rules for a spin. Well, step right up.

It was good to bring out the 15mm troops for a learning game on a 3x5-foot table. I ran through the mechanics at the beginning and repeated them during the game, pointing out this, that, and the other.

As he's a veteran gamer, most of the mechanics were familiar. As I designed this for large multi-player battles, my theory is that the more players you have, the more straightforward the rules need to be. Sure, *SN* has nuances, but as I found out when I first released it, even new players can pick up most of the basic move-shoot-melee-morale mechanics by the third turn of those 15-20 player Campaign-in-a-Day games across a dozen tables.

Renaud and the French infantry advance. The French cavalry corps at right awaits their orders.

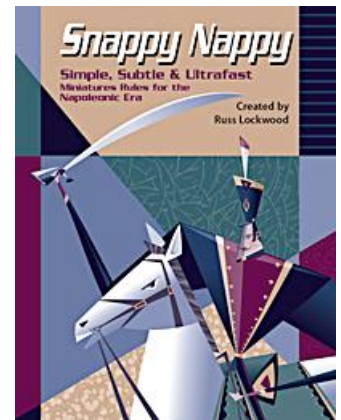
The Game

I put a French infantry corps and French cavalry corps against a Russian infantry corps and a Russian Cossack corp. The Russians had a unit per corps advantage in numbers, but the French had better quality -- especially in cavalry.

Terrain was a few woods patches, a couple villages, a road, and a couple "plateau" hills. All was open terrain except for the hills, which were "broken" terrain (minus one-third movement).

Renaud won the initiative and quickly took the main hill with his infantry, which deployed into a nice line, including the artillery. His cavalry advanced to fill the gap on the Russian right/French left.

I danced a bit in the center, holding the reverse side of the hill. The



infantry battle opened with cannon fire, produced more casualties on my side than his, although I did overrun a battery with a militia unit hitting the flank via a “double turn.”

You see, I had lost initiative in the previous turn and won initiative in the new turn, gaining the “double turn” that is part of forcing players to think about sudden shifts of fate.

The French line versus the developing Russian center.

On the cavalry side, I did as best I could. The French light cavalry shifted into line and I hit each of his two Hussar units with four of mine in column. It was as close to getting even odds as I could. Dice fell more or less as anticipated in the melee. Militia versus veterans is never a good thing, even with double the figures.

I did manage one small victory, sweeping away one of the Hussar units, but the French moved up the cuirassiers...

The Russians were steadily losing the infantry battle. Renaud managed to crunch my reserve cavalry unit and send his cavalry behind the Russian infantry lines. It was only a matter of time, so I conceded.

The Russian light cavalry lose a melee with French light cavalry on the hill.

Lessons

I knew the cavalry battle was lopsided, as I wanted him to see how the difference in troop quality affects longevity in the attack and defense. When rolling for Morale Checks with a d10, militia need a 9+ and despite some nice “10” rolls, I could not do that enough to maintain a battle line for long against veterans.

On the infantry side, all troops except the two Russian militia units were veteran. Here, it was a bit closer fight until his artillery pounded a couple of units of mine, including my big 12-pounder artillery unit. Then he got to see how artillery can soften up infantry.

We all got to see how rolling 50-50 doesn't guarantee success every other roll!

Full disclosure: I created *Snappy Nappy*.

Quick Reference Sheet: Available on Peter's blog: [Blunders on the Danube](#), under the Campaigns in a Day section. You'll also find a complete record of all the big multi-player, multi-table games, including maps and OOBs. Enjoy.

French cavalry victorious on the right flank. My general attaches to my cavalry reserve.



1814 Campaign: One Pager

by Russ Lockwood

After gaming *Snappy Nappy*, we had a few minutes left so I asked if he'd like to playtest a quick and easy game point-to-point game of the 1814 campaign. For *Against the Odds* magazine, it's tentatively titled *Empire's End*.

We played the basic version. The game has three commander counters: Napoleon, Blucher, and Schwarzenberg and six Army counters: a 4 Strength Point (SP) Army with 3 SP on reverse, and a 2 SP army with a 1 SP on reverse. You only play with one army counter per commander at a time. If a 4 SP army takes a loss, it's flipped to the 3 SP side. If a 3SP army takes a loss, the counter is removed and the 2 SP counter placed on the map. If a 2 SP army takes a loss, it's flipped to the 1 SP side.

A quick playtest game... Renaud ponders.

Each turn includes a die roll for possible 1 SP in reinforcements per army per turn.

The goal is for the two Allied Armies to capture two out of three fortress. They have six turns to do it. Movement is by die roll -- Napoleon has the advantage here needing a 1-5 on a d6 to move a space.

Combat is comparing SPs (Napoleon is worth 2 SPs) and rolling a die. Napoleon has the advantage here, too.

As the French by random picking, Renaud played an aggressive first game. Alas, he suffered from a number of die rolls of 6. As Napoleon either couldn't move or lost SPs, the odds began to even out and the way to Paris opened up for an Allied win.

Second Game

In the second game, Renaud played a cagier French game, dancing around and delivering sharp attacks before trading space for time. My Allied commands suffered a couple battlefield losses (made good with reinforcements) and a case of the slows. Still, I had a remote chance with the odds very much against me. The odds won and so did Renaud.

Still a clever game and has expanded capabilities that need to be tested.

Empire's End will be included in the upcoming *La Bataille de Kulm* game package

Full disclosure: I am ATO's Staff Developer for *Empire's End*.





The factory fortress tabletop battlefield.

Below: The Americans arrive on the south side.

RUSE II: WWII Factory Fortress

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud tinkered with his *RUSE* ruleset to try out units made up of individual figures, instead of the pure skirmish game we played before. This had more of a *Bolt Action*, *Chain of Command*, and *Skirmish Action* feel to it.

Instead of drawing cubes, we put one card per unit into a common deck. Each phase, we drew two cards. Either one side had both cards or each side had one card, in which case the lowest card drawn went first. If tied, dice off. The deck also contained two “Overwatch” cards per player -- this wrinkle in the card system automatically went first.

A drawn card allowed you to select any of your units to activate. As before, you could move and shoot, move twice, or remain stationary and use aimed fire. You may think that's an easy decision, and it often is, but sometimes you are ping-ponging back and forth deciding which unit needs to be activated.

Furthermore, and I like this, you can “push your luck” and decide to activate a unit that was already activated. But you'll need to pass a d6 die roll first. If you fail, you lose the activation. Talk about decision making.



OOB

The Germans had three infantry squads, each with a two-man LMG team and variety of rifle, SMG, assault rifle, and panzerfaust-armed soldiers, two light mortar teams, two 75mm AT guns, two HMG teams, a sniper, a medic, and a platoon commander for a total of 12 units. At some point, a Tiger I would arrive for a 13th unit.

The US had four infantry squads, each with a BAR and variety of rifle and SMG-armed soldiers, one light mortar team, two bazooka teams, two Sherman tanks, a M-10 Tank Destroyer, a sniper, and a platoon commander for a total of 12 units.

The US had a little more High-Explosive firepower in the tanks, but the Germans had more firepower in small arms.

The LMG team with assault assist fire on an American squad with devastating results. The mortar team also hit directly.

Set Up

Renaud had set up a Factory Fortress scenario, where the Germans set up in or within six inches of a central factory and the Americans set up within six inches of any table edge. We alternated placing units.

I went with a fairly standard all-around defense, placing the three infantry squads in a rough triangle inside the factory, with the mortar teams in the middle, a HMG team on two sides, and an AT team on the third and fourth sides. Unfortunately, there wasn't a tall spot for the sniper, so I put him in an unused corner covering a relatively open area, just in case someone was sneaking that way. Both our snipers were hidden (not deployed on table) with the positions recorded.

The Americans put one squad on each edge, with two of them next to a bazooka team and a third with the mortar team. The fourth squad had a Sherman tank. The other Sherman tank, along with the platoon commander, deployed with a squad and bazooka team. The M-10 was deployed in a corner by its lonesome. As for the sniper, I don't know where it was deployed.

The conga line of troops backs up Beady-eyed Bruno and his panzerfaust. The M-10 took a gun hit. The LMG team atop the ruins (bottom left) spray the open top and eliminate the gunner. Defanged!

Firing Combat

The defender roll is a clever mechanic. The target starts with 1d6, adds more dice depending on the terrain, and perhaps adds more dice depending on various situations.

Each weapon receives a certain number of attack dice, so when a squad activates and fires at another squad, the firer totals up all the weapon dice in Line of Sight and rolls against the defender's highest roll.

No matter how many attack dice are rolled, all are compared to the highest defender roll. Rolling equal to or higher than the defender roll results in a hit and one target figure is placed on its side.

Whenever you activate a unit with figures on its side, each figure rolls a "wound check." It's a 50-50 roll to either stand up and be back in the fight, or be incapacitated and removed from the game. The owning player decides which figures are removed (the riflemen always head off table first and the automatic weapons figures last).

Naturally, the more dice the defender rolls, the more likely to roll a high number. The more dice the attacker rolls, the more likely to roll a high number to equal or beat the defender's highest roll. It can be a bloodbath.





American return fire punishes the German squad sortie. All get hit and all but Beady-eyed Bruno and the LMG team perish.

That said, if you have a squad out in the open and roll only a single die, and that die roll is a 1, then everything the attacker fires will hit and knock over that number of figures. Remember, a hit is not a kill -- it's a 50-50 wound check.

The Game

The first card was American. As a Sherman and German 75mm AT gun were staring at each other, the American was quicker off the draw. Half the AT crew were hit.

A melee with Germans rushing the Americans. The US squad was wiped out.

The next card was German, and I activated the AT gun. I rolled the 50-50 roll for the two crew to shake off the HE shot and they did. An AT round plowed into the Sherman and caused weapon damage.

In this version, a damaged gun fires only half dice. So, with that result, a tank can still move and fire, but with fewer dice.

Then came one heckuva German shot on the draw of two German cards for the phase. First, I put a mortar round right in the middle of a two-man bazooka team. While the defender die roll was good, mine was better. Both figures were down.

Then, I unleashed the LMG and assault-gun fire (8d6) and managed to roll so well, seven of the eight shots hit the American squad.

Next phase, I had the first card, so I re-activated the LMG-assault gun fire, passed the activation die roll, and took out the rest of the US squad. When the US card came around, both bazooka team figures blew their 50-50 wound check roll and were removed. The squad tossed odds and passed six of 10 checks.

The surviving Americans on a later turn moved up and shot up a figure or two of mine, but felt the wrath of more German automatic fire, hitting four of the six. I activated the same German squad again, passed the die roll, and charged into melee.

Melee

Figures that are down and meleed are not automatically killed or captured. Instead, they are given a chance to do a wound check to stand up and melee. Renaud rolled odds and two stood up and two were removed.



The melee uses a slightly different calculation, but the opposed rolls are the same. However, a hit in melee is an automatic kill and removal. A low American die roll allowed my seven soldaten to sweep the Americans away.

Of course, now they were out of the nice cover of a fortress...

The Tiger arrives...but misses.

More Firing

The tanks fired HE of varying effect. My AT gun took multiple shots at the M-10, but all missed. The other AT gun fired at the damaged Sherman to no effect. The intact Sherman put a nice HE shell into another of my squads and keeled fire of them over. The M-10 moved and fired along with a squad at my squad holding the eastern side of the factory. Cover or not, I was slowly being picked apart.

Enough of that, I activated that squad and sent out Panzerfaust Fritz along with most of the squad to hunt the M-10. The shot hit the M-10 and put a gun damage on it. I used the LMG team, which was still in the factory at a higher elevation, to pepper the crew. Remember that an M-10 is an open-topped vehicle. I hit 'em all, and the gunner was the one who failed his wound check. The M-10 could drive, but not fire.

Alas, now that the squad was mostly in the open, here came a torrent of American fire that hit all of the squad. Only two made the wound check -- the lucky LMG team remained alive.

The firefight continued, but the Germans seemed to be doing better than the US. I even managed to land most mortar rounds on target. That's a lucky bunch of rolls. One that I missed hit the intact Sherman, but did nothing in terms of damage. It would be a rare event for a light mortar round to do anything to a tank. The open-topped M-10...hmmm, but that was already crippled.

Tiger Terror

The joker finally appeared on the fourth turn. The Tiger lurched to a halt just inside the north edge and fired at the damaged Sherman. I missed.

The Sherman, perhaps name Fury, turned and drove around to the side of the Tiger. Uh-oh. Flank shot! A miss.

I activated the Tiger, pivoted to show the front, and fired. A hit! The Sherman brewed up.

