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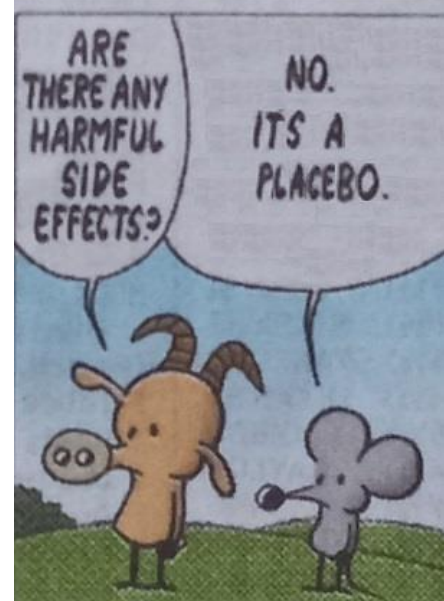
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# King Me, Baby! Splitting Heirs in Kingmaker

by Russ Lockwood

We seven ambitious British nobles gathered to crown a new king, but of course differences of opinion arose between the red rose and the white rose lines. In addition, while each of us had no particular favorite among the seven heirs to the throne, we each wanted our particular heir to gain the crown. So began a game of *Kingmaker*, played out on a large customized map that even our grognard eyes could read.

## We Already Have a King

Henry VI starts the game as king.

How'd he become King? A strange woman lying in a pond handed out a sword ... seems like that system of government worked for centuries.

Technically, Henry VI was the king, not an heir, but for simplicity, all those with a shot at being king, including the actual king, will be called heirs.

There are seven heirs at start, one in Ireland, one in France, two in Wales, and the rest in England.

With nobles dealt out, we began. I started with my main man, Fitzalan the Earl of Arundel with 180 troops, just to the west of Shrewsbury and a hop, skip, and a jump within range of one heir. My other nobles, Grey (20 troops and owner of Northampton) and Berkeley (10 troops) were in their home castles.

*My three nobles at start and a face-down card to be played later.*

## Heir and Tortoise

The game started with an heir within one move of my starting nobles. However, it was in a town with a 200-troop garrison. If I wanted the heir, I had to come up with an equal or greater number of troops. I had almost enough with Earl Fitzalan, but needed all my scattered nobles to join me. Nobles move very s-l-o-w-l-y to get anywhere.

I moved to the town to fight anyone who might try to take this heir. It took 29 turns, but eventually I had everyone stick around long enough to siege. Edward was mine. This game should be called The Heir and Tortoise Race.

Ed managed to nab King Henry VI himself, a powerful monarch who can call Parliament and if he has enough votes, hand out some titles and other goodies that were set aside at the beginning of the game.

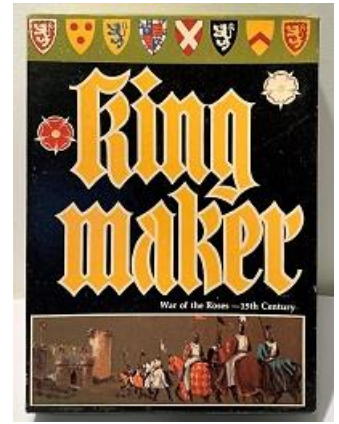
Dennis waltzed into an open city to take an heir. Ed and Dan allied to sail to France and nab a second heir, which they immediately split -- his head from his body, that is. Henry VI was the man and execution was the likely result for any heir within his grasp. Mike nabbed Richard, putting him in opposition to Ed (and Henry VI). Steve grabbed the heir Margaret.

One of the heirs was all by his lonesome somewhere in Britain. Another was in Ireland -- and one title I had was Lieutenant of Ireland.

## Beam Me Heir And There, Event Card

I started to remember why I'm not particularly fond of *Kingmaker*. It's so random.

Every time you start to formulate a plan and gather your forces for a siege, some damn event card whisks you away to some place on the board you can't reach even if you had three or four turns of peaceful marching.



It is incredibly frustrating. For example, another of the heirs to the throne was all by his lonesome. I needed all my nobles and mercenaries and titles to total up the 200+ troops for a siege. I'd get one turn away and pffft -- half my force teleports to some back or beyond place.

As I already had one heir with me, all of my troops also went to that back or beyond place. Then, as I tried to work my way back to this other lone heir, pffft, away goes another noble and I'm back in limbo land.

I'm not the only one. Plenty of others suffered teleportationitis, too.

*Noble lads, all! Clockwise from bottom left: Dennis, Steve, Mike, Ed, John, and Dan. Nice big map!*



## A Weathered Heir in my Coventry Soup?

After 258 turns, Steve eventually arrived in the city of Coventry. I had just enough men to siege him and for once, I actually had all the boys in the band arrive at that city. I went for a siege.

I tallied just enough for the 200 defenders + Steve's defending troops. That's when secret troop cards can get used.

He tossed in cards for more troops.

I tossed in cards to keep just ahead.

Our allies tossed in cards.

*Initial nobles at Coventry, Steve's force to left, mine (with Edward the heir) at right.*

It became a game of troop chicken.

And why not? The Heir, the Tortoise, and the Chicken was the closest thing to a battle for the last 258 turns.

Eventually, we all ran out of cards.

Aha! I tallied just a tad more. The city falls! Victory is mine. I crushed my enemies, drove them before me, and heard the lamentations of the....WHAT????

A million curses upon the combat system!

When you have more troops sieging than the enemy has defending, a siege is automatically successful. You draw a card and look at the battle results to see which, if any, nobles died during the siege.



I flipped over the card. Nobody died. Good.  
Except...the result said, "Bad Weather. Attack Delayed."

Are you frickin' kidding me? 500 event cards and I draw the one, or maybe one of two outta 500, that give the bad weather result? Thus, no siege battle took place. We both stared at each other.

Steve came up on the battlements and shouted: "Your mother was a hamster and your father smelled of elderberry, you donkey bottom biter. I wave my private parts at you and fart in your general direction. Now, go away or I shall taunt you some more!"

Points to Steve for the reference, but now I really remember why I'm not a fan of the game.

## Henry VI vs Richard

By this time, Ed (holding Henry VI) and Mike (holding Richard) were co-kings, even if they were opposing rose colors. Ed, with the larger force began gobbling up players and splitting heirs in two held by Dan and Dennis.

As we have seen, through ill card draw luck, I (holding Edward) had failed to take another heir, which Steve spirited away. He didn't even have to fight my troops. How can you siege a city and not fight the troops escaping from the city...

Nonetheless, the Henry VI express chugged over to Steve, who executed the heir Margaret when confronted with an overwhelming force.

I can't remember which other heir was executed, but I do remember that at this point, Ed (Henry VI), Mike (Richard), and me (Edward) held heirs and a fourth was in Ireland. As I held the Lieutenant of Ireland card, I expected to be teleported to the Emerald Island so I could siege, capture, and execute that heir.

## Here's Stevie

That Steve. Ya gotta watch him. He did a suicide run -- called ambush -- that automatically killed his mediocre-at-best noble Bushwhacker Bob and gave him a 2d6 roll against **every** enemy noble looking for a 2 or 12 to kill the enemy noble. Cursed low-odds varmint! Bushwhacker Bob chopped one down with a boxcars.

Later in the game, oh around turn 416, Mike had some battle where he got to roll, too. It would seem that he should have better odds at killing enemy nobles, but no, he hit only on a 12. We scratched our heads, consulted the rules, and confirmed -- although whatever it was seemed counter-intuitive.

## Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow

As we teleported around, it looked like it would come down to one big battle if we could even get close enough.

And then, my event card triggered a natural death of one heir. But who?

Let's go to the 2d6 Heir Natural Death table. I rolled.

The two cubes bounced along and settled on a '7.' Look up 7 on the chart -- Henry VI!

All of a sudden, Mike had the main heir, with me runner up. We had a ship slipping around the south of England to pick me up and drop me on the Irish heir. We had at least a one-turn headstart on the enemy ships.

The late Henry VI now expressed a willingness to unite under Richard. It must have been a deathbed confession.

Game Over.

*Henry VI. Image from web.*

## Random Ending

Literally, the game ended because I rolled a 7. Think of it as a divine mercy killing so that we could end the game.

The Ed-Dan-Steve-John team was clearly in the lead, but the random teleporting kept tearing apart plans.



