

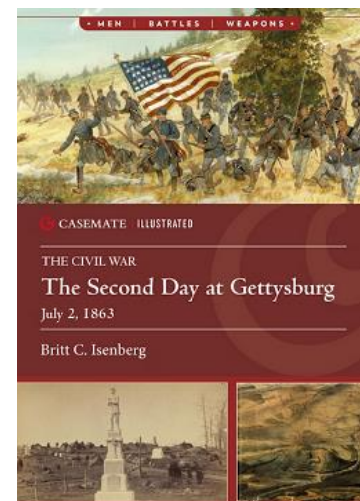
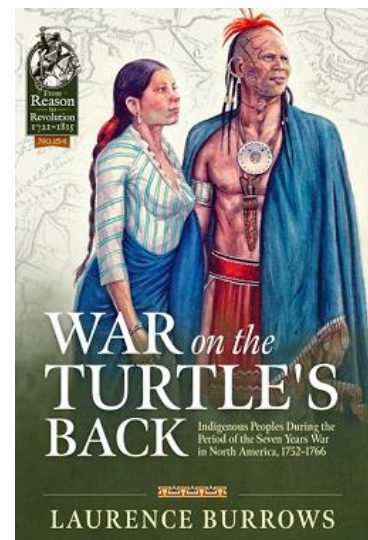
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One Hour World War II: Doubletime
HMGS Next Generation: AmRev Gaming and More
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Waterdeep Northern Campaign: Company of the Sun
Terminal Velocity: Wild Ride RPG
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Books I've Read

War on the Turtle's Back: 7YW (RtR154)
F4F Wildcat vs A6M2-N Rufe: Duel 155
With Napoleon's Guard in Russia: 1812
Baptism of Fire: Hungary Slovak 1939 EaW62
We Then Prepared Our Batteries: ECW CS135
Philippines 1941-42: Air Campaign 62
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Lost Legionary in South Africa: UK Colonial
To War With the All-American: US 82nd
Roman Army Units East Prov. 3: MAA 570
Regulator: Death of a Bank (novel)
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Second World War's Military Legacy
Charles F. Ball: Gardens to Gallipoli
German Marders of WWII: New Vanguard 350
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The Second Mountain: Quest for Moral Life
Military History of Byzantine Rome: 1204-1261
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ABDA Striking Force 1943: Fleet 19
Gunboats and Empires: Early US Naval Policy
Tanks Caucasus 1942-43: New Vanguard 351
D'You Hear There! Daily Pipes of the Royal Navy



Dave's tour-de-fort





Ancient ones' pre-game smiles. Romans left (Rich, Larry, Chris). Germans right (Tom, GM Dave, Marc, Jay, Sam, and Russ). Photo by Mike.

Romans vs Germans: *Field of Glory*

by Russ Lockwood

Some of my warriors looked as green as the leaves of the trees from the feasting of last night. No matter, the coming battle with the Romans will see them with clear heads and bloodied blades.

Our tribe's shaman, Grzbarz, said the omens were favorable. Then again, I never knew him to say they were ever unfavorable. As long as my warriors believed him, the battles always went in our favor.

*Top: My fellow German commanders: Dave, Marc, Jay, and Sam.
Bottom: Roman commanders: Chris, Mike, Larry, Phil, and Rich.*



From the small rise, I could see the gathering of the tribes spread out across the field. Slight hills separated our host from the Romans. We seemed to have more men than the Romans, but Roman discipline and armor helped restore the balance of power. I had my archers in front as a screen to my two warbands. Across, I saw cavalry and legionnaires.

Our big chief Jaysnaric said me and Samelrocksic were to be the left-hand anvils while Jaysnaric and Marcixic would flank and hammer the Romans on the right. On the far right flank, our cavalry would shred the Roman cavalry and swing behind.

So much for plans...



Foggy Rules

Dave laid on his usual terrain excellence and Phil ran the game, even as both also took a command, although Dave would cede his cavalry when Tom arrived. It was a good crowd. The Roman fort, a resin model if I recall right, anchored one flank while woods anchored the other. A smattering of hills were in between.

Random die rolls found the Romans to be Phil, Larry, Rich, Chris, and Mike. Germans were Dave (replaced by Tom), Marc, Jay, Sam, and me. The rules were *Field of Glory* (FoG) and both sides had 1,100 points.

My troops advance to try and secure the hill crests. Notice the leader moves the left-hand warband twice as far as the right-hand warband. Roman cavalry come off the hill while legionnaires (upper right corner) advance to contact.



Sounding of the War Horn

I had a pair of hills in front of me and a larger one farther away. I knew of the might of the Romans, so I advanced to the crests of both hills with the warbands. It was a small advantage, but I needed every one. That maneuver went fine.

A note about movement: *FoG* has an odd movement rule where a unit with leader attached can move twice its



The end of Turn 2. Romans on left, Germans on right.

usual distance. Our leaders could attach to two units. You can imagine that my two warbands without the leader move 4 inches while my two warbands with the leader move 8 inches. So, the next turn, I have to move my leader to the other two units so they can move 8 inches to catch up to the other warbands that now move 4 inches. I suspect there must be some sort of line command, but the GM said it was a maximum of two units per leader.

My bow-boys fire...to no effect.

Anyway, as for the archers, I sent them out for some 50-50 shots at the approaching Roman cavalry. I even had a flank shot, which apparently gave no benefit. My archers did no damage -- not even force a test for cohesion.



Roman Maneuvering

The entire Roman line performed an echelon move to our left. Great! Samelrocksic and me are supposed to be the anvil. Only the Roman cavalry on our right flank stayed relatively put, giving ground until it arrived on the crest of a hill, where it turned around to meet our German cavalry, which was twice as large.

If at first you can't succeed...bows miss again. Roman cohorts charged and evaded they away.

As for the Roman cavalry facing me under Mikus the Merrymaker, the arrows may have had an effect. His slovenly equites obviously paid more attention to merrymaking than cavalry formation drills, for they hardly did anything Mikus ordered.

In FoG terms, most moves other than straight ahead or a slight wheel are considered "Complex" moves and require a cohesion die roll to actually do the maneuver. I find this a bad mechanic -- that's worse than "odd" by the way - - because units can "forget" how to perform a maneuver because of bad die rolls. I've advocated for and played modified FoG games using a percentage of lost movement to perform a complex maneuver. It works far better with far less fuss than Yahtzee movement. So I believe, anyway.

In this game, we played with rules as written. Hence, Mikus the Merrymaker spent a couple turns getting nowhere. His frustration was evident as he began fiddling with the wine amphora and barrels inside the fort instead of moving into combat.

Mikus' cavalry can't remember how to turn. Photo by Mike.



Archer Evade

Roman Richus eventually charged a legionnaire unit to clear my archers. I had left a gap, but I needn't have bothered, most archers cleared the warbands behind. I pivoted the evaders to the left and headed to hold my open left flank. Mikus' cavalry was aiming for just that spot, but his aforementioned bad complex die rolls foiled him more than my troops did.



Obviously, Mikus the Merrymaker was dreaming of a hot bath with a goodly amount of sweet wine and delicacies. He kept sending aides to arrange and re-arrange the amphora and barrels in anticipation of his victorious arrival.

On the Right

Chrisimus made his complex rolls and drew the German cavalry onward. He reached the crest of the hill and turned to face the Germans. The pursuit was not in a straight line, which delayed both German cavalry units from combining in one big charge.



One Roman cavalry vs. two German cavalry. Chrisimus shows you how it's done.

Clever Chrisimus.

In the Center

The Romans advanced, as did the troops under Jaysnarc and Marcixic -- the latter had a longer distance to travel, but he was moving as fast as he could.

Jaysnarc contemplates launching a charge in the center. Photo by Mike.

Pretty soon, the German units were within charge range. This required a cohesion roll in order to keep the warbands from charging and allow Marcixic time to swing around.

No such luck.

The war horns sounded and every tribal warband that could charge did so and hit the Romans head on. Jaysnarc, Marcixic, and Samelrocksic had done as best they could to coordinate one big hit.

Not me. I was the anvil and Richus' troops had yet to close to trigger the die roll reaction.

Our tribal charge slammed into the waiting Roman lines with a terrifying impact. It was dense. It was brutal. It was magnificent.

Jaysnarc, Marcixic, and Samelrocksic charge the Romans!

Big Charge, Bright Saves

When a unit charges into the enemy, it's called Impact. It's also the best chance for the Germans to hammer the Romans. Indeed, besides a couple tied results, us Germans won five combats outright, triggering a cohesion die roll and a death die roll for each.

The cohesion die roll is 2d6 looking for a 7+, with a few modifiers. The Romans made four of five!

On the death die roll, they were less fortunate, and four stands were sent across the River Styx.



Incidentally, the *FoG* death die roll is a brilliant mechanic within this combat system. The loser of an Impact or regular melee rolls a d6. If the roll is equal to or less than the number of hits inflicted during combat, one stand is removed. If higher, no effect. It's clean. It's fast. It's tension-filled. Brilliant. It almost makes up for the movement mechanic. Almost.

The melee in the center.

Romans Hold the Line

So the initial Impact charge was settled and the Roman line held. During melee, the Romans have a pretty good advantage. During melee, the roles and rolls reversed. The Germans took it on the chin...and head...and torso...and shins. The Romans kicked our ass.

Disorder and fragmentation appeared in the Germanic line.



Roman Cavalry On the Right

Despite better cavalry and more cavalry, Christmas presents apparently came early for Chrisimus and his outnumbered Roman cavalry. He managed to stymie the Germanic cavalry and cause damage and problems as they came in piecemeal.

That secured the entire Roman flank on our right, preventing any cavalry attacks in the center.

My charge. White rings denote Superior Roman troops. Photo by Mike.

On the Left

As my shaman shook his oak branch and sang a song of the ancients, I told my troops "Grzbarz has cast a spell that protects you from Roman steel. Charge! Charge! Charge!"

No way was I going to hit piecemeal via some die roll. I led my warbands off the hill and across the flat ground to slam into the dreaded legionnaires. I needed to overthrow the Romans quick if the center was to be supported. I noticed that Marcixic was doing the same on the right.

My left-hand German warband spread out and bashed into the Romans. Unfortunately, they forgot to swing their swords. Not only did the Roman line hold under the impact, the later melee found my inept lads routing away.

"What are you? Gauls?" I screamed, but they fled nonetheless.

That must have unnerved my own tried and true warriors, for their impact was also lame and they sunk into disorder. I fought all the harder in the front. After melee, they fell into fragmentation.

My last warband, the one closest to Samelrocksic, took heart and emerged victorious, causing the Roman legionnaires to become disordered.

I did not see how Marcixic fared -- awful difficult when you're in the middle of melee. I don't recall hearing any triumphant German cheers, but I had my own problems.

Dragged Away

While I was battering a legionnaire, his centurion struck a cunning stab into my chest. The pain was exquisite and my breathing became labored. I felt my bodyguards pull me back from the fray and up the hill.



My shield and sword were gone. I gasped for air, looking at the carnage of battle. Unengaged legionnaires were starting to pivot and flank my warbands -- the ones that were still fighting.

The scene faded as my eyes became unfocused. Someone placed my sword in my hand. The pain faded with my vision. And then all went black.

*My other charge. Circular base is my leader and bodyguard.
Photo by Mike.*

End Game

The great German charge was foiled by a combination of superior troops (re-roll die rolls of "1" to see if the miss becomes a hit) and at least a couple elite troops (re-roll 1s and 2s). The initial Impact wins were thwarted by successful Roman cohesion rolls. After that, the odds were way stacked in favor of the Romans.

Chrisimus the Roman cavalry commander on the right deserves particular praise for holding the flank against the odds. Mikus the Merrymaker obviously deserves scorn for never getting into battle except as a target of ineffective bowfire. He was last seen heading into the fort for a bath.

Jay's plan provided a good chance to mix it up in the center, but successful Roman cohesion rolls shut down that hope. Melee advantages buried the Germans.

I suppose the comment should be: "Whaddaya expect?" Barbarian charges into the teeth of Roman training and armor had a chance of success at the impact, but faded as the melee continued.

The painting on the German figures were fantastic. I'm not quite sure I ever saw two shield patterns the same. It was good to see all these figures across the table, although this was mostly a straight-up, head-on bash. We thought about setting up an ambush in the woods, sort of a Varus scenario. Perhaps next time.

Thanks, Dave and Phil for hosting and GMing and to all commanders for an entertaining game.

End of game positions.

The Merrymaker Speaks

by Mike

It has been years since we last saw these minis on the tabletop, and it was a joy to do battle with them again. And it was good to see that many players around the table too.

Anyways, my equites Romanii, 600 strong Patricians, the cream of Rome's best, performed brilliant cavalry maneuvers back and forth on the prestigious right flank -- where Rome's gods want us. We had the Germanii peasants in awe to the point that they simply ran away. Well, Rich's legionnaires, plebs, of course, were there too, and they did Caesar well. Anyways, our horses were tired, and it was time for our hot bath.

I second Chris as the MVP! When we started the game, I did ask Chris which wing he wanted. When he said he did care and stayed on the Roman left (German right), I didn't complain. What a contrast of opposition. He faced overwhelming plenty and near zero odds of succeeding! I had, essentially, no opposition unless Russ was prepared to



move his left-most unit of heavy infantry further left....but that wasn't really an option for him with Rich's legionnaires (Superior) moving aggressively towards him.

Many thanks to Phil and Dave for running a *FoG* ancients game of Roman legionnaires vs Germanic something warriors.

End of game. The red chip indicates Rout. The yellow chip indicates Fragmentation. The green chip indicates Disorder. A lot of chips on the German side... Photo by Mike.

Just Another Day Against the Barbarians

by Rich

The scenario was good. I like these games especially well because they allow many players to move lots of troops, fight, and come to a conclusion in one night.

The Germans seemed to attack in a piecemeal fashion which did not allow them to exploit their advantage in numbers. I was also happily surprised that the Roman left flank cavalry was able to hold off the German right flank cavalry. In my opinion, those German horse are the most powerful units in their army. My vote for Roman MVP goes to Chris. I did not see how he managed it, but when I first saw the table I thought he was doomed.

The Roman equites to my right seemed more intent on getting into the warm baths in the fort than fighting Germans. But they did successfully keep all Germans off my right flank. So they all accomplished their mission.

Thanks Mike.

Larry to my left was stalwart and tough. Together we formed an iron Roman wall and pushed the Germans back.

It not clear to me what happened to Larry's left under Phil but things seemed to be going well for the Romans.

Thanks to Phil and Dave for the game. I especially enjoy the ancients and this game had a lot of them. The forts were fantastic. And the table was again up to Dave's high standard.



The Center of Iron

by Larry

Despite any issues with interpreting the rules, it was still a fun game. As always, a stunning table and spirited fight. I agree that the Roman MVP goes to Chris!

Germanic Protest

by Phil the GM

A protest lodged by the German delegation has been upheld. I was troubled by the relative ease which the Romans had in overcoming the Germans. I ran several simulations showing that the situation was unbalanced, which we all saw. I have concluded that the outcome was determined not by bad omens but shoddy game mastering by the "experienced gamesmaster" -- me.

In reassessing the melee modifiers, I found the note on the chart clearly stating that the plus for better armor by one level only applies when there are no other pluses and none of the players saw this on the chart. Therefore the Roman superior units would not have been scoring hits on 3+s, but on 4+s per usual. I think this would have affected some results despite a general imbalance in the Romans favor in die rolling.

It might not have changed the outcome but it says that the game was not as imbalanced as it appeared. My apologies.

Roman superiority is not so much the d6 hitting on 3+ as it is re-rolling 1s (misses) and sometimes 1s and 2s. Rich rolled 6d6 and whiffed on every roll -- no hits. But then he re-rolled 1s and 2s (Superior troops with a commander fighting in front) and poof! Four hits and squashing my own two hits, winning the impact, and turning my lads into Fragmented after an abysmal German cohesion roll. The subsequent melee routed my left-most lads. -- RL



My starting force – an infantry-only command with a couple cannons.

Blenheim 1704: Alternate Fire & Fury

by Russ Lockwood

I don't recall being in a game of one of the most famous battles in Western history, but Jay spread Blenheim out on the tabletop. The figures were gorgeously colorful.

Starting up. Left to right: Dave, Tom, GM Jay, Sam (seated), Rich, Michael, and Phil. The village of Blenheim is towards the bottom of the photo between the two streams.

The terrain hemmed in the British and Allies versus the French. Uh-oh. No flanking in this



game -- the river to the left and the end of the world to the right presaged a straight-ahead bash. For rules, we used Bill Gray's *Fire & Fury* official variation *Age of Honor*.

By dint of me being late, I was assigned to the British and I chose the infantry in the middle of the table. Since I knew little about the Lace Wars, I figured I would do little damage if I was the infantry command in the middle of the line.

The main thing I had to remember was that infantry came in two types: Volley Firing (2 fire points per stand) and Regular Firing (1 point per stand). The other main thing was that the swampy stream I had to cross caused disorder, which halved my fire. This disorder only went away when the unit emerged onto dry land. The third main thing is that infantry move half in the muck and cavalry move a third in the muck.

Now, the 1980s *Fire & Fury* rules make you roll a d10 for movement, with about a 50-50 chance of a full move. That's not too bad if your unit is Fresh (+2), had a nearby division commander (+1), and perhaps even better with a nearby C-in-C commander (+1). However, disorder is another matter of die rolling disadvantage and it isn't 50-50. I foresaw a long, long plod...

Anyway, Jay went over some of his scenario-specific rule variations and then asked if anyone wanted anything. I replied, "I'll have a coffee," but for some reason Jay ignored that. Then the game began...

Not Much Of A Plan

I don't know how Marlborough got such a reputation, not to mention a palatial estate, out of this charge through the muck battle. I suppose it was to reward his pre-battle maneuvering that gave him a slight numerical superiority. Otherwise, seeing the tabletop terrain, the French commander chose a pretty good spot to defend.

French Dave (left) and Tom prepare to receive. They could have gone out for coffee because of the movement restrictions in the muck and mire. That slight crease running left to right between our two forces is a hill crest. As if I didn't have enough of a problem with disordering terrain.

Anyway, our plan was...um...charge through the muck. To be fair, there was a slight bit of clear ground in front of Blenheim town and a somewhat larger bit of clear ground on the far right with only the stream in between Allied Rich and French Sam's forces.

Other than that, we Brits and Allies would hope to use our numerical superiority on the left to push through and roll up the French line.

Into the Muck and Mire

My infantry die rolling for movement started fine, rolling full 6-inch moves, which immediately became half that in the muck. Then came the mire in subsequent turns, with some full moves and mostly half moves and sometimes no moves. And by move, I mean all were halved by the muck. What a grind.

My infantry force stalemated in the muck.

I finally reached the edge of the muck, only to have French Mike advance his cavalry to the edge as well. Infantry can't charge cavalry, so I'm stuck in muckland, firing at half



effect and basically needing a 9 or 10 to do anything. The cavalry pistols are ineffective no matter what Mike can roll, so it was a standoff until Mike decided to attack since his cavalry was out of the muck and mine was within.

Amazingly, I was able to win the melee and force him back. I rolled well enough to move out of the muck in good order. My neighboring infantry unit remained stalemated. I had other units, but they were taking their sweet die rolling time.

On The Right

To my immediate right, British Michael's cavalry came across the muck at one-third speed and was pretty much forced to suffer shots, if not too many casualties, from French artillery and infantry fire. That was a grind, too.

On the right flank, Rich and his Danes fought French Sam to a standstill, trading fire. Sam cleverly brought up an artillery battery to fire into the flank, but the die rolls apparently did not bounce the French way.

French Sam holds off Rich's Danes.

On My Left

British Phil managed to cross the muck and engage the French cavalry with his own cavalry and basically out-rolled French Mike. The British dented French lines. He was engaging with the French in Blenheim town to limited effect.

When Phil had to leave early, Jay stepped in and continued the British momentum. I can only say that he rotated between three different d10s and rolled 10 after 10 after 10 for melee.

The middle of the game. French Mike (left) holds Blenheim and stymies my infantry. Dave (center) is in support. Tom fends off Michael's cavalry in the center.

This was all the more amazing since French Tom sent a cavalry unit that flanked one of the triumphant British cavalry. The attacks and counterattacks played out and the dent became a hole, requiring French reserves to patch up the line.

My infantry scales the hill and repulses Tom's cavalry (yellow uniforms) attack. Then I am forced into square against my will.

Back In The Center

French Tom, fresh from damaging British Michael, next charged my lead infantry unit. He was fortunate that he just nicked my unit, so I had minimal fire, which whiffed. But



in the melee, I won by just a smidgen and forced him back.

Upon that result, I read that the infantry must form square. That's rude. I don't want to form square, but square I must. Sorry, French Mike, I had not done so after repulsing your cavalry attack. I also quickly formed the supporting unit into square as well.

And that's where we ended it -- plenty of die roll bashing left. The tabletop was still wall to wall miniatures.

Late game.



Thoughts

The historical situation is what it is, but without maneuver room, Blenheim is a case of *Yahtzee*. Jay started to advance in earnest with a succession of d10 rolls of 10 (the best result in melee).

End game.



Not that the muck allowed much movement. I had two infantry units across and one in good terrain. The rest? Either stalemated or plodding along. If French Mike hadn't charged, I wouldn't have gotten that far.

I don't know enough about *Lace Wars* to contemplate changing rules, but mechanics-wise, if you roll off the disorder and voluntarily not move, then you might want to consider removing the disorder. Or, you might want to allow infantry to "charge" cavalry, which should have the option to retreat out of musket range.

One point that we couldn't find in the rules: when a unit retreats from melee, does it also retreat any supporting unit? And, if the one or two units retreat into a third unit, what happens to the third unit? We played that all three lines of units (melee losers, supporting line, and third line unit) all retreat, with the supporting unit being disordered but this third unit not being disordered. That may or may not be the case.