The nearest American squad saw that and moved doubletime to put some distance and intervening terrain between them and the Tiger.

With that side secure, I turned to the last Sherman. I moved two panzerfaust-armed soldiers into the open and fired. Two rolls and boxcars! Two sixes. As ties got to the attacker, two hits on the Sherman put two gun hits on the Sherman. Another one defanged.

The Sherman flanked the Tiger, but missed. The Tiger pivoted and did not.

End of Game

This was about halfway through the fifth turn and it didn't look too good for the Americans. Sure, Yahtzees can turn the tide, as it sometimes did for me, but odds said an intact Tiger and no US armor or bazooka teams means a slow death from afar. So we ended the game.

Plays fairly quick -- four and a half turns in two and a half hours -- between two players.

Some other things to think about are movement penalties depending on terrain, what exactly does a morale hit do on a vehicle, how a medic works, close combat sequence (firing vs melee), and other uses of the Overwatch card. These were some of the things we talked about during the game and we changed some things on the fly to see the effect.

The basic mechanics move quick, especially in a two player game. Some nuances need to be worked out. As I said to Renaud after the game, "Promising. Keep going."



NEWS



Gamers at 11am at the EPGS.

Eastern PA Gaming Society *by Russ Lockwood*

I had heard about this group years ago, but since I used to work Saturdays, and the Eastern Pennsylvania Gaming Society (EPGS) meets on the first and third Saturdays, I never could get to a session. Well, with my Saturdays now open, I finally went to the Oxford Valley Mall at the corner of I-295 and Rte 1 a stone's throw from Sesame Place amusement park.

First off, I didn't know the OV Mall had a community room (second floor, behind the bathrooms). It's not the most elegant of spots, but it has tables, chairs, and excellent lighting. Being in a mall, the food court is a two-minute walk on the same floor.

Scott (foreground) oversees a playtest of his Napoleonic game.



I wasn't planning to game, so I arrived at about 11am to find one miniatures game, five board games, and a card game with most in full swing.

The miniatures game was a playtest of Napoleonic rules being run by Scott Washburn. You may know him as Paper Terrain guy from the HMGS conventions.

The board games were mostly eurogames, except for one GMT game called *Seas of Thunder*, a WWII area global naval game that has a lot of counters being sorted. In the 45 minutes I was there, had yet to be set up. The two

players sure seemed to be looking forward to the game. There was also a five-player game which I think was called Six Empires, for I was invited to sit in as the sixth. Alas, I was there for a fly by.

The guys with the card game had just arrived and were sorting through cards.

I'd say about 20-25 gamers were there when I was. I don't know if any more gamers would show up, but that's a pretty good crowd.

I wonder if other malls have community rooms?

WWI: A Forlorn Hope Graphics

by Russ Lockwood

Wharf Rat Games announced it signed Tawakalitu "Tawa" Abiwa to design the graphics for the WWI game *A Forlorn Hope*.

Tawakalitu "Tawa" Abiwa (*at right*) is an illustrator and graphic designer based in central Maryland, passionate about blending art with speculative biology and fashion. She graduated from the University of Maryland with a BFA in Graphic Design, where she honed her skills in transforming complex ideas into accessible visuals.

Info: wharfratgames.com



National SPI Wargame Convention: Historicon 2025

by Russ Lockwood

Previously, HMGS has considered inviting other gaming groups to be a part of Historicon. So it will come to pass at Historicon 2025. HMGS inked a deal for the "SPI is Alive in 2025" National SPI Wargame Convention to be held in one of the 25x50-foot ballrooms at Historicon in Lancaster, PA, July 16-20, 2025.

You need a Historicon badge to game in the SPI area.

Historicon Info: hmgs.org

Sign-up:

www.spigames.net/Form_FestSignUpForm.htm

General SPI net Info: www.spigames.net

Keeping SPI Alive in '25! -- Welcome, SPI Gamers!

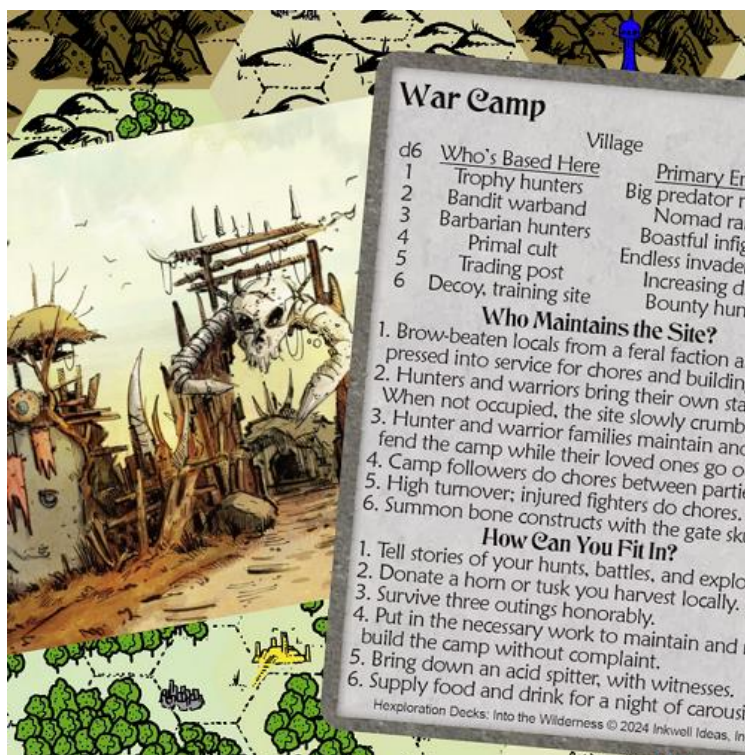


Hex Tiles and Cards: Inkwell Ideas

by Russ Lockwood

A decade ago, three other gamers and I co-founded a company called 4D10 to make gaming accessories. We did successful "print your own design on a blank playing card with your laser printer," "make your own playing cards with your laser printer" sets in bridge, poker, tarot, and half sizes, and "make your own *Settlers of Catan*" hex tiles with your laser printer" products. For the latter, we had die-cut hexes produced and peel-off sheets with die-cut hexes you could populate with graphics and print on your laser printer.

They were all Kickstarters and we delivered on time because I insisted we have all the pre-production aspects done before we launched the KS.



Anyway, Inkwell Ideas has done a variety of printed copy game accessories over the years to supplement its *Hexographer*, *Worldographer*, and other mapping programs. This time, it's playing card RPG suggestions for adventure locations and 3-inch hex tiles with seven 1-inch hexes printed on it and terrain stickers.

The project is run through Backerkit, not KS. It's already double funded, but you still have until mid March to consider it. A variety of printed, PDF, and printed and PDF options are available ranging from \$5 to \$100. Shipping in the US is a flat \$6.

There will be four decks, each with 54 poker-sized cards: *Settled Lands* - Focuses on cities, towns, villages, castles, and other settled locations of a fantasy world; *Into the Wilderness* - Features strange paths, spooky wilderness, isolated shrines, a hermit's hut, and so on; *The Underrealms* - Has ideas for locations in intriguing underground kingdoms; and *Otherworldly Domains* - Spins fantasy locations like a city on the Plane of Fire, magical floating islands, and improbable architecture to list just a few.

Backerit:

<https://www.backerkit.com/c/projects/inkwell-ideas/hexploration-decks-hexcrawl-sandbox-rpg-support#top>

***Flames of War* Price Increase**

by Russ Lockwood

In case you missed it, Battlefront Miniatures out of NZ will be increasing the price of all its historical “settings” by 9% to 11%. According to its e-mail, this includes

“*Flames Of War*, *WWIII: Team Yankee*, *Clash of Steel* miniatures, books, starter sets, army deals, special order codes, and so on. It does not affect Unit Card packs.”

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



Did Someone Say Vikings?



*A HMGS-NG game featured Viking longships.
Photo by John Spiess.*



The adventurers reform the party. From bottom center clockwise: Dan (baseball cap), Steve, GM Sean (behind screen), Ed, Fred, John, and Connor.

The River of Wrath: More D&D Adventure

by Russ Lockwood

Last we left Tazan Rell the archer (see the 1/26/2025 AAR), he and some battered adventurers had bashed their way through half of Kobold Caverns. There had been rumors of a red dragon, but if true, Tazan hadn't seen it.

Yet the Prior of Pelor had issued a recall, leaving the Caverns group in a dilemma. They only cleared out half the Kobold Caverns and certainly didn't like leaving any evil forces behind.

What To Do?

I shifted the quiver and leaned against the wall. “You know, me hardies, we need to sort out a payment plan from the kobolds for our troubles. It'll save us time bashing the rest of their little heads in or fracturing them with frostballs. They probably won't give us everything, but I bet they'll give us enough to save their scrawny necks.”

Keul piped up. “Hey, dudes, whatever we choose to do is totally fine. But they got a red dragon.”

“So we assume, but do they? It certainly hasn't made an appearance to save the day,” I replied. “You'd think it would be a bit more fussy about lettering precision at the entrance to these caverns.”

“But maybe we need to, like, play it cool here and, like, head back to Sheffield as fast as possible.”

“We will, but with our pockets filled. I mean, we have to pay for a lost mule and gear.” I thought a bit. “I bet there might be a dragon. I bet it's a young dragon, newly hatched and nowhere near full size or power.”

I stepped forward. “So, I propose we demand payment to make us leave. After all, we had none of our fighters with us. We either leave with pay, or leave, get our fighters and wizards and clerics and come back for more pay!”

“Well, like, you can give it a try, dude.”

I stood where most kobolds could hear me, especially any leader kobolds left, and spoke in orc -- or at least as diplomatically as I could in the orc language. I mean, let's face it, orcs are not exactly the most diplomatic race around. “Kobolds! Yeah, you kobolds in there! Parley?”

I waited a tick and continued. "Good. Now, let's not bicker and argue about who killed who. You're in a bit of a tight spot. You've lost half your cavern, half your force, and we only lost half a mule. Well, more like 90 percent of it. Although we were rather fond of our dear Muffin the Mule."

"Now, we could continue cleaning out the rest of your cavern, leaving your with nothing but the earth which your bones fall upon. Or, we can come to a meeting of the minds where we leave you and your cavern intact in exchange for some...minor...payment considerations."

I made a show of hemming and hawing deep in thought. "We could, for example, be persuaded to leave all the artworks intact in exchange for sacks full of gems. Well, except for one minor tapestry which we will need to take back with us...for use against the cold of the hills."

"And if we were to depart upon additional favorable terms, such as you and your dragon not launching raids against the Yeomanry Kingdom, we would certainly refrain from bringing back true fighters and wizards to scour the caverns and claim all the art and treasure."

"Think it over, kobolds. What say you?"

A muffled accented shout from the other side, "Go away, you silly adventuring bumbler. We heap scorn upon your puny efforts, you bunch of mule bottom biters. Now begone or we will open the door, let Pyrothaxus the dragon breathe fire on you, and then taunt your blackened bones."

I nodded at the rejection. "Well, what rude fellows..."

Keul placed a hand on my shoulder. "Don't mean to harsh your downer even more, but dude, they probably knew we were suffering from bad vibes like them."

I shook his head and muttered, "Nah. The problem is you just can't negotiate with evil."

I turned to face everyone once again. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained. Now, let's see what we can salvage."

The party collected the artworks and other treasures and piled them outside. I pried the paintings from the frame and rolled up the canvases to put in my quiver. Other members walked back to the tower and picked up a mule that had been tended by kobolds that had previously surrendered. Back came the new mule, the treasures were loaded, and back we walked to Sheffield. Nevar's traps on those small tunnels were still intact as far as we knew.

Before we went, I took the head, all that was left of our dear departed mule Muffin, and left it on the entryway desk as a reminder to the kobolds about what will happen to them.

We backtracked to the tower and headed down the road, if you could call it that, stopping in to say hello to our stone giant friend, and ending at Stillwater. We picked up our horses and rode back to the city.

Sheffield

Back at the Basilica, we presented the liberated tapestry showing the Paladin of Pelor battling a dragon to the Prior, who expressed gratitude at its return. What we didn't keep collectively or individually we sold for 883 gold pieces (GPs), which we used to repurchase the common adventuring items lost when Muffin fell into the lava.

Among the items we kept were 20 Dragon-minted gold pieces, which remained in the quiver, magic mithril mail that adapted to fit Tazan, a stuffed marmoset desired by Rufus, a large red ruby gem worth 5,000 GP, and 10 gems each worth 1,000 GPs. We also distributed a healing potion, a sleep spell scroll, magic warhammer, magic short sword, and a smiley face magic shield whose magic was never becoming dirty.