Technically, we could continue to play until only one heir remained. We decided not to. I guess it's appropriate that the game ended on a random roll.

Ed's comment was that although he was winning, he didn't think he had done anything spectacular to gain the edge or anything bad to lose. Existential, man.

Me thinks him too modest, for he listened to Dan about the heir in France and figured out the heir-killing steamroller strategy, although I guess he should have kept a spare heir alive.

The only thing I did to gain great fame and fortune was to grab an heir early and make sure I kept all my nobles together. My one big siege against another player was a 1-in-500 card draw for no effect (bad weather). My big winning move was to roll a 7.

So, I'm good for another couple decades before the next *Kingmaker* game.

On the very positive side, I enjoyed all of us playing one game. Certainly the tableside commentaries proved as enlightening and humorous as always. And for that, I thank the group for playing and Dan for hosting.

## Crimson and Clover: Word Match Game

by Russ Lockwood

Steve brought over a game called *So Clover* that had nothing to do with agriculture and everything to do with matching two-word combos. Mike took one look and said he could break the game. Frickin' efficiency guru. Let Steve explain the game with more than a one-line summary before making it crash and burn.

To be fair, Mike was right, but let's first take a step back and understand the word-match game mechanics.

Each player gets a clover board that holds four square cards. Each card has one word along each edge. In secret, you put four cards on the board so that each "leaf" of the clover has two words.

Then, you write one word in each leaf describing the two-word combo under the leaf. You pop the cards out of their slots, shuffle, and add a random fifth card.



### Wordies, Assemble

Based on the one-word written description, players rotate the cards and try and figure out the exact location of all four cards. If done correctly, the two words on the cards should bear some resemblance to the one-word written clue.

*The cloverleaf with square cards and clues.*

Since each card has four words, rotating the cards becomes the mechanic of 'fun.' If the guessers put the words in the right spot on the first try, the guessers get 2 points per word pair.

After this first try, any out of place cards are removed from the clover, leaving any cards that are in the correct location under the leaf, and the guessers get a second try. If the guessers get it on second try, the guessers get 1 point per new correctly-placed pair.

The key is that each card occupies two positions -- under its own leaf and under an adjacent leaf.



### Efficiency Guru Spoiler

The following is a spoiler alert on how to break the game. If you don't want to turn red with envy at his instant recognition, then please skip to the next article. Don't blame me. I'm just the messenger. Hum a little Joan Jett. Music soothes the savage beast.

Mike's played a lot of eurogames, so he immediately spotted the workaround: Slug the clue only to the left card of the pair, ignoring the second word of the pair.

*Steve (left) and Mike consider their words.*

Bear with me, or bear with Mike. Think about this as you look at the *So Clover* board.

Remember, each card occupies two positions -- under its own leaf and under an adjacent leaf.

If you only worry about the left word under the first leaf, then rotate the board 90 degrees and only worry about the left word under the second leaf, by definition the second word under the first leaf is automatically placed. Rinse and repeat for all four leaves.

It's quite a clever hack he instantly saw -- it took me a couple minutes of twisting a clover board and the cards for me to get it. The addition of a random fifth card didn't affect his logic as much as it did my illogic of not initially grasping Mike's hack.

*Russ (left) takes a photo as John looks on. Steve and Mike consider new cards. Photo by Dan.*

## One Round

We played one round. Steve went first to show us how it's done. Mike understood before we even played the round. It took me a leaf or two to get it.

My verdict?

Meh.

I'd rather play *Apples to Apples*, which I did over the Thanksgiving Day holiday with

non-gaming friends. *Apples to Apples* is always a go-to game with desert for non-gamers. We use the original edition from decades ago, although there are 389 different versions now.

*So Clover* is similar to *Just One*, which is a word-matching game based on one-word clues, with duplicate clues being eliminated (see the 10/24/2019 AAR for my game explanation and recap).

Steve put it back in the box as we settled down to play *Space Base*...



# Are You a Space Case? Nope, Just a Cadet

by Russ Lockwood



I've already extolled the virtues of *Space Base*, a card-based eurogame (see the 8/23/2023 AAR). It's definitely for resource-calculating gamers, but the spreadsheet-like calculations are often overtaken by pure dumb luck. Not always, but enough to give even the most whacked out odds strategy a slim chance of working.

In short, your 2d6 die rolls point to cards that generate gold that allow you to buy more cards that might, but not always, generate more gold, or VPs, or income-generating mutual funds. OK, I made up the last category, but it's somewhat true.

The wrinkle here is that as you buy cards for your own space trading empire, the replaced cards get flipped over and generate gold or other goodies when your opponents roll dice. Hence, you're always involved in all players' rolls. You may or may not actually get anything from any given roll, but the longer the game goes on and the more cards get replaced, the more you can generate from opponents' rolls.

Better yet, you can hop out for a snack or a bathroom break and the opponents can track the gold and goodies for you -- it's like 99.9999% obvious.

The more gold you spend for a card, the better the card. And some of them are doosies. Low to low-middlin' odds doosies, but doosies nonetheless.

*Space Base in action. From left: Russ, John calculates the gold from his roll, Steve, and Mike. Photo by Dan.*



## Our Game

It's hard to recap a fast-moving game like *Space Base*. The random cards that appear for sale in the central market and the exact results of goodies gotten from opponents' rolls are numerous and random. Well, er, I was busy playing, not notetaking.

Like all card games, some combos are super doosies. Steve figured this one out. He used a pair of cards in the low slots ('1' and '2,' I believe) that could alter die rolls. He then managed to buy lots of VP cards in the '9' slot where he got the VPs on opponents' die rolls. Not too shabby, right?

It was brilliant. He'd 'power up' the die-altering cards and wait for the right 2d6 roll of 7 or 8 -- then he's use the special power to alter the die roll up to 9 and grab lots of VPs. Rinse and repeat.

Like the dish running away with the spoon, Steve ran away with the VPs for the win.

Well done!

And I still find this a great game after a dozen or so playings.



*My Space Base set up mid to late in the game.*

# Shermans and Sorcery! *Bolt Action* Warlords

Recap and Photos by Erik

Inspired by the classic article from the December 1975 edition of *Strategic Review* entitled *Sturmgeschutz and Sorcery* and my recently painted *Bolt Action* USA platoon, I called up players for a game of *Warlords of Erehwon* – a d10 based skirmish warband game for 30-50 figures per player designed by Rick Priestley and published by Warlord Games. It's WWII meets fantasy.

It uses an interesting orders mechanic in which each unit in the game has a die that is placed into a bag. As dice are drawn from the bag, they are assigned to units from the controlling player as one of six orders available – advance, run, ambush, fire, rally, and down. This means you could wait until a more opportune time to activate a certain unit, but there's a chance that there could be a run of dice, allowing your opponents to activate multiple units before you have a chance to again.

The order system is impacted by pin markers – each time you are hit by enemy missile fire, or for each casualty sustained in close combat, you receive a pin. Each pin provides a -1 to a test to see if your unit follows the orders given to them or goes down instead, but you can encourage or force your units to follow orders through proximity to any HQ unit and rally them with any unit within 12 inches. However, if a unit accumulates as many pins as their starting command stat (usually between seven and nine), they are routed from the table regardless of remaining models or wounds in the unit.

Once the turn ends, all of the dice (aside from broken and destroyed units) go back into the bag for the following turn. I had stumbled onto the game system's rulebook while at the last HMGS Fall In convention's flea market, and learned that although it is designed for fantasy games, the designer, Rick Priestley, had released documents and formula about how to create your own armies and weapons on his website <https://thisgaminglife.uk/>.

## Call to Action

Armed with that knowledge, I swiftly set sent the following messages to the four players who would join me for a playtest of this mashup of *Bolt Action* inspired units ported into the *Warlords of Erehwon* engine.