On a more confusing note, and just because we like to give Jay grief, we had a heckuva time figuring out which troops were whose. We finally figured out that the commands were arrayed horizontally, so troops in one command often sat in front of two players. Also, the font on the troops labels were obviously made for non-groggnard eyes. In typical wargamer manner, we Brits solved the problem by declaring the commands were vertical -- just play what was in front of you. As each brigade was self-contained and had no impact on its division or corps, that solution worked out fine.

Thanks, gents, for the game and thanks, Jay, for setting up a colorful game and an entertaining morning and afternoon. Can I get my coffee now?

Danes On The Right

by Rich

The table looked great with fine terrain and very well done 15mm figures. The battle was difficult from my edge of the table. I feel lucky to have advanced as far as I did against French Field Marshal Sam. The Danes in my command spearheaded the attack on my flank and gave as good as they got. Michael's ancestors were tough, not the cannon fodder that was expected of them, though they caught their share of cannon balls.

Thanks for the game, Jay. I had a good time and appreciate all of the time and effort that you put into the game. I'm looking forward to another one.

Cavalry In The Center

by Michael

The efforts invested by Jay were evident and much appreciated. With the terrain laid out and the figures on the table, we better get the next game, using Tricorne, scheduled.

As to the Danes, their progress involved swapping with their supporting line. This enabled the brave Danes to offer their left flank for a couple of close-range enfilades by a well-positioned French battery. When the cannon roar and smoke settled, the Danes were dusting off the burning gunpowder and whatever the French of the time filled their canisters with -- "No Effect" results were prevalent.

Michael tries to force the center with his cavalry. Photo by Michael.

They also shouted encouragements to the dismayed French to do it again. And so they did with the same "No Effect" rolls. Well, perhaps a bit of Disorder, but with all the leaders available, Disorder was rarely much of an issue for the troops. About four to five times I rallied but couldn't move in the muck.

As French Mike pointed out, 20 stands of cavalry firing pistols are not worth the imaginary gun powder and balls. Essentially, you are firing blanks in a good chunk of the entire upper left quadrant of the firing table. Perhaps guns were that impotent at this time, but it seemed strange to me.

The start of the game. Blenheim on left beyond the muck and mire. Photo by Michael.



The next big HMGS convention...





The battlefield before the Germans arrive from the right. Greeks are already deployed.

Snuffing Out a Greece Fire: WWII Command Decision

by Russ Lockwood

Von Lockwood was at it again, recounting his *Command Decision* (CD) efforts from long ago from the comfort of his rocking chair.

He was just a Captain of a German motorized infantry company as part of a battalion push deep into Greece. All he had to do was control a long highway with four platoons: One HQ, two rifle, and one Heavy Weapons. At least he could call on some artillery in a pinch -- and judging from the long line of Greek motorcycles, Universal Carriers, and other troops racing down the highway at him, it would not be easy.

The stalwart Greeks, Vito (left) and Rich, watch the German battalion's main thrust on the German right towards the town of Akritas.

Objective

Heer regimental command ordered our battalion to take a town, remove a roadblock, capture the highest hill in the area, and keep a main road open. When you have four



objectives and only one battalion, I knew things could get dicey. Yet, we did have five companies within our area and some Stukas and artillery on call, so if we could match one superior German company against one inferior Greek company, we should be able to accomplish our goals.

From prisoners, we learned the Greeks were no new conscripts, but veterans of the Italian invasion -- not quite as experienced as we were, but close enough.

On the German left flank, I set up the troop line in the woods in an effort to clear the intersection.



Getting the Jump

The good news was that the battalion's advance was so swift, the Germans tore through the countryside before the Greeks could organize a coordinated defense. A motorized company, the engineer platoon, gun company, and the Panzer company advanced on the town of Akritas, which had been deserted save for its very last block, but with Greek platoons dug into the ridge behind the town.

First blood went to the Greeks, who nailed an infantry platoon in the open and caused the entire German company to hit the dirt and stay in it, pinned. As the pair of Panzer III platoons and a Panzer II platoon churned towards the ridge and traded sporadic firing, Greek reinforcements poured onto the battlefield: More motorcycle infantry, more motorized infantry, and now some AT guns.

Left Flank Von Lockwood

While most of our German troops attacked Akritas and the ridge, I received the special honor of figuring out how to keep a highway open with four platoons. And by open, that meant not a Greek that could bring fire upon the road.

I had the trucks drive towards the spot where the road emerged from the trees at an intersection. Radio chatter suggested that I might come up short and the last thing I wanted was to be inside trucks subjected to automatic fire. I had the company dismount and move through the woods.

By this time, the Greeks had turned the corner of the main road and headed towards the bridge, but soon realized that I was moving through the woods towards the intersection. So, they dismounted and filtered through the woods back to the intersection.

The Greeks mostly abandoned Akritas and dug in on the hill. Panzers helped power the German attack.

Visibility is quite limited in woods: only 100m (two tabletop inches). My platoons crept to the edge of the road. The Greeks confidently reached the edge on the other side of the road. Contact! Open fire!



Uphill Battle

Meanwhile, back at Akritas, battalion brought in a second German infantry company to keep the momentum going as the panzers ground up the hill. The supporting artillery platoons -- 75mm infantry gun, 37mm AT/HE gun, and 20mm AA gun -- fired shot after shot at anything that moved on the ridge.

The 75mm was accurate enough to cause damage and unease, the 37mm HE proved lackadaisical, but the 20mm AA gun fired every which way as long as it was upward at phantom Allied aircraft. The AA platoon commander later said his firing kept away all Allied aircraft in a 50-mile radius. It's lucky this inept platoon didn't shoot down our Stuka squadron.

The key to opening the ridge was the MGs on the panzers and from a heavy weapons company -- they shredded the original Greek company on defense as well as the reinforcement platoons.

And yet, just as the Greek line was beginning to crumble, first the panzer company and then the infantry company pinned in place (the dreaded d10 rolls of 10s).

Pin Power

I've often said *Command Decision* is a game of 10s -- roll a 10 morale and even though nothing has happened to the company, including not being fired at but just seeing enemy, and the company pins in place. In the case of both companies, I rolled consecutive 10s... Argh!

Engineers begin the process of clearing the roadblock.

Engineering Efforts

I slithered the engineering platoon up the central stream and reached the roadblock at the bridge. Greek AT shots proved long-range and low odds -- hampered by my artillery fire.

The roadblock needed a full turn for removal. When done, it mounted up and headed over the bridge towards the main road.

GM Marc (right) helps Rich adjust the Greek defense above Akritas.

Von Lockwood's Defense

I had lined the road by the intersection with my platoons. The Greeks, with a slight numbers advantage, expected to roll over me. I was faster on the draw and took out three of four Greek platoons without loss. The backing pair of platoons halted and passed their morale test.

The remaining platoon failed and pinned in place. I soon concentrated all fire on it and eliminated it.

By this time, the engineering platoon was getting close to the remaining pair of Greek platoons. It was only a matter of time before I caught them in a pincer.

Ridgeline Running

Back at the ridgeline, surviving Greek platoons soon bolted to the rear towards their overall commander. The now unpinned panzers and infantry followed in hot pursuit, plinking away at the laggards.

Even the gun platoon got in the pursuit, with the 75mm gun scoring a direct hit on the Greek car platoon, which was carrying MGs. No Greek made it out. Their motorcycles fled the fastest.



Hilltop Surprise

The big hill held the Greek AT gun company and assorted infantry. The initial company turned out to be dummy stands -- Vito let slip they were dummies. Obviously, this was a radio intercept.

Still, they were the last concentration of Greek power in the area and finally, the Stuka squadron strike came in and dropped lots of bombs -- ineffective at producing casualties but effective as a morale bane.

The Stuka screams into the attack.

Indeed. Vito used the AA gun to actually abort the Stuka follow-up attack. I am not sure if it was Greek AA fire or my errant 20mm AA gun platoon spraying lead all over the place.

The Stukas reported tankettes on the far side of the hill, but they turned out to be dummy units, too.

End of Battle

I don't know how many turns we played, but it was 11:15pm and time to call the game.

Technically, I had not accomplished all my missions. The battalion did take the town of Akritas, the engineers did remove the roadblock, and my company did keep the main road open. However, we did not capture the highest hill in the area. Granted, most everything on the hill was killed off or suppressed, but as possession is 9/10s the law, I was 9/10s short of grabbing the fourth objective.

My panzers and gun companies chase the broken Greek defenders. The hill I need as my fourth objective is just to the right of the river next to Vito.



Rich and Vito argued that they had little left for defense of the actual hill and had done very little damage to the German battalion. Well, I wasn't going to argue against that very perceptive observation, so Von Lockwood took a minor victory and an Iron Cross second class.

Thoughts

It's a tough game for the Germans to do everything within three hours (or however many turns the scenario called for). I'd say the luck went both ways. The Greeks rolled 9s and 10s for the ridge defenders that turned them into retreats, not pins. It probably saved them because I got a pair of consecutive 10s on my intact force that pinned me in place for a turn. Don't even talk to me about my 20mm AA gun.

As for the rest, moans, groans, and cheers greeted the relatively even die tosses. I learned that one die had a propensity to roll high. It took me half the game, but then I only used it when I rolled for damage (high is better for damage, but low is better for firing). It worked (mostly, anyway), too. I wish I could remember what color it was...next time I'm going to have to go through this learning process all over again.

Thanks, Marc for hosting and to Rich and Vito for a comment- and laugh-filled game.

Avengers Assemble: Avoiding a Thanos Thumping

by Russ Lockwood

Dan pulled out a favorite cooperative game, *Thanos Rising*. We settled in with a random selection of me as Black Panther and Dan as Thor.

AAR readers know I'm fond of this dice game. Basically, Thanos is in one section out of three and each section holds three cards: either Avengers or evil followers. Each turn, you pick a section to recruit Avengers or defeat the evil followers. Thanos may randomly rotate to a new section or stay in his existing section -- inflicting wounds on all the Avengers in that section and triggering the followers to do their special function (usually inflict more wounds). Put enough wounds on an Avenger and he or she is killed.

In addition, Thanos collects Infinity Stones. He needs five "clues" to grab one colored stone and the clues are by random d6 roll. This serves as a clock mechanism because if he gets all of them, game over Avengers. Also, if 10 Avengers are killed before Thanos grabs all the Infinity Stones, game over Avengers.

We brave Avengers win if we defeat 10 evil followers.

Combat uses a filtration system -- roll d6s with a variety of icons, match rolled icons to icons printed on a card and recruit an Avenger or inflict one wound on a follower. Put enough wounds on a follower and it's killed -- gain a bonus token (extra icon, move a wound, remove a clue, etc.).

Each Avenger provides some sort of benefit to the team leader: add more dice, turn a die face, heal a wound, and so on. It's all quite balanced and clever.

Dan as Thor wields his hammer of dice.



Avengers Party!

It's hard to track all the rolls and icon placements, but the initial shuffle and placing of the nine cards across three sections put nine Avengers in play. So, we recruited and recruited.

Remember, this is a cooperative game, so removing a wound from a hero could be any hero. I "recruited" a pair of those type cards early, which later helped keep Avengers alive.

That said, the flip side is that Thanos was receiving many clues. It was inevitable.

Finally, Thanos followers arrived on the scene and while we could not always defeat them due to the random icon rolls, we could recruit more Avengers. Still, as Dan noted about halfway through the game, we were winning the recruiting war but losing the Infinity Stone war.

In fact, it got so bad, there were a few times when a single bad roll (of a green stone icon to be precise) would be game over. That's great game tension...

Towards the end, we even allowed Thanos to grab the red stone in order to remove a clue so that the "one bad roll" wouldn't end the game.

Followers Appear

About this time, we had no dead Avengers, but racked up five dead followers. So we added to the follower dead pile without Avenger loss until the very end. The Thanos die roll and follower "benefit" of inflicting more wounds on Avengers put just about all of Dan's Avengers in danger of dying.

So, he tallied his icons and thought about where to put the icons. He first assigned them to the 10th follower so that we could win the game, but only if he saved enough Avengers. It turns out nine Avengers were in peril, so we would technically win the game 10-9 and Thanos grabbing only five of six stones -- a narrow win indeed.

But that wasn't good enough. We were the Avengers. Dan had icons and went to work trying to remove wounds so more could survive. He thought and thought and assigned until "only" five Avengers fell.

This was another tight game in the middle to late period and was pulled out only in the end. It looked grim, but the Avengers prevailed.

Thanks, Dan, for an entertaining game.

Thanos Rising: Another Close Game

by Daniel

Russ came to visit after fulfilling his annual obligation to take his bride for a walk on the beach. Afterwards we played a game we've enjoyed in the past, *Thanos Rising*. It's an easy game to play with kids and takes a finite time to complete. Each player starts with one of the five possible starting Heroes to build a team of heroes to defeat Thanos.

Russ channels Dr. Pepper instead of Dr. Strange as we start a game of Thanos Rising. Russ drew Black Panther and I drew Thor. Photo by Dan.



Thanos wins by either gathering all six Infinity Stones or eliminating 10 Heroes before the Heroes eliminate 7-10 Villains (depending on how hard you want the Victory Conditions to be, 10 for our game), so this is very much a cooperative game. The players have to pay attention and cooperate with each other to help eliminate Thanos' "Villains," gather useful Heroes, and try to save wounded Heroes who haven't been recruited yet.

Through random distribution, I was "Team Thor" and Russ was "Team Black Panther." We were ready to save the universe. The "Team Leaders" have a special card with a unique "Team Ability" that may be triggered only on the player's initial roll of his Power Dice. Each "Team Ability" is different but very useful when triggered.

As each player takes a turn, you assign your "Mission Token" to one of the three sectors available. The "Thanos Dice" are then rolled. Thanos *always* deals damage to any Heroes present on one of three sectors (including *your* team's Heroes if it's in the sector) and *always* gains progress towards obtaining an Infinity Stone (five cubes capture a Stone). Displayed "Villains" can also cause additional damage, depending if Thanos is present or not. Players *must* make the most of their turns to keep pace. Adding Heroes to your team often expands that team's abilities and possibly earn extra Power Dice. Each damage scored on a Villain gains a "Bonus Token" that can be used almost anytime.

Some Assembly Required

Unlike previous games, Russ and I were able to assemble our teams of heroes successfully, gaining additional abilities such as extra Power Dice, healing one or more heroes, or manipulating the Power Dice. A 2-player game plays differently than a 3-, 4-, or 5-player game as each team gains heroes quicker in a 2-player game.

*Reaching a critical point in the game: "Team Thor" has nine heroes while "Team Black Panther" has 10 heroes, so each team can handle Thanos' Villains fairly easily and eight have been defeated at this point – but Thanos has three Infinity Stones and the last three are within reach. If the Time Stone (green) is activated before we eliminate 10 Villains, we lose the game (because the Time Stone's effect adds a clue cube to **each** Infinity Stone with the least amount of cubes and the last three Infinity Stones to be captured each have four cubes).*



There comes a point where the focus has to be eliminating displayed Villains instead of gaining more heroes on your team, but as you roll your Power Dice, options *how* to use those dice may allow for only one realistic choice to pursue – even if it's *not* what you might want to accomplish, so it's a challenge at times on how to commit your Power Dice. Although other players cannot activate their Heroes when it's not their turn, they can offer to use their "Bonus Tokens" to help the active player.

Russ checking his team before placing his Mission Marker on a sector. He'll be going after the Villain in the lower left sector. We're on borrowed time now as we could lose the game on any turn from Thanos capturing the last three Infinity Stones.



We were feeling pretty confident about winning the game until we did the math and realized we had two more Villains to dispatch while Thanos had captured three Infinity Stones. The ugly truth was that the remaining three Infinity Stones each had four cubes (one away from being captured). We had to wrap this up before Thanos filled up his Infinity Gauntlet.

One Villain was on display, so not only did we have to eliminate that Villain, but grab as many heroes from the sector to draw more cards from the deck to find the tenth Villain.

For five perilous turns we were very lucky that the Thanos Dice did not activate the Time Stone. Activating Thor's Team Ability adds an extra damage to a Villain (very useful now). The displayed Villain was eliminated. Each time you wound a Villain, you gain a "Bonus Token." A couple of these removed a cube from an Infinity Stone - but if the Reality Stone (red) is activated, you can't use Bonus Tokens and you can't heal heroes. Each turn, we faced losing the game but managed to reveal the tenth Villain and eliminate it before Thanos could capture the last two Infinity Stones.

Retro WWII: War in the Pacific

by Russ Lockwood

Years ago, I played a couple games of *Admiral's War*, a WWII game of naval strategy. Feeling nostalgic, Dan pulled out *War in the Pacific* -- along with *War at Sea* formed the basis of *Admiral's War*.

By random draw, I was the Japanese and Dan the US/UK.

Dan places reinforcements at Pearl on Turn 2.

VPs are earned turn after turn for control of sea areas, which means having at least one ship or one aircraft alone in an area. The problem for the Japanese is that the US/UK plays second, so the Japanese place ships first and the US/UK player can respond or ignore as desired.

The turn has two types of ship placement: patrol (the kind you need to control an area) and raid (the kind that doesn't). Aircraft are placed after ships as long as you have one airfield in or on perimeter of an area. The perimeter Guadalcanal airfield becomes important if the US/UK intends to drive back the Japanese in the central Pacific.

Combat is simple: 6s hit and 5s force a withdrawal back to a naval base. Some ships and aircraft on both sides gain a +1 die modifier. It's quick and often deadly...or not depending on the fickleness of the dice.

I should note that some aspects of WWII ship



combat are ignored. No ship fires AA -- it's all offensive dice looking for 5s and 6s. Likewise, there's no CAP. It's all offensive dice.

Being the first time I played this -- yes, I hang my head in shame for never playing the original *War at Sea/War in the Pacific* games -- it takes a while to ignore these aspects.

Pearl Harbor

The game starts with Pearl Harbor and Singapore. Pearl Harbor has a few ship requirements for speed and offers two “free” surprise air strikes. In other words, roll dice and roll high. Fortunately, just about all the Japanese carriers have excellent +1 pilots. To help the US, the Japanese need double hits to sink a ship at Pearl.

After that, the Japanese player has the option to perform two regular attacks: either daylight air strikes or night surface battles. Both players have to agree on which one, and if not, then high die wins the type of attack.

The Singapore attack has no “free” surprise air attacks.

Game Start

I sent all but one small carrier in the Pearl Harbor attack. Why? Because Dan did that in *Admiral's War* to excellent effect. I did enough damage, I suppose, sinking a couple battleships and cruisers and putting a world of hurt on the rest. My ships went back to Japan.

Singapore was also successful with an overwhelming surface battle.

I scattered ships across the Pacific to make sure I got VPs.

The US rolls for its carriers' starting location -- and it was all Hawaiian Islands. Dan went hunting.

Patrol vs. Raid Decisions

The turn order of placement goes: Japanese patrol ships, US/UK patrol ships, Japanese raid ships, US/UK raid ships, Japanese air units, US/UK air units, and the one Japanese submarine.

Think about this. The Japanese have to figure out how to keep enough patrol ships alive to control an area. The US/UK can see the disposition and react with however much force they want to commit to an area.

The Japanese then get to assign raid ships to an area. Then the US/UK reacts to that and assigns raid ships.

Thus, if the Japanese put a minimal number of ships in an area, the US can counter with a massive number of ships. I never quite got the hang of the split between patrol and raid ships.

Worse, patrol ships move one area with no problem, but to move into a second area requires a d6 roll under the speed of the ship to move into that second area. Raid ships move up to two areas without a problem, but must roll that d6 to enter a third area.

Furthermore, if the ship fails the d6 roll, it goes back to base as if it never moved.

I have no idea why the same ship can move two areas as a raid and possibly a third area but must roll for the second area if on a patrol. At the end of the turn, all ships return to base. Oddly enough, I get the end-of-turn return to base for maintenance.

Yamamoto I Am Not

I could never figure out how to catch the US/UK ships. On turn 2, I tried a mix of patrol and raid to expand into the Indian Ocean and elsewhere, but half my ships failed the d6 roll. Those that made it were slaughtered by the US/UK fleets.

On turn 3, I tried pure patrol to force a fight. I got one, but only where the US/UK massed.

As for Dan, US carriers ignored my deployments and picked on non-carrier forces, demanding an air attack. Or, concentrated on forces with only one carrier. Although I won some of the die roll offs for surface vs. air, a carrier vs. non carrier force has an advantage. Remember, no AA or CAP. That's air immunity.

Calling It Quits

After Turn 3, I could see I was outmatched. I conceded.

It was an education. I suppose I need a lot more seasoning to figure out the mix.

Thoughts

I suppose the Japanese going first reflects the US/UK cracking the naval code. I wonder how the game would play if it was a blind game: write down where your ships would appear instead of the perfect intel. The US may have known Midway was an objective, but as to the actual location of the Japanese fleet, that seemed more the result of air recon than code cracking.

A far longer game, I suppose, when you have to compare either written deployments or players use two games with a divider screen like *Midway*. Or *Battleship*.

Dunno, but *War at Sea* and *War in the Pacific* are classics for ease of play and presumably, balance.

The other thought that hit me was the difficulty in projecting air power. You need an airbase in or on the perimeter of an area. The Marine units are the mechanic to flip a base from one side to another. I know I didn't use my Imperial Japanese Marines to good use. When I finally figured out to send two Marines into the Indian Ocean to flip air bases, they (transports so to speak) were slaughtered.

This applies to the US/UK as well trying to get into the central Pacific areas.

In any case, it was worth giving a classic a shot. Thanks, Dan, for the game, although I didn't offer you much of one.



At start. The US ships at Pearl Harbor and all the Japanese ships are off board on the OOB sheets. It's easier to match 'em up there than move everything to the board on the first turn.