I thought about keeping a trumpet. I figured it might be magic and would be like Boromir's horn or Gideon's Trumpet, but our collective Detect Magic and Item Identify spells found it to be a plain old trumpet. We sold it.

Our wizards researched spells, including Cristof, who used two of the gems to pay for wizardly wizardry, and Gavriel, who hired himself out to create scrolls for a little petty cash. Nevar successfully duplicated a *Potion of Climbing* recovered from the Kobald caverns and created an *Extra Healing* potion.

As for me, the only fighter left in a group full of wizards and clerics, I found myself at loose ends for two weeks of R&R. Sheffield, which had withstood the siege thanks in part to our group's heroic efforts, was worse for wear, although the barest beginnings of work to rebuild the city had started, helped by an influx of people from the south fleeing bandits, monsters, and other horrors.

That said, I decided the party could use a headquarters, preferably a fortified manor of some sort, in Sheffield, complete with ballrooms, meeting rooms, workrooms, laboratory, stable, bedroom suites, storerooms, dining hall, kitchen, guestrooms, servants quarters, and other rooms, not to mention outside gardens. Well, it would be a work in progress.

So, I went looking for a place, but much of the city was in ruins. Nonetheless, I made connections and struck up conversations with those who recognized what the group had done -- they agreed to donate a marvelous large lot to the group.

Back I went to the Basilica, but the Prior was not there. I did find Endi, who had helped me recover from certain death at the Siege. Seeing how we had delivered the tapestry back to the Basilica, I wondered if the acolytes would find it in their heart to clear out the boulders, rubble, and other ruins upon our new land. Using what charisma I had, I may have mentioned the idea that we were headed south to the Hilltop Abbey to report on conditions there and do some selective slaughtering of marauding bandits. Endi made no promises, of course, but would see what he could do.

It certainly would be in their best interest to keep such an effective team of adventurers in the city. Many a creature, or at least ones with a sense of self-preservation, would think twice about attacking the city hosting the headquarters of our group. After all, we almost fought the Chicken of Bristol. Not only would safety be increased, our collective looting field and local spending would aid the rebuilding of economy.

FNG: Free New Guy (Yeah, That's It)

The Basilica sent word to us of an adventurer named Balian looking for a group to join, so we recruiting him. How could we resist a wizard with an owl familiar? We sold a gem and gave him 1,000 GPs for expenses.

We had several options. Nevar wanted to scour the Tor Hills for giants, but more favored going south after reported bandits. Keul noted, "Monsters, monsters everywhere, so what's closest? Which pack of monsters is near, like, the best hotel? Because a good hotel is super important, y'know?"

Rumors of the walking dead also filtered up from the south. The ever helpful Keul said, "I hung out with a guy named Rick in the Astral Plane, y'know? At this bowling alley. He hates the walking dead dudes. But how's the hotel down south? They got a hot tub?"

Keul thought a bit. "Whatever we choose to do is totally fine. Seems like The Man is happy about those giants we chased off, so it's, like, up to us? It's all good, y'know, but which of these many paths help us with that lich guy? Weren't we worried about that thing, Sterling whozeewhatsis? So, like, if we think one way or the other way I can ask Tymo -- I mean Rudd, yeah about it, and see? What does Rudd says? Because this is like a really important time, man, I mean it's all fate of the world time."

I thought Keul made sense for half the time. All the monsters needed to be reined in here as war continued in the north, so it made little difference which ones we needed to subdue. As for the other half of the time, who the heck is this Rick, Rudd, or Tymo?

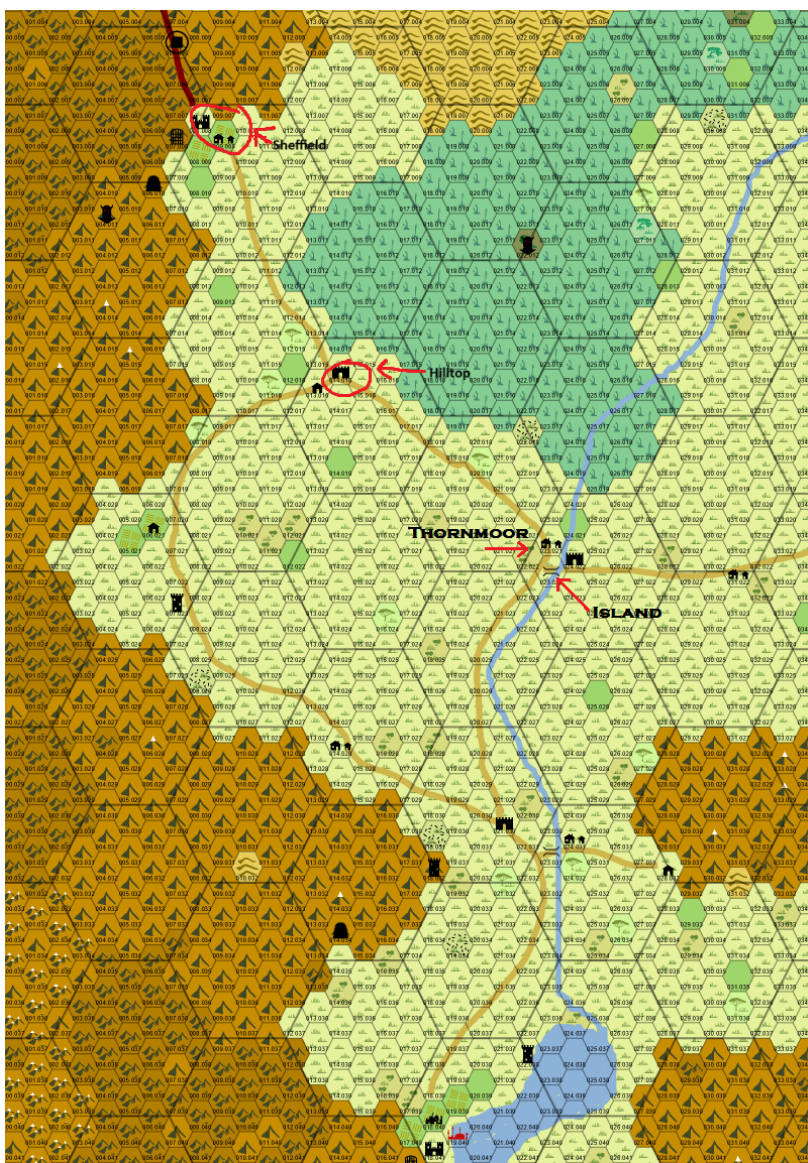
South it was...

Sheffield in upper left.

Southward

We picked up horses from the Basilica and headed to Hilltop, or, for some of us, back to the Hilltop Abbey. Our party consisted of Tazan Rell the Human Archer (me), Cristof the Human Wizard (Steve), Keul the Asimar Cleric (Ed), Navar the Human Alchemist (Dan), Gavriel the Human Wizard (Connor), Rufus the Gif Cleric (John), and Balien the half-Elven Wizard (Fred). We also had two mules, Willy and Harry, carrying the mundane gear.

Winged lizards of some evil being tracked us for a while. Last time, Ranger



Gorven and I shot a pair of low-flying spies out of the air near the tower. This time, as if knowing my range was 600 feet, the lizards flew at 601 feet. Cheeky beasties.

We hoofed into Hilltop and the Abbey, spending the night and hearing all the latest rumors. Here, the oddest thing happened. Snow fell overnight despite the warmish temperatures. Apparently, it was becoming cooler in these parts than anyone could recollect. Checking on refugees from even further south, we discovered the same thing happening elsewhere. It was strange.

As for rumors, we heard reports of bandits with red eyes near the river Hewl. Oh great, some sort of thieves cult. Well, we'll put things aright soon enough.

The Black Obelisk

A black obelisk, sitting outside the temple for as long as anyone could recall, drew the wizards' attention. Despite some prodigious spell work and personal peril by touching the stone, our assembly could not determine much about it. Balian beheld a vision of a hand holding an eyeball and Nevar had a vision of a library shrouded in darkness as well as a hand holding an eyeball. Maybe it means we should give someone a hand looking for a monocle.

It snowed again that night and with the morning the sun melted it all again. "Evil's afoot," Nevar noted.

And so were we on the road to the village of Thornmoor on the River Hewl. It was not looking good. Burned out farms studded our way. The farmers had long since fled to Hilltop and to Sheffield.

Sure enough, Thornmoor was as burned as the farms. Only seven buildings made up this fishing village and six were ruins. A seventh was also a ruin, but it seemed as if it was cleaned up a bit. The debris that lay scattered among the other houses was cleared from one house.

"Anyone home?" Cristof called out. No answer.

Cristof called out again as we edged towards the front door, such as it was.

"Go away!" came a reply. It sounded like an old man.

"We mean you no harm. We just want to find out why all is burned and sacked. Was it bandits?"

"Go away! If you don't, I have a crossbow bolt with your name on it!"

I could take no more. I shouted, "And I have an arrow that can go around corners and never misses!"

Cristof stared at me. "You really need to improve your opening lines if you're going to talk to someone."

In case the fellow inside couldn't hear, I raised my voice. "And threats of shooting before talking deserve a return threat. He's lucky I didn't loose!" I whispered, "You never know when a little bluster may solve an impasse."

"Or start the shooting," Cristof responded.

"Fair point, but he started the threats."

"Well, we never formally met. You never asked his name."

Apparently, the old man inside figured that any party that questioned shooting versus talking would think first. He slowly rose. "I am Oliver, the last of the Thornmoorians."

Well, I thought, at least we're getting somewhere. He confirmed the rumor: Bandits with red eyes attacked the village, slaughtered many, and left upriver.

Leaving some to talk, others explored. We walked to the pier and onto a half-sunk ship. Balian had sailing skills and knowledge of ships. I had carpentry tools and woodworking knowledge. Together with others, especially Nevar and his magical mending ability, we made the ship seaworthy, or at least river worthy. We needed to name it. Rufus piped up. "Legend of the Marmoset!"

For some reason, he was awfully fond of the stuffed marmoset we found in Kobold Caverns. So our ship became *Legend of the Marmoset*.

Our party looks at a job well done. The Legend lives.

Across the four-mile wide river, the fortress of Prince Ravenshield served as a river guardian. Whether it was intact or stormed, we could not tell.

Riverdancing



We settled onto the ship, all except Rufus who stayed ashore, and set watches. Nevar set a warning spell on the pier as well as two trap spells. Give the river bandits credit, they didn't wait long. As soon as night fell, a fog rolled in from upriver along with two ghostly rowboats -- one with four skeletons and one with two skeletons, a skeletal Swashbuckler named Capt. Marcel, a magic user of some sort named Dark Tide, and some other entity we couldn't identify at first.

Our two sentries, Balien and Rufus, spread the alarm. The rest of us hopped to it, although surprise was complete. We headed up to the main deck sans armor. I at least wore the mithril mail and had grabbed my bow and quiver.

In come the boats of evil.

Capt. Marcel leapt from rowboat upon our front spar, tiptoed down the spar, and jumped up onto the foremast. It was as neat an acrobatic display as any of us had ever seen. Nevar greeted this performance with an accurate shot from his firearm.

Two quick arrow shots were in the air, but that skeletal gymnast muttered something and my arrows bent away from him. Uh-oh. Capt. Marcel wasn't a mime. He had spells of some sort.

Nevar and Gavriel were more successful, and hit the Captain. That probably just annoyed it, but it showed us it could be hurt. And anything that can be hurt, can be killed.

A Dark Tide spell was countered by Balien, Cristof's Lightning spell bent away from Marcel, and Rufus struck Dark Tide's ghostly rowboat with a fireball that cindered the skeletons and singed Dark Tide and the entity to be named later. Balien went into some sort of riverdance routine and attacked Capt. Marcel to no effect.

Out of the water came a quartet of spectres heading towards our ship. A ghoulish tried to enter the starboard ship via the pier, but not only did it trigger Nevar's warning spell, it triggered the snare spell too and was lifted a few feet above the pier. Two more ghouls jumped aboard on the ship's stern, and the rowboat sidled up to the port side with four skeletons ready to board.

Marcel on our ship, a ghoulish in a trap (on top of yellow die), spectres on the water, and more undead nasties assail us.

Now we found out about the entity in the back of the rowboat. It leapt from the boat into the water and loosed a screech to chill our bones. I said a siren. Wiser ones said a Banshee. I stood corrected. We all needed to gird our nerves versus something. We all made it.