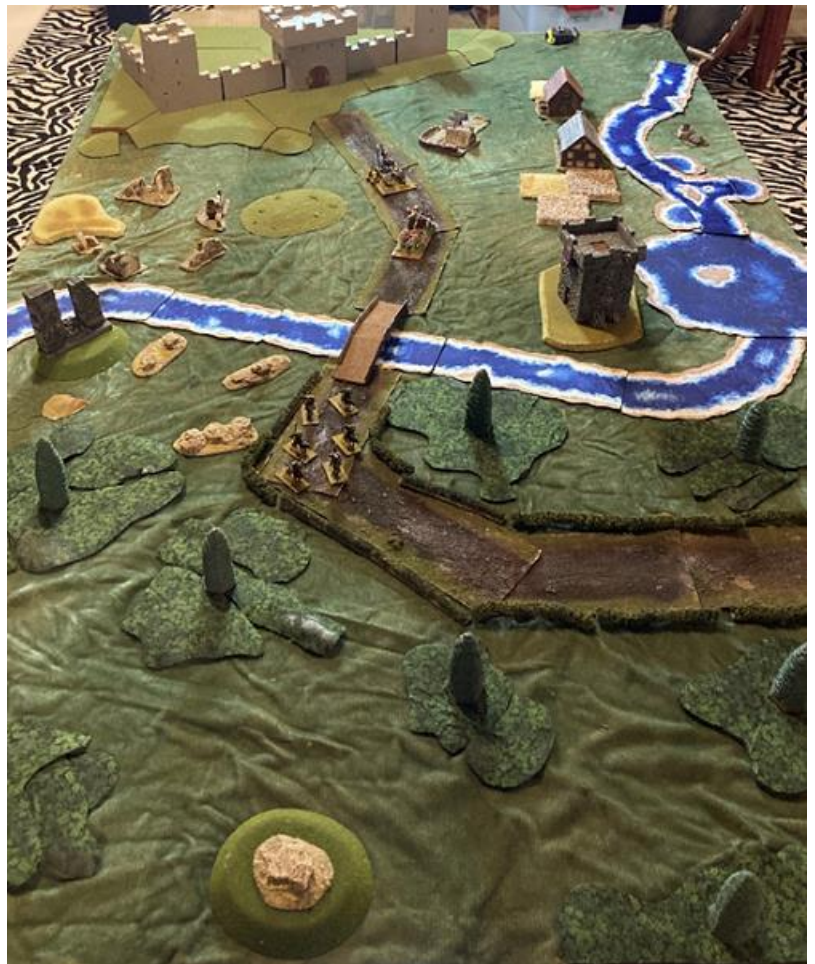
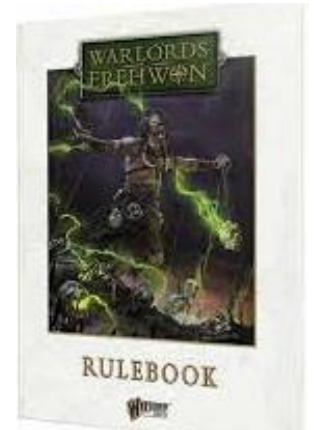
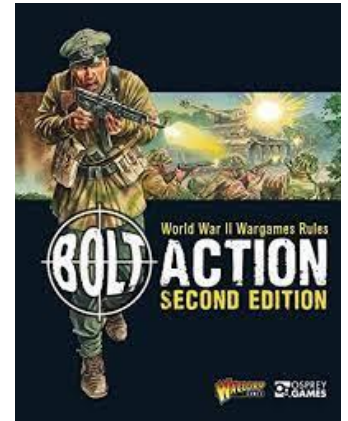
*The Necromancer sends out the garrison.*

## Spring 1944: Somewhere in Northern France

*Lieutenant:*

*There has been unusual resistance activity in this area from Fritz, and in the last few days a routine scouting patrol were wiped out in a battle with these unknown forces. Only a single old man was found at the scene of the conflict, although none of our men in the company have been able to communicate with him outside of rudimentary and basic phrases.*

*Our translators learned that a group of guerrillas are operating behind the lines and have made their camp in a remote area of Flanders to your north that is accessible by the means of a rough cart*





track. You must proceed to this area, surround the camp, and defeat these Germans, capturing their leadership if possible. The suspected camp site is undoubtedly well-camouflaged and benefits from a natural fog from the bogs, for aerial recon has found only very occasional signs of movement there

Take your platoon, along with a few armored elements to deal with this threat. A squad of engineers from division command will accompany you in order to close off access to Fritz's hidey-hole once the fighting's done. A sketch from our aerial recon follows – your force should approach from the south-east track, and the main guerilla camp lies on and around the hills across the stream. The gray shading represents the foggy bog that we are certain their advance pickets will be hiding among.

## 582 CY (Common Year): Northern Furyondy Along the Border of the Veng River

*Necromancer:*

Your able lieutenant Grack-Strongclaw and the shaman Halvstik have failed to return from an exploration of an area of unusual nature – just west of your castle a thick fog has sprung up and has been obscuring vision for the last three days. It cannot be dispelled or dispersed. It is possible that the Paladin Rehnquist is behind this development, and is using the mist to obscure gathering troops. The bulk of your orc and goblin army are raiding Rehnquist's holdings to the south across the river Veng in Furyondy, so you will have to make do with your garrison force of 100 greenskins and your own undead guard. An orc detailed to patrol the edge of the fog area has just reported that unusual sounds have been issuing from the area – he described them as “low growls, the clanking of chains, and a deep humming.”

Considering the state your forces are in, it is up to you and your two remaining orc and goblin commanders what the best course to follow is. You can send forces to ambush the enemy within the woods before they reach your stronghold, camouflage units along the stream, or hole up in the castle to prepare to withstand a siege. However, if the attackers are strong and not molested until they reach the castle walls, your forces may not be able to prevent an escalade, and you cannot lose your castle!

Your forces can also take advantage of the portal that you have set up in the crypt below the stone hedge across the stream – it will bring them into the castle instantaneously.

## Pregame Set Up

With these two missives presented to our four players, they headed off to separate corners to assemble their 1000 point forces. Of course, the map given to both players would have inaccuracies – obviously a magic fog had developed linking forested areas of Europe and Oerth, setting the stage for a conflict between elements of the 1st Infantry Division and the forces of the Veng River Necromancer.

### Forces: Necromancer

The forces of the Necromancer included the big baddy himself played by Riley, who had summoned two swarms of zombies, one group of skeleton archers, one of skeleton warriors, and his magical plate mail encased skeleton honor guard led by an undead champion. He'd also secured the services of a manticore.

His goblin chieftain and shaman sallied out of the fort as well under Dylan's command, accompanied by three units of goblin archers, five trolls, two chariots, and six outriders on wolves.

*A 'dragon' named Sherman leads the way with infantry support.*

### Forces: US Army

On the American side, Sean chose to play as the platoon's lieutenant, accompanied by two squads of 12 men, each supplied with two BARs and a SMG to supplement their M1s. Additionally, he had one .30 caliber



medium machine gun team on foot and another MG team using a pintle-mounted MG on a Jeep, which also held a bazooka in the back seat in case of emergencies.

They would be supplemented by Fred, playing as the armored support led by the platoon's staff sergeant. He commanded one squad of 12 infantrymen equipped as above, along with a 81mm mortar team, a M4 Sherman, and a M8 Greyhound Armored Car.

In numerical terms, the Americans were bringing 51 soldiers and three vehicles to the Necromancer's 104 figures and two chariots.

*Ambushed by goblin archers.*

### Turn 1: Noises in the Woods!

The American forces slowly advanced along the dirt road, encountering fog that limited line of sight to 12 inches. The Sherman tank led the column with a squad riding on top of the vehicle as it bumped along the track.

Suddenly, a clatter of arrows fell among the infantry, with Pvt. Jenkins catching one in the gut! The squad was paralyzed with surprise, failing their initiative check to react to the attack which seemed to come from what looked like Hitler-Jugend in the woods with weapons from their scout camp. Despite yells from the troops, the tank crew pivoted the Sherman to face the children and scattered them with machine gun fire. The troops were then further unnerved by moans which came from the hedgerow on the other side of the road.

Attempting to react again to the arrival of enemy combatants, the squad was again startled to see living dead – Hitler's long suspected wiedergänger forces! Nazi zombies shambled out of the woods as the squad frantically called back down the road for support. Lt. Sean's forces advanced on, cutting down both groups of enemies with the support of the Greyhound.