Hidden *RUSE*: WWII Eastern Front

by Russ Lockwood

Renaud pulled out his updated *RUSE* rules, this time for the WWII Eastern Front. By random roll, I led a platoon of German infantry, backed by a half track and Pz III against a Soviet farm. Against me, a Soviet platoon backed by a T-34 tank. I heard the tracks and checked my troops: not an anti-tank rifle nor anti-tank gun nor anti-tank mine nor any of the rumored anti-tank rocket-propelled weapons. So, it would be either a mad rush with a bundle of grenades or the Pz III with its 50mm gun would somehow need to get a flank shot.

The battlefield. My troops at bottom.



My platoon consisted of two 12-man squads with recruits fresh out of boot camp. In fact, they had the “Reluctant” trait, which meant they needed to pass a stress test (50-50 chance) to do anything. Fortunately, I had positioned myself between them, giving a re-roll should they fail.

My third squad consisted of veterans, slightly tougher to eliminate and with slightly more LMGs because, well, they're veterans who understood battle and picked up extra firepower. I also had one HMG with crew, the halftrack with MG, and the Pz III. My landsers needed to sweep the farm.

The Soviets had two understrength squads of seven riflemen each plus an understrength squad of SMG tank riders. Having seen some battle, they were all neither reluctant nor veteran. Lt. Ivan commanded them plus a HMG, two (!?) snipers, an Anti-Tank Rifle team, and an early model T-34. They all started hidden.

Not A Soviet In Sight

I entered the battlefield with the veteran squad on the right, the new landsers in the center and left. The HMG was on the left, sheltered by the hill with the halftrack while the Pz III inched around the hill.

Renaud started his troops in hiding as my skirmish line advanced. My Pz III was to the left of the halftrack.



That's when the Soviet AT Rifle team popped up and loosed a shot at the halftrack, but missed. The massed German fire from multiple units obliterated the AT Rifle team.

The sniper was a different story. Vasily was hard to spot and two landsers quickly keeled over.

A Word About The Revised System

As Renaud evolved the *RUSE* system, things were tried, accepted or rejected, and the next set of trials would occur. Last time around, we placed activation beads (one per unit) in one of those weekly pill boxes that are labeled Monday through Sunday. One compartment was labeled Withdraw, two were Stay in Place/Prep/Fire, and three were Advance/Advance and Fire.

When the compartment is opened, you assigned any beads within to a unit -- any of your units that have not been previously activated. That allows for some flexibility in dealing with enemy activations.

The seventh compartment were for the beads from eliminated units -- when 50% of the units were eliminated, the side breaks off and the game is over.

Previous versions went in that order: Withdraw, Stay, and Advance. This time around, he used six cards for a random order. It increased the Chaos factor.

Another major change was in firing. Instead of dealing with hits immediately, the hits are tracked and only resolved when the unit is activated via bead. Since a bead will eventually be used on that unit in a turn, the hits will be dealt with either in the current turn (if the unit had not been activated) or in the next turn (if the unit had already been activated and hits received after its activation).

The final change was the re-adoption of the equivalent of a saving roll. Instead of a hit being a hit and kill, you roll a number of d12s equal to the number of hits (which may well be greater than the number of troops in a team or squad). Roll under the Strength/Toughness of a unit and the hit is a no effect. Roll equal and it's an "Impaired" (like a wound without the connotations of a "wound"), and anything over is a kill. As the infantry were mostly 3s and some 4s, a hit was mostly a kill, but every so often -- as when Renaud rolled two 1s on 2d12 -- you get lucky and someone survived.

In the case of the Soviet AT Rifle team, I put 15 hits on the two-man team, so I rolled 15d12s -- the team was chutnied.

I eventually found Vasily the Sniper, who had the stealthy trait and so remained hidden for a long time. Another frenzy of fire chutnied Vasily, but that still left Ludmilla, who plagued my troops with unobserved fire.

The Battle Continues

Then the T-34 came out from behind the farmhouse and lined up a shot on the Pz III. My miserable roll of the dice meant the Pz III brewed up. Uh-oh. I would have to get real close with a landser to even have a chance of blowing up the Soviet tank.

The T-34 peeking around the farmhouse (upper middle of photo) smoked my PzIII (left bottom corner). My squad infiltrates into the woods at the top of the hill and pounded the Soviet squad in the wheatfield. The red bead indicates Shock. The red dice indicate casualties.

A Soviet rifle squad popped up out of the wheatfield, but mostly whiffed. The return landser fire, along with my own HMG, eliminated all of them in two turns.

A second Soviet infantry squad pops up on the edge of the wheatfield after the first squad was eliminated.

Not to worry, another Soviet rifle squad popped up right behind all those bodies. They didn't do much damage, but the T-34 shifted fire to my infantry.

The HE system uses the same basic hit system. His shell plopped right in the middle of my landsers. But then, a low-odds minor miracle roll rendered it the equivalent of a dud (he needed to roll a 7 on a d6). That was actually the second ineffective HE shot from the tank.



Soviet HMG fire ripped out of the farmhouse and my other landsers fell in droves. Out of the 12, I had four left huddled in light cover. They returned fire along with the halftrack. The HMG was soon eliminated.

Of course, my own HMG team came under fire and that was the end of them. Three-man teams don't last long in this system!

The T-34, fed up with defective HE firing, advanced and used MGs to shoot up my up-to-then lucky landsers -- gunning down 11 of 12.

Rally!

I'm not sure whether to curse Renaud for his evil Rally rules or praise him for a clever mechanic. In the RUSE system, a dead figure may not necessarily be dead, just ineffective. As long as one figure in the unit remains, you have a chance to get back some of those "dead" guys. You also have a chance to lose your remaining guys. It's a 50-50 roll per figure for success. Total up your successes and failures, subtract the lower total from the higher, and apply. A leader impacts the rolls. In the case of my 11 dead landsers and one live one, I took the chance and rolled five more successes than failures. Hence, five lucky landsers were roused from their hiding places or returned from wherever they fled to, and otherwise came back to the unit.

It could've gone the other way with more failures than successes and thus lose the last guy and eliminate the unit from the battle. In this case, since I got five figures back, it was obviously a clever mechanic.

Veteran Savvy

On the right flank, since I had not observed any action, I used my veterans to rush forward. That's when Lt. Ivan had his seven-man SMG squad rushed from the farmhouse to engage. That was 21 dice versus one of my teams. They were basically buried in hits.

I drove up my halftrack and saw Lt. Ivan in the open in between me and the SMGs. We had a discussion about target selection and whether one Ivan could shield the SMGers. I fired at Ivan and got three hits. The odds were not good for Ivan when the d12s were rolled.

The Soviet SMG squad shoots up my veterans.



My other veteran teams got the drop on the SMGs in the next turn but took out only three -- not the 50% I needed to stress them. They responded with 12 dice. Buried in hits again. Both veteran teams eliminated.

And that was the end of the game: I had lost the Pz III, one reluctant squad, both veteran teams, and the HMG team. That was five out of the nine units and so over 50%, so I withdrew. Renaud was close to breaking, but not there even if he blew all his d12 saving rolls.

Evolution

We played to a conclusion in 2.5 hours, so consider that a sufficient lethality-to-time ratio. The random card draw for activation tends to induce players to spread out the beads among the compartments instead of sometimes packing them in one. We had a lot more die roll-offs than before for who goes first because we had more bead ties per compartment.

The random draw order for the compartments added more uncertainty to which function (Withdraw, Stay, or Advance) would be triggered. That's offset by the flexibility of assigned a bead to any unactivated unit.

The d12 saving rolls (technically, I suppose you could call it hit result rolls) mostly eliminated figures since it was a 2 in 12 chance of a no effect and 1 in 12 chance of impaired (two impairs equal a kill). With a basic 75% elimination and the accumulation of hits, it was often a foregone conclusion.

The scenario shows the advantage of hidden units that could pop out at the most advantageous time. First shots are devastating, although lucky rolls can foil the best-laid plans.

Thanks, Renaud, for another upgrade to the *RUSE* games.

Failure of the Will: Broken Game?

by Russ Lockwood

I cracked open the shrink wrap of another game. Man, I love the sound of crinkling shrinkwrap in the morning. It's the sound of hope, as in, I hope this game lives up to the marketing hype.

Renaud studies the map at the start of the game. An awful lot of open space beckons.

This two-player game posits that the Germans and Japanese won WWII and split the globe between them, with the Italians holding a small slice as well. As there is no honor among thieves, so the Nazis and Tojoists fell out and began the final battle for world dominion.

It's a fairly simple system on the order of *Risk*. Each unit gets 1d6 and high roll wins. Defender wins ties. Loser removes the unit. First one to capture the other's capital wins.

That said, some combat wrinkles like tanks on the attack get +1, air superiority roll generates air units that give +1, and special units give +1. Then there are the atomic bombs.

Each side starts with one A-bomb and may buy more with production points. One A-bomb targets one enemy unit for a 66% chance to nuke it. However, once you launch 12 exploding nukes, the 13th triggers a nuclear winter die roll. The more nukes fired, the higher the odds of losing the game. Whoever fires the latest nuke rolls the die and if winter occurs, that player loses the game.

Did I mention the UN? Every ungarrisoned area has a one in six chance of being in rebellion. Worse, if you don't stamp that out, it helps spread the rebellion to adjacent areas with a +1 die modifier. If all non-capital areas rebel and become UN, both players lose the game.

There's more, and one mechanic breaks the game, but I'll get to that.

By random die roll, Renaud was the Germans and I was the Japanese. We each had 21 production points to start and to spread bought units out across the globe. Technically, a player chooses how to spend his 21 points. I set up the game and so gave us equal forces, except Renaud and the Germans had the special 6th SS Tank Army with its extra +1 on top of +1 for attacking while I had the special Kido Butai +1 Fleet for the Japanese. We scattered our forces across the continents.

Map

The game uses a polar map with areas instead of the usual Mercator map. I don't mind the non-standard look, but I did mind the boundaries of four areas often meeting at one point and the rules scrambling to tell you which of these were impassible on the diagonal. Map Creation 101 sez you never make such gaffes.

Often, it did not matter because individual units may move an unlimited number of areas until they hit an enemy -- forcing a battle from which neither player may retreat.

Worse, the orientation of charts is one-sided. When you have two players, you should have the useful charts oriented so each can read his own chart. This was all facing one way -- even though plenty of map space was available if the Units Available spaces were smaller.

While the map had a Phase track, it lacked a turn track, although we doubled up on the nuke tracker used a spare counter.



Broken Mechanics

Combat is simple enough, but has a post-resolution problem. All units in an area must join in combat and any survivors must be flipped to used status -- they cannot move or attack for the rest of the turn. So, one tactic is to attack a stack of units with only one unit. Maybe the attacking unit is defeated or maybe it took a unit with it. Either way, all the units are flipped to used side.

Can one Japanese unit stuff the entire German production system? We think yes.

I did this in Germany at the start of the turn. My navy shuttled one unit to Germany, which is the only German reinforcement point. Renaud had six units (the maximum that can stack). Regardless of how combat resolved, all remaining German units would be flipped to the used side for the turn. If I was lucky, I'd lose the battle so that all six German units would be stuck -- and Renaud couldn't build the next turn due to stacking limitations.

We thought that a bit much and so only turned counters to the used side if participating in actual combat. Alternately, the defender could assign a number of counters for defense -- if they win, only those counters are flipped. Any others not included are left on their active side. If the attackers won, then the defenders lose all counters. There are problems with that as well, but at least it's defender's choice.

We found another conundrum: German naval builds. If the Japanese have one fleet in the naval area adjacent to Germany, Germany cannot build any fleets. In many games with this sort of "naval blockade," you can build new fleets to immediately attack the blockading fleets.

That would leave him only nukes and air superiority to build, and nukes are limited to a specific number per turn.

Placement Restriction

We scratched our heads over new unit placement -- only in capital areas (Germany and Japan). As stacking is limited to six per land area and six per ocean area, the rules specifically state not to build more than you can stack. Since production points come from all over the map, why can't you place a new unit anywhere on the map. At least have factories like *Axis and Allies*.

Nope.

This really screws Japan because Japan needs fleets to transport the armies off the island. Nuke a fleet and that's one army without a ride, which means it stays on the island and the island can't stack more than six units. Maybe that's why you can stuff Germany with a single unit and a couple of transporting fleets.

UN Blossoms

Rolling for every area to see if it gets a 6 to generate a UN rebellion isn't the best use of time, but I will say we both looked forward to the tension of seeing if an area rebelled or not. When you add +1 to the d6 roll for every adjacent already rebelled area, it's even more tense.

We couldn't figure out if the +1 for adjacent was only for areas that started the Rebellion Phase with a UN counter, or, if an area rolled a 6, then the next adjacent area had the +1 die modifier applied. We opted for the area had to be in rebellion at the start of the Phase.

One thing we overlooked was that once an area rebelled, you roll a d6 to see how many UN army counters get placed in the area. We only put one, which helped us stamp out rebellions. Imagine stamping out six counters!



Game Rolls On

Germany overran all of mainland Asia, Europe, and Africa. We split North America and South America.

We nuked here and there, although I nuked early and often. We were up to 16 mushroom clouds, but I never rolled a “1” that would end the game for me. However, dependent on fleets, I was being forced into a smaller and smaller area, with less and less movement. So, I looked around and conceded.

Thoughts

We later figured out we had missed a couple nuances. First off, we had limited Atomic Bomb production to a number equal to the game turn. In actuality, the number doubled per turn: Turn 1 equals 1 (starting), Turn 2 = 2 Turn 3 = 4, etc. I don't think it mattered too much in our play. Maybe a few more would have been tossed.

Enemy control markers do NOT stop movement, which is basically unlimited until you hit an enemy unit. In our game, we stopped when reaching an enemy control marker. That just seems odd to us to zigzag all over the place grabbing control.

We also forgot about tanks with air support clearing enemy from an area being able to move and conduct a second attack. See the above paragraph.

We added air support to fleets. Ooops. No can do.

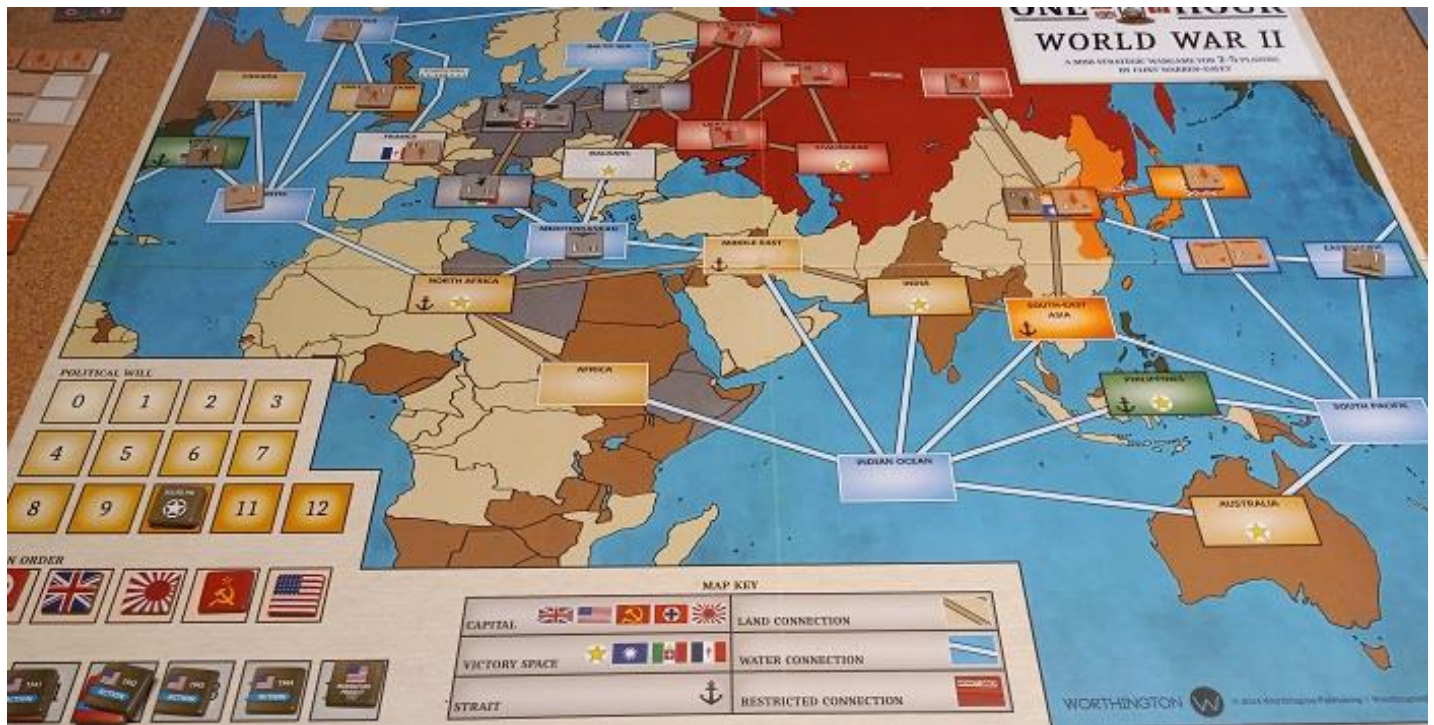
It's not a particularly good game the way we played it and given this new understanding, even less so. Troop-to-area ratio is minimal and not being able to place new production anywhere makes the board depopulate fast. The permutations of being able to stuff a capital city area, or in the case of Japan, adjacent ocean area, to prevent movement and new production grinds this game to an A-bomb exchange.

The UN rebellion and the Nuclear Winter mechanics are clever, but as for the rest, some significant problems brought our game to a halt. As we agreed, some questionable design decisions. I also find the map and chart content and layout need significant help. Development must have been truncated.

Anyway, thanks, Renaud, for trying out the game.



End of game.



The map at start.

One Hour World War II: Doubletime

by Russ Lockwood

A decade ago, there was a pretty neat “two-hour” WWII game out, but along comes Worthington with a “one-hour” game. Huh. Allow me to offer a super special “One-Minute” WWII game...

Roll 1d6. On a 1 through 5, the Allies win. On a 6, the Axis hold out and roll again. If a second 1d6 roll, on a 1 through 5, the Allies still win. On a 6, Hamburg and Munich are turned into atomic wastelands, but the Japanese remain unconvinced until Hiroshima is turned into nuclear ashes. The Allies win.

Seriously, this one-hour Worthington game takes twice as long as advertised on the first run through, but has some clever mechanisms to make the wargame interesting and may get you down to the magic one-hour promise in repeated games.

Action Men

Each of the five countries -- US, UK, USSR, Germany, and Japan -- receive a number of Action tokens to spend in a turn (one year) on four main actions: Build, Offensive, Strategic Redeploy, and Upgrade. These are fairly self-explanatory with the exception of upgrade.

Status Cards. Left column: Your four choices. Right column: Opponent choices. Bottom row left side: Reserve (none on Soviet card) and right side: Spent (five Soviet units).



Your air prowess, naval prowess, and industrial infrastructure are represented by a wooden cube on three tracks. When you attack with a land unit(s), you add your air prowess modifier to your die roll. When you attack with a naval unit(s), you add your naval prowess modifier to your die roll. When you build, you move from one to four points of land or naval units from the reserve pile to the map, or from the “spent” pile to the reserve pile, or some combination of such.

Response

Whatever you pick, the opponents (and sometimes allies) get to expend an Action token to trigger a response AFTER the original action is completed. For example, a Soviet Build, after moving strength points around, the German player may opt to spend an Action token to implement Strategic Bombing, which sends two strength points of Reserve units to the Spent pile, or, downgrades the Build action by one point (i.e. shift the cube). Likewise, the US player may opt to spend an Action token for Lend Lease, which shifts two points of Spent units to the Reserve pile.

This is a clever mechanic, for it makes all players think about if they want to spend an Action token as a response or as an Action. When you only have a pair of Action tokens, you think long and hard about how to spend them. Managing your Reserve and Spent units is a simple, but tension-filled, part of the game.

Odd Part: No Making Change

Some units are worth 2 strength points, although most are worth 1 strength point. If all you have is a 2 SP unit on the map and must lose 1 SP, you don't make change -- the entire 2 SP unit is gone to the Spent pile.

I got tagged like that during Operation Torch. I used the Monty action (+2 to die roll) along with an offensive Action to move a 2 SP Canadian tank unit to North Africa. When I lost the combat due to a bad die roll and had to lose 1 SP, I had to eliminate the entire 2 SP unit. To me, that lacks logic because you're talking something like a half a million combat troops to the land strength point.

V for Victory

Each side starts with 10 Victory Points. It's called Political Will, but we called them VPs. Wargamers. Bah. They never accept Veneer Points.

At the end of every turn, you compare how many Victory Areas each side holds -- and the areas have to have been originally enemy or neutral. So, the Germans grabbing France count as a German VP, but holding Berlin does not as that was originally a home area.

Subtract the lower VP total from the higher and the difference is how many VPs are subtracted from your running total. For example, Germany grabbed France and the Balkans, both non-home areas with 1 VP designations. I did not grab any. So, 2 VP minus 0 VP = 2 and my VP score dropped from 10 to 8.

Game Start 1940

The Allies start to gain more Action tokens with each turn, so while the course of the war is dark and scary at first, it gets easier as the game rolls along and you can absorb bad news, like losing a 2 Strength Point (SP) unit, because you can mostly immediately Build it back. Not always, but mostly.

Renaud weighs which option to choose for the Germans or Japanese on Turn 2.

In any case, the Germans rolled into France and the Balkans and the Japanese thought about bombing Pearl Harbor in 1940, but didn't. They waited until 1941, when the USN fought them tooth and nail for the Eastern Pacific VP area. It was going badly for the US. The British showed up with a 2 SP Fleet in the South Pacific.