The skeletal swashbuckler Marcel sliced Balien deep -- deep enough to stagger our half elf to miss a step in his rope-a-dope riverdance. And then he didn't move. Balien seemed frozen in place. Dark magic indeed! Nevar's *Flash of Genius* allowed Balien to save against this magic. Concerned for his stricken comrade, Nevar cast *Healing Word* to grant back 11 points after scoring another accurate shot at Marcel.

I pivoted to send two magic Walloping arrows into the stern ghouls. When fighting undead, you need all the help you can get. One tumbled to the deck. The other wobbled but remained standing.



Spells and counter-spells flew through the air. I quickly realized that being a fighter in a spell war was decidedly unhealthy. I barely caught the phrase that pays from Keul. "All for Luck!" Or something like that. He unleashed a powerful Turn Undead spell.

The skeletons sailed away. The ghouls jumped overboard. The spectres fled. The Banshee remained, but was soon incinerated. Then, only Capt Marcel, Dark Tide wizard, and the ensnared ghouls remained. Dark Tide opened a dimension door and fled, his undead countenance more undead than when he started. Gavriel flipped a Banish spell at Capt Marcel, who vanished to some other plane of existence. Don't ask me, I'm just an archer. At one point, Cristof opened up his own dimension door to one of the small boats and took me along with him. As it was only a short way away, I was only lost in darkness for a split second.

The ghostly boats began fading from corporeal existence and Balien summoned up a water elemental to push them to shore before they disintegrated. I don't recall what happened to the ensnared ghouls. We probably destroyed it.

The only thing of note we could scavenge from this attack was the sword Capt Marcel carried. When he vanished, he dropped it. After a couple spells, the wizards pronounced it the Frozen Blade of the Drowned, a cursed blade that would give its wielder significant advantages in combat, but curse the owner with nightmares every night until it drove the owner mad. We wrapped that sucker up so none could touch it.

The other info of note; Two icons -- an angry water face with trident and a hand holding an eye. Apparently, and my lore is sketchy, that meant some Cult of Water Elementals was working with some demon called Exema. Normally, the two were rivals. I guess the enemy of my enemy is my friend.

We retired back to our boat to recover from our battle. Thankfully, the night passed peacefully.

Upriver

We left at first light, tacking upriver towards an island that once served as a mid-river anchor point to two mighty bridges. As we progressed, the air turned colder and small patches of ice floated on the river. We were getting close.

We saw the ruins of the bridges as well as a ruined tower on the island. The pier proved sturdy enough, so we docked.

Ambush!

Amid the dock's barrels and crates, four armed humans popped up. Ah, maybe these were the last survivors of the garrison, not unlike ol' Oliver. No such luck. Four humans, four spells. Another damn wiz war! This time with cultists.

Four cultists cause much more trouble than their numbers indicate.

Rufus and Gavriel were struck by the Hold spells and frozen in place. I, too, felt a wave of paralysis come over me, but I shrugged it off. The last spell must have been a summoning one, for a Water Elemental popped up and smacked Keul with a curl of water.

One of the cultists tried to board the ship, but Rufus not only smacked him around, he shoved him off the ship, leapt after him, and hammered an elbow to the midsection.

Balien began shuffle dancing, which apparently was some sort of defense mechanism while he could attack. More spells came from the cultists, although most were harmlessly dispersed. My arrows struck their marks and at least felled one, but I was definitely on the annoyance end of the hit point-producing scale of death dealing. On the plus side, I was ignored so I could ply my pointy trade.

Once the first cultist fell, we could concentrate greater power against the remainder. When Balien disintegrated the Water Elemental, the cultists soon followed except for one prisoner being held by Rufus.

Balien demanded information, but the cultist, being a true cultist, refused to answer. So Balien cut off the cultist's thumb and demanded answers. Keul walked away. Rufus just about passed out. The cultist maintained his silence.

Cristof tried. "We can do this the easy way or the hard way."

The cultist was unimpressed and yelled, "Arasic will reward me for my devotion!"

Cristof shoved a dagger into the recalcitrant human's heart. The cultist died in ecstasy. Rufus wailed about the injustice of it all.



Keul added to the objection. “Dude, that was very uncool, cutting off that guy’s thumb, then just killing the guy like that. I mean, sure, he probably had to die but it ain’t cool to just off the jerk, y’know? You guys gotta tell me that’s the end of that. It ain’t lucky to go around torturing people, even the bad ones, because then, like, we’re the bad ones? And that ain’t lucky. I sure hope we go with the luck, mannnnnnn...”

“What!” Cristof complained. “The evil cultist wanted to join his demon. I did him a favor.”

Besides 20 GP in our common account, we pulled off a pair of magic gloves that gave cold damage when scoring a hit. Balien claimed them.

Nevar announced he would stay and guard the ship along with our two mules Willy and Harry.

Tower or Stairs?

The dock yielded only rotten and decaying wares, so we pushed on to the mini-fortress with its crenelated walls and single central tower. We found a door into the tower and a doorway leading to stairs heading downward.

We opted for the tower. Cristof saw the library and before I could say “It’s a trap!”, he crossed the threshold, followed by Balien. Didn’t they just witness Nevar’s traps? Ah, for the greed of spell books...

Three books flew off the shelves and pounded them. As they flapped and flailed about to try and defend their heads, Cristof wailed, “What is this, the Demon Decimal System?”

The rest of us poured attacks into the rooms. Rufus rushed into the room and ripped a shelf from the wall just in case more books would fly off the shelves.

The six books were quickly felled. As they poked through the shelves, a pseudopod of goo erupted from behind the books and struck about. A Black Pudding monster hid upstairs, but was soon burned out with fireballs and burning hands spells.

Someone commented that Rufus was like a “bull in a china shop.” I countered, “No, he’s a Hippopotamus in a Bookstore!” From that point on, we all agreed that the phrase to unleash mayhem was “Hippo in a bookstore!”

I poked around the books on the floor. I found a trade ledger from the year 443 -- and it year 579. The others poked around and found demonic icons for Iuz and Ziggymoy on the walls behind the shelves. Now, I’m not familiar with all the background, but it seems a Coalition of the Demonic was building against the free peoples. Sheesh. How much more did we have to do to make the world safe for the aristocracy?

Apparently much.

Downstairs

Just as we got to the landing at the bottom of the stairs, a Nikola appeared in front of the door. “What do you serve?”

The Nikola at the base of the stairs.

“LUCK!” Keul yelled.

Ooops. Wrong answer. The Nikola attacked. So did we. We were better. The Nikola soon became a corpse.

We opened the doors to find a landing, a stone bridge over a river, a landing on the other side, and another 10-foot door.

More cultists!

Water elementals rise on either side of the bridge. Across were five more cultists. The middle one was mine!

Keul charged across the bridge and screamed, “FOR LUCK!”



I wasn't about to let the big brute in the middle say a word. My bow twanged twice and I put a massive 59 HP into the cultist. It keeled over, dead. Fireballs, lightning bolts, and Sacred Flame spells sped across the river, killing off the cultists. The one evil spell loosed was Sleetstorm that made footing slippery, but the death of the last cultist ended the spell.

Balien advanced to cross the bridge. Two water elementals rose from the river on either side of the bridge.

Arcs of water stretched out to batter Keul and Balien and try and drag them into the water. Balien was the first to be pulled underwater. Our concentrated fire tried to free him.

Meanwhile, the far door opened and out strode a sorceress named Niceone and a sorcerer named Zaric the Drowned. The magic battle began anew. Gavriel immediately saw the peril and cast Banish, but the sorceress negated the spell. Cristof hit her with a Banish attack that succeeded. Rufus placed Zaric inside a wall of fire.

I nocked and loosed two arrows at the Water Elemental and did just enough damage to break the watery bonds. The Elemental collapsed and released Balien, who crawled out of the water.

Zaric blew on a conch shell and a Fishhead Genie appeared. Then he advanced and hit Balien with a scimitar. The spells flew fast and furious, with most of our efforts against the Water Elemental. I loosed two more arrows that severed the water bonds and the second Elemental splashed back into the river.

I thought Zaric had more tricks in his robes, so I took careful aim and fired off a quartet of arrows. Despite rolling a d20 and a d8 and adding 6 Skill to try and reach the 20+ I expected to need to hit, all four arrows missed with low die rolls. Worse, I had used my one Arrow Flurry special ability to no effect.

I called out to Ed, for he had received a gag gift called a Dice Dungeon. An earlier set of abysmal die rolls sent one of his dice there. I consigned my errant d20 die to the same fate. Ed opened the door, shoved the offending die inside, and slammed the bars shut. A green glow surrounded the die -- obviously some cleansing beam of some type. There it sat for the rest of the game.

Although tough to see, you can just make out a d20 residing in the Dice Dungeon. Its replacement, evidently inspired, did far better.

This Genie No Dream

The Genie loosed a water jet that bowled over Gavriel and Cristof, but my superior dexterity allowed me to dance away.

With more than a little malice in their hearts, Gavriel the Soggy cast a Mind Sliver, but Zaric saved. Cristof the Drenched was more successful. With a flurry of hand jive and words of conjuring, a lightning bolt reached across the river and pierced Zaric, who disintegrated. Zaric had some sort of boomerang protection, so a slice of lightning rebounded and hit Cristof. That was a rude surprise! Cristof crumpled to the ground.

As it was Cristof's Banish spell that sent Niceone away, so the unconscious Cristof, hovering at Death's door, lost his spell. Niceone popped back into the battle and she looked angry.

Rufus raced to Cristof's aid, or so we thought. Instead, Rufus raced right on past. The last words of Cristof seemed to be, "Wait! Aren't you going to stop and heal me?"

Nope. Rufus hurled a fireball at Niceone the sorceress, who staggered but retaliated with a Cone of Cold that felled Gavriel and Rufus. They joined Cristof in knocking on Death's door.

Keul kept trying to free himself from Fishhead's water attack. Every once in a while, a hand with a magic hammer would appear above the water and strike the enveloping whirlpool.

Things were looking bleak. Three of our spell-slingers were down. A fourth was being held underwater and it's hard to speak a spell with a mouth full of water. That left Balien and me.

Balien gathered his energy and delivered a triple attack on Niceone. She crumpled and dissolved into nothingness. That left the genie.



The Last Hurrah

I shot a pair of arrows into ol' Fishhead the Genie. It was getting rather woozy, and even though its conch-calling master was but a bit of dust in the wind, Fishhead remained standing.

Fishhead the Genie is summoned via conch shell. Balien attacks the mage while Keul on the bridge is about to be grabbed by an elemental.



Balien went invisible and attacked with surprise, carving great chunks of scales and water from the genie. That left Genie dreaming of mortality. It suddenly asked, “Truce?”

Lengthy negotiations were out of the question. Keul's been under a while. In many ways, Fishhead held all the cards, or at least the important card of Keul.

I replied, “How long?”

“A day.”

“No. Two years.”

“OK.” The Genie lifted Keul out of the water and released him. “Now you give me conch shell.”

Balien threatened. “We can destroy the shell.”

“That's OK by me,” Fishhead said.

Aha, that conch was some sort of binding spell. Now, as far as I'm concerned, it was mission accomplished. Sure, Keul was looking rather uncool in his current half-drowned state, but he was alive and we could count on his spells again.

I drew, nocked, and shot two arrows into Fishhead.

“But, but, but...we have a truce...” ol' Fishhead whined as he started to dissolve.

“Isn't this how a truce works?” I replied innocently as I watched the evil genie swirl back into the conch shell.

Balien gaped in surprise. Even the three corpses twitched in surprise. Not me.

“Now, now. I don't recall actually agreeing to the truce. Nothing was signed and you know how legalistic evil ones are. I *suggested* two years. Ol' Fishhead accepted, but I didn't actually agree. You all *assumed* I agreed, but negotiations were ongoing.”

This didn't seem to move them. No matter. Keul was alive and used a revive spell with a diamond focus to bring back Gavriel from the threshold of Death's door. Back came the other two with the usual magic healing. A cacophony of outrage greeted my ears.

“Oh my, objections, objections? From the dead and near dead?” I asked. “Where were all these high-minded objections when torture was applied, thumbs cut off, and daggers driven into hearts?”

I waited for more outrage, but mum was the word. “And now we have a genie in our pocket.”

“But we'll have to keep him far away from you,” Balien said.

“Not really. The conch protected Zaric and will protect us. I don't know much about genies, but I bet that one will apportion blame among us all.”

The grumbling began to get louder, so I spoke quickly. “If we've know one thing, you never negotiate with evil or their minions. They never, ever keep their word, so I never give mine. And if they happen to convince themselves I did, I make sure to strike with surprise, firstest and fastest.”