*Top: Someone call for a shaman special?*

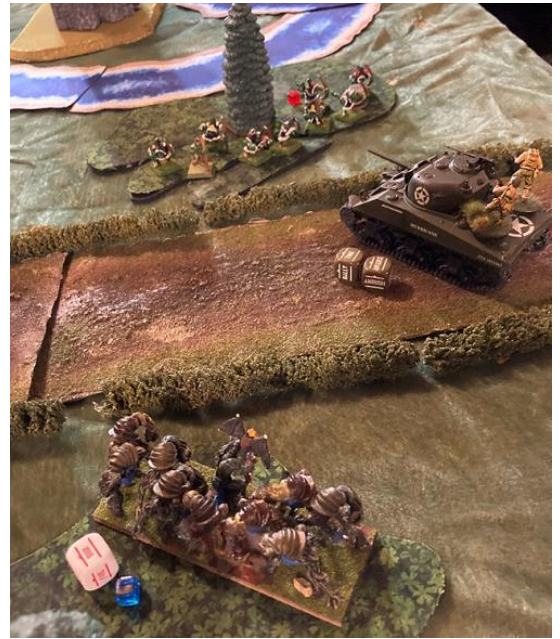
*Bottom: Someone call for a manticore?*

### Turn 2: Fiery Balls!

As Lt. Sean's squads advanced forwards, one soldier reported that he saw a tower across the river and rising through the fog. Meanwhile, a bright light approached from that direction – the goblin shaman hurled fireballs towards the platoon. Aided by magic, the shaman was able to see through the obscuring fog, which had lightened to allow for 20-inch vision through it. Thankfully for the American forces, the fireball only vaporized one of the two assistants with Lt. Sean – startling the GIs who were convinced artillery had ranged in on them.

Meanwhile, the armored elements moved forward and revealed more wiedergänger – skeletons armed from a medieval museum and more bow-armed Hitler-Jugend. Unphased by these threats, both vehicles opened up with their machine guns, although their efforts were hampered by the cover, fog, and bumpy road they travelled down.

Then more screams came from the Lt. Sean's team as the remaining assistant was plucked into the air by a monster from fairy-tale itself – a manticore! The whole section turned to gun it down before it could take back into the air and succeeded in routing it from the table.



*Goblin archers (foreground) and skeleton warriors wait for the invaders.*

### **Turns 3 and 4: The Fog Lifts**

With the fog finally lifting, the American troops confronted the full truth: these German children were goblins – monsters of the forest itself. Likewise, the Necromancer’s troops discovered that these growling green monstrosities were not dragons – just golems or constructs of some sort and could be defeated. Summoning his forces to emerge from the forest, the Necromancer threw his personal guard and a swarm of zombies to overtake what he thought of as an Apparatus of Kwalish, but their magic weapons were of no use. The metal construct spat rocks of fire and decimated the horde of undead. Further, the trolls, in their dim-witted glory, took their entire turn to hop over the hedgerow and were unable to attack the star-embazoned monstrosity. Enraged, the Necromancer summoned a swarm of insects inside of the tank, causing it to reverse down the road.

*Swarm the tank!*

Then fortune favored the goblin shaman, who hurled a ball of fire directly into the open top of the Greyhound, setting the vehicle ablaze and killing two of the three crewmen, the last barely managing to escape in time to join the Platoon Sgt.’s fire team.

This did nothing other than draw the attention of the Americans to the shaman’s tower, and a high explosive round from the Sherman’s turret killed all of the minions atop the tower and left the goblin fleeing from the roof – singed, but not beaten.

The Americans continued to move up, taking cover behind the Sherman and wrecked Greyhound to lay down a field of fire on the approaching horde of monsters. In the woods nearby, the Duke brothers and their MMG armed Jeep bumped and skipped off road to take up a position from which they could outflank the trolls.

*The little ‘dragon’ goes up in flames, but the big dragon proved harder to kill.*

### **Turn 5: Blazing Chariots**

Seizing the initiative, the forces of the Necromancer charged back down the road with the undead guard leading the way. Their enchanted halberds were unable to breach the Sherman’s armor, but they were starting to weaken the hull for future attacks. However, due to unfortunate placement, no other units could charge the tank. Return fire from the Sherman took care of the undead guard threat, smashing bones apart with machine gun fire.

The guards’ obliteration opened the way for Dylan’s goblin chariot to smash into the tank’s front armor. To no one’s surprise, the tank took no damage from the charge, but incredibly a wolf somehow got its muzzle into a viewport and nearly bit a crew member, causing a pin marker on the tank.



GIs and the Duke brothers in their Jeep poured fire and grenades into the chariot and their skeletal support, killing all but three skeletons.

*The bold, if futile, chariot charge against the Sherman tank.*

To the south, the second wolf chariot failed to clear the river, getting stuck for a turn while the goblin guard and warlord charged the troops there. A bloody firefight and melee would leave only the warlord alive and half of a squad of GIs cut down. The chariot finally made it over the river and killed the foot MG team, but found itself routed off the table by American fire.

### Turn 6: Americans Withdraw

Finally the troop of trolls advance – despite one of their number being caught and exploded from a bazooka round they move as a whole toward the Sherman and hork up vomit.

Yep.

This “Chunder” always causes a hit on a roll of 5, and immediately melted through the Sherman’s front armor, killing the crew, and driving the American players’ morale to the breaking point. Sure, they could continue to fire on the Necromancers forces and probably win the day, but at the cost of how many more men now that the armored support was gone? After all, there were still four trolls and they had plenty more Chunder left.

With the American withdrawal, the Necromancer’s forces were left in control of the field and successfully defended his realm from the invaders.

*One goblin with a flag stares down US soldiers.*

### Post-Game Thoughts

We called the game at this point. Assessing the casualties, we learned that Dylan and Riley had both lost half their force in points, as had Fred. Sean fared better with only 25% casualties. Overall, the consensus was that we probably should have allowed more room for maneuvering before the goblins could ambush the column and added a second road that American forces could have entered the table from, but that the forces were largely equal in ability – with the Americans excelling in ranged combat and the Necromancers forces doing their best in close through overwhelming numbers. We’ll definitely be trying this scenario again, perhaps with the Americans being aided by the forces of a local paladin, and the Necromancer being aided by Axis reinforcements.



*Here’s one way of merging WWII and fantasy tabletop miniatures. Sounds interesting. --RL*

# Pole-Vaulting Into Turkey: *FoG Renaissance*

by Russ Lockwood

For a brief moment, I thought I saw Hussites on the tabletop field of battle. I saw a wagon laager, but the troops inside had a Renaissance, not medieval, air to them. As it turns out, GM Jay had set up a *Fields of Glory (FoG) Renaissance* battle between Turks and Poles, and the Poles apparently also used wagon laagers.

*The Polish laager. Note the cannons in the bottom left corner. Photo by Mike.*

Unlike the usual random roll for sides, Jay actually pre-picked the players per side, putting me, Marc, Sam, and Rich on the Polish side and Phil, Dave, and Mike on the Turkish side.

I'm not quite sure what would happen in the center, for Marc (Poles) in his wagon laager faced off against Dave (Turks) in his entrenchments. It looked like a siege there. We'd see.

As I took some pre-game photos and Jay described troop types, he realized he needed to alter the position of some of my cavalry units. So much for my photos.

As he rearranged the units, I held out my phone as if to take a picture and then poised my pointer finger above the phone. Just as Jay finished moving the last base, I fake-tapped my phone multiple times and declared to the group, "Delete! Delete! Delete! Delete!" That drew a chuckle.

*Pre-game photo that wasn't deleted. Clockwise from left: Rich, Phil, Marc, Dave, GM Jay (explaining how far his personal zone of control extends), and Mike (wondering how his four Turkish units are going to fare against Polish winged hussars).*



## Opposing Sides

I had a pure cavalry force with a unit of light horse, two of winged hussars, two of German mercenary reiters, and three of regular cavalry. Some of my cavalry had bow, others carbines, and some no ranged weapons at all. Marc had three foot units behind the wagons and an artillery battery, with more foot units coming onto the board on Turn 2. Sam had a foot unit and the rest of cavalry. Rich had a pure cavalry force, but four of the units were fragile Cossacks. Sam had mostly a cavalry force, but with a unit of foot musketeers backed by a unit of Polish winged hussars that

looked great, but were winged hussars lite -- i.e. a "mob" in Jay terms dressed up to look like winged hussars. It was a nifty deception.