As the turns rolled by, the British India Army invaded Indochina, but the Japanese played a special Action token that created the Indian Army -- in India (specifically regardless of supply status)! As I had no army in India, this VP area reverted to the Japanese. I offset that with a response that created a Chinese Army in China.



The Germans and Italians expanded into North Africa and then the Germans went to the Middle East to open up a supply line to the cut off Indian Army. Alas, we later learned that only the home country supplies a unit, and I had two British units in blocking positions.

Nonetheless, German and Japanese expansion accelerated, dropping me from 8 to 2 on the chart. When you get to zero, game over.

Speaking of Supply

We had a question about the rule noting supply never goes “through” an enemy occupied area. That seems simple enough until you realize that offensive actions need for the units to be in supply. If two sides occupy the same area, is supply supplied to that area? We said yes, so the choice of offensive in the same area action would be available. Likewise, we said strategic redeploy allowed a unit to exit an area with enemy units as well. Both are ill defined in the rules.

Also not defined is how the Special Actions use the four basic Actions. Some seem to play off a specific Action. For example, Monty gives a +2 die modifier when used with an Offensive Action. That's pretty clear, but others not so much. Since the opponent can use a Response Action, knowing which of the four Actions is important. The rules are mum. We played it by ear.

Allied Comeback

In 1943, the tide turned as the Allies got many more Action tokens, which meant a higher rate of moving troops onto the map and attacking. For example, while the Japanese had three fleets to my one at Pearl Harbor (Eastern Pacific), I used the extra actions to drop 4 SP of fleets into Pearl. Although it would take many Offensive Actions to whittle down the Japanese fleet, Renaud didn't have much of fleet beyond that. He used a Strategic Movement to shuffle away and then defended the Central Pacific area quite well.

The Green Die

Part of the Allied comeback was because I changed dice. Renaud's black die was paranormally affected to roll high against my green die. In fact, every, and I mean every, die roll I made with the green die was 1 to 3 -- great for an *Axis and Allies* game, but a catastrophe for this one. So, I switched to a white die. My luck immediately began to change.

The rationale: I got rid of all the bumbling commanders -- well, except for Monty, whose low die roll was an aberration. In any case, the die rolls flipped. Apparently, the black die feared the white die.

The 1944 Advance

With a stalemate in the Pacific, I used a Response to dump another Chinese Army in China, giving me control of the area and a VP. I took North Africa, cleared the Med of the Italian fleet, and took Italy for 2 VPs more.

I played a Special Action French Resistance, which resurrected the French Army and tied up the Germans in France -- depriving them of a VP. However, the Gestapo proved rather effective at fighting, oh, the white die lost its mojo in this battle, and eliminated the French Army. D-Day soon rolled into France with four Armies and took out the German occupation Army.

End of game in 1944.



The Soviets rolled forward and tied up the Germans in Poland and Balkans, depriving the Axis of VPs. The only VP the Axis got was launching V2s -- I lost a VP and was down to only 1 VP. Renaud was down to 2 VPs, but Germany was empty and 1944 over.

End Game

So the worm turned and Renaud looked at 1945 and all the Allied Actions, plus the Special Action Atomic Bomb (Germany loses 2 VPs). If he pulled back his East Front armies to defend Germany, I gain 2 VPs. If he builds the one army allowed, my four Armies in France roll into Germany for a large advantage. The Japanese had some advantages, but I could spend a US action to pump fleets into the Pacific.

So, Renaud called it a game.

Thoughts

Some clever mechanisms within, although the rules were sometimes vague about how they worked. Special Actions proved the least well explained, but we just worked it out.

And it worked out well enough that it is worth a second try if we can scour the web for answers.

Thanks for the game, Renaud.



American Revolution Gaming at Somers.

HMGS Next Generation: American Revolution Gaming and More

by John Spiess

American Revolution: Somers, NY

We put on another American War of Independence game for the Somers (NY) 250th Anniversary event calendar. We ran the Battle of Monmouth, which seems to be the most popular scenario among libraries.

During the game, as unit stands were being destroyed or ran away, the kids put them on a nearby shelf. We were using the totals to calculate army morale every turn. So, they joked around and named the area “the shelf of shame.” Every turn they would run over with their rulers and all shout in unison: “Shame, shame, shame!”



The troops in action at Somers.

I looked at one of the fathers who was playing and asked if he was thinking the same thing that I was (i.e. *Game of Thrones*!). He just cracked up, and said his kids had never seen it, which made it even funnier.

In addition, the library moved us to the main reading room this time so everyone could come in and watch. That was pretty cool. After the game, an older gentleman asked if I ever ran the Battle of Yorktown. It turns out that he is the President of the Westchester Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution. He was descended from a soldier who fought there. I told him that we would be more than happy to run a game for his members in the Fall. I'll try to get it scheduled before the Fall-In convention so we can perhaps entice a couple people to come to the show. The gentleman said he used to play the old Avalon Hill games (including *Stalingrad*), so this might work out well.

American Revolution Double Header: Wilton, CT

First, we ran the popular Battle of Ridgefield American Revolution game in the afternoon for the teens and then we ran it again at night for the adults. The Wilton library has a strict no-photo policy for kids, so I don't have any pictures of that game. However, one of the teens who showed up was a girl who works at the Keeler Tavern and Museum in Ridgefield for the summer. So it looks like I have a good reference for doing another event there pretty soon.

Battle of Monmouth: Harrison, NY

I ran our first event at the Harrison, NY, library. The librarian, Colin, decided to combine adults and teens into one game. We played the Battle of Monmouth, which worked out extremely well, since we had parents playing alongside kids. We are now signed up for monthly events through year end, which is nice.

Battle of Monmouth in full swing.



Battle of Arsuf: Larchmont

I ran another kids game at the Larchmont library. This was the Battle of Arsuf, pitting Richard versus Saladin in the Third Crusade.

Young commanders at Arsuf.

Tanks Aplenty: Rye, NY

I was back in Rye running a *Bolt Action* WWII tank game with some models I picked up in the flea market at Historicon. Kids always love tanks and they wouldn't stop playing until the library was closing up. This was good since we got the parents to play near the end when they arrived to pick their kids up.

The Bolt Action gamers are all smiles.



NEWS

Historicon 2027: Date Change

by Dale Zartman, HMGS Secretary

Historicon 2027 is changing dates from July 14 - 18 to Wednesday, July 21 to Sunday, July 25, 2027.

At the request of the Hotel/Convention Center, HMGS was offered a significant financial incentive to make this change. Both the Convention Director and the Board of Directors agreed to the change.

The theme for Historicon 2027 is: Small Battles with Big Impacts.

In military history, it's not always the grandiose or epic battle that wins the war and changes history. Sometimes a small, overlooked battle can stop invading empires, decapitate leadership, or remove prominent figures and/or capabilities.

HMGS is looking for those minor, unnoticed actions or minor historical skirmishes that caused massive changes. It could be a minor skirmish that acted as a turning point in history or a tiny spark that lit a larger fire or put a fire out.



HMGS Fills Positions: Welcome

by Dale Zartman, HMGS Secretary

The HMGS Board of Directors announced HMGS filled three HMGS positions. The Board welcomes Mike Gesser as Treasurer, Rob Seidle as IT Director, and Cat Hultberg as Marketing and Social Media Director.

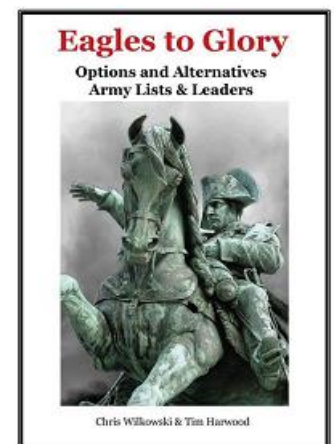


Eagles to Glory: Supplement

by Russ Lockwood

Tim Harwood, author of *Eagles to Glory* Napoleonic miniature rules, announced the release of a supplement with optional rules, Army Lists, and Leaders. Optional rules include leadership ratings, leader casualty table, battalion guns, rockets, garrisons, rifle-armed skirmishers, and more.

Available on Wargames Vault for \$3.00.



Princeton Battlefield Society: Young Patriots Day - Sep. 20, 2026

by Russ Lockwood

Celebrate the American Revolution battle and colonial life in an immersive experience. The Princeton Battlefield Society is hosting its annual Young Patriots Day on Sept. 20, 2026 from 11:00am to 3:00pm at the Princeton Battlefield State Park (500 Mercer Rd., Princeton, NJ 08540).

Featured Activities: Muskets and cannon -- marching and drilling with Continental Soldiers; General George Washington and Ben Franklin; and Colonial life: cloth making, woodworking, tailoring and shirt mending; 18th century medicine, and kitchen garden. Meet Dr. Benjamin Rush in the Clarke House and learn about caring for British and American casualties after the battle; US Army Heritage Trailer; Colonial games; Activity tables from area historic sites and organizations; Help us recognize high school students for their historical research and digital history projects; Food truck on site; and Gifts for registered children. Cost: \$10 per family or \$20 if six or more children.

Register at: <https://pbs1777.org/event/youngpatriotsday/>

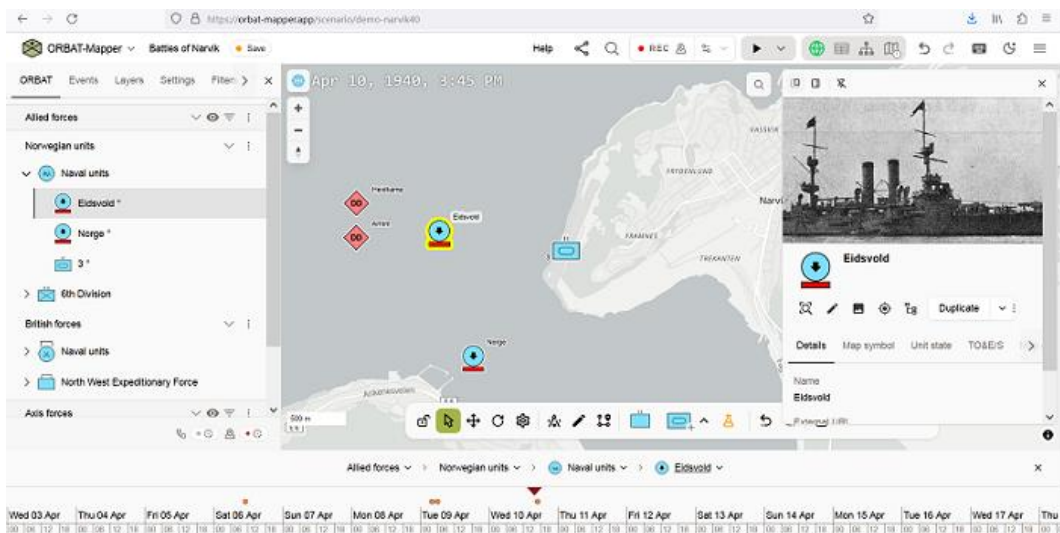


The PBS tent at 1776 Days in Princeton, NJ.

Orbat Mapper: by Russ Lockwood

This browser-based app lets you put units on a map and apparently a whole lot more. I opened up the Narvik scenario and put an armor battalion on the map via point and click. That part's simple enough, but as for creating something from scratch, you'll have to consult the user guide.

Info: <https://docs.orbat-mapper.app/>



New Wargame: Battle of Shrewsbury 1403 by Russ Lockwood

High Flying Dice Games released a new wargame: *Fragile Crown, Hard Battle: The Battle of Shrewsbury, July 21, 1403*. By the summer of 1403, Henry Percy (nicknamed "Hotspur") lost patience with the king over payments and ransoms. He and his supporters rose in revolt. The rebel forces of about 10,000 met the Lancastrian's 14,000 troops near Shrewsbury and fought in one of the bloodiest battles in English history.

The game contains: Two 11x17-inch maps with Turn Record and Morale Tracks, 120 double-sided counters, and rules. A hex is approximately 100 yards across. Each turn represents 45 minutes of time. Units represent 800-1000 men. Designed by Paul Rohrbaugh. \$20.95 plus sales tax (where applicable) and shipping and handling. Mounted counters can be had for an additional \$8.00. A custom card set of cards is \$12.00 and replaces the ordinary deck of playing cards needed for play.

Info: <http://www.hfdgames.com/shrew.html>



War Department Archives: Online by Russ Lockwood



As many of you know, I co-founded MargWeb.com, an archive of wargaming and military history magazines -- got up to 162 when it closed in 2010.

At the end of the dealer hall at Historicon 2026, I watched a demo of War Department Archives, an online resource that digitizes US government publications. Every document on WD Archives is an original historical record or manual, digitally preserved and presented.

Talking to Tim, his group vacuumed the web for public domain documents already online and then used AI to OCR the text. That's how you can search for a specific battle, town, unit, or person names.

One aspect MagWeb offered was the ability to highlight text and copy it to a Word doc. War Department Archives does not allow you to do so -- you can read, but not copy and paste, text.

Why not? Because other websites would strip the text for their own use -- public domain is public domain. I get that, although it's a limiting characteristic. Yet, there's a ton of material for the searching and might save a ton of time.

Several sample publications are available for a look see on the website.

Info and free trial: www.wdarchives.com/free-trial

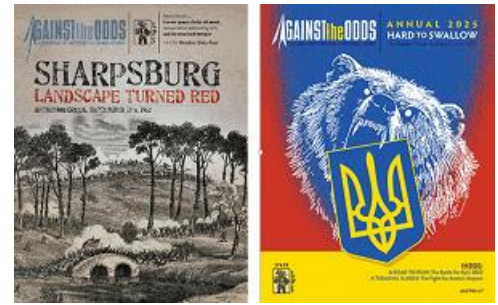
ATO Pre-Order: Sharpsburg and Hard to Swallow

by Russ Lockwood

Against the Odds magazine announces its next issue with a game, *Sharpsburg* (ACW's Antietam which also includes the WWII mini-game *Tunisgrad 1943* -- \$39.95 including US shipping or \$59.95 includes international shipping), and its next Annual, *Hard to Swallow* (2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine with mini-game *Terminal Illness* (Attacks on Antonov Airport 2022) and bonus game *The Dragon and the Serpent* (China invades Taiwan) -- \$64.95 including US shipping or \$114.95 includes international shipping), are available for pre-order.

Full Disclosure: I am the Staff Developer for both main games.

Info: <https://www.atomagazine.com/Results.cfm?category=18>



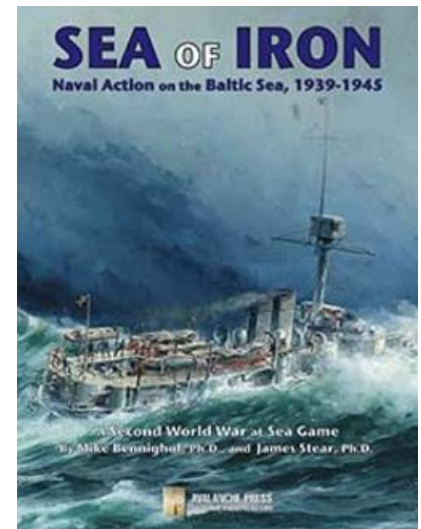
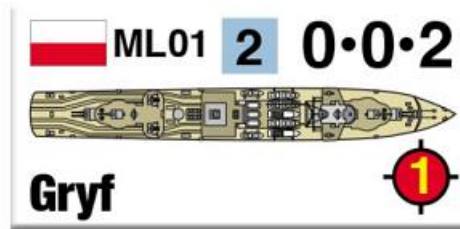
Avalanche Press: Sea of Iron

by Russ Lockwood

Avalanche Press released the second edition of *Sea of Iron: Naval Action on the Baltic Sea 1939-1945*. Its four distinct chapters: 1939 (Germany and the Soviet Union against Poland's small but very brave fleet); 1939-40 (the Winter War, the Soviet Union against Finland's even tinier fleet, and the possibilities of support from Sweden's much more substantial Navy); 1941 (the naval side of Operation Barbarossa); and 1944 (the naval side of Nazi Germany's collapse in the East) follow the historical campaigns on the Baltic Sea in WWII.

It contains 41 scenarios (22 of them brand-new for this edition). You get to play with a full-sized operational map and 560 pieces (die-cut and silky-smooth!). But most of all, *Sea of Iron* is a historical narrative of the Baltic naval war, told through its game scenarios. \$90.99

Info: <https://izuye1-h6.myshopify.com/products/seairon>



Avalanche Press: Payment Processing

by Russ Lockwood

Avalanche Press noted it still takes credit cards for payment. According to their news flash: “not bore you with details you won’t read, but due to excessive fees, we’ve de-activated one of the processors in our webstore. The store now only processes via PayPal. You do not (repeat do not) need a PayPal account to use the PayPal processor. Click on it, select the credit card option,” and enter the information.

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

Flying Pig: Production Progress

by Russ Lockwood

Flying Pig reported the '65 *Strategy Guide* began fulfillment in mid-August. Orders were sent for North America to Quarter Master Logistics and the last mile data was sent to Games Quest for EU, UK, and ROW (Rest of World). QML will ship the inventory needed to GQ by end of August.

The *Old School Tactical* reprints (V2, V3, *Hell Bent*, and *Ghost Front*) are due to arrive at port in September. From there, they will be trucked to Orlando (QML) and then we can begin last mile shipping. That being said, if you haven't already completed your survey please do so! We need your information to get you your games!

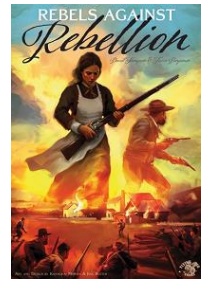
The print proof printer files for *Rising Dragon* (and all other titles from this



campaign) and were being proofread in mid to late August.

The *Rebels Against Rebellion* game on Kickstarter was funded in 25 minutes, at press time has 787 backers, earned the “Project We Love” badge, and generated \$43,393 -- more than 400% over the \$10,000 goal.

More Info: <https://flyingpiggames.com/>



GHQ Releases Batch 3

by Russ Lockwood



Note: GHQ is running a 15% off sale (Code: Sizzle) through Sep. 15, 2026, for orders of \$100 or more. www.ghqmodels.com

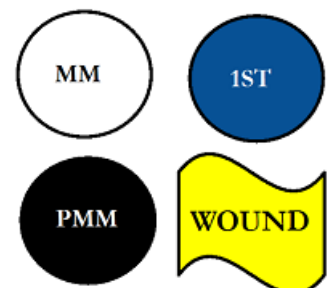
Light Bobs: Game Markers Info Sheet

by Russ Lockwood

Chris Parker Games released a free Game Aid for its *Light Bobs* miniatures rules covering the American Revolution.

Parker also started page layout for the new version of *Light Bobs*, which will contain a lot of great “approved” re-enactor images and game examples using drawings.

Info: <https://www.dayofbattlegames.com/game-markers-info-sheet-for-light-bobs-ii/>



Oxford Valley Mall, PA: Gaming Day

by Russ Lockwood

The Eastern Pennsylvania Gaming Society will host board gaming on Saturday, September 19, 2026, from 10:00am until 8:00pm in the Community Room on the Upper Level of Oxford Valley Mall in Langhorne, PA. The community room is near the mall office and the public restrooms.

Cadwalader Lectures: Princeton Battlefield Society

by Russ Lockwood

The Princeton Battlefield Society hosts the Cadwalader series of lectures about the American Revolution. The next ones are:

September 30: Dr. Richard Bell -- *The American Revolution and the Fate of the World*

Dr. Bell traces the far-reaching consequences of the Revolution through the experiences of the people it displaced, empowered, and transformed. This thought-provoking program examines how commerce, diplomacy, migration, propaganda, and warfare combined to create one of the most consequential events in world history—and why its legacy remains relevant today.

Lecture: Wednesday, September 30 at 6:00pm

Location: The Nassau Club, Princeton

Admission: \$50 donation

Info and Sign Up: <https://pbs1777.org/event/richardbell/>

Full Disclosure: I am a trustee of the PBS.



October 17: New Jersey Signers of the Declaration of Independence and their Descendants

November 19: Arthur Lefkowitz -- *George Washington's Revenge and George Washington's Dilemma*

Hunterdon County Historical Society: Answering The Call

by Russ Lockwood

The Hunterdon County Historical Society has tentatively scheduled the opening of its exhibition *Answering The Call: Hunterdon County's 250 Years of Sacrifice and Service* on Saturday, Nov. 14, 2026 at the Society's Museum and Library, 114 Main St., Flemington, NJ 08822. A special opening for veterans and their families is planned for Veteran's Day.

The HCHS thanks Megan Jablonski of the US Navy's Naval History & Heritage Command for helping identify a commander's uniform from 1907.