Whether that placated them or not, I could not tell, but we gathered what loot we could find, including Amulet of Freezing Depths, Trident of Tempest, Cloak of Drowned King, Sapphire, Boots of Frost Walking, Water Tsunami Spell Scroll, Basin of Water Elemental Control, and an Ice Heart Pendant.

How these operate is wizard's work, so I'll leave it to them.

Meanwhile, we went back to the ship to heal and regroup.

Thanks, Sean and gang for one of the most humorous and nail-biting adventures yet...

BOOKS I'VE READ

By Russ Lockwood

The Last Charge of the Rough Rider. by William Elliot Hazelgrove. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 337 pages. 2025 reprint of 2023 book.

Subtitle: *Theodore Roosevelt's Last Days*

The subtitle's a bit off. Although this is indeed a microscopic look at TR's last two years, plenty of earlier exploits are included. The text switches forwards and backwards in years with marvelous prose, providing a full and dee-lightful "narrative non-fiction" bio.

Narrative non-fiction is a method of writing a true story in the manner of a fiction novel. Thus, you get speculative details and quotes throughout. For the most part, Hazelgrove gets away with it without too much stretching of the truth -- except for TR's last seconds of his life.

TR's last words (p271), as recorded by his valet James, were: "James, will you please put out the light?" This line is footnoted and linked to Edmund Morris' TR bio. What comes next is a non-footnoted description of TR's last breaths, of which he is supposed to be dreaming of charging the Germans at the head of a WWI Rough Riders division. That is one "narrative" too far for me.

Before that sour taste, the book about politics, healing through action, and a multitude of injuries and illnesses that gradually caught up to him proved entertaining and informative.

Of note to me is my newly-discovered relation to TR. On April 14, 1917, TR's son Archie married Grace Lockwood (p156-157). As there are two main branches of Lockwoods dating to 1630 in Massachusetts, I cannot say which branch Grace hails from, but it's likely one of them, or at least I'd like to think so.

Grace Lockwood. Image from web.

I poked around a bit and at the WikiTree website found these connections to her: "Grace is 22 degrees from Beyoncé Knowles, 19 degrees from Jean Béliveau (hockey player), 18 degrees from Madonna Ciccone..." I'm not exactly sure what "degrees from" means, but assuming it's something akin to "cousin ## times removed," I guess I should invite the Queen Bee to the next family picnic. I'll sign the invitation "Emperor R..."

The book contains 10 black and white photos and one black and white illustration.

What can I say about the book?

"Bully!" sez I. "Bully!"

("Bully" in an expression TR used to signify a positive response to something. In this review vernacular, treat it as "Enjoyed it.")

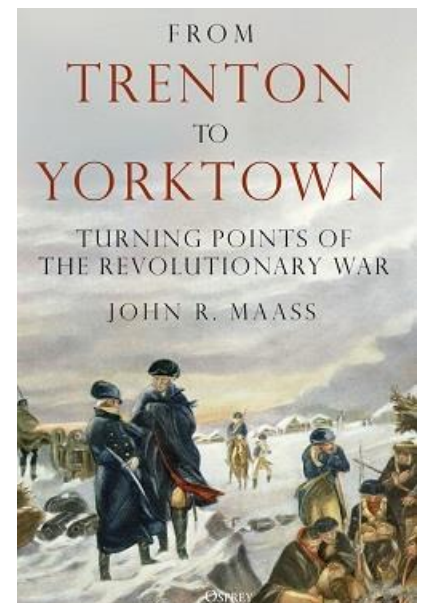
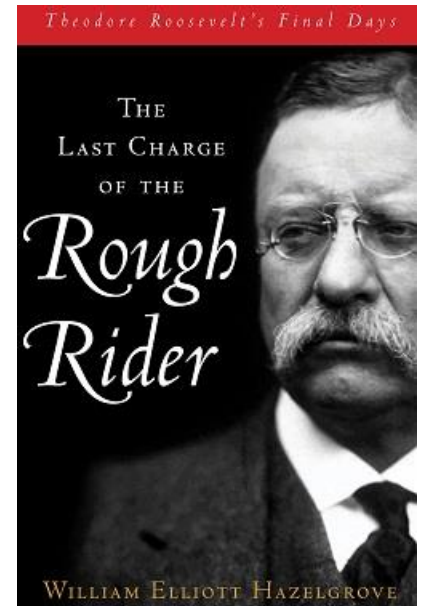
From Trenton to Yorktown: Turning Points of the Revolutionary War. by John R. Maass. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 280 pages. 2025.

As you might expect, the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution, presumably starting with the battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775, will bring numerous releases of AmerRev books. One way to cover the entire war is to focus on five turning points.

These five specific events -- four battles and one encampment -- changed the course of the American Revolution. Certainly other events contributed to the American independence, but these five receive scrutiny about why they were the main turning points.

The five: Battles of Trenton/Princeton, Battle of Saratoga and related campaign, Valley Forge Encampment, Battle of Guilford Courthouse, and Battle of Yorktown.

The short version of why (in order above): first success that American



troops could win a battle and keep army alive; eliminated a British army, repelled others, and received French recognition; kept army relatively intact and trained it up to quasi-European standards; British pyrrhic victory stopped British northward invasion from south; and eliminated a British army and unnerved British enough to enter negotiations to end war and recognize United States.

The long version -- you'll have to read the well-written book. To be sure, this is not a book about battles. It primarily covers politics, British and American strategies for waging the war, and converging outside events that led to the above results. Each chapter runs about 40-45 pages, or roughly the text-length of a Campaign volume.

The book contains one black and white photo, three color photos, 17 black and white illustrations, and four color illustrations.

Whether or not you agree with his five points, you will appreciate the reasoning behind each of his five. Other battles and events are considered in passing, presenting a good overview of the American Revolution as we enter the 250th anniversary of the AWI.

Enjoyed it.

War in Ukraine: Europe at War 40. by Tom Cooper, Adrien Fontanellaz, and Milos Sipos. Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 98 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Volume 6: The Air War February-March 2022*

Kudos to Helion for producing this modern war analysis in full color as this volume rewinds the war to its early air phase. *Volume 2* did a masterful early job of recounting the initial Russian invasion of Ukraine. *Volume 6* goes back with a focus on the air war.

The first two chapters cover the Russian and Ukrainian air forces' inventory and lots of tech specs. It may not be scintillating prose, but it does set a foundation for plane and helicopter capabilities. The war in the air starts with chapter 3, starting with an attempted coup in grabbing Kiev's airport that was foiled by poor planning, limited logistics, and unexpected defensive opposition.

A bit of a surprise to me was a Russian hack attack that targeted satellite system used by Ukraine and Italy. Indeed, computer systems and servers in Italy were targeted and out of commission for weeks (p37). How that didn't trigger a NATO response boggles the mind.

Meanwhile, Russian cruise missiles did considerable damage and the Russian air force swept most of the Ukrainian air force from the sky. Yet for all that airpower advantage, small groups of Ukrainians armed with shoulder-fired anti-aircraft missiles managed to exact revenge on the helicopter assault forces and limited Ukrainian jets performed hit and run bombing attacks on crucial Russian troops concentrations, logistics, and infrastructure. It wasn't much, but it was just enough.

The booklet contains three black and white photos, 110 color photos, one black and white map, five color maps (almost all with no scale, 24 color camouflage aircraft profiles, and nine color camouflage helicopter profiles.

I'm not sure how many more volumes will fill out the Russo-Ukraine War, but I look forward to more expert analysis.

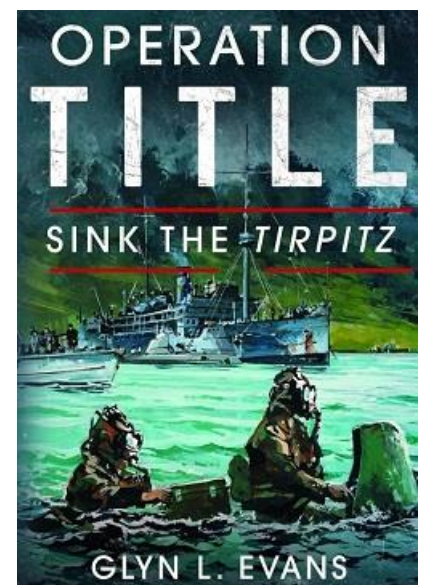
Enjoyed it.

Operation Title: Sink the Tirpitz. by Glyn L. Evans. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 249 pages. 2024.

The British were so impressed with the Italian frogmen atop small underwater craft nicknamed "chariots," they set out to duplicate the craft and trained frogmen. The mission was to blow up the Tirpitz in a Norwegian fjord, for just the threat of the ship sailing to intercept convoys bound for the Soviet Union was enough to scatter PQ-17 -- and individual ships were easier targets for aircraft and U-boats that prowled the route.

A captured Italian craft helped reverse engineer the design, the training with what we now know as a scuba suit proceeded with considerable difficulty and the occasional casualty, and the successful outfitting of a Norwegian fishing boat to carry two chariots, crew, and support crew finally earned the mission a name: Operation Title.

Per usual, problems plagued the mission, including the fishing boat engine that failed but was fixed well enough to proceed and the crossing that



ended up damaging both chariots beyond use oh so close to the target.

The book contains 24 black and white photos and two black and white illustrations.

This tale of a naval commando mission is well told, including research into the fate of the crew, including Able Seaman Robert Paul Evans, who is not related to the author, but spurred the interest in the operation.

Enjoyed it.

Rome's Greatest Emperor: Vespasian. by Tony Sullivan. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 249 pages. 2024.

I'm not entirely convinced Vespasian was Rome's greatest emperor, but he certainly confronted a number of challenges, including surviving Caligula's reign, winning the civil war of the four emperors, taming barbarian tribes, putting down a revolt, and stabilizing the economic and social fabric of the empire after the civil war.

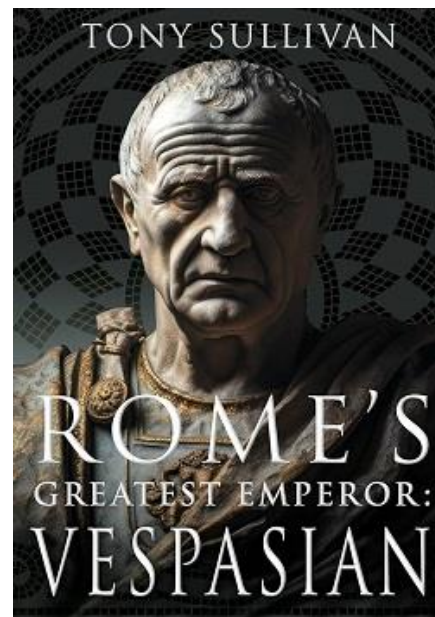
That said, historical sources seem thin, for most of the book concentrates on Roman history, social customs, and Imperial culture, not Vespasian biography. Oh, biographical information is woven skillfully enough into the text, but consider that Vespasian started construction of the iconic Coliseum atop Nero's palace now generated a chapter on gladiators. Having recently read two Osprey booklets on gladiators, I tended to skip around that particular chapter.

I'm sympathetic with this approach because if you haven't read much about the Roman Empire, this will help fill in gaps. I'm also guessing that if you are buying a book on Vespasian, you already know the general information within the text. It's a bit of a no-win situation for an author.

The book contains 48 black and white photos, 16 black and white maps, and one black and white illustration.

It's smoothly written and I learned -- or perhaps re-learned -- about the efforts and exploits of Vespasian, especially when it came to stabilizing the economy.

Enjoyed it.



True for the Cause of Liberty. by Oscar E. Gilbert and Catherine R. Gilbert. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 328 pages. 2025 reprint of 2015 book.

Subtitle: *The Second Spartan Regiment in the American Revolution*

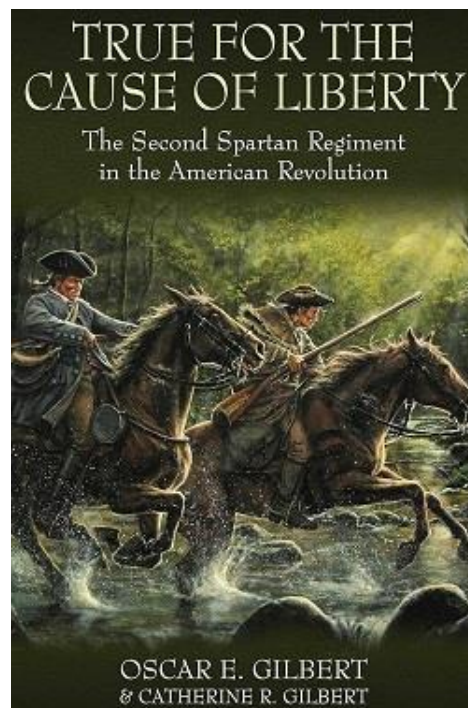
These short descriptions of battles and skirmishes in South Carolina during the American Revolution remind me of another book: *Battleground: South Carolina in the Revolution*, a collection of 62 newspaper articles. However, in *True for the Cause of Liberty*, just about all the skirmishes and battles are in South Carolina, with the longer recaps and analysis concerning the militia unit Second Spartan Regiment.