*You could tell these were the 'fake' winged hussars because they didn't have wings. Maybe they needed Red Bull.*

In the center, Dave had two batteries and musket-armed troops behind fortifications. To his left, opposite me, Mike had four units of carbine-armed cavalry that could shoot from horseback. To his right, opposite Rich and Sam, Phil had a cavalry force as well.

The Poles had a slight edge overall. In my Polish right flank case, I had eight cavalry units supported by Marc's artillery battery versus Mike's four cavalry units supported by one of Dave's artillery batteries and a unit of elite Janissaries.

For my part, it was not so much unit numbers but unit frontages. Once I spread the winged hussars into a single line, my frontage became cramped. Mike's four units could cover it without a problem.

*Real Polish hussars. Very nicely painted!*

### **Advance!**

My cavalry advance, with the light horse leading, brought the first surprise: Mike turned his back and ran. His four units split in two: two roughly heading behind Dave's fortifications and two hanging onto the table edge.

It was at that moment that I recalled Jay had mentioned that the flanks beyond the table edge were open. Was Mike setting me up for a devastating flank charge?

I had the units, so I kept a couple back just in case. If there was indeed some sort of Mike flank attack, I wanted reserves to outflank the enemy flankers, if you know what I mean.

*My Polish cavalry force advances against Mike's four Turkish units. Dave's Janissaries (red) pop out from behind his fieldworks. The artillery battery stays inside. My light horse get close to Mike's retreating cavalry in upper right corner. End of Turn 1.*



On the Polish left flank, Rich and Sam also headed towards the Turks, but as best I can recall, for the other side of the table was far away when you have your own tactical conundrums to contend with, Phil came out with a more aggressive posture against Rich's Cossacks. In the center, Dave and Marc took artillery potshots.

*The Turks await their fate. L to r: Phil, Dave, GM Jay (explaining how huge his dice are), and Mike (still recalculating like a GPS).*



## Winged Hussars Question

At about this time, Rich asked Jay a question about the melee capabilities of the Polish winged hussars in two ranks.

Jay replied, "The front rank fights better than the rear rank."

Perplexed, Rich asked, "So rear rank only counts as half?"

"No, only the front rank counts. The rear rank doesn't count at all."

Chuckles all around. Sure, Jay is trying to balance perfect information versus fog of war, but yep, front rank certainly fights better when the rear rank watches in impotence.

To be fair, that is rather important information, for I had two units of winged hussars. I immediately maneuvered the rear ranks to be part of a front line.

For the record, the winged hussars were "Determined" troops that were great in the Impact Phase (Charge Phase) of the turn -- an "advantage" in *FoG* lingo. You definitely want all of them fighting if possible during that phase.

*Mike begins to create his 'Crocodile Jaw' defense.*



## Follow Up

Mike quickly ran out of space to retreat and my light horse unit was in hot pursuit. I almost hit one of his cavalry units in the rear. Almost. I turned to Mike, crooked my pointer finger just above my thumb and said, "So close. Oooh, so close. So, so close." My light horse was 5mm short!

*In the upper right corner, my light horse almost catch his cavalry in the rear. So close! End of Turn 2.*

Obviously, Mike's cybernetic eye knew exactly how far he needed to move to avoid getting slammed in the south end of a north-bound unit. So close!

Next phase, Mike turned around and we traded shots, only his firestick with balls beats my twangy wood with arrows.

In *FoG*, evading light cavalry cannot interpenetrate other units without severe repercussions, so I maneuvered a "hole" for their evade move. Sure enough, Mike charged, I evaded, and he swept into the armored reiter unit with their light lances. I had an advantage and dealt out more damage than I received. Mike failed his morale test, but didn't lose a base from the "death die."



## Death Die Mechanic

There are a number of mechanics I don't like about FoG -- rolling for "Complex" movement being at the top of the list. But the Death Die mechanic within the confines of the system is brilliant.

*My light horse get tagged by gunfire. Twice. And fail morale twice. Hence the yellow tag that shows how imprudent it was to follow the Turkish cavalry too closely. But I was this close to catching 'em. I make a hole for their upcoming evasion. End of Turn 3.*

When you tally the number of hits, the opponent rolls a "death die" (d6). If the roll is equal to or less than the number of hits, the opponent loses a base. If you put one hit on a unit, only a roll of 1 removes a stand. If you nail it for three hits, a roll of 1-3 removes a base. If, as Marc and I did later in the game, we put seven hits on a unit, one base is automatically removed and a roll of 1 removes a second base.

## In the Center

Marc tried valiantly, but his reinforcing foot had to traverse about five feet of table space at a glorious 3 inches per turn. Nothin' doing there. Dave wasn't about to abandon his fortifications.

I didn't lose a base from Dave's cannon, but Rich and Sam did. In fact, it seemed like some sort of Turkish artillery sharpshooter was crunching Polish units with regularity. I seem to recall bad Polish rolls.

## On the Left

The Turks sprung the flank ambush, roaring from off table despite what looked like a line of cliffs and forests at the edge. A baffled Rich complained about being blind-sided, but I recall Jay explained that a flank attack could take place. We Poles didn't have a flank attack, and quite frankly, if one was to occur, I expected it on my side because it was open.

It must have been successful. The abundance of Rich's Polish and Cossack cavalry evaporated by the time we called the game.

*Turkish ambush spring from rocks is no Turkish delight for the Poles. The winged hussars get into action while a pair of purple Cossack units try to fight their way out of the ambush. End of Turn 4.*





## Impact Impact

While the brouhaha roiled the left flank, I continued my advance. Mike had tried to be clever and form an L-shaped ambush, but I was having none of that.

*Reiters (right) and Winged Hussars (left) slam into Mike's cavalry and rout it (red tag). One fang yanked from the crocodile jaw. End of Turn 4.*

Instead, I fronted two units against Dave's Janissary foot unit. True, it was in somewhat crappy ground, but I was hoping my hotsy totsy winged hussars would make donner kabob out of them.

Marc had already picked off one Janissary base, but despite many hits, Dave rolled well for his Death Die. I was waiting for the second base to fall, which would have negative modifiers in Impact and Melee phases.

*Another view of the same event. Note the jaws on the left and right. Photo by Mike.*

Alas, Dave's fire was generally accurate enough to force me to roll morale and a Death Die. My reiters lost a base and morale level, which upset my charge plan. By the time I recovered, I lost a second base.

When an average unit like the reiters lost 50% of their bases, the unit vaporizes.

In hard fighting, I had just vaporized one of Mike's cavalry units when his second unit hit me. Here I did not have the advantage and lost the Impact, dropping a morale level but passing the Death Die. In fact, the subsequent combat found me losing again, but passing both morale and Death Die rolls.

## End Game

We had played 5.5 turns in three hours. Mike had stabilized his end of things. I would have liked to charge the winged hussars into the depleted Janissaries, but we didn't get to the Polish end of the turn.

I'm not sure of the final score, but as the Poles had the burden of attack and the Turkish line looked pretty solid, based on losses, Jay declared it a Turkish victory.

Thanks for GMing Jay. And thanks for hosting, Dave. As Dave noted, this was his 37th year of hosting. This game marked my 35th year of attending. May we get another 37...





*Smiles all around at the end of the game. L to r: Sam, Rich, Phil, Dave, and Jay (telling a 'pull my finger' joke).*

## **Scenario Design Notes: And Recap**

*by Jay*

The game's premise was to have two equal pointed armies fight a battle to conclusion predicated on historic doctrinal deployments (thus the lack of redeployment by either side). In order to provide some "spice" to the battle the flank march was included; had the Turks rolled poorly and the flankers not arrived, they might easily have been overwhelmed. To compensate for this risk, the arrival of such a force had to have a substantial impact upon the game.

Meanwhile, utilization of Fake Hussars can be quite influential as they not only in this case provided rear support to the foot Cossacks for a mere eight points, but served as a considerable threat to any Turkish infantry advancing beyond the works.

We played 25mm *FoG* with book standard 40mm UD's. Given the depth of the table and the desire to "finish" the game, I felt it the appropriate scale.

The strength of the Poles is as an attacking impact army whereas the Turks rely upon firepower and counter-attack capabilities. Given historic proportions and unit capabilities, I felt it necessary to provide the Turks with certain terrain advantages. I hoped to mitigate this to some degree with a great Polish commander and a consequential initiative advantage. A Polish first move might well have deprived the Turk position of considerable depth.