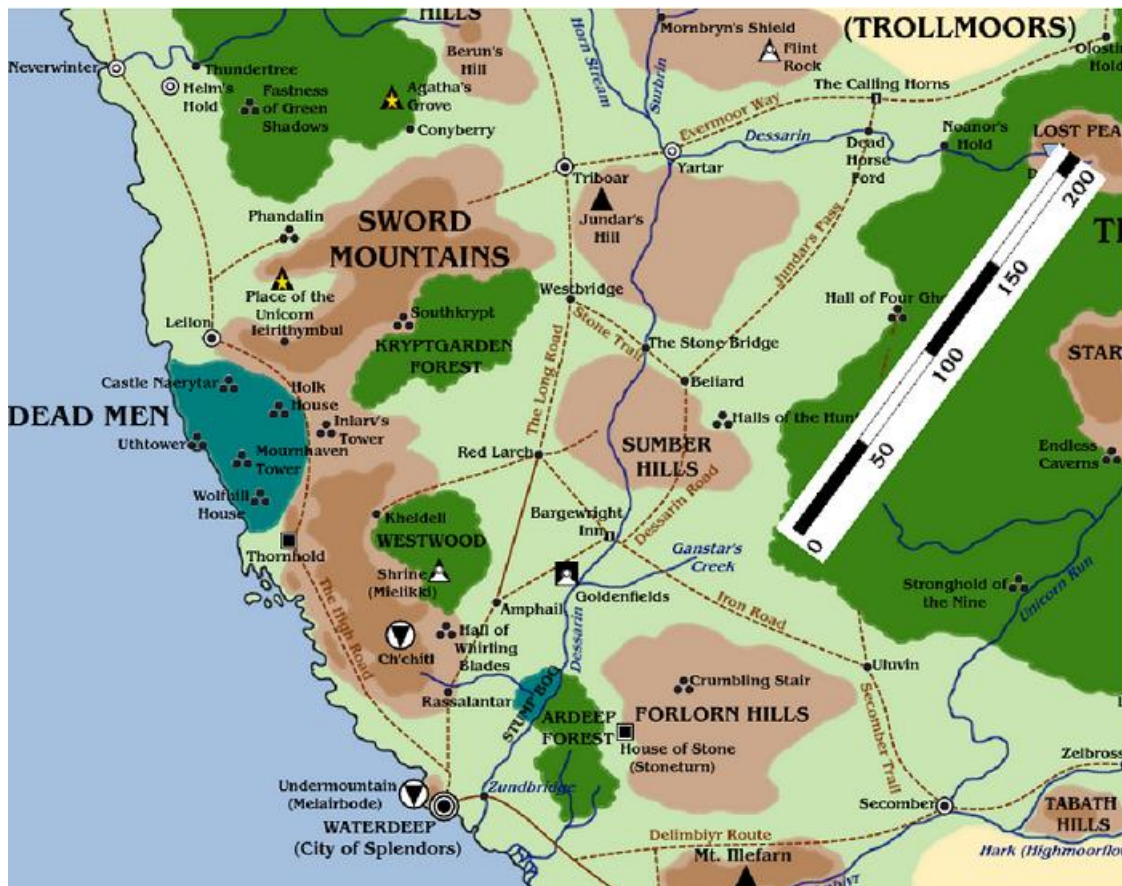


The exhibit will display artifacts from the Society's archives, including uniforms, equipment, photographs, documents, and so on, in the 1845 Doric House Museum and attached Library. The exhibit will run through at least the end of January 2027.

Admission is free, although donations are welcomed.

Full Disclosure: I am a trustee of the HCHS.

As details emerge and dates are confirmed, info will be on the HCHS website: <https://hunterdonhistory.org/>



The Map. The lost battle was at top center. The retreat followed the river towards Yartar.

Northern Campaign of Waterdeep: Company of the Sun

by GM Keith

The Adjutant-Ensigns in this D&D game are: Garrus (Human Paladin: John), Eyz (half-Elf Scout and Rogue: Ed), and Corson (Human Bard: Fred).

The Open Lord Peregrine, a human Paladin, received word of an army attacking the far north of Waterdeep. So she hired the redoubtable Captain Guilio Bernucci and the company: Company of the Sun. The Open Lord also hired several other mercenary companies, including Captain Harry Bluegloves and his group of light horse known as the Raven Company. She also called up the 10,000 militia of Waterdeep.

The Adjutant-Ensigns were ordered to the Great Ball that celebrated the army's departure and so dressed in their best to show the Company of the Sun in the best light.

The Open Lord Peregrine, in some disfavor after executing a slaver from the well-known and well-connected Kormallis family, would lead the combined force of nearly 20,000. Raven Company scouting reports suggested our force would overwhelm the enemy, but the quality of this information seemed suspect to "Eyz" -- a professional scout and the Eye of our Company. Some pointed gossip linked Harry Bluegloves to the family of the executed noble of the Kormallis clan, and Captain Bernucci declined to enter a separate agreement with this family -- an agreement the Raven Company undertook gladly.

March and Battle

After a month of casual marching -- the Waterdavian troops march but three days in four with a rest on the fourth day -- battle was joined far to the north in largely open, hilly land east of the great river. On our left, the army of Waterdeep seemed to hold. On the right, the troops lead by Open Lord Peregrine collapsed and ran. In the center, a desperate action called for the intervention of Captain Bernucci and his mighty band of 300 armored knights and infantry. Alas, the foe was greater than expected and shattered his company's knights and heavy infantry. Only the left flank heralded some better-than-disastrous news.

Accordingly, the three Adjutant-Ensigns remained in operational command of an army in great peril of routing. But Corson sung out orders to the handgunners and steadied them before the onrush of foul goblin cavalry which clucked and gabbled on the attack. Just-hearted Garrus, he that stands for Tyr, joined the fight and steadied the retreat. The baggage train, wounded, and camp followers were saved.

But there was more to do, and faced with no fewer than six desperate calls demanding time and attention, the three Adjutant-Ensigns proceeded to find the Company's magic carpet, loaned to a Waterdavian wizard struck by lightning. They ordered the handgunners to attend to the baggage train and wounded while searching the battlefield. In something of a lucky break, they found sending stones as well as a stout captain of halflings named Dan managing his 2,000-strong strong command in a brilliant fighting withdrawal.

Arkesh Patel, commander of the elephant squadron, had burst through the enemy, but as the enemy on the right was disrupted by the flight of the Waterdavian militias, he sought escape to the rear. The ensigns recovered the standard of the heavy infantry.

Just as they were about to withdraw, they spied Captain Bernucci's personal standard and his headless corpse surrounded by dire men, if men standing seven feet tall and possessing the strength of five normal men could be considered men. A reckless melee came to a standstill after Ensign Corson, a spell-casting bard, threatened to broil the dire chief in his own armor. Battered but unbowed, the skirmish-ending parley allowed the ensigns, corpse, standard, and anything carried to withdraw from the field of battle.

Alas, Treachery!

Perfidy struck the baggage train when cavalry Captain of the Ravens Harry Bluegloves knifed Barry 'Boots' Cooper, commander of the handgunners, and led his light cavalry in an attempt to steal the Company of the Sun's pay chest.

Corson ordered an attack and soon made short work of these turncoats. He began organizing a fighting retreat with what was left of the Company and kept them in good order. Off in the distance, he heard the retort of artillery, so flew there apace and faced not one but two Frost Giants along with a goodly number of their armored barbarians ready to fall upon the cannon. Only a remnant of our heavy infantry remained with the artillery.

Garrus returned the banner to the armored foot, which stood them well against the charge of the Frost Giants. The guns roared and melee commenced, felling many of the armored soldiers. Corson, full of surprises, deployed a small figurine of a war elephant, which grew to be a full-sized war elephant. A second volley of uncouth but killing iron, the sharp sword of Garrus, and many an arrow saved these human armored foot and the cannon.

In the end, what was left of the Company of the Sun, added stragglers, and other unit remnants managed an relatively orderly withdrawal to a ruined fortress 10 hours march south.

Well into the night, no word was heard of the Open Lord of Waterdeep. She never responded to magical messages. Corson sent stragglers from the cavalry back to search her out but without success.

Come morning, the Adjutant-Ensigns would lead the shattered remnants of the army towards Waterdeep. Only about a third of the numbers who started the Battle of Morne remained. How many of the enemy fell on the field of battle is not known.



Waterdeep: Treachery Avenged

by Fred

The report of Adjutant-Ensign Corson:

Our army war mage was fried by multiple Lightning Bolts, leaving his charred body but an intact magic flying carpet. We three Adjutant-Ensigns, for Garrus the pilot and Eyz were with me, could just fit upon it while we flew over the battlefield to intervene in the smaller skirmishes and rally troops. We also rescued a few important magic items from dead leaders as well retrieved our knight commander's headless body and the unit's banner.

I received the news that Harry Bluegloves was absconding with the Army pay chest and raced to confront the traitor. In a duel, Ensign Eyz shafted the turncoat with a few arrows, I put a pistol shot into Bluegloves' head, and then I broiled him in his own armor burned him beyond recognition with a Heat Metal spell.

No one who witnessed the duel complained and the Army's pay chest was saved. However, I expect I made enemies back in Waterdeep -- Harry Bluegloves was either a member of an influential noble family who would not forget this death or one of the family's retainers. If the latter, I might expect only minor inconveniences.

The remainder of Blueglove's unit, the Ravens, abandoned the Army and ran away.

Meanwhile, I reluctantly took command with Eyz and a third Ensign, Garrus, supporting the efforts to bring the Army back to derelict Fort Smith on the way back to Waterdeep. The halflings successfully completed a rear guard action against the invaders.

I never wanted this level of responsibility. I was quite satisfied with serving as the "fire brigade" for the Army to help plug local breakthroughs or enhance charges against the enemy at the Battle of Morne. Until Open Lord Peregrine is returned to her rightful place as our leader, I remain the commander of the Army, such as it is.

I tallied what remained: Three trained war elephants, a hundred handgunners, about 2,000 Clan MacDonald halfling pike and slingers, three artillery pieces, halberdiers, and only about a hundred of the 10,000 Waterdeep militia. The other militia, or at least those who survived, seem to be running every which way across the countryside.

I observed that the Heat Metal spell is a terror to any heavily armored creature. There is no saving throw, and it takes many precious seconds to remove heavy armor, all the while taking damage.

Waterdeep: Better Lucky And Good

by Ed

The company knows me as Eyz, the Eye of the Company, which is enough for all to know. I'm a Fighter Scout, with enough stealthy capabilities to perform my scouting duties.

I'm impressed with the Heat Metal trick, although it worked in large part because Corson made ALL his Concentration checks -- Six? Eight? In addition, we were fighting non-spellcasters and mostly non-missile troops.

The counter to Heat Metal is "mash the caster." I wouldn't bet the Heat Metal strategy works as well going forward ... if for no other reason that at some point Corson's Concentration checks won't all be passes. That said, in a "just all us so'jers here dakin' it out" environment, it's a pretty effective option.

In the fight for our Captain's banner and body, we only won because Corson again passed all those Concentration checks -- we weren't able to successfully hand-to-hand those big armored barbarian types.

Army Report: Negligence

by GM Keith

Ultimately, negligent reconnaissance by mercenary cavalry was responsible for the loss of the Battle of Morne and the deaths of many Waterdhavians and their allies. Though it would still not be known how the enemy commander Odaker had gathered the horde under his command, the utter failure of the scouts to determine his line of march, his force's composition, or even a basic judgement of their capabilities set Open Lord Peregrine up to fail.

The only thing preventing complete disaster was the intervention of several junior officers of the Compagnia del Sol in organizing a rear guard and fighting retreat. Peregrine and her lifeguard spent those crucial hours personally fighting to hold back Odaker's forces, and though many lives were undoubtedly saved by their intervention, there was no high authority to stem the tide of the rout of nearly 9,000 surviving Waterdhavians. Fortunately, the majority of Odaker's army fell to plundering of the baggage and the dead, failing to capitalize on their enemies' collapse.



D&D campaign continues. (l to r) Dylan (Claude), Steve (Richelouie), Saffire the Dragon, GM Keith, and Fred (Corson). Ed (Eyz) arrived later.

Terminal Velocity: Wild Ride RPG

by Russ Lockwood

I heard about the disastrous Battle of Morne over a tavern lunch with a fellow officer. Make that a former fellow officer, for I had declined to re-up. My rank guaranteed some residual pull in the Army, but I realized that dedication and competence only went so far in gaining higher rank and command within Waterdeep. This city of 100,000 souls and surrounding area of half a million more was run by a dozen families -- and 11 of them were only guesses for their names and deliberations were kept secret. Well, maybe a thinly held secret, but a secret nonetheless.

For those who won the birthing lottery, opportunity abounded. For the rest of us, the Army was one way out. The mercenary companies were another. I had done my bit in the former and thought it was time to try the latter. But which one?

So, over lunch, my friend and I discussed the variety of companies around and those that might be hiring. It was over dessert that he leaned in and half-whispered a brief account of the Battle of Morne that came in via sending stone.

Well, well, well. Nothing like a disaster and command decapitation to offer up opportunity. While I hemmed and hawed about commitment, I had already made my mind up to try and join the Company of the Sun.

Using my connections, I was granted observer status, an Army horse, and more importantly, the all-important pass that allowed me to switch horses at various posts upriver and towards the Army. From what I heard, make that the remnants of the Army. Changing into comfortable riding clothes, I traveled light and galloped hard, switching from lathered horse to fresh horse as needed to cover the 200 miles to Fort Smith, an abandoned town upriver.

Oddly, I passed a massive resupply train of wagons plodding northward that seemed oblivious to what had happened at the so-called Battle of Morne.

Arrival

I found a secluded spot by the great river for a quick, refreshing nap. Upon waking, I brushed the dust from my clothes, pulled out the field uniform with my former rank badge showing, and made myself as presentable as possible -- but not too presentable. The dress uniform remained safely tucked away.

It took a while to press through defeated soldiers, but I found what stood for a command group. My connections held firm and I was able to pass by the guard with a cheery greeting to a former NCO under my command.

I arrived at the beginning of a discussion about possible plans. This dissolved into who would lead the Company and the Army. A human named Corson seemed nominally in charge, although a halfling named Dan seemed to be angling for command. A human cleric named Richelouie, presumably there to heal someone, a halfling festooned with

daggers named Claude, and another halfling named Edward the Anarchist in charge of the cannon also attended this group.

Adjutant-Ensign Corson, apparently the ranking commander of the Company of the Sun, was trying to avoid being the commander of what was left of the Army. Halfling Dan wasn't dissuading him, but the cleric argued that heroics and duty almost demanded him to continue in command. Halfling Dan wanted a council of a half-dozen to make command decisions by committee. This seemed like a propitious time to introduce myself.

"Unwise," I offered. "Better one bad commander than a half-dozen good ones countermanding each other."

"Who in all the underworlds are you?" halfling Dan spat.

"Zeg," I answered. "Zeg Zegatorio, formerly of the Waterdeep Army, sent as an independent observer."

"I don't know who you are. Get the frong outta here!"

In my years in the Army, I had picked up some non-Common language lingo and his halfling was particularly rude. Well. Rude is as rude does, so I responded, "And who are you, Shorty?"

Halflings can be rather prickly about their stature. He turned to halfling Claude and commanded, "Toss a dagger at his feet."

Claude dutifully sent a dagger into the ground by my feet. Now, I could respond in many ways, including nailing arrogant Dan with a dagger or even sending an arrow through him, but as I was unstabbed, I kept still. I needed to understand more of the dynamic as well as see what Corson would do as nominal leader.

"STOP!" Corson commanded and fixed a glare at Claude. "Why did you do that?"

Halfling Claude pointed at the other halfling and said, "He ordered me to do it."

"Well, don't do that! Nobody shoots anybody!" Corson commanded.

Dan piped in with vigor, "I don't know who he is! And I don't know who this cleric is, either!"

Corson could see the logic in that and turned to me. "And who are you?"

"As I said, Zeg Zegatorio, independent observer. If I see promise, I stay. If not, I report back to Waterdeep."

Turning to the cleric, Corson asked, "And you?"

"Richelouie the Cleric. I, too, am an independent, but I know an Army always needs healers," he said as he cast an eye around. "And you seem to need me."

Satisfied, Corson brought back the topic of command. "I will reluctantly keep command."

I interjected, "I vote for him."

"Shut the frong up! And get out!"

"Nobody shoot anybody!" Corson ordered. He was obeyed. That was a good sign.

A silence descended upon the group. I ventured, "It looks like you can use an experienced officer as aide-de-camp."

Corson nodded at my longbow. "Archer?"

"I know my way around a bow, among other skills."

"You'll need to join the Company of the Sun."

"Acceptable." I glanced at halfling Dan the Arrogant. "But only under your direct command."

"That's acceptable."

Another halfling, Muriel Proudfoot, appeared as if from nowhere, quill and paper forms in hand. She gave an abbreviated oath of fealty, I signed the form and just like that, I was a member of the Company of the Sun. I stowed my baggage, such as it was, on the officer's cart. The horse I tied to the cart.

Richelouie soon followed suit and joined, only he insisted he was not going to be an officer and preferred to be confirmed as a Master Cleric.

As for Claude, for his quick toss of a dagger, he was made Junior Lieutenant in the Halfling unit. He desperately tried to avoid being an officer, but Dan would have none of it.

Next thing you know, a teal and purple colored dragon the size of a small cat showed up. She didn't seem to know much, but we discovered that she was only one day old. She didn't even have a name, so Richelouie asked her if she liked the name Saffire. It seemed acceptable to her so Saffire joined the company as well as, as, as, well I'm not sure. A fighting member, such that she could be. She could breathe fire, albeit with the flame about the size of an oversized match, and she could fly. And she really liked bacon.

Rally 'Round the Banner

A report came in that an isolated group of soldiers were holding out in a ruined village about two miles away. Given the paucity of command, I volunteered to lead a rescue mission. Corson accepted.

Corson allocated Arkesh and the elephants and about half of Barry Boots and his handgunners to turn around the resupply train and head back 40 miles to the nearest strongpoint -- the city of Yardar. Dan and his halflings would continue with a rearguard action and collect dispirited troops to rally.

The Rescue

That's when I learned about Corson's magic carpet. I tell you, it is a wonder of magic. It'll hold two comfortably, so Corson and I hopped on and flew ahead while our ground troops marched the two miles to the embattled survivors of an allied company holding out in a ruined village hard against the river.

Ogres riding giant goats draw near the ruins.

We scouted around -- the view is marvelous -- and found goblins riding small velociraptor dinosaurs, ogres riding huge goats, a band of orcs, and a chariot with four fugly uglies standing seven feet tall heading for the village. Our lads would get there first, but not by much and only because a bit of a marsh with scrub was in between the bad guys and our good guys -- er, reasonable neutral good guys anyway.

So began the Battle of the Unnamed Ruins. I'm sure the village had a name at one time, but I didn't know it at the moment. We descended to man the defenses.

Corson, our bard, cast a foliage grow spell onto that marshy terrain. A hundred feet blob of tangled undergrowth popped up out of the ground. The band of orcs could hardly move. We never saw them emerge.

The ogre-riding goats proved tougher and powered through the undergrowth at a much reduced speed. The handgunners unleashed a full volley and dropped the lead ogre. Our one galloper gun cannon fired and blew out its breach, injuring the crew.

When the chariot appeared, our galloper gun (center right in photo above bridge) had one job. Just one job.

The chariot came closer and closer to the halflings hiding at the edge of a scrub-filled

ravine. Three of the seven-foot-tall soldiers leapt off the chariot and began to work their way towards the halflings defending that side of the ruins. I recalled the big uglies being identified as dire men. I called them "Cronks."

It was at this point that I was atop what passed for a vantage point and looked around. I spotted something in the river, but just below the water surface. I squinted.

Frogmen. Literal man-sized frogs in mail with shields heading towards the shoreline. And the Frog Squad was outflanking us to our rear. Clever Kermits!

I shouted the alarm and headed that way. As the froggies emerged, I fired an arrow, hitting one, but not toppling it. Corson came to the rescue with a Shatter spell that took out the center of the squad. Richelouie cast a Crown of Madness spell on one of the froggies, who immediately turned and attacked his fellow frog. The morale of the Frog Squad broke and the survivors fled back into the water.

The Cronk leader cast a Bane spell on the halfling slingers, who then dealt some damage on the warrior Cronks as the other halflings with pikes waited. From my perspective, halfling pikes are more like spears, but they had pointy sticks facing the right direction and stood firm at the edge of the ravine.



I headed to the edge of the ravine and hit the remaining ogre with an arrow. Richelouie hit the ogre with a Guiding Bolt spell for more damage. The handgunners added even more damage. Claude tossed a dagger that drew more blood from the ogre than my arrow.

The Cronks dismount from the chariot and enter the brush at the top of the ravine. The halfling pikemen prepare for the onslaught.

That's when Corson heaved a grenade at the chariot. The explosion killed all the horses and injured all the Cronks. Saffire the tiny dragon flew in and clawed at one of the warrior Cronks.

The Cronk wizard loosed a Color Spray spell against the halfling slingers, but retribution came swiftly. Richelouie hit the wizard with a Guiding Bolt spell, felling the Cronk. I shafted another Cronk to the ground. The handgunners and halflings battered the last Cronk into oblivion.

The remaining ogre and goat fled.

Sadly, the looting of the corpses produced little, although the goat meat would prove tasty to Saffire. The allied company had 40 handgunners still in fighting shape and a number of wounded. We bundled everyone back to Fort Smith, less a fort and more a spot on the map. We tried to motivate the 2,000 halflings to help create quick entrenchments, but they avoided work like the plague. We convinced them to at least dig a moat to cover some of the river line. You'd think an attack by a Frog Squad would be enough to convince them, but these halflings seem to argue like dwarves.

They even complained that Saffire the mini-dragon took up a nice warm spot in their bread baking oven. Complain like dwarves, too.

Open Lord Peregrine by Makayla Larner on Unsplash.

Recon

Corson and I went back in the air and headed north. We spotted a pair of longships upriver with about 100 men, about 5,000 goblins being whipped forward by Cronks, a half dozen giants, a few thousand more Cronks, and about 10,000 other infantry looting what used to be Peregrine's supply wagons. We landed back at Fort Smith and sent out scouts five miles away.

Eyz came in from his long-range scouting to confirm the numbers.

At that moment, Open Lord Peregrine rode up with only 10 of her life bodyguard cavalry. She looked a little worse for wear, but dismounted and asked for a status report. So, Corson reported.



Now, Corson had been around the Army council fires in the background, absorbing details to help Captain Guilio Bernucci. He was not unknown to the Open Lord.

Peregrine said, "Very good. You've done well just to keep this part of the Army intact. I confirm you as commander of the Army."

No fool, Corson accepted.

She asked, "Are you the new commander of the Company of the Sun?"

Still not a fool, Corson said, "Yes, albeit reluctantly."