One takeaway is the absolute viciousness of the campaigns between Loyalist and Patriot militia units, also referred to as "Tory" and "Whig." It's a little confusing at times, but you get the idea who's who with all the cold-blooded murders, tortures, rapes, house and barn burning, looting, and other brutal depredations. It gets even worse when Patriots battled the Cherokees, the allies of the British, on the western frontier of the state. Unsurprisingly, such tactics failed to generate anything but short-term gain and long-term revenge.

The book contains 12 black and white photos, 10 black and white maps, and eight black and white illustrations.

It's all well written and you can certainly find numerous skirmishes suitable for the tabletop. For larger battles, you get a good description of the 2nd Spartan's efforts, although if the unit wasn't there, not so detailed. This is, at its core, a unit history.

Enjoyed it.



Don Troiani's Black Soldiers in America's Wars 1754-1865. by Don Troiani and John U. Rees. Hardback (8.8x11.3 inches). 149 pages. 2025.

One of the best military artists in the biz teams up with veteran historian John Rees to examine Black soldiers in the French and Indian War, American Revolution, War of 1812, and American Civil War.

Troiani's illustrations are the big draw, but don't overlook the text. Besides concise unit histories, almost always accompanied by a full-page or two-thirds page uniform illustration, you get numerous first-person accounts attesting to black-segregated and black-integrated unit performance and contributions in a wide variety of battles.

The book contains 47 color illustrations (39 uniforms and eight battlescenes), 44 color photos, and one black and white illustration. To further break down the uniform illustrations, there are two of French and Indian War, 22 American Revolution, 11 War of 1812, and 12 American Civil War. The illustrations' copyrights range from 2006 to 2023, so you may have seen a few before.

Given the page count and almost 100 years of warfare, you won't get a detailed examination of tactics, OOBs, or other units' participation. That's OK. It's meant to focus on black units and excels at portraying them.

Enjoyed it.

Fighting the Invasion: The German Army at D-Day. Edited by David C. Isby. Softcover (6.2x9.2 inches). 328 pages. 2024 reprint of 2016 reprint of 2005 reprint of 2004 book.

I bought this book 20 years ago for the German perspective of the invasion. No, I didn't compare and contrast contents between the two editions.

Much of the book consists of period reports, official records, and post-war post-war interviews about the German preparations for the expected Allied invasion and the immediate response when the Allies landed. The effects of the deployment debate between Rommel and Von Rundstedt, shortages of men and construction material, and lack of training because the soldiers were put to work on defenses all get an in-depth analysis by the German commanders on the spot.

The book contains 19 black and white photos, five black and white illustrations, 10 black and white maps, and one German organizational chart.

One typo: "Summer of 1945, GenPzWest reported" (p74) should be 1944.

The book has certainly aged well. The selections cover a lot of ground and topics. Although you must consider the viewpoints as sometimes a bit self-serving, the overall content provides an excellent examination of the Axis side of D-Day.

Enjoyed it.

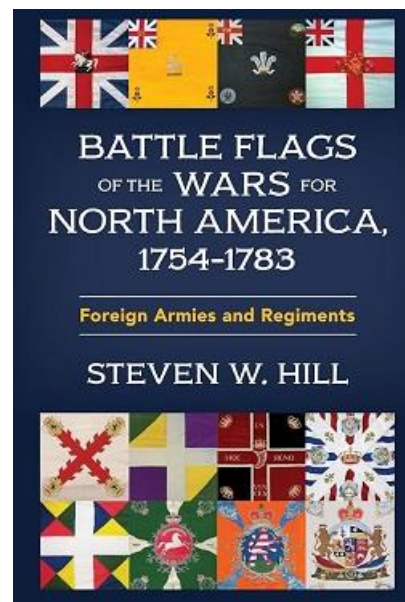
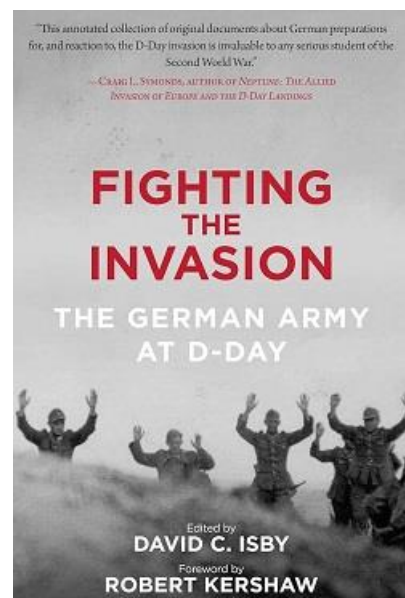
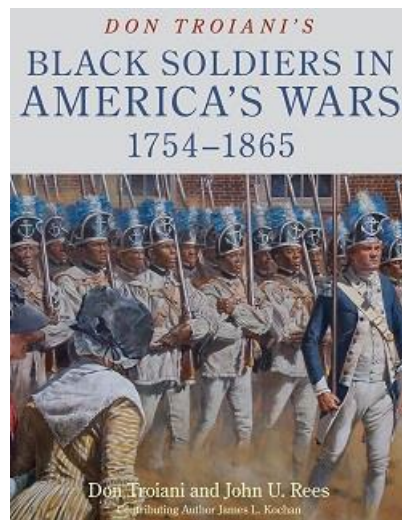
Battle Flags of the Wars for North America 1754-1783. by Steven W. Hill. Hardback (8.8x11.5 inches). 239 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Foreign Armies and Regiments*

Covering the French and Indian War and the American Revolution, this book about flags is comprehensive in its illustrations and supporting text. Descriptions from a multitude of sources, including an analysis and discussion of contradictory sources, provides an authoritative tome covering every flag of every British, French, German, and Spanish regiment serving in North America.

Each regimental flag receives a short history of use, including any changes or swapping out of the flags and color illustrations of the flag and sometimes including photos of the actual flag, period illustrations, and later illustrations.

Not one British flag survives that was carried in the French & Indian



War and very few from the associated Seven Years War (p15). Not a single French flag exists from regiments serving in North America during the American Revolution (p109). Of the 79 flags carried by German regiments serving in North America during the American Revolution and shipped back to Germany, none remain (p158). However, 35 were captured by Americans (p158) -- although later in the text (p172), the number is 25, so one or the other is a typo -- six remain relatively intact and five remains as “scraps.”

With few or no original flags, the search for similar period flags also includes a variety of illustrations published in the intervening years as well as written descriptions. It's a detective story and Hill proves a masterful sleuth.

The book contains 362 color photos and illustrations and nine black and white photos and illustrations.

What a magnificent sourcebook for flags. I do hope he brings out a Volume 2: American and Canadian flags. Enjoyed it.

The Best of All Appointments? by Roger Wood. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 310 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *The Evolution of Infantry Brigade Command in the British Army on the Western Front 1915-1917*

The Brigadiers, like most of the British officer corps before WWI, consisted of a closed social circle recruited from select schools and professions. The expansion of the British Army in WWI, as well as losses at the front, necessitated opening up the ranks to the commercial and merchant classes due to dire staff shortages. Change came slower to regiments with royal patronage, but eventually meritorious officers received promotions and began to increase the aggressiveness of the attacks. Add in less haphazard and more structured officer training (p42) and by the end of the war, British Brigadiers managed to be successful middle managers of assaults and defenses.

The early war period saw a cycle of loss and expansion, where inexperienced line officers had to fill in staff positions. That led to problematic planning that generated considerable losses. For example, while brigades typically would hold a 600 yard to 800 yard frontage, inexperienced officer would reduce brigade frontages to 400 yards, resulting in more concentrated masses in men and more casualties (p127).

Improved preparation, planning, and communication for brigades generated better coordination of the attack as well as more flexible responses to successful trench clearing and capturing.

On defense, an increased emphasis on defense in depth reduced casualties. Instead of lining the forward trenches, by 1918 the British instituted a 600-yard to 3,000-yard deep Forward Zone with outposts and strongpoints. The Main Line, or Battle Zone, was a heavily wired area that stretched 1,750 yards to 3,500 yards and contained mutually supporting MG nests. Finally, the Rear Zone contained the artillery -- out of reach of German artillery -- and the reserves (p217-218).

A few typos: “in the vent” (p40) should be “event;” “including tow segments” (p46) should be “two;” and “300 hundred yards” (p161) needs a deleted “hundred.”

The book contains nine black and white photos and 11 color maps.

The workmanlike prose needs a bit of punching up at times, but the information within is solid.

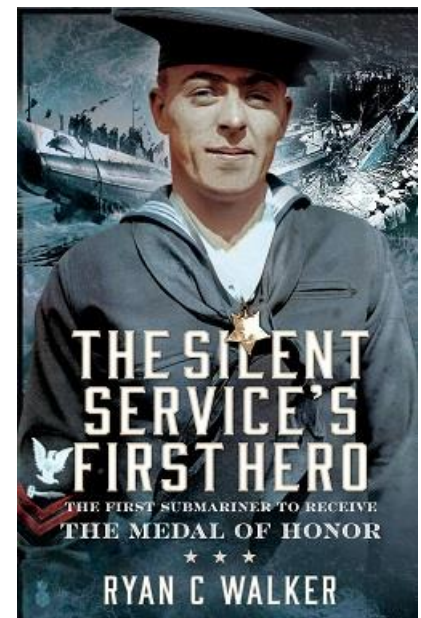
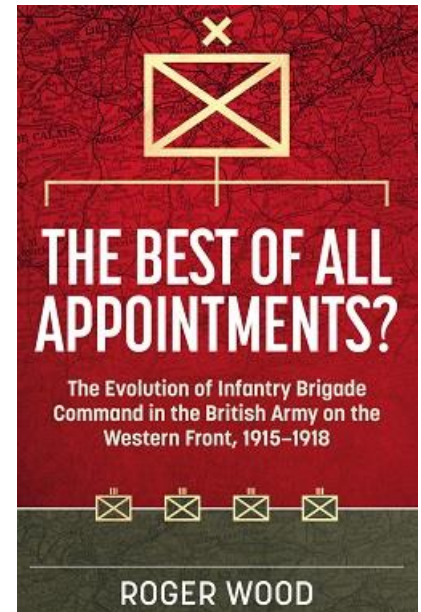
Enjoyed it.

The Silent Service's First Hero. by Ryan C. Walker. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 227 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *The First Submariner to Receive the Medal of Honor*

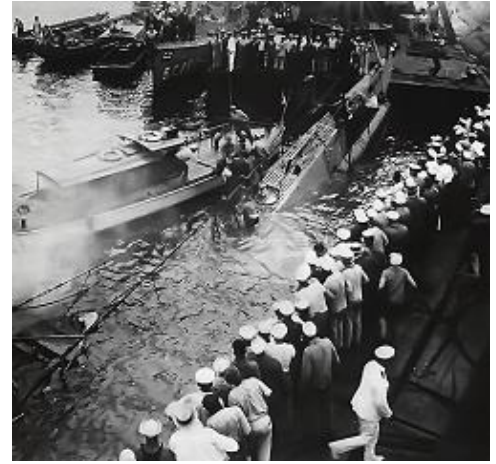
The first few chapters of this half biography - half social examination chronicles the life of Henry Breault, who joined the Canadian Navy in 1917 and was discharged in 1918. After WWI, he entered the US and joined the US Navy's submarine service. He served until his death on Dec. 5, 1941.

As for his Medal of Honor, his submarine, O-5, collided with *Abangarez* and sank in about 40-feet of water off Panama in 1923. Although he had escaped, he realized Chief Electrician's Mate Lawrence Brown had not



evacuated and so Breault re-entered the sub to get Brown. By that time, they could not make it out and closed the hatches to wait for a rescue. About 31 hours later, after using a wrench to bang on the sub and let rescuers know they were alive, they were saved. Breault suffered from caisson disease (the bends), but recovered.

The O-5 before recovery. Image from web.



Although originally nominated for a Navy Cross, the admiral in charge upgraded the nomination to Medal of Honor, which Breault received in a White House ceremony.

From page 77 on, the rest of the book concentrates on the social fabric of the interwar era, including submarine service and Navy life in general, civilian attitudes, and speculations about Breault's reaction to receiving the medal.