Prior to the start of the game, I pointed out that the Turks traditionally had considerable light horse which is why the Poles fortified their camps. Close examination of the battlefield would have revealed but one Turkish light cavalry unit. I also noted that the winged hussars were "Determined" horse units (my mistake was not to remind everyone that only the front rank counted in combat).

### **Polish Left Flank**

The Poles on the left flank both initially and throughout the game had a superiority in the number and combat value. Several things went wrong on that flank.

The Hussars did not deploy in line so as to allow the Cossacks to adequately protect the flank.

The table edge appeared obstructed by terrain which seems to have provided a false sense of security to Rich. While this was done for purely aesthetic purposes, it did lead to some confusion.

While a warning was clearly given during the prior turn, little use was made of this information -- possibly because so many units were in two ranks on the battle line (due to the Hussar deployment issue) and the consequent lack of uncommitted reserves let alone unfamiliarity with the ability of flank marchers to move/charge from off board. Had the Turks merely appeared on the board edge, they might have simply been run off due to a lack of a rear evade zone.

While I did not pay quite as much attention to the Polish right flank (Mike and Russ), it seemed that Russ kept some units in reserve and Mike played a great holding action. Next turn looked potentially nasty.

Given the Great Polish Commander's command radius, he need not have been deployed on the left since no double march was attempted and he is far too valuable to be committed to melees.

Cossack infantry should not have been trading shots with superior Janissaries and artillery. They may have moved off to their left to support the Hussars while being effectively protected by the latter.

## **Polish Reserve Infantry**

At the games start the Poles were informed of the arrival of several pike units on the next turn. With this information I assumed the infantry would be so aligned as to utilize forced march capabilities when coupled with the great commander. I had initially thought to leave one of the Polish commanders off board so as to have them force march onto the field. Second thoughts led me to leave two commanders on the right flank so as to speed up the Polish onslaught. Marc was correct in noting given the size of the armies yet another commander on each side might have been called for.

## **Thoughts Going Forward**

At this scale at least one more commander per side.

Possibly make the battlefield a foot or two wider.

Clearly defined edge of table.

Review unit capabilities unless commanders had played recently.

## **Summary**

The game played out somewhat as anticipated i.e. Had the flank march not arrived in a timely manner the Turks were probably in big trouble. The entire swirling nature of the cavalry actions appeared much as hoped for.

Thanks guys and I hoped you all enjoyed it.

## **The Polish Left Flank Commander Speaks**

*by Rich*

I agree a major Polish mistake was not to realize that the Turks should have more Light Horse somewhere.

As for the winged hussars, I did not redeploy into single lines because most of my horse was initially deployed in double line (except one LH unit I believe). I did not realize the increased efficiency of single line and did not want to slow the attack to redeploy.

Speaking for myself (not Sam who had the troops), I felt that it was better overall for the infantry to absorb the artillery and possible Janissary fire and not the winged hussar units. Since the Infantry started in the 1st line it would either get in the way of the Hussar attack and/or get slaughtered by the Turkish battle cavalry if it moved further to the Polish left.

The reason the Great Polish Commander came to the Polish left was because there was no other "Polish" commander there -- just the Cossack commander who could not be used with the Polish units. The GPC started inside the wagon laager and those troops were going nowhere.

Also, I assumed (bad assumption) that there would be a commander marching in with the reserve infantry so they can do double moves.

All in all it was a fun game even though this Polish commander made some bad decisions on how to fight the Turks. I hope that I can learn from these mistakes and fight another day to make "different" mistakes.

Thanks again for the game.

## The Turkish Left Flank Commander Speaks

by Mike

A big thank you to Jay for his game. I am busy painting Ottomans and in a few years' time I will have as many as Jay put on the table. Perhaps. I also have a full Polish army which I want to see on the tabletop again.

Anyway, Jay presented a colorful army with a wide variety of troops.

I only had four units of cavalry. Opposite me, General R. Locowodski was bringing on too many Polish units to count, so I decided to perform a tactical withdrawal. I confess I really didn't know if I had time and space to perform that convoluted maneuver in the face of the enemy and commentaries flowing in from the Turkish commander on the far right of the Ottoman army suggested I didn't.

And there were moments when I knew he was right. My "crocodile jaw" formation (two units in the lower right in the attached - and, yes, I did manage to about-turn both) had the General Locowodski in awe and his units looking elsewhere for joy. Good fun.

*I suspected Mike pulled back because of some reinforcement, but then saw Phil's charge and felt safer. --RL*

I reminded myself time and again to consider table distances and turns as I was figuring out if I really could do what I was trying to do without Russ catching and clobbering me.

I thought the flank march was a nice feature forcing us Turks to choose between "risky" and "not so risky" use of resources. We went for the former. I don't know, of course, what the Polish players were told or not in your pre-game briefing of them, but I am not sure they had much time to think through the implications of what you told us when we were all present, and then what to do about it.

*I agree that charging on board is a special case. Ambushes were a concern. But it also assumes that an army (in this case Poles) didn't have flanking cavalry to do scouting and give warning. Maybe this special ambush case from off table needs some sort of defensive reaction -- automatic facing turn for light cavalry or complex die roll for non-light cavalry to turn to face? -- RL*

My most recent attempt as a Game Master forced me to recognize that many of my clearly expressed (or so I thought) intentions, guidance, and instructions were not entirely picked-up and/or remembered by the players. I do have a track record of not being able to curtail myself, so I no doubt overdid the data-dump.

I enjoyed the game, had a good time, and was happy to see the gang. I thought your armies with all their equipment looked good. A big thanks to Dave for hosting, especially for 37 years! It is an achievement par excellence.

## The Turkish Right Flank Commander Speaks

by Phil

The game was beautiful. I don't think I should be allowed to charge onto the board even when giving warning. It still took Dave's sharpshooting artillery knocking out some of the best enemy units to make us feel secure. I'm looking forward to the next encounter.

## The Turkish Center Commander Speaks

by Dave

This was a good game with a lot of thought and preparation.

*Pregame photo finds Dave (left) pondering a position while Russ gets some close-up photos. Photo by Mike.*



## NEWS

### Bill's Wargame World: YouTube Channel

by Russ Lockwood



AAR reader Bill Molyneux e-mailed me to check out his YouTube Channel: *Bill's Wargame World*. He has "2.11K subscribers and 635 videos" sez the site.

As he noted, "I make a video of the shop (Gettysburg Miniature Toy Soldiers) once a month. My videos are not fancy and the money I make I donate to a small museum each month."

I also poked around his other videos, which cover other topics for wargamers. The link is:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnpXc0O2Tna0Qxoo3fab04w>

### New Wargame: Battle for Corregidor 1945

From the HFD PR announcement:

*Whatever the Cost: The Battle for Corregidor, February, 1945* is an introductory level mini-game on the final US airborne offensive in the Pacific Theater against the Japanese held island fortress of Corregidor. The Japanese took the US fortress in May 1942, completing their conquest of the Philippine Archipelago. The recapture of Corregidor was seen as both necessary to complete the liberation of the Philippines, and for MacArthur, personal redemption for the earlier US defeat and surrender.

Each copy contains: One 8.5 by 11 inch map with game tracks, unit and terrain ID; 35 double-sided, un-mounted units, and three pages of rules. Designed by Paul Rohrbaugh. \$15.95. More info:

<https://www.hfdgames.com/WTC.html>

Players will also need a standard deck of playing cards, with one Joker card, and a six-sided die to play the game. A custom card set is also available

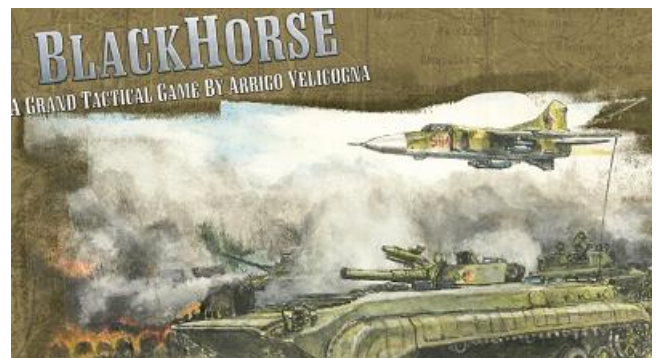
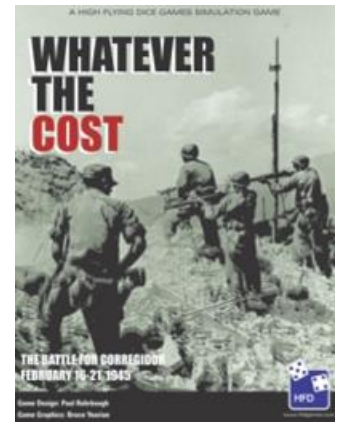


that replaces the standard deck of playing cards called for in the rules, has rules reminders on pertinent cards, and features graphics by Bruce Yearian. Card set cost: \$10.00.