"Good. I am heading back to Waterdeep to raise another Army. About 9,000 of our militia are running south. I'm not stopping them. However, I want to personally hire your Company to me and only to me."

Corson thought a moment. That's when the question of pay became the topic of the comment. She offered 20,000 gold plus all expenses, or about 80,000 gold in total, which he said seemed a fair, if a tad below market, price.

I piped up, "What about land?"

She glared at me. Whether she recognized me as a line officer or not, I don't know, but she could not mistake my rank badge. "I'm not giving you land."

"Even unclaimed land?" I pointedly looked around.

"No."

"Then how about a title of nobility?"

Peregrine paused and said, "I'll make you a marquis."

That was above a knight, but below a baron, so I asked for a baron title.

"No. You can't be a baron."

"Because I don't have any land?"

"Correct," she said.

"Then I accept to be a marquis."

Peregrine frowned. "Oh, no. We'll figure this out later."

Less than positive, and a bit of a withdrawal of an offer, but at least I had her thinking about nobility. And the land to go with it. Maybe not now, but in the future. If I survived the invasion and helped wrest back Waterdeep land.

Muriel Proudfoot proffered the requisite contract, which Peregrine and Corson signed. She handed over a Bag of Holding with considerable coin inside, ordered a delaying action, and departed for Waterdeep.

The Nighttime Raid

Corson and I concocted a plan to at least rid the river of the longships before they could float down and do us harm.

"It's simple," I said. "We get a couple hundred pounds of rocks from the ruins, and drop them on the boats."

Halfling Dan suggested a big grenade made out of a cooking pot. I said we didn't need it, Corson was convinced we did, and we headed north above the river for a little rock and roll. Saffire came along for the ride and to serve as the lighter of the grenade fuse.

The fuse is lit....



We hovered and dropped the first rock. Bullseye! That's when the confusion began below us. We dropped a second rock and the other boat took a hit. In all, we dropped six rocks and such was our accuracy, five hit. We didn't exactly know the results, but judging from the shouting, scratch two longboats.

That's when Corson had Saffire light the fuse and over the side the bomb went. Alas, Corson fumbled (a roll of 1!) and the grenade blew up only halfway down. That got their attention skyward. Next thing you know, a flying man rose up from the ground and loosed a Cone of Cold at us. I nearly froze to death!

Still, we made our escape.

Claude was concerned at our arrival. "What about the carpet? Did it get damaged?"

"Carpet? What about it?" Corson carped. "You're concerned about the carpet? What about us?"

Dan, resentful at not being named leader of the company, said, "We can always elect another Captain, but we can't get a new magic carpet."

Heartwarming comradery. Clerical healing back at Fort Smith warmed me back up.

Ambush and Ambushed

Eyz headed out with some of the halflings to set up an ambush at a marshy spot between us and the horde. He didn't have long to wait. The goblins came on with their velociraptors, but halfling slingers and the handgunners did so much damage, even the whips couldn't contain the goblin rout.

Goblin by Cris Ramos on Pexels.



That's when we noticed their air support: four men riding giant ravens. They were keeping their distance, but it was too tempting a target. Corson darted the carpet towards the ravens and I loosed. One of the men toppled over, kept on the bird by some sort of belt. The three remaining Raven Riders fled.

Four giants now arrived, spreading fear among the halflings. We hovered and loosed spell and arrow. The one we hit fled. Two others ran and jumped in the river. The fourth was made of sterner stuff. She swiveled her bow around, nocked an arrow, and loosed. I thought I was the only extra-ranged archer around.

Nope.

Her arrow sliced into me, although my half-plate armor deflected the arrow just enough to avoid it being a killing shot. Still, half of me felt the pain as blood flowed.

That's when 80 chariots with one Cronk and three men each came within range of the galloper gun, which fired and destroyed one chariot.

Still, it was time to go. Our delaying action forced the enemy to deploy, costing them time and allowing our forces and baggage wagons to head back to the next rallying point 40 miles away: Yardar.

The Lost Boot

As we filtered back through Fort Smith, a size 9 boot fell from the sky and nearly beamed Eyz. We all looked up and saw nothing.

"That wizard!" Corson exclaimed. "Invisibility spell."

We scrambled onto the magic carpet. I had an arrow ready as Carson cast a See Invisible spell on himself. "There!" he pointed. "About 180 feet away!"

They heard that on the ground. Richelouie yelled, "Tell him we're holding his boot for ransom!"

I couldn't see anything invisible, but using Corson's outstretched arm and finger and guesstimate of 180 feet, I loosed anyway. We heard a screech (critical hit!). Not critical enough to cause the wizard to lose concentration, but a hit nonetheless. That oughta give him pause.

What gave him more pause was Corson using a Dispel Magic spell. The wizard became visible and dropped. Only his fast reaction of a Feather Fall spell stopped his descent.

Now that the flying wizard was visible and slowly descending, I shot and hit him again. Two arrows now protruded from his body. That's when Corson sent another Dispel Magic spell his way and the wiz didn't have any counters to it. The wizard smashed into the ground.

He was quite dead. Richelouie rifled through his pockets, but found no spellbook. An invisibility potion and ring of protection, yes, but spellbook, no.

To the river.

One of the handgunners tried to sink the body in the river, but Richelouie stopped him. We needed to get rid of the body in its entirety to make sure it was not resurrected -- a rather disturbing thought.

Richelouie piled it on a cart.

We joined the march southwards to Yardar.



AI More Destructive Than Known: Shredding the Past

By Russ Lockwood

Mashable posted a disturbing article about how AI companies are buying up books, including rare books, slicing the pages from the binding, trimming the pages to a certain size, and then feeding them into a high-speed scanning machine. Bad enough, but then the company recycles the pages, hence, destroying the book for all time.

History is full of book-burning morons -- Nazis in relatively recent memory, the wife of Imperial Roman Emperor Constantine, the Roman Republic after the sack of Carthage, and so on. Most of those texts mentioned or excerpted by ancient authors are lost -- and 'tis a sad commentary on society that AI companies care so little for history that they are destroying the very information they seek to turn into a profit.

Back in my *Creative Computing* magazine days, a book came in for review that was supposed to be the first book written by a computer. I can't remember the name of the book, but an internet search turned up *The Policeman's Beard is Half Constructed*, published in 1984 by Warner Books. Maybe that's it or not, but it tallies with my time at the magazine. It was a bizarre read that scattered all over the place, but it was a "computer-generated" book.

Nowadays, AI-generated writing is much smoother than decades ago. Relatively recently, a *NY Times* article profiled romance novelist Coral Hart (pseudonym) who used Claude AI to produce over 200 books in one year, selling approximately 50,000 copies. I used AI to find that info, for I could not remember her name. Using a calculator, that means a book every other day and sales of about 250 copies per title.

I'm in favor of preserving books, and I find digitization a good way to do so -- IF you don't destroy what you save. Plenty of nondestructive options exist to turn print into electrons, albeit at a slower digitizing pace. For everyone who's suffered data loss of one sort or another, from crashed hard drives, inadvertent tapping a delete icon (twice!), or a company goes out of business, physical copies may not be the only back-up, but they're a fine first place to preserve.

Mashable article: <https://mashable.com/tech/anthropic-ai-book-training-destroy>

Books I've Read

War on the Turtle's Back: Reason to Revolution 154. by Laurence Burrows. Hardback (7.0x10.0 inches). 394 pages. 2025.

Subtitle: *Indigenous Peoples During the Period of the Seven Years War in North America 1752-1766*

Most books on the Seven Years War in North America, which we on this side of the pond call the French & Indian War, don't spend a lot of time on the Native Americans, which we on this side of the pond used to call Indians. Both the British and French sides appealed to Native Americans to join them against the enemy and many did, maybe even with the name of the tribe, too.

This book offers a far more comprehensive accounting of the diplomacy and the tribes' participation as well as the social and political interactions among the tribes. The text navigates these complex relationships with insight, providing explicit explanations about what tribes did as well as why they chose to take various actions.

The use of belts as the equivalent of passports, for peace or war, was a surprise to me. Yet it shows the tribes had a great organization among themselves.

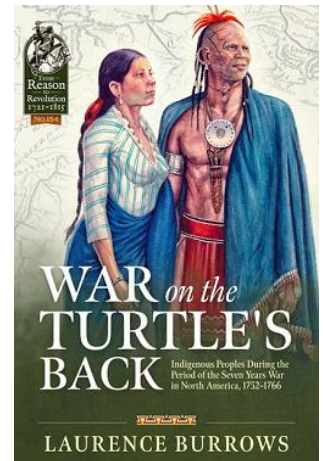
Hundreds of skirmishes, including Jumonville, Monogahela, and many more, receive ample detail to set up a tabletop battlefield, although terrain will often need a bit more work to uncover in other sources. The warriors excelled at woodland skills, mostly because when they warred with other tribes, the other tribes had similar skills. The use of L- or V-shaped ambushes were specialties of most warriors, who fought less under orders and more under suggestions from a war-chief. Sieges, often with European troops, are also discussed.

One surprise is that while certain tribes tortured and slaughtered captives with ruthless disdain, other tribes treated their captives well and even transferred them to the French or British for eventual exchange. Some were claimed and kept as members of the tribe, later encountered as part of trading expeditions or as translators.

The book contains 14 black and white maps (no scale), four black and white illustrations, 14 color illustrations (including uniformed figures), 28 color photos, and four color maps.

As someone who knew few details about Native American participations in the French & Indian War, this book was quite the eye-opener. I admit I stumbled over the tribe and warrior names, but this book provides a fantastic launching point to learn about Native American contributions during the war -- on both sides.

Enjoyed it.



F4F Wildcat vs A6M2-N Rufe: Duel 155. by Michael John Claringbould.
Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Solomon Islands 1942-43*

Long-time readers of my AAR know of my fondness for Claringbould books and booklets. This one offers the usual Osprey *Duel* focus on two specific opponents and draws on Claringbould's extensive knowledge and research into WWII air operations in the Pacific theater.

The usual technical specs, pilot training, dogfighting doctrine, and combat recaps of a *Duel* series aircraft booklet are included, although I warn you that specific F4F vs Rufe combats were relatively rare -- the Japanese often had other floatplanes in any particular dogfight and the US often had other aircraft in such aerial melees as well.

Most said duels were in 1942 as after that, both planes were increasingly being replaced by other types. Indeed, the combat examples include other aircraft types that were part of the dogfights.

That said, you'd think the dogfights would be one-sided, but not exactly. It seems odd that a float plane, even one based on a Zero, would stand a chance, but maneuverability and pilot skill had much to do with the outcome.

The booklet contains 56 black and white photos, two color photos, two color maps, six color camouflage illustrations, two color cockpit illustrations, two color weapon illustrations, and one color two-page action illustration.

For another publisher, Claringbould wrote a series examining Solomon Islands air combats in great detail. Consider this *Duel* booklet a hyper-focused subset of that topic, with specialized information pertaining to the F4F and Rufe specs, deployments, and air combats.

Enjoyed it.



With Napoleon's Guard in Russia. by Louis Joseph Vionnet. Translated and Edited by Jonathan North. Softcover (6.2x9.2 inches). 209 pages. 2022 reprint of 2012 book.

Subtitle: *The Memoirs of Major Vionnet 1812*

Major Louis Joseph Vionnet, with the Fusiliers of the French Imperial Guard since 1809, took part in the 1812 invasion of Russia. Much of the text discusses the endless marching through villages, punctuated by acknowledgement of battles, but without much description. He delves into greater detail in later battles, presumably because his regiment of the Imperial Guard was used more often in combat.

He does describe the environs of Moscow in some detail, including witnessing and arresting a "peasant" setting fires in Moscow (p79). Then comes the long march back to France. At least he was smart enough to buy himself fur-lined cloak, a fur riding coat, and food supplies before setting off back to France (p87).

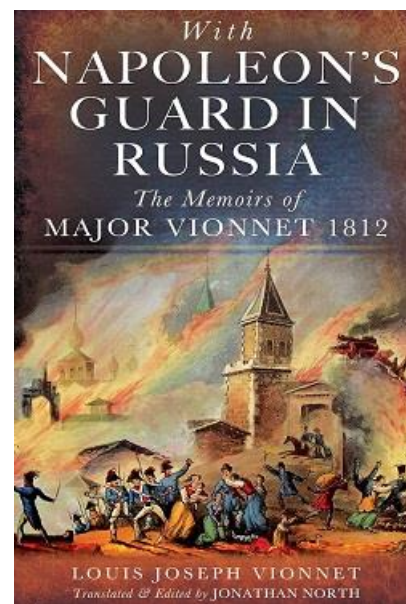
He was made of sterner stuff than many soldiers, enduring frozen wastelands, Cossack attacks, and soldiers who froze to death. The weather is a hot topic in his memoirs.

One interesting note: Napoleon paid his army in rubles, not francs. The Emperor said he paid his troops double when in Russia, but not exactly. He paid a soldier twice as many rubles as francs, but a ruble was only worth about 1/4 of a franc. Do the math and you discover he cut the soldiers' pay in half (p98).

As Vionnet trudged across the Berezina and into Poland, he stumbled upon a food cache that kept him going. Just as he was about to succumb to fever and starvation in Berlin, Germany, a kindly architect took pity on him and nursed him back for a couple of days to a semblance of health -- or at least enough to finally reach France, where he recuperated.

His tale continues into the Spring and Fall 1813 campaigns, where he was wounded enough for Napoleon to take notice. He was made a baron, awarded cash he never received, and his regiment received honors in his name. And that's where the book ends.

The book contains 27 black and white illustrations and three black and white maps.



It's a first-hand account and quick read, filled with details about the billets he and fellow officers were quartered in more than the tactical details of 1812 battles. It offers a mid-level officer's perspective on the campaigns of 1812 and 1813, not to mention the personal travails he encountered on the way in and the way out of Russia.

Enjoyed it.

Baptism of Fire: Europe at War 62. by Csaba B. Stenge. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 84 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Revised and Expanded Edition*

Subtitle: *The First Combat Experiences of the Royal Hungarian Air Force and Slovak Air Force, March 1939*

I'm not sure what was revised and expanded for there is no specific explanation, but the war between Hungary and Slovakia just before WWII is a little known conflict -- or at least to me.

Two days of dogfighting, bombing, and strafing by Hungary helped recover parts of Carpathia that had been taken away after WWI. Neither air force was particularly numerous or overwhelming, although Hungary had the edge. For the most part, Slovak Avia and Letov aircraft faced off against Hungarian Fiats and Junkers. Some interesting scenarios with biplane and monoplane aircraft can be pulled from the pages. It'll be something different than the usual early war ME-109s and 110s vs Hurricanes and Spitfires.

Some aircraft were shot down, others damaged, and many lost to accidents. The combat descriptions are quite extensive -- a nice bonus given that few aerial combats occurred. Lots of pilot mini-bios are included that often carry through WWII and into the Cold War.

The book contains 148 black and white photos, three color photos, one black and white map, one black and white illustration, and 12 color camouflage aircraft profiles.

I've often noted that there's nothing new like history and I'm starting to understand more about post-WWI low-level conflicts and jockeying that continued up to WWII. Here's one volume that highlights the aerial combats of one of these border wars.

Enjoyed it.

We Then Prepared Our Batteries: Century of the Soldier 135. by Richard Israel. Softcover (7.0x9.8 inches). 181 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Medieval Castles of the Welsh Marches to the British Civil Wars of 1642-1646 and 1648*

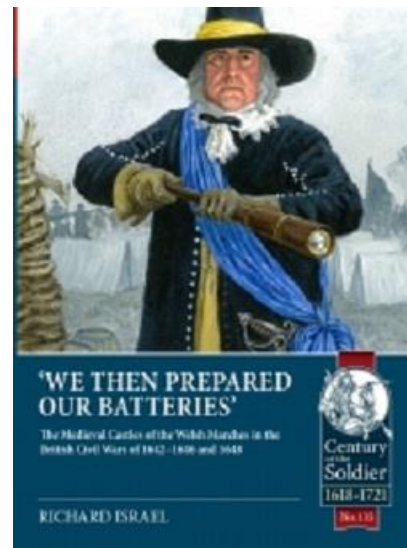
Seven English Civil War sieges of medieval castles in Wales (Hopton, Beeston, two of Chepstow, Goodrich, Danbigh, and Raglan) receive considerable profiles of their architecture, including measurements, and the sieges that roiled around them. Much is explained how medieval fortifications coped -- or not -- with cannons, including defensive measures that would occasionally stymie the siegers long enough for a relief force to threaten to arrive.

Most of these sieges were successful for a variety of reasons: hunger starved out the garrison, mortars rained destruction over the walls, mining undermined wall sections, and sometimes even the threat of more artillery firing. But mostly, medieval fortifications were not designed to stand up to artillery.

The book contains 60 black and white photos, one black and white map, and 14 black and white illustrations. For modelers, the overhead maps of the fortifications, along with measurements in the text, may often aid you in building a tabletop version. Don't forget to make rubble wall sections.

Now, these castles were in or near Wales, but the principles likely apply to most other medieval castles in England. The dawn of cannon started in the 14th century, but by the 17th century, artillery was a mature technology and often devastating when lined up against medieval defensive technology. An interesting read about the clash between time periods.

Enjoyed it.



Philippines 1941-42: Air Campaign 62. by Mark Lardas. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *America's Disastrous Start to the Pacific War*

This broad overview covers the US deployment of air assets to the Philippines just prior to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor and subsequent invasion of the Philippines. The successful Japanese air assault on the US Far East Air Force came down to successful planning, American command confusion, and a little bit of luck.

The assortment of US aircraft in the Philippines were mostly obsolete, although a goodly number of B-17s and P-40s were based on the islands. After news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor reached the Philippines, MacArthur proved to be unavailable and requests for a strike on Formosa airfields went unanswered. In frustration and with an order not to allow the US aircraft to be bombed on the ground, the US planes were sent aloft, without bombs, just to get them up in the air.

Here's the luck part. Fog over Formosa delayed the initial Japanese air strikes at Clark Field and other airfields. By the time the US planes sent aloft had to land for refueling, it was lunchtime, so all work was abandoned. Even the radar site didn't seem to have an operator and the phone line between site and airfield was also down. You guessed it, the Japanese arrived right then with US planes lined wingtip to wingtip for faster refueling. Carnage resulted.

The booklet contains 57 black and white photos, two black and white illustrations, two color illustrations, nine color maps, two color photos, and three color two-page action illustrations.

It reads quick, it reads well, and follows the usual *Air Campaign* format -- including tinier fonts than the regular *Campaign* booklets. Other than that, an excellent volume in the series.

Enjoyed it.

Roman Britain & Celtic Ireland: In Greek and Roman Sources. by Raoul McLaughlin. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 270 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *AD 60 to 500*

This sequel continues translations from 500BC to 60AD with excerpts of ancient writings about Britain and Ireland from Roman and Greek sources circa 60AD to a nice even 500 AD. All the greats are here, including Tacitus, Cassius Dio, Suetonius, Ammianus Marcellinus, and Procopius as well as a fair number of more obscure writers. A number of inscriptions are also included.

While it makes sense, I had little idea of the Roman merchants who traded in present-day Ireland or of efforts to bring Ireland into the Roman Empire. Campaigns against the Celts and Picts of Scotland are covered, but Ireland? True, not much is mentioned, and some sources are poetry from old Irish writings, but that they're mentioned at all deserves kudos.

The book contains four black and white maps, 30 color photos of 15 coins (obverse and reverse), four black and white photos, 13 color photos, and three black and white illustrations.

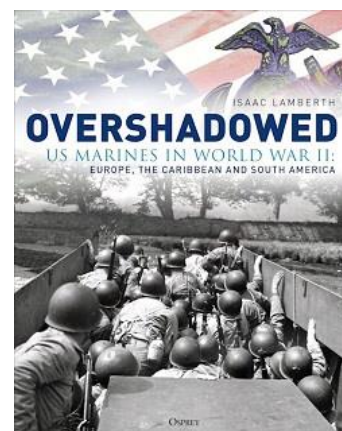
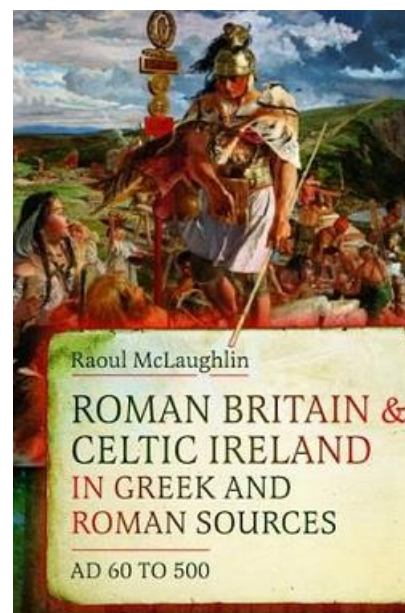
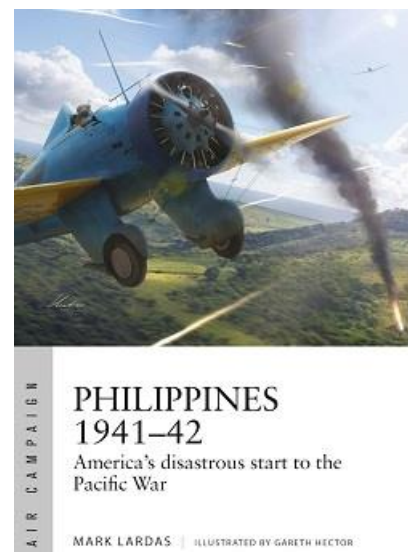
Obviously, excerpts won't tell the entire 440-year history, but their selection and McLaughlin's explanations of context offer an overview of perceptions about Britain and Ireland at the time of the Roman Empire. Over the decades, I've collected a number of full translations that are now collecting dust, but this book offers a pleasant little jog of the memory.