Two typos (p69): “Tambor. COs reinforced the prestige...” should have “Tambor” removed and the previous mention of the submarine Tambor needs the name in italics.

The book contains 25 black and white photos and two black and white illustrations. Oddly, it contains no index.

The book offers little for wargaming, but enough for social commentary about the interwar period. Enjoyed it.

The Shiloh Campaign 1862: Battle for the Heartland. by Sean Michael Chick. Softcover (6.7x9.5 inches). 128 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Casemate Illustrated: The Civil War*

The two-day Battle of Shiloh in Tennessee receives a nice overview of the concentration of forces for both the Union and Confederates followed by the highlights of the battle. As per usual with the Casemate Illustrated series, the booklet offers a considerable number of images: 33 black and white photos, 69 black and white illustrations, four color photos, 29 color illustrations, and five color maps.

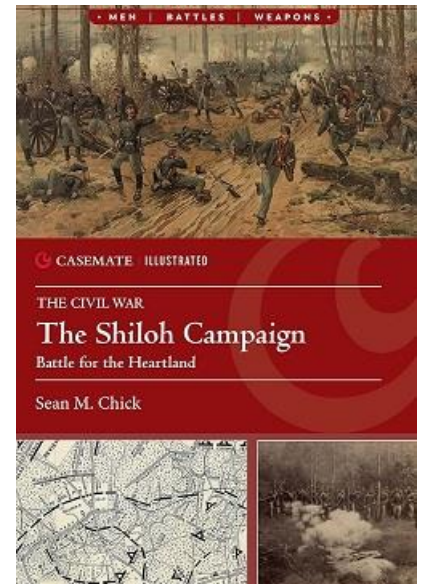
A nit to pick: Those five color maps lack elevations. Having toured the battlefield numerous times, including once on a bicycle, while the terrain is generally level except for the hill down to the river, it is not perfectly flat, especially when you read the text that references ravines and such. The open fields and vegetation is well represented.

OK, another nit to pick with the four *Casemate Illustrated* volumes reviewed here: small font size. I can only say, “Really? C'mon! Papa grognard needs a larger text size.” Why publishers are in a race to the smallest type size is beyond me.

A typo (p120): “picked of stragglers” should be “off”.

The concise recap of the battle includes the strategy, missed opportunities, anecdotes about individual actions, and challenges of fighting in the woods. It's a nice addition to the series.

Enjoyed it.



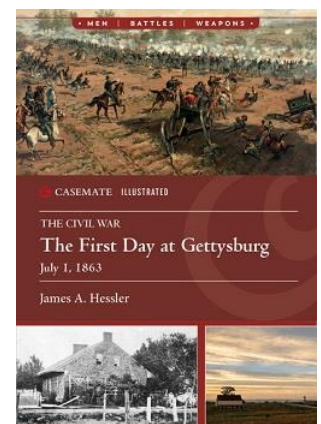
The First Day at Gettysburg: July 1, 1863. by James A. Hessler. Softcover (6.7x9.5 inches). 128 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Casemate Illustrated: The Civil War*

Although the title says “First Day,” the book includes the campaign leading up to this first day, with the maneuvers of the main armies. JEB Stuart's roundabout route around the Union Army that deprived Robert E. Lee of most of his scouting assets is also covered.

The loss of Stonewall Jackson at Chancellorsville is considered as the CSA forces marched to concentrate at Gettysburg. Meanwhile, the Union reacts and confronts the Confederates in some advanced spots of the battlefield before withdrawing.

This volume of the Casemate Illustrated series contains an OOB, whereas the



Shiloh and Vicksburg volumes do not. It also contains many commander short bios.

The booklet contains 75 black and white photos, 69 black and white illustrations, four color photos, 29 color illustrations, and five color maps. Once again, the color maps don't show elevations, which we wargamers would prefer to see.

I'll repeat my nit with the four Casemate Illustrated volumes reviewed here: small font size. I can only say, "Really? C'mon! Papa gognard needs a larger text size." Why publishers are in a race to the smallest type size is beyond me.

Hessler does a nice job recounting the events that led up to the initial clashes and the results of the battles. It's a nice addition to the series.

Enjoyed it.

Peredur: The Undiscovered Truth of the Nazi Grail Quest. by David James Senior. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 162 pages. 2024.

Two parts make up this book: Part I follows Otto Rahn, a real-life seeker of the Holy Grail employed by the German SS during the 1930s, and Part II follows Peredur, a British knight born around 550AD who allegedly obtains the Holy Grail.

Rahn believed the Grail was in the Languedoc region of France and that the medieval Cathars safeguarded it and hid it in a grotto. He spent a considerable amount of time searching for the grotto, but failed to find it. He traveled to the UK and Iceland in his quest and eventually admitted defeat in 1939. Having fallen out of favor, he resigned from the SS, headed into the mountains of Germany, and was never heard from again. The SS reinstated him and printed a death notice.

As for Peredur, son of Evrawc, he seemed to have served as the model for three epics: *Parzival* (written 1210), *Perceval* (1180), and *Peredur* (about 1100 to 1200). Peredur seemed to be the seventh son of the Earl of Evrawc (current day York) and the only surviving son after father and brothers perished in a battle (p104-105). However, the book also mentions co-ruling Evrawc with his brother Gurci (p110), so I'm not sure of the conundrum. Both brothers are killed in a battle at Caer Greu in 580.

All these historical tales twist and turn with certain similarities as well as significant differences. One argument is that the Holy Grail is not a physical cup, but a symbolic object representing spiritual enlightenment (p126). For better or worse, everything seems to get tied up into the King Arthur story.

The author asserts the Grail tale originates from a Celtic myth about a knight presented with a "grail" -- a serving plate -- with a severed head atop it. This Celtic oral tradition became enhanced and embellished with a Christian overtone so that the tale morphed into the cup that caught Christ's blood while He was on the cross.

The real Holy Grail is a "grail"? Image from web.

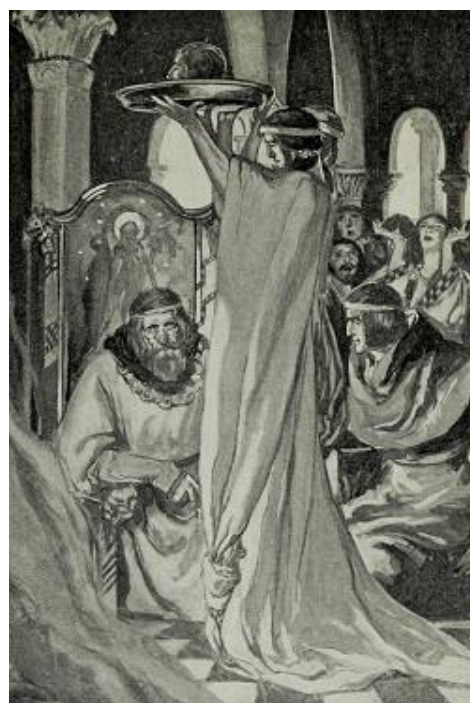
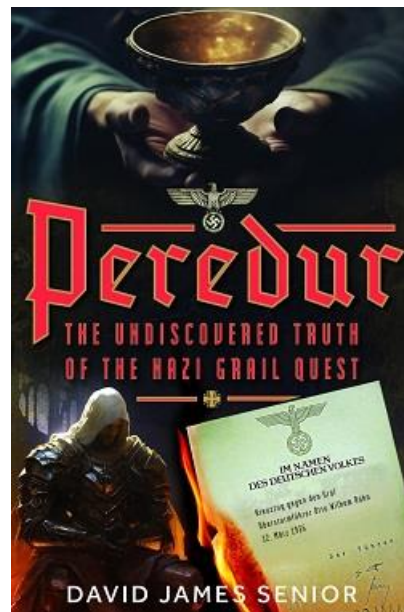
The book contains 37 black and white photos, 19 black and white illustrations, and three black and white maps.

A typo (p37): "the castle to be to be lent" needs a "to be" deleted.

Senior asserts that Rahn served as a model for Henry "Indiana" Jones -- ah, junior, not Henry Sr. I don't know about that. Senior also doesn't say where the Graal is located, if it is a real object and not a symbolic one. Certainly a number of History Channel programs purport to show its location. I don't know about the reality of that, either.

I can say its meandering prose tracks Rahn's movement and the tales of Peredur / Perzival / Perceval. As I knew little to nothing about any of these personalities, I came away knowing more than I did going in.

Enjoyed it.



The Vicksburg Campaign 1863: Volume 1. by Chris Mackowski. Softcover (6.7x9.5 inches). 128 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Grant's Failed Offensives*

Subtitle: *Casemate Illustrated: The Civil War*

The two *Vicksburg* volumes are a little bit better than the *Shiloh* and *First Day Gettysburg* volumes. The font is still small and the color maps need elevations (the Vicksburg area is quite hilly at times), but the writing is a bit sharper here. It's possible that using two volumes instead of one offered Mackowski more flexibility, which helped it read better.

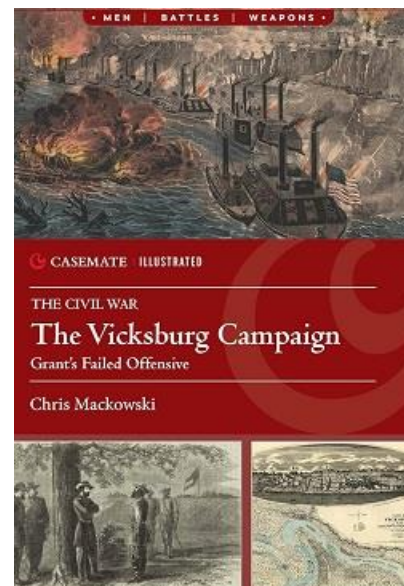
The same great info is within along with analysis of Union and Confederate objectives and strategies. Chugging past Vicksburg's guns gave enough naval transport to meet three Union corps on the west side of the Mississippi River and float them across.

The booklet contains 36 black and white photos, 57 black and white illustrations, 23 color photos, two color illustrations, six black and white maps, and five color maps. Once again, the color maps don't show elevations, which we wargamers would prefer to see.

A couple typos: "garrisoned five thousand men" (p58) is missing a "by" and "lost site of the forest through the cypress trees" (p124) should be "sight".

This volume ends with Grant across the Mississippi River. Fortunately, I didn't have to wait for the next volume.

Enjoyed it.



The Vicksburg Campaign 1863: Volume 2. by Chris Mackowski. Softcover (6.7x9.5 inches). 128 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The Inland Battles, Siege and Surrender*

Subtitle: *Casemate Illustrated: The Civil War*

This volume continues Grant's campaign against Vicksburg.

Of note is the command dysfunction on both sides as conflicting orders came down on CSA's Pemberton and USA's Grant. Grant turned a blind eye towards orders and Pemberton tried to walk the middle line. The end result was a campaign of maneuver that saw opportunities missed and taken in the month it took to capture the city.

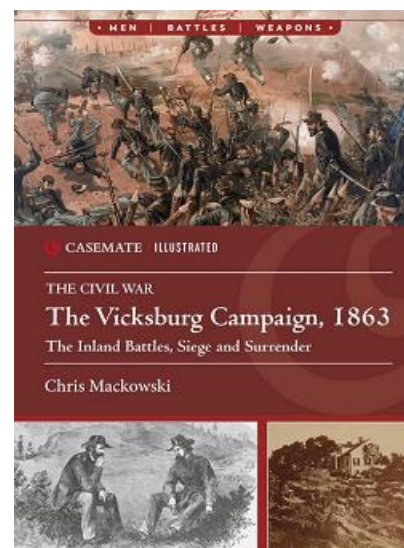
Some nice battles worthy of tabletop action: Port Gibson, Raymond, and Champion Hill. Per usual, the color maps lacked contour lines. OOBs would have been nice, too. And larger text...

The booklet contains 22 black and white photos, 24 black and white illustrations, 58 color photos, eight color illustrations, three black and white maps, and five color maps.

One typo (p40): "his army back him up too close" should be "backed".

The *Casemate Illustrated* series offers a nice overview of particular campaigns. The color maps need help and OOBs would be handy, too. Otherwise, these are nice introductions to important ACW campaigns.

Enjoyed it.



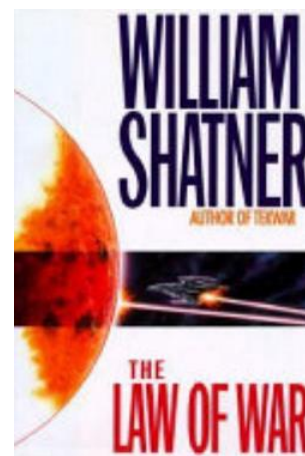
The Law of War. by William Shatner. Paperback (4.1x6.7 inches). 274 pages. 2001 paperback version of 1998 book.