### New Wargame: *Blackhorse* 1989

From the TBG PR announcement:

*Blackhorse* is a two-player, grand tactical game of mechanized command in the summer of 1989. Units are companies and platoons. Hexes are 1000 meters across. Turns are three hours each, using a system emphasizing friction and the importance of command and control. *Blackhorse* puts the player in the shoes of the



commanding generals of the Soviet 79th Guards Tank Division and an array of U.S. units drawn from the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment and the 3rd Armored Division. \$55.00

This game includes:

- \* Colorful 17x22-inch map depicting the Fulda Gap area.
- \* Two counter sheets.
- \* Four Player Aid Cards.
- \* One d10.
- \* Box.
- \* Takes about 114 minutes to play a scenario.

More info: <https://tinybattlepublishing.com/products/blackhorse>



## 3D Printed WWII Specialty Troops: German Motorcycle

by Russ Lockwood

Chris Parker Games continues to add to its WWII line-up. I picked the German motorcycle and sidecar to highlight. The 28mm and 40mm sets contain three bikes and six crew (54mm are a two bikes and four crew), supplied unpainted. The 28mm set is \$25 while the 40mm and 54mm sets are \$35.00. Note that if you order two or three sets, you get a 10% discount, and if you order four or more sets, you get a 15% discount.

He's also released a number of other German specialty sets plus a variety of Japanese and Polish sets.

More info: [chrisparkergames.com](http://chrisparkergames.com)



## Pressurised vs. Pressured: Mystery Solved

In my book review of *The Battle of Castillon 1453: Retinue to Regiment No. 21*, I wrote the following: *One typo (p39): "where artillery fire pressurised" is likely "pressured."*

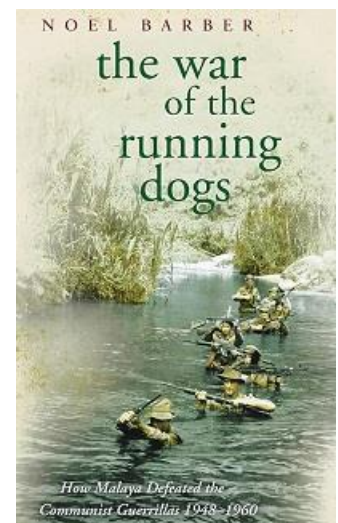
One of the AAR's readers, Jack, wrote back that "pressurised" is indeed a British term, usually encountered with books on India.

Thanks. Learn something new every day.

## Malayan Book Suggestion: War Of Running Dogs

My book review (see the 9/28/2023 AAR or up on hmgs.org) of Mark Forsdike's *Images of War* volume *The Malayan Emergency* generated an e-mail from Mike that noted: "I am reading *The War of The Running Dogs* by Noel Barber, which is excellent, and the success of the British campaign rested on High Commissioner Sir Henry Gurney's decision "that on no account must the armed forces have control over the conduct of the wear."

Forsdike's book is an excellent companion book with way better maps than Barber's and hundreds of photos, of which Barber's book has none. I actually find *Malayan Emergency* smack full of all sorts of details on how the military went about doing its business -- or at least the 1st Suffolk. How patrols were organized, order of march, preferred arms (Oven) and least preferred arms (Sten), fire patterns, vehicles, etc. etc. The sort of military minutia that Noel Barber's *The War of the Running Dogs* doesn't even get close to. *Malayan Emergency* also has way better maps, and then there are all the images, of which Barber's has none. Between the two, the topic is well covered.



# On My Mind: AI and Book Reviews

by Russ Lockwood

Artificial intelligence (AI) in publishing made the news again as *Sports Illustrated* magazine tried to deflect the outrage when readers and staff discovered that AI generated a number of stories, product reviews, photos, and authors for its website and monthly magazine.

Someone at the web site Futurism caught on that one of the "authors" of the *Sports Illustrated* product reviews -- Drew Ortiz -- had a photo from a website that sells AI-generated portraits.

When Futurism questioned *Sports Illustrated*, poof! All those AI-generated authors and stories disappeared from the website, according to a PBS news story. How about that.

*Sports Illustrated* insisted it fired a third-party company originally hired to create content and says it has launched an investigation. How about that.

It's not the first publisher to use AI, just the sneakiest so far. Gannett and CNET at least referenced use of AI. BuzzFeed listed 'Buzzy the Robot' as co-author on articles. I already read that a science fiction magazine stopped accepting entries due to a deluge of AI-created stories.

## Problems With AI

As noted on a recent *60 Minutes* segment, AI can be good at gathering information, composing sentences that make sense, and generating footnotes. Alas, AI has yet to distinguish fact from fiction, generating summaries that use inaccurate information along with accurate information. Worse, the test showed the AI made up fake sources that looked real until someone at *60 Minutes* actually checked 'em.

I'm sure it will get better, but in the meantime, a quick internet search finds a number of "AI tools" that create writing, including book reviews.

Now, there's already a lot of 'fake' book reviews. I suppose we should call these 'overly enthusiastic reviews that are too generic to be real.' My guess is that AI will make this problem worse as it mashes together reviews from blogs, Amazon, Good Reads, and other spots on the internet. Just as AI cannot tell fact from fiction, my guess is that the deluge of fake reviews will proliferate even more.

## What To Do?

The short answer is to find and stick with a trusted reviewer. The problem is that such a reviewer can only review so many books per month.

According to the counter on my *Historical Book Reviews* blog on HMGS.org, through the end of November 2023 I have posted 1,275 military history book reviews. I started in spring 2019, so that's almost five years, or over 250 reviews per year. That doesn't count the sci-fi books that are in the AAR but not up on HMGS.org.

And yes, I read every book -- unless the review says I skipped around or abandoned the book. Most books are competently done, but not every book is great. I explain why I "enjoyed" a book or why not. I list typos that I find and count the types of images. It's my schtick, I guess. I figure I like to know these things and you would, too.

I read about two to three hours a day on average. I find it far more interesting than most TV. I suppose if I had been painting instead of reading, I'd have a heckuva set of armies...



## And What About Books?

Which brings me to AI-written books. My guess is that electronic books on Kindle et al will be more affected than the paper copies that arrive at my house. I suppose it's inevitable that an AI book will be among them, which gets me to thinking how I would be able to tell it's a fake or not.

I mean, I read for information. I know some periods better than others, and some not at all. I wonder if I will be able to pick up on a fake commander's name or a fake unit in an OOB in a period obscure to me.

I suspect the trust issue will extend to publishers. They are the ones forking over the budget to produce paper copies, so they are the ones that need to vet authors' works.

## Publisher Roulette

A recent article in *The New Yorker* examined the premise behind Dan Sinykin's book *Big Fiction: How Conglomeration Changed the Publishing Industry and American Literature*.

Now, this refers to fiction books, noting that a corporate ethos -- dubbed "the Conglomerate era" -- dominates the modern publishing world. As mergers consolidated the once independent publishing houses, cost-cutting overrode the idea of editors nurturing new writers. As editors were let go, the books selected for publishing were more same-ol' same ol' instead of new ideas and approaches.

From the article:

*Today's publishing house is closer to a hedge fund than a tastemaker. Every book that it acquires is a bet on profitability. The financialization of the acquisition process functions like an index of risk, creating a "system in which homogeneity . . . is encouraged" to minimize bad bets. This system affects all houses, no matter their size. Every season, Big Five publishers are incentivized to pursue best-sellers, authors whose works can scale into a franchise or a movie.*

If an author's first book doesn't sell well, bye-bye. It's an investment write-off. Don't call us, we'll call you. More from the article:

*As a parade of industry executives testified in the course of the Penguin Random House antitrust trial last year, a certain amount of randomness defines everything about literary success. No one ultimately knows which books will make money, let alone make it onto the classics shelf.*

Maybe AI already replaced publishing executives, crunching past numbers to forecast future sales. Or maybe it's just going to be same ol' same ol' because it may sell x number of copies, driven by AI-generated book reviews.