Enjoyed it.

Overshadowed: US Marines in World War II. by Isaac Lamberth. Hardback (8.0x9.8 inches). 288 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Europe, The Caribbean, and South America*

When I hear US Marines and WWII together, I think of island invasions in the Pacific. However, the Marines also saw service elsewhere on the globe, as noted in the subtitle.



They guarded bases in the Western Hemisphere and Marine Air Squadrons patrolled the surrounding waters. They served as ship security forces. Three Marines were supposed to be on the Dieppe raid, but were reassigned just before the operation. Some landed in North Africa as part of Operation Torch and seven of them landed at D-Day.

Col. Robert O. Bare sent a letter to a friend about participation in D-Day planning (p226-228). Capt. Marvin C. Ross was part of the 'Monuments Men' team.

The book contains 301 black and white photos, 21 color photos, three black and white illustrations, four color maps, one 301 black and white cartoon, and numerous photos of letters, records, citations, and other documents.

It's a nice photo-intensive collection of accounts of Marines on the 'other' side of the world. They may be the unsung Marines of WWII, but this book shows they cannot be forgotten.

Enjoyed it.

A Lost Legionary in South Africa. by Colonel George Hamilton-Browne. Annotated by John Leband. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 266 pages. 2026 reprint and analysis of 1912 book.

George MacDonald Fraser wrote the marvelous *Flashman* series of novels about a reluctant British officer serving queen and country around the globe during the Victorian era. The novels were brilliant, although the 1972 movie that used parts of the first two books never quite captured the cowardly inner voice of ol' Flashy as he bluffed his way to a heroic image.

Hamilton-Browne's memoir of his service in the British Army during the Zulu wars is a lot of bluster and a smidgen of reality. He wrote three books about his military service across the globe, but thanks to sharp analysis by Prof. Leband, much of those memoirs were borrowed from other sources or just fabricated.

Don't get me wrong, it's a fascinating read about the British military in South Africa, but Leband's scrutinizing of records shows that Hamilton-Browne couldn't have been in places he claimed he was, and was often far from actual battles like Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. Yes, he was sometimes in the area, but often back in Cape Town, not at the front. At best, he could claim skirmishing, but that didn't stop the book from becoming popular in its release in 1880 or from him wearing undeserved campaign medals.

The book contains three black and white photos and 12 black and white illustrations.

Leband's analysis separates Hamilton-Browne's reality from legend. The memoir portion has some value, at least as an indication of British perceptions of the period, but the analysis to set the record straight is golden.

Enjoyed it.

To War With the All-American. by Martin King and Steve Mrozek. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 237 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *A History of the 82nd Airborne Division*

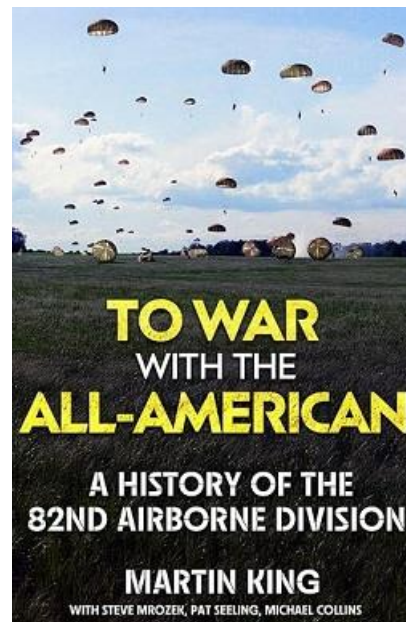
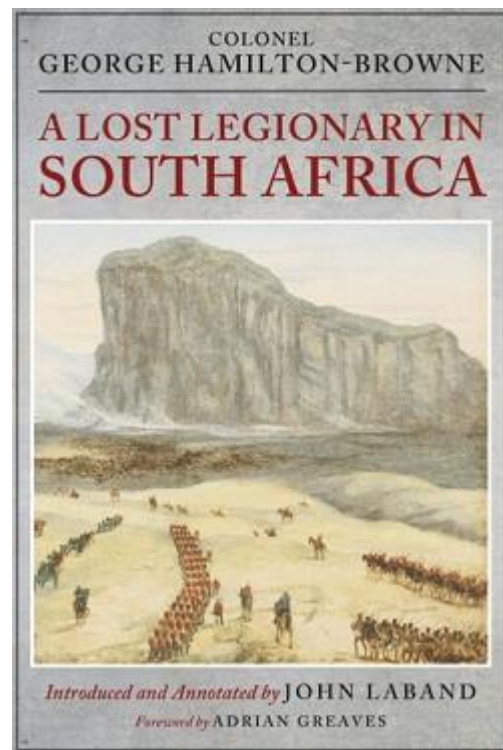
The 82nd Division started in WWI with men from all over the US. Obviously, it wasn't airborne in the beginning. Yet it served with distinction and was reconstituted as an airborne division for WWII and took part in all the major paratroop operations.

Because the 82nd has been covered so much for its WWII service, I found the WWI accounts, from training to the Meuse-Argonne Offensive more enlightening. I had not realized that Sgt Alvin York was a member of the 82nd when he stormed German lines in WWI.

The book also covers the 82nd from the Cold War to Afghanistan (p175-235).

One typo (p180): "I've you've never been around..." should be If, not I've, at the start of the sentence.

The book contains 14 black and white photos, nine black and white maps, and 11 color photos.



As a unit history, it covers about 100 years, so don't expect too much detail, although some actions get down to the foxhole level. It reads well, fills in gaps often little covered, and provides a holistic account of the division.

Enjoyed it.

Roman Army Units in the Eastern Provinces (3): Men At Arms 570. by Raffaele D'Amato. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 56 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *4th-5th Centuries AD*

The arms, armor, and other equipment of Roman Army infantry and cavalry in the time period receive ample description. Of note is a heckuva OOB (p8 to p11) in small font of the unit type, unit name, location, and years of deployment. This might be the only time when I don't mind such a small font.

Two items stand out: the finding of a helmet made out of crocodile skin (p40) and the finding of a camp stool in exquisite condition (p24), with photo on the page.

The booklet contains 46 color photos (including numerous period paintings and mosaics), one black and white photo, 18 black and white illustrations, and the usual central section of eight pages of color plates with 16 foot, seven mounted horse, and one mounted camel uniform illustrations. It's all quite colorful, with the uniform illustrations taking inspiration from the color paintings and mosaics.

As this is the third book of the topic, if this is your interest, then the first two should also be on your list. The workmanlike prose descriptions may help you understand sculpts of your figures, but the illustrations can help you paint them in period colors.

Enjoyed it.

The Regulator: Death of a Bank. by M. J. Finn. Softcover (5.5x8.5 inches). 318 pages. 2024.

This self-published novel follows Kate Adams, a Federal Reserve regulator tasked with ensuring banks follow financial rules and regulations. Called in by her soon to retire boss to look at some irregularities at Tech Valley Bank. Under painstaking accounting research, Adams begins to uncover a scheme to intentionally cause a run is being masterminded by the Chinese. As you might expect, that knowledge triggers something more than paper cuts.

That a Silicon Valley bank can fail was amply demonstrated but just such a failure not too long ago. The Fed's bailed out the bank because otherwise, companies with uninsured accounts couldn't meet payroll and other expenses, which could lead to a broader economic problem. Chinese involvement? That's where fact and fiction diverge.

I can't say I was ecstatic at the accounting explanations in the beginning, but as that's the nub of the plan, you have to power through. That's about the time the TV movie of the week trope pops in: I've observed that when a movie drags, out pops either two Nazi thugs breaking in with guns ablazing, or, two hot babes. Finn went with the latter, but not to worry, two Chinese thugs make an appearance later on.

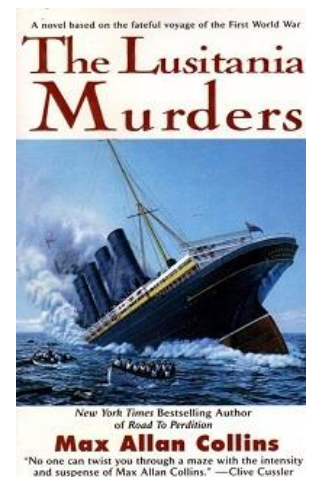
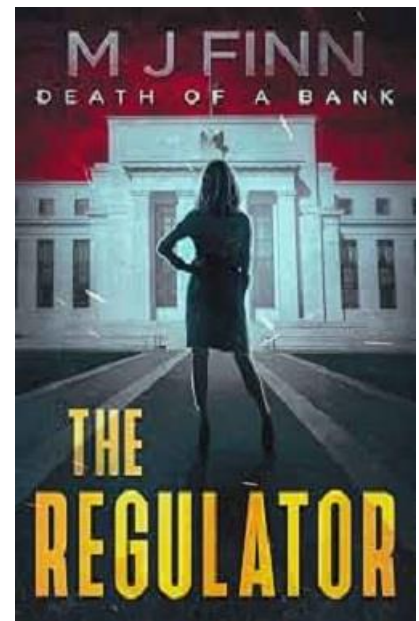
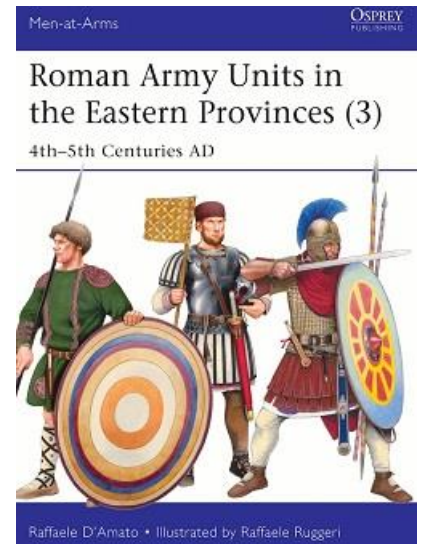
The second half of the book proved far more interesting precisely because you had powered through that previous accounting info. Now you're talking thriller, especially when her ex-husband in a FBI special agent. And yes, I can see this as a TV movie, or perhaps a multi-part series, with a strong female lead, Chinese thugs, and the cleverly crafted mergers and acquisitions.

Enjoyed it.

The Lusitania Murders. by Max Allan Collins. Paperback (4.2x6.7 inches). 243 pages. 2002.

Murder mysteries are not my usual form of novel, but as this involved the *Lusitania*, I thought I'd give it a try. He also wrote *Road to Perdition* and I liked the Tom Hanks movie.

The ship itself receives considerable attention as our two heroes, S.S. Van Dine,



aka Willard Wright, a journalist undercover to see if the ship is carrying munitions, and the gorgeous Pinkerton agent and ship detective Philomina Vance, try to figure out who murdered possible German saboteurs.

It's a "closed room" mystery -- in that all the suspects are confined to one location. Agatha Christie, said a BBC documentary, was the master of that particular mystery. Collins has a bit of a more complicated closed room, i.e. the entire ship.

It's an easy enough read as our heroes move among the upper crust of society on the way to Britain. It's not exactly my fiction genre, but it was a pleasant enough distraction as I awaited the U-boat.

Enjoyed it.

The Second World War's Military Legacy. by David Wragg. Softcover (6.2x9.2 inches). 205 pages. 2022 reprint of 2014 book.

Subtitle: *The Atomic Bomb and Much More*

I went back and forth about this book's content. It discusses technology primarily developed in WWII and applied to Cold War military systems. On the plus side, if you know little about WWII, you'll be amazed at how much Cold War evolution came out of WWII. On the minus side, if you read a lot about WWII, it seems a bit obvious.

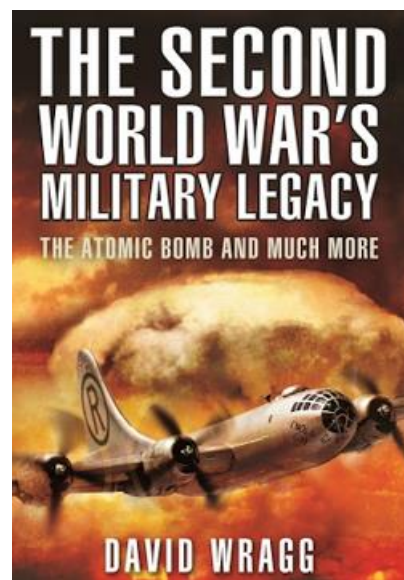
For example, cruise missiles came out of V1s, ICBMs came out of V2s, helicopters came out of autogyros, electronic warfare out of radars and jammers, and so on and so on. I like some of the links between old and new practices and procedures, like paratroopers evolving into air mobile operations and commandos evolving into Special Forces.

It starts with general developments and then has three main chapters: air, ground, and sea.

The book contains 32 black and white photos, one black and white illustration, and one black and white radar map of WWII Britain.

How much will be new to you depends on how much you read about WWII and the Cold War. For those seeking a book that links WWII with the Cold War and -- to an extent -- 21st century warfare, here's a fine book to start the research processes. Ties go to the author.

Enjoyed it.



Charles Frederick Ball. by Brian Willan. Softcover (6.2x9.2 inches). 188 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *From Dublin's Botanic Gardens to the Killing Fields of Gallipoli*

This bio of Charles Frederick Ball follows him from his childhood through botanical studies to Kew Gardens and Dublin's Botanic Gardens and to Gallipoli.

Ball certainly knew his plants and became a pre-WWI expert on a full range of botanical topics. He interned at the prestigious Kew Gardens and then left for better opportunities that eventually found him in Dublin. He became editor of *Irish Gardening* and was on expeditions to Europe to bring back new plant species. A highlight was an interview with the horticulture enthusiast Ferdinand I, the King of Bulgaria.

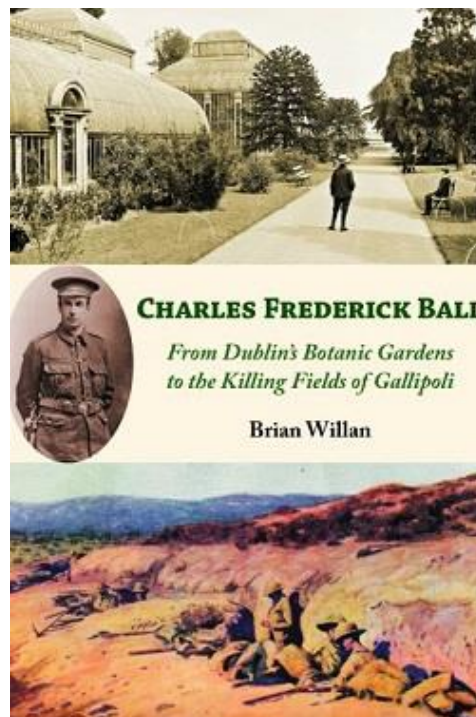
WWI started and Ball eventually joined up. He was sent to Gallipoli and lived through the landings, assaults, and trench warfare. Ironically, he died from a stray Turkish shell that struck a rest camp in Suvla Bay.

The bulk of this book is all about plants. After a short description of training camp, Gallipoli receives a description of trench and other conditions. His actions include saving his friend's life, a harrowing trip to the hospital ship, and an argument with a naval officer that in no uncertain terms his friend was going to be put on that hospital ship.

The book contains a multitude of plant illustrations -- and a few of Gallipoli, too.

It's a nice bio of a semi-famous gardener in Edwardian England and Ireland. It reads smoothly, the imagery is interesting to see, and you'll learn about horticulture.

Enjoyed it.



German Marders of World War II: New Vanguard 350. by Steven J. Zaloga. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Wehrmacht's Prime Tank Destroyers*

This overview covers the design and development of the Marder series of tank destroyers, which were not officially designated "Marder" until Feb. 1, 1944 (p4). All were basically repurposed aging or obsolete chassis with various anti-tank guns. The Marder I was based on a French Lorraine chassis, the Marder II on a Panzer II chassis, and a Marder III on a Pzkwf 38(t) chassis.

The biggest and most successful conversion used captured Soviet F22 76.2mm AT guns and captured ammo. All Marders, while effective at the time, were phased out in favor of the STuG and Hetzer armored vehicles -- although some were still being used in 1945. Other potential, but ultimately less effective successors than the STuG or Hetzer included the RSO and various AT guns mounted on halftracks.

As you'd expect from a Zaloga volume, lots of tabular data supplements the smooth text. As you'd expect from Osprey, lots of imagery.

The book contains 40 black and white photos, 1 color photo, 12 color camouflage profiles, and one color two-page action illustration as partially displayed on the front cover.

The usual excellence of a Zaloga booklet carries through to this volume in the *New Vanguard* series. Most Marders were deployed on the Eastern Front, but some appeared in North Africa, Italy, and the Western Front.

Enjoyed it.

Pirates and Privateers of the Atlantic and the Caribbean. by Hunt Janin and Nicole Sheehan. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 211 pages. 2026.

Despite the bibliography, I have suspicions that this broad-based survey of US privateering was slapped together out of internet parts.

For example: During the American Revolution, Americans crewed 600 privateers (p. xxi). Or is it 800 American privateers (p53)? Or is it 1,197 American privateer ships (p61)? Or is it that the Continental Congress commissioned more than 2,000 privateer ships (p157)? I gave up after page 157.

I found other numerical contradictions -- the kind, I suspect, that came from multiple AI searches. If the numbers had been close, welllll, maybe, but with so great a difference, I have no confidence in any of the numbers presented in the book.

The book's too repetitious with too many anomalies. I have a hard time believing any editor even looked at the text.

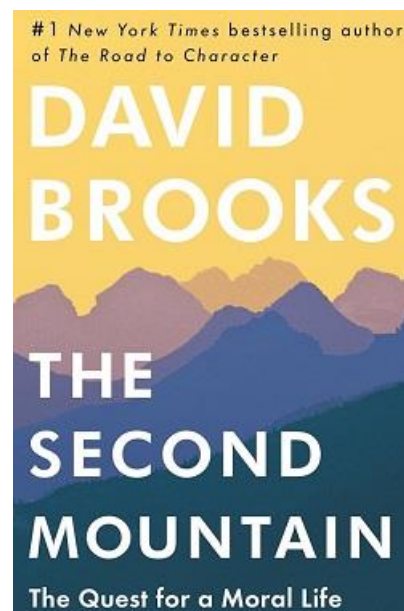
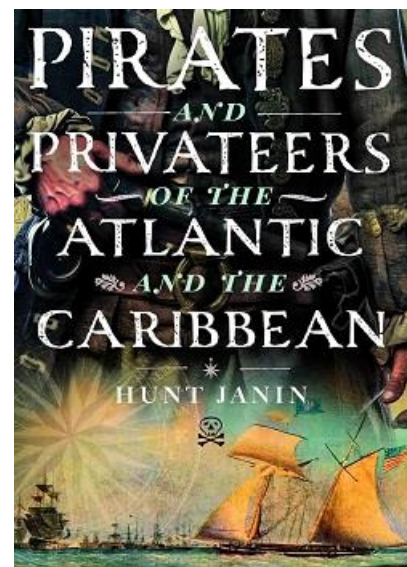
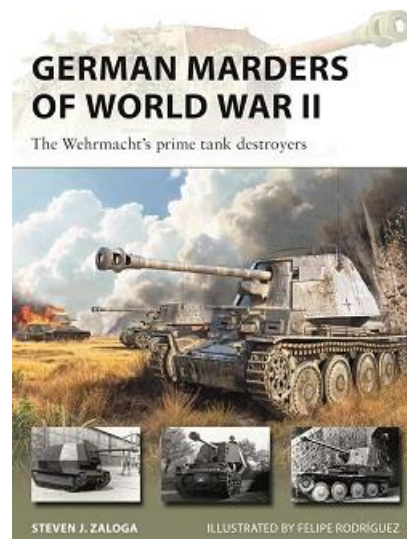
The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life. by David Brooks. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 347 pages. 2019.

David Brooks was a New York Times columnist and is still a weekly PBS pundit, but this book has nothing to do with politics, per se, but is about philosophy. Inside, he tracks four major variables and a number of minor ones to living a moral life full of purpose.

He uses a metaphor of two mountains: the first is all about satisfying self and ego and accumulating tangibles. The second, and more difficult mountain to climb, is all about living a "relationist" life by offering selflessness above selfishness within a series of interrelated "communities" -- think beyond neighborhoods and into volunteer organizations, workplaces, and circles of friends.

If Brooks thought 2019 was a nightmare of what I would call an "I got mine, screw you" society, he must be apoplectic now in 2026. The levels of distrust are spiking, the quest to gather tangibles is increasing, and the celebration of individualism at the expense of society is skyrocketing.

Yet he offers relationist advice in four areas: Vocation, Marriage, Philosophy/Faith, and Community. He bolsters his call for service over self with quotes and excerpts from hundreds of



philosophers and wags. I'm not sure all these ideas pertain, and all those scattered opinions sometimes make this a difficult book to read, but I can agree with at least some of the ideas: get to know your neighbors, expand your circle of friends, volunteer to strengthen your community, understand that solving a societal problem requires a comprehensive approach across multiple "programs" and not just funding one program, and so on. Much more gets discussed within the text, but you get the idea.

I don't know if I'm on that second mountain, but I keep trying. My journalism Vocation has almost run out, but writers never retire, we just keep working on our next novel -- and then work on getting an agent. To me, Marriage of over 40 years continues to be even more wondrous than ever. Philosophy/Faith continue to evolve as most folks do over decades. Community: always the tough one, but newfound time means I can help out more -- trustee of three historical societies and editor for HMGS to help bring history (and social in-person gaming) alive to, um, whomever will listen. I certainly hope this AAR newsletter offers informative and entertaining prose and photos and makes the world a little brighter for a few minutes. Maybe I should tag that under Philosophy/Faith...

The book is thought provoking, even if I skipped over some of the longer quotes that proved a little repetitious. Still, this is a book about hope and is just as valid in 2026 as it was in 2019.

Enjoyed it.