I bought this sequel to *Man O'War* for a quarter out of a discount bin, but I hadn't read the first book.

Mars seeks its independence from Earth in a relatively dystopian future. No warp drive yet, but fast impulse drive seems in place. Martian Prime Minister Benton Hawkes tried diplomacy and now must try war. Earth demands unconditional surrender, tries a few black ops, and ultimately sends a fleet against the inferior Martian fleet. Ah, but the Martians are an innovative lot.

Most of the plot actually makes sense most of the way through the book. The ending is a bit funky in a *Kobayashi Maru* sort of way, but it kept my attention.

Enjoyed it.



Tigers in Normandy. by Wolfgang Schneider. Softcover (7.9x10.0 inches). 377 pages. 2025 reprint of 2011 reprint of a 2006 book.

The nuts and bolts of Tigers operating against the Allies features lots of first-person tactical excerpts: about defending territory, about being strafed by fighters, about infantry-armor cooperation, and so on. Some of these excerpts go on for pages.

I like a good excerpt embedded within the narrative, but when you insert too many, every battle starts to read the same and the book loses its coherency. Maybe that's how it was planned -- each chapter features one operation (Epson, Bluecoat, Jupiter, Totalize, Goodwood, etc.).

On the plus side, I do like his narratives about the ebb and flow of attacks, defenses, and counter-attacks. You get a nice delve into which tigers, and I do mean individual tanks, go where, perform actions, and either survive, get brewed, or are abandoned due to fuel or mechanical issues. Then along comes an excerpt or two of 'em, or more. Or a real long one.

Of note, the Germans fielded 122 Tiger Is and 12 Tiger IIs in Normandy and they accounted for 500 destroyed Allied tanks by mid-August 1944 (p356), even though the largest concentration for an attack was only 21 tanks (Battle for Hill 112). Despite all the Allied fighter-bomber attacks during that period, only 10 were lost due to the Jabos. Most were abandoned by crew due to no fuel or mechanical breakdowns.

The book contains 400 black and white photos and 41 black and white maps. I rather enjoyed the idea of so many Tiger I and Tiger II photos, especially the "Then and Now" comparisons of period photos with current (for 2006 anyway) photos of the same views.

That said, the photos are exceptionally light, which I suppose is better than exceptionally dark. The photos and maps are quite faint as if some graphics person applied a wee bit too much transparency filter. Rest assured, the photos show vehicle and terrain details, but I wish they were a tad darker.

Plenty of info, including Tiger Battalion OOBs and British Corps and Division OOBs down to the British regiment level, and plenty of German and British excerpts. The US is almost never mentioned, probably because they didn't face Tigers in Normandy. The info holds up well for a 19-year old book.

Enjoyed it.

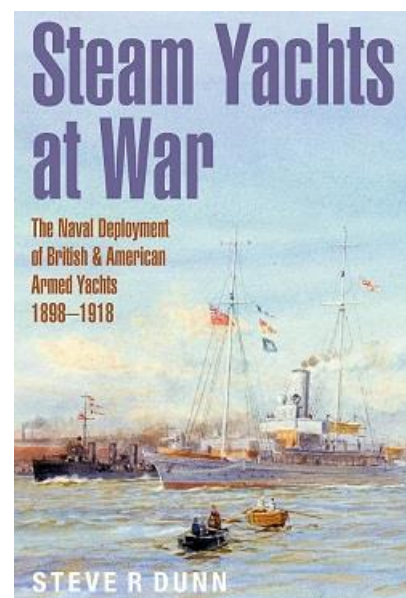
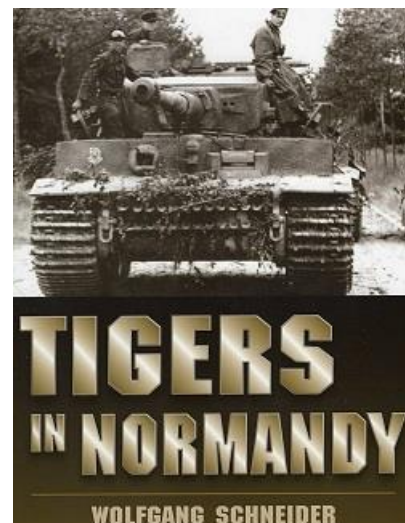
Steam Yachts at War. by Steve R. Dunn. Hardback (7.7x9.9 inches). 272 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *The Naval Deployment of British & American Armed Yachts 1898-1918*

Now here's a topic you don't run across every day -- rich men's yachts bought, leased, or confiscated for use by US and British Navies during the Spanish-American War and WWI. Of note, the British often labeled such ships HMV (His Majesty's Yacht) instead of HMS (His Majesty's Ship). The US Navy usually used USS (United States Ship) in the name, although the USN often renamed the yacht.

Sure enough, the book offers descriptions of yacht after yacht used by the navies during the wars. As these were generally under 1,000 tons and built for pleasure, not wartime service, retrofitting guns and depth charges to the hulls meant they had minimal maneuverability and firepower. They were mostly used against small fishing boats or on coastal and U-Boat patrols.

Some surface actions did occur, so you might have a tabletop scenario of three. A couple yachts even bagged U-boats with depth charges and surface gunnery.



For example, J P Morgan's *Corsair* was commandeered by the US Navy and upgunned with four 6-lbers, four 3-lbers, and two Colt MGs to help enforce a blockade around Cuba in 1898. It later attacked and helped ground Spanish gunboats and torpedo boats (the latter with the USS Indiana).

Design, conversions, costs, crews, and deployments showcase yacht actions. Some served as hospital ships. While the prose is a bit workmanlike, it's all covered in detail per yacht.

The book contains 142 black and white photos, 23 black and white illustrations, two color photos, and 10 color illustrations.

One typo (p44): [yachts] "might cost 55,000-55,000 [pounds] to build" has the same number twice. Just when you thought all naval topics have been covered, along comes a book about armed yachts. Enjoyed it.

Thunderbolt to the Rebels. by Darin Wipperman. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 362 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *The United States Sharpshooters in the Civil War*

Give Wipperman credit for an almost person-by-person account of the 1st and 2nd United States Sharpshooters (USSS) units in the Union Army during the American Civil War. After reading this, you can understand the extensive bibliography.

Created by Col. Hiram Berdan as a specialized unit of the best marksmen in the North, it best served as infantry with skirmisher capability. Alas, it was often used as regular infantry, depot guards, and fatigue duty infantry -- leading to complaints by its soldiers. Worse, few of the Sharpshooters respected Berdan. Or perhaps put it this way: very few of the surviving quotes used in the text were favorable to Berdan. It seemed Berdan was at war with his senior sub-commanders as he was with the Confederate Army.

Part of the book steps away from the unit narrative to examine the pros and cons of various historical views. For example, Wipperman asserts Charles Stevens' unit history compared Berdan's brief exchange of fire with the Alabama brigade on July 2 at Gettysburg with Leonides' stand with 300 Spartans against the Persians. "Stevens' grandiose wording constitutes the most idiotic statement related to the Sharpshooters ever printed." (p133) Wipperman then examines the particular incident.

Hiram Berdan. Image from web.

A running tally of deaths discusses the results of combat and disease within camps and on the march.

The USSS served in many of the hot battles of the ACW, from McClellan's ill-starred jaunt up the Peninsula to Gettysburg and all the way to Petersburg. The majority of three-year enlistments were up in 1864 and so few re-upped, the consolidated units were eventually disbanded on February 16, 1865, just two months prior to the end of the ACW.

The book contains 31 black and white photos, eight black and white maps of USSS positions during major battles, and one black and white illustration.

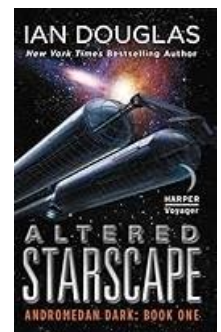
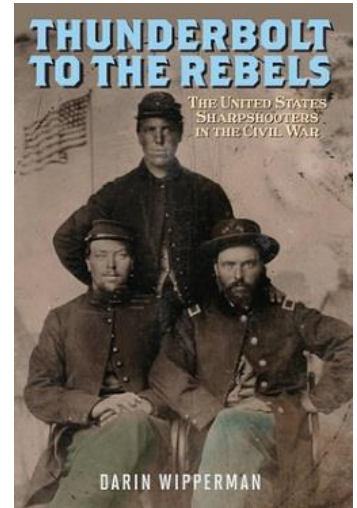
It's a fine unit history full of details and anecdotes about individual soldiers and the units as a whole. It contains an awful lot of first-person quotes, which can be wearing even as it conveys the repetition of campaign life and the activity of combat.

Enjoyed it.

Altered Starscape: Andromeda Dark Book One. by Ian Douglas. Paperback (4.1x6.7 inches). 373 pages. 2016.

A discount bin 25-cents book posits a giant human spaceship Tellus Ad Astra with a million crew and explorers heading to the galactic core as a follow-up to a first contact visit. The problems start with a mis-jump that sends the ship 4 billion years into the future. That's when the battles begin as the ship and its Captain St. Clair try to figure out who's who, what's what, and how to stay out of an ongoing war with dark matter attacks.

Of note was the depiction of AI in the future, which has *Star Trek*-like androids as benign helpers and not Terminator-like robot revolution killers. The interaction with ship AI is



even more helpful in the running of ship operations. Apparently, hacking doesn't exist among the million humans, although security against enemy hacking ramps up. Interestingly enough, really advanced civilization end up in a Matrix-like setting -- the old bread and circuses trope from Ancient Rome, so to speak. And let's not forget the contingent of Marines. You can't have a sci-fi book with spaceship battles without a good boarding action.

The prose putters along just fine with a number of sub-plots, such as providing citizen status to said androids and political machinations of an emperor wannabe, with varying degrees of credibility.

Enjoyed it.

Battle for Monte Natale. by John Ernest Strafford. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 314 pages. 2024.

Subtitle: *First-Hand Accounts of the Crossing of the River Garigliano on the Gustav Line*

This is not a book per se, but a collection of excerpts from unit war diaries, period reports, and first-person accounts from secondary sources detailing the Battle of Monte Natale. There is no narrative, just these paragraphs in day-by-day chronological order from January 17, 1944 to February 5, 1944.

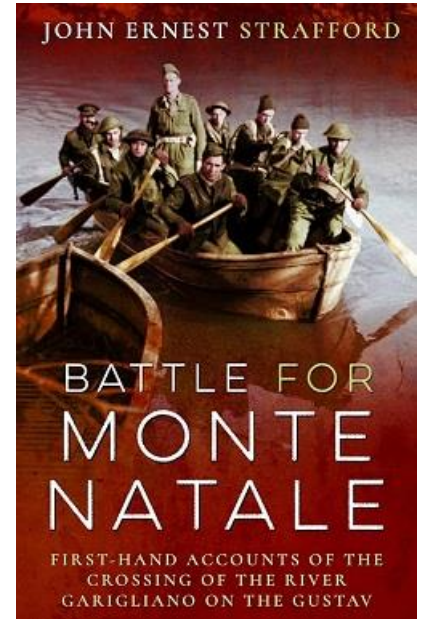
Long-time readers of my reviews may well remember by notion that a selection of first-person accounts add detail to a narrative, but too many detract from that narrative. As this has no prose, it lacks cohesion. As marvelous as these excerpts are, and as fine an effort as it was to track all this information down, a collection of facts does not a narrative make.

On the A+ side, all excerpts are scrupulously organized and Strafford certainly did his research, including visiting the battlefield and taking contemporary photos of particular spots. A plethora of maps and sections of maps show the attacks and counterattacks, although many are somewhat ill-reproduced. Lots of period photos are added as well -- although most of them seem blurry as if low-res images were enlarged to fit the page.

The downside of all this effort is a "book" that pretty much reads the same no matter what day it is. Yes, I can appreciate the amount of data presented, but as well organized as it is, it left me skipping around.

The book contains 84 black and white photos and 28 black and white maps.

As this was a labor of love representing the author's quest to find the story and grave of his father, I hesitate to criticize too much. There really is some good information about British attacks against a river line on the Gustav Line and the German counterattacks to try and take back lost heights. Yet, it's a collection of factoids without a cohesive narrative -- an unfinished book about a battle in the Italian mountains.



Bonus HMGS-NG WWI Photo



In HMGS-NG's WWI game, an Allied artillery bombardment destroys the German tank ... and the French bunker.

Photo by John Spiess.