## The Final Battle?

Maybe it comes down to an AI vs AI battle, with AI programs designed to detect fake books, and presumably even fake reviews of fake books. How you'd find out the results of such an AI vs AI battle might be a challenge.

It's a pity that technological advancements create detriments as well as benefits. E-mail is great for communications, but also begets spam. Social media is great at sharing information, but also begets trolls and worse. Twitter/X is great for fast blasts of info and news, but generates some of the most repugnant commentary imaginable. AI can be great at sifting through mountains of info, but not if it doesn't know fact from fiction.

As for me, whether you agree or disagree with any particular book review of mine, know that each one was written by a real human. That's the only way I'll write them.



## Sources:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/sports-illustrated-found-publishing-ai-generated-stories-photos-and-authors>  
<https://www.newyorker.com/books/under-review/how-has-big-publishing-changed-american-fiction>



# Battalion Base Bulge: Playtest One

by Russ Lockwood

Lee brought his rules in progress for another playtest. It's gone through a variety of changes as he's changed this and that. But that's the nature of playtests.

What has stayed the same is the battalion per base scale with one-hour turns. The idea is to use 15mm *Flames of War* bases and models as is -- they have not been exercised enough over the years -- while creating large-scale games.

*Dennis (left) and Allen consider the US options.*

As you may have read in past AARs, my own *Snappy* WWII version has gone through a considerable number of iterations. I also call it Rules In Progress, but abbreviate it as RIP -- because they're sometimes dead on arrival. Well, not quite dead. They usually can go for a walk.

Anyway, WWII has a lot of moving parts to incorporate. I tweak and alter to fit my ideas, all pointing to roughly historical time and space sequences.

As Lee constantly asked, "What if we do this?" and "What if we do that?" and my answer is: "Design the game you enjoy playing. It may or may not be what other gamers like, but your rules should reflect your idea of WWII."

My two cents at design philosophy.

*Dennis' division in 15mm.*

## Bulge Anew

We played with two main factors: An "Attack" factor and a "Defense" factor. Tigers were at the top end with 6 and 6. I think Shermans were 4 and 4. It's a good way to boil down differences in unit characteristics: average armor and gun, big gun but thin armor, etc.

Ranged combat was straightforward enough:  $d6 + \text{Attack factor}$  compared to  $d6 + \text{Defense factor}$ . If the attacker total is greater than the defender total, the defender gets one hit. Then the defender simultaneously fires back. So, it is possible that each side can inflict a hit on the other. When hits drive the defense factor down to 0, the unit is removed. There is a lot more to it that involves morale, ambush shots, and other attributes, but that's the basic combat scheme.

Dennis and Allen each ran a full US division while I ran three understrength German "divisions." There were only one or two artillery pieces per side. We just wanted to keep the combat system simple to try ranged combat and close assault combat.

Not much terrain -- just clear, town, and impassable. The three towns were the victory objectives.

We did include aircraft -- the US rolled for up to 5 planes while the Germans had one and rolled for a second. I got the second only once. The US had from one to five each turn. Seems fitting for a first outing.



## German Vorwärts

My left flank division went after one town. My center division went after the middle town. My right flank division went after the right town. It was a broad front advance on both sides. The Allies managed to grab the initiative more often than not and move first -- grabbing the flank towns while I grabbed the middle town.

*My three German divisions.*

I steered my infantry-heavy panzer division to the right to wrest the town from Allen, kept the center fairly intact to ward off advancing Allied troops, and screened the left flank town with the understrength, but Tiger-equipped division. I also put the AA gun there as well -- that kept Allied Jabos off the division to the chagrin of the other divisions.

As per good playtesting, some mechanics were perplexing to me. The artillery and air attacks used a separate table based on terrain, which in this case was mostly moving in the open for a 3+ (on a d6) to get a hit. Yet, another mechanic said that armored targets needed a 6 to get a hit. So, armored moving in the open was not a 3+, but a 6. In woods terrain hits were on a 5+, but again, armor moving in woods terrain was a 6 to get hit. We had a discussion about separating terrain from movement, with an idea that terrain was a fixed To-Hit number and moving gave a +1 die modifier, or dropping the move aspect entirely from the chart and to go to a fixed To-Hit number. Lee will have to noodle that one out a bit more.

*Allen moves out on Turn 1.*

## Ranged Combat

The system made you keep track of the Attack and Defense factors. Each hit dropped the factors by one. Since Lee opposes rosters, he tracked each unit with one black die (Attack) and one white die (Defense). Since these little dice can get bumped and rolled, he used the lids of bead containers to hold the dice flat -- which meant each unit towed around a lid. Tanks and Trays...

Eh....efficient at factor tracking, but clumsy. And ugly. And clumsy.

We didn't come up with anything better for the moment and keep the dual factors, but Allen suggested making each unit just one number for Attack and Defense. We kept going as is.

Fire ranged to 6 inches. That part worked fine, with simple calculations and turning the dice to record hits. The hits dropped the fire factor, which affected the Attack vs Defense rolls.

Lee kept his "No sure thing" idea from previous versions where a roll of 6 in the Attack was an automatic hit and a roll of 6 in defense was an automatic save (no hit). So, it is possible that an almost-dead 1 factor attack by a M5 light tank can hit a full-strength King Tiger II, or, the M5 can try to save after being hit by a Tiger II.

That may seem odd, but remember that each base is a battalion, with other supporting "targets" besides the big tank. Also remember that the front of a base is not every tank lined up hub to hub, but more like a main line of resistance with elements of a battalion in advance or to the side of the hard edges of a base.



## Close Assault Combat

Close assault combat is essentially 1 inch ranged combat with different modifiers and double hits on the loser. Again, that part went smoothly enough except when we considered towns.

*The close assault on the right town. The red puffs mark the primary unit in each close assault.*

Lee had originally not allowed troops to occupy a town, but gain VPs if they touch a town. Novel idea, but what about the troops in and around Bastogne? Lee defined a town as blocking line of sight. What happens if both sides touch a town, but the town is more than 1 inch across and so they are technically not in close assault range? As other units within an inch can support, where does that 1 inch measure from?

Can it be the side of a town, even if it is more than an inch from the close assaulting unit or target?

We had to put on our noodle hats for this one, especially since I was attacking the town on my right. Some of this clashed with other mechanics as in "Does this apply?" or "How about that?"

I told you WWII has a lot of moving parts. But we played on with the rules as is to see how it all came out.

I took some significant damage attacking the town, as you might expect when it becomes essentially a 1 on 1 attack. I mean, you can only shove so many troops into a given space.



## The Last Push

Meanwhile, the Panthers on my right-center were doing better than the Shermans opposing me, but I have to say my dice ran as cold as December 1944 snow midway through the game. I ended up shifting some units from my left to the center to repel the Allies, but Tigers rolling 1s can't hit the broad side of a town, much less an American unit.

We stopped after a couple hours.

It was a successful playtest in that the main combat functions generally worked, even if questions were generated. It takes time to refine and Lee keeps working along.

## Battalion Base Bulge: Playtest Two

*by Russ Lockwood*

Lee made some changes to his rules, so Dennis and I set up another Bulge-style late-war game. Two US armored divisions (sans artillery and infantry) are trying to force a river crossing. Five bridges spanned the river, with a town on either side of the central bridge. The Germans have a reinforce division to oppose. Numbers wise, it was 10 Allied units against eight German units on a roughly six foot by four foot table. No artillery or air.

*Dennis considers where to place the German defenders.*

I sent two units over the far right bridge, two over the near right bridge, four (including my one and only infantry battalion) to occupy and try and force the center bridge, one to cover the near left bridge and two to cross the far right bridge. A few woods (+1 terrain



die modifier for the defense) spotted the far bank. The town had four blocks (+2 terrain die modifier for the defense) with two per side.

*My tanks cross the river on the far and near right bridges.*

### Cross and Double Cross

As the Germans were the defenders, PzLeader Dennis moved units into the woods where they could, except for a PzIV battalion and PzGren battalion that hunkered down in the town blocks, block bridge