Military History of Byzantine Rome: 1204-1261. by Juho Wilskman. Hardback (6.5x9.5 inches). 265 pages. 2026.

This first volume -- of ultimately three volumes -- covers Byzantium from 1204 to 1261, or, from when the Latin Catholic-European crusaders captured Constantinople until the year the Romans (as the Byzantines liked to call themselves) recaptured the city. The earlier volumes in the series were written by a different author.

If it is heavy on politics and internecine relations and light on tactical battle descriptions, a lot is due to the sources. You can certainly start plotting a campaign. Plenty of opponents: Byzantines, Crusaders, Nicaeans, Turks, Thessalonikans, Mongols, Bulgars, and Epirosans for a start. You'll have to fudge the numbers per type of troops a bit -- medieval sources tend to exaggerate -- but the effort is there to rationalize them closer to reality. Great start, that.

The battles are a bit generic, but their ramifications echo through the text. Your head might spin a bit at all the different emperors, pretenders, contenders, and also-rans who battled for this kingdom or that kingdom and ultimately tried to grab the throne.

The book contains 26 black and white photos, 15 black and white illustrations, and seven black and white maps.

This book is a converted PhD thesis, which tends to make me shudder, but I was pleasantly surprised to see the academia aspects of the text mostly, but not entirely, exorcised from the prose. Some Pen & Sword editor was on the ball and didn't drop it. Nice introduction to medieval Byzantine politics and events.

Enjoyed it.

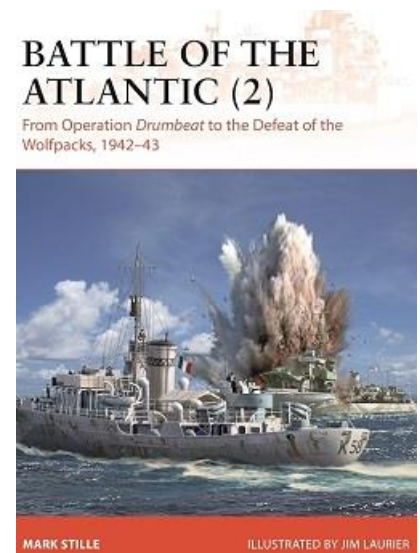
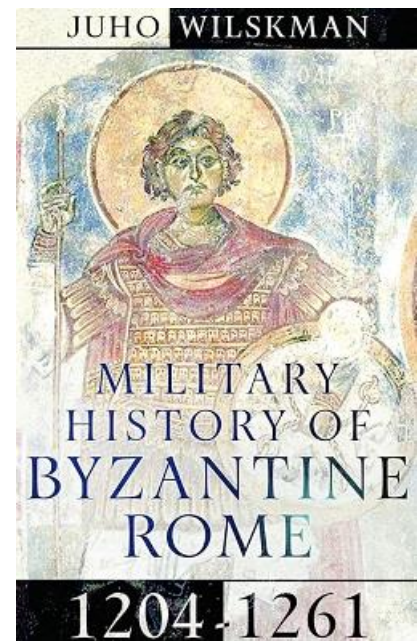
Battle of the Atlantic 2: Campaign 432. by Mark Stille. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *From Operation Drumbeat to the Defeat of the Wolfpacks 1942-43*

The years 1942 and 1943 saw the Allied battle against the U-boats swing from unfavorable to favorable to triumphant as new technology and plain ol' increasing numbers of ships and aircraft were deployed.

The U-boats took advantage of the US entry into WWII to roam up and down the East Coast of the US taking advantage of US naval inexperience and a certain amount of arrogance. As losses accrued, the convoy lessons learned by the British sunk into US doctrine to reduce losses. When U-boats extended their reach into the Gulf of Mexico, the defensive doctrine extended, too.

The usual *Campaign* format includes a situational overview, commanders, technical details of ships and planes, a UK Royal Navy-slanted OOB with ancillary info about US and German forces, and an excellent overview of the war at sea -- hitting the high and low points of Allied and German



victories, losses, and shifting fortunes.

Losses showcase both sides' technical advancements while the shift to wolfpacks took advantage of increased German production. Adm. Donitz figured he needed to sink 700,000 tons of merchant shipping per month to win the sea war, and did achieve it -- but only once. However, increased Allied production dwarfed losses and a good statistical analysis showed that convoys got through intact far more often than perceived, in part due to Ultra reading German communications to allow re-routing. Increased air coverage, technical advancements, and more resources reduced Allied losses and increased U-boat losses.

The booklet contains 64 black and white photos, one color photo, one color illustration, eight color maps, and three color two-page action illustrations.

Presumably, the third booklet in a *Battle of the Atlantic Campaign* trilogy will close out WWII. In the meantime, volumes 1 and 2 will bring you to the decisive shift in U-boat warfare.

Enjoyed it.

The Trayne of Artillery 1642-1646: Century of the Soldier 133. by Simon Marsh. Softcover (7.2x9.7 inches). 314 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Ordnance and Associated Capabilities of English Armies During the First Civil War*

This comprehensive examination of artillery trains during the English Civil War offers a detailed look at the composition of a number of trains: Essex, Eastern Association, Waller, Royalist Oxford, New Model Army, and a few others. Of all the trains, the Essex train has the most information as it has the most extensive period sources.

Just to be clear, a “trayne” is an assembly of artillery cannons of various types and sizes, specialist personnel, and equipment assigned to an army. It also includes pioneers who were the manual labor to clear roads, build bastions, and otherwise follow orders from the specialists who would site, service, and fire the cannons.

This in-depth analysis includes composition of each train down to the last gun, logistics of supplying and maintaining the train, roles filled by each type of personnel, and the combat records of the trains during various sieges and open-field battles. The research is quite extensive, supported by lots of period illustrations highlighting marching, emplacement, and equipment.

The light 3-pounder field guns had an effective range of about 100m to 200m and the gun team could reload in about four to five minutes. Thus, a gun would usually get one shot at advancing infantry and might often be able to withdraw to a supporting second line of infantry for the actual reload (p74). Parliament had more guns at the start of the war and decreed that two light guns would be assigned to each infantry regiment (p78).

Other common tactics included placing the larger guns on the flanks, mask the guns behind a screen of cavalry that would withdraw to unveil the guns for firing, site guns on higher terrain to fire over friendly troops, and advance the light guns along with the troops (p78).

The book contains 59 black and white illustrations, 19 black and white photos, and five black and white maps.

Sometimes, the data in the workmanlike prose might be better off in tabular format, but otherwise, it churns right along. The more you're interested in ECW artillery, the more notes you'll be taking for your tabletop wargame.

Enjoyed it.

The Second Day at Gettysburg: Casemate Illustrated. by Britt C. Isenberg. Softcover (6.8x9.3 inches). 128 pages. 2026.

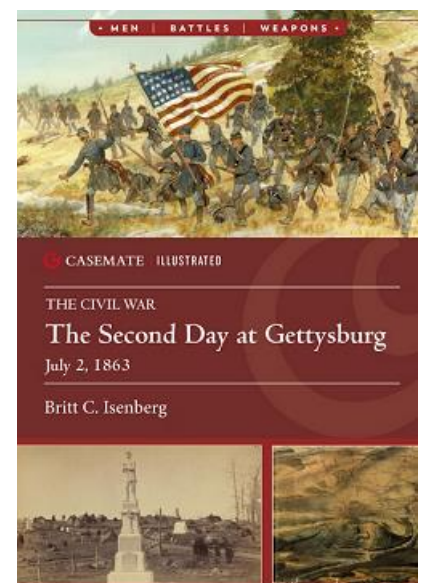
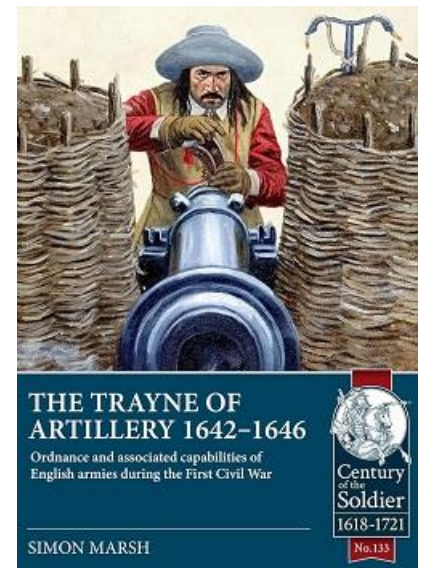
Subtitle: *The Civil War*

Subtitle: *July 2, 1863*

This follow-up volume continues the overview of the ACW Battle of Gettysburg with the second day, consisting mostly of the battles for the Wheatfield, Little Round Top, and Culp's Hill.

The descriptions highlight key moments, reinforced by excerpts from eyewitness accounts praising each side's valor and the density of enemy fire.

As per the illustrated part, the book contains 55 black and white photos,



51 color photos, four black and white illustrations, three color illustrations, one black and white map, and nine color maps.

As for the color maps, the color Wheatfield battle maps are overhead views like a Google satellite image with units superimposed upon it. The movements are noted with a series of three or four beginning and ending positions, which helps explain where those charges began and ended. The contour lines might be a bit more prominent, but I appreciate the effort. I find the basic battle maps elsewhere to be well done with recognizable terrain, albeit I don't know what the elevation between contour lines represents. I know...picky, but I use maps for both information and to set up a scenario on a tabletop.

Don't get me wrong, a satellite image map adds the requisite color to a plain black and white map and is superior to 3D maps, but so far, a plain military-style map with clear contour lines and a proper map key and scale are so far superior to these other maps. Then again, I've been studying book maps and wargame maps for decades, so I am comfortable making the translations from page to tabletop.

Anyway, another nice extension of the *Casemate Illustrated* series.

Enjoyed it.

The Crucible of Combat: Volume 1. by Harold E. Raugh, jr. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 362 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Perspectives on British Military History and Leadership*

This first volume of three reprints 14 articles that appeared in various magazines, most often *Soldiers of the Queen*, from 20 or so years ago. Most of the articles deal with Victorian colonial battles and campaigns, although also included are a few post-Boer War articles up through WWII (Operation Compass).

Some aspects of dissecting maneuvers and British leadership are quite incisive. Wolseley and Wavell get high marks for their campaigns, especially for bold action, and as for Wolseley, his spreading of disinformation among the war correspondents. Col. Meinertzhagen's "lost" haversack with fake plans to hit Gaza in WWI was also a misdirection coup in helping gaining surprise at Beersheba (WWI). Omdurman and the artillery battery serve as another example of clear explanation of action and consequence.

However, many articles contain excerpt after excerpt. While valuable in limited quantities to provide combat accounts, after a while, I find the accounts to be repetitious. Now, this is not particularly fatal in an article, but a book of articles filled with page after page of excerpt is tiring to read. To me, and I might be a distinct minority here, an excerpt that highlights a key aspect of a battle or campaign is worth the interruption of the prose. Too many interruptions ruin the analysis of the author.

So, I skipped around quite a bit and even abandoned chapters when I started reading too many reports and memoirs and not enough insight from beyond the period.

One typo: "Only" (p95) needs a space after the period.

The book contains 17 black and white photos, 42 black and white illustrations, and 22 black and white maps or varying clarity.

If you have old back issues of *Soldiers of the Queen*, you already have most of these articles. If you don't, and you are interested in Victorian British colonial campaigns and battles with lots of excerpts, this will fill in the blanks nicely. Ties go to the author.

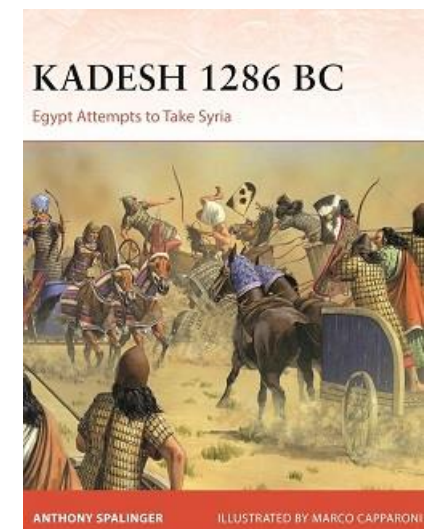
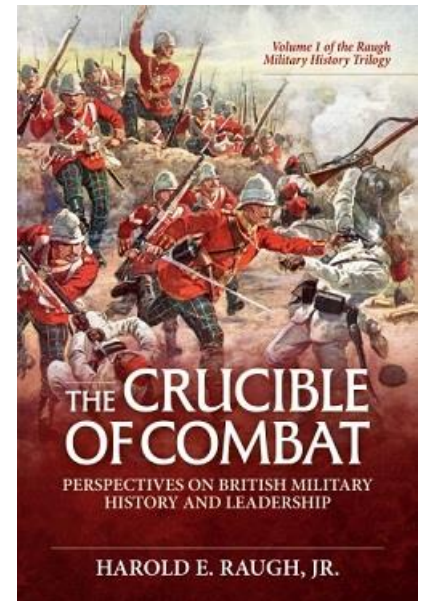
Enjoyed it.

Kadesh 1286 BC: Campaign 430. by Anthony Spalinger. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *Egypt Attempts to Take Syria*

Ramesses II led the Egyptian Army out of Egypt and across what is today Israel and into Syria to try and wrest away a piece of the Hittite Empire.

Muwatallis, the Hittite commander, apparently ambushed one Egyptian division and was attacking the Egyptian camp when Ramesses counter-attacked with his immediate bodyguard to blunt the Hittites until reinforcements arrived. That's when the second Hittite attack struck.



The examination of the surviving source material -- hieroglyphics and carvings -- offers summaries of what was recorded by the presumably victorious Ramesses. It's wonderfully encapsulated with bulleted points and then fuller explanations. A lively discussion of unit strengths and tactical distances involved makes for fascinating reading. The source numbers are a bit suspect as Ramesses tried to make the best of an ambush and stalemate, but it's a comprehensive account that allows you to make your best judgment as to tabletop scenario strengths.

As the Egyptian divisions seem to have been stretched out on the march, an interesting what-if scenario might be what would have happened had Muwatallis waited to attack and more Egyptian troops and chariots were opposing him.

The booklet contains five black and white photos, 25 black and white illustrations (mostly recreated carvings and hieroglyphics), six color maps, 35 color photos, five color illustrations, one color 3D map, and three color two-page action illustrations.

You sometimes have to read carefully because the translations bounce around a bit when interspersed with commentary, but the booklet provides an excellent overview.

Enjoyed it.

ABDA Striking Force 1943: Fleet 19. by Angus Konstam. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Joint Allied Command Lost at Java Sea*

The ABDA (American, British, Dutch, and Australian) command of warships at the opening of WWII in the Pacific Theater seemed reasonable enough, but the reality that confronted them showed how badly outgunned they were.

The usual Fleet examination of ships, crew, and commanders distinguishes the aging and hand-me-down nature of the ABDA ships versus the more modern Imperial Japanese Navy ships. The disparity in airpower was even greater despite some stopgap shipments. The lack of Allied logistical support was even more telling.

Although the Battle of Balikpapan was a bit of an ABDA success, the rest of the campaign proved catastrophic for the Allied war effort. Few of the ABDA ships escaped to Australia, the result of overwhelming airpower and seapower. Some Allied opportunities were missed that might have made a difference, or at least imposed a delay in the conquest of all the Dutch colonies. The vaunted Japanese launched a lot of torpedoes in various surface actions, but few actually hit a ship. Even fewer Allied torpedoes hit a Japanese ship.

A good OOB is included, although you'll need to look elsewhere for specific ship specifications.

The booklet contains 34 black and white photos, three black and white illustrations, three color maps, two color illustrations, four color diagrams, and three color two-page action illustrations.

The Japanese victory is well explained within the neat prose of the booklet. The odds were mighty long for an Allied rebuff of the Japanese forces, but for those who wish to learn what might have been, here's a great place to start.

Enjoyed it.

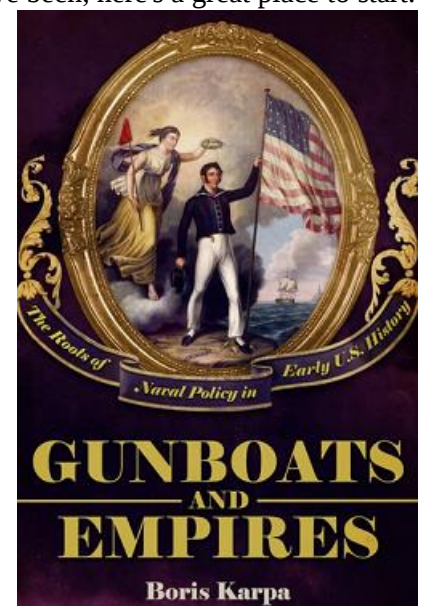
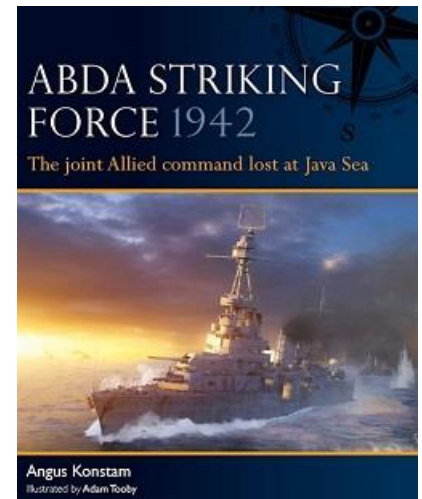
Gunboats and Empires. by Boris Karpa. Hardback (6.2x9.2 inches). 153 pages. 2026.

Subtitle: *The Roots of Naval Policy in Early U.S. History*

This is not a naval battle book, but as the subtitle says, a naval policy book centered around the post-American Revolution era. Thomas Jefferson, and to an extent James Madison, shaped US doctrine at the intersection of national security, economic limitations, and political feasibility.

Jefferson was what the book calls an anti-navalist: he didn't want a US Navy filled with frigates and ships of the line. Partially, it was the expense of building, manning, and maintaining the ships, but mostly, it was a deep philosophical opposition to what he considered was a step towards tyranny. A navy, he reasoned, would bolster the creation of an Empire and an Empire would lead to stratification of society as in the British Empire -- and the colonies had just completed a war to overthrow royalty and aristocracy.

He believed American defense would be better served with port fortifications and small coastal gunboats manned by militia. What he did not count on



was British and French depredations of American merchantmen at sea. Between the impressment of sailors into their fleets or simple piracy under the excuse that neutral US ships carried war supplies to the enemy, US trade was being hurt. It was the Barbary pirate attacks that prompted a revision to naval policy and that revision accelerated under Madison in the preliminaries for the War of 1812.

One typo: "launched attacks after attack" (p55) has an extra s.

The book contains 11 black and white illustrations and two black and white photos.

This being a repurposed PhD thesis, the prose lacks smoothness and is often difficult to read. The information and analysis admirably cover a key period between Revolution and War of 1812, but prying such out of the prose often proves tiring. Still, info wins out and ties go to the author.

Enjoyed it.

Tanks in the Caucasus 1942-43: New Vanguard 351. by William E. Hiestand. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2026.

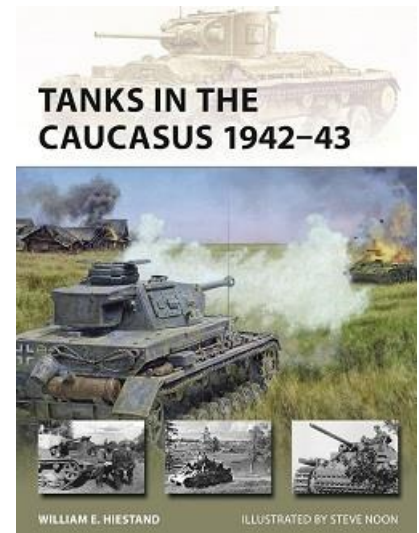
This overview of German and Soviet tanks used in the 1942-1943 battles during Fall Blau including US and British lend lease tanks as well. All the usual armored suspects are covered. A short recap of the German operation to capture the oil fields, as well as a comparison of doctrine and field deployments, add context to the nuts and bolts and treads of the specifications.

That said, and because so many Ospreys and other books cover the same range of tanks, how much you already know or how many books you already own will determine this booklet's value to your personal library. Duplication is inevitable.

The booklet contains 49 black and white photos, one color photo, one color two-page action illustration, and 12 color camouflage armored vehicle illustrations (six German and six Soviet).

This offers a competent overview of the attack into the Caucasus and the color camouflage illustrations can certainly help in the painting process. It's a fine entry-level overview.

Enjoyed it.



D'You Hear There!: Daily Pipes of the Royal Navy. by Richard Harris. Hardback (5.0x7.3 inches). 144 pages. 2026.

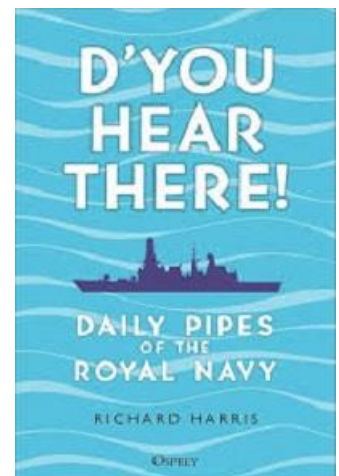
Pipes are basically public address announcements on a British Royal Navy ship. They range from the serious, like calling the crew to fight a fire, to the frivolous, such as pranks. As the author served for 31 years in the RN and retired as a Commodore, you'll get a wide variety of announcements, including routine drills, unique personnel assignments, and special events that have the bonus of explaining something about shipboard life.

The book slings a lot of slang. Fortunately, the translations helps us landlubbers understand it all. The book concludes with a traditional crossing of the equator ceremony, complete with pre-ritual pipes and dialogue from the ceremony itself.

The book contains 10 cartoons.

It's a fast read, with more than a few chuckles within.

Enjoyed it.



Get ready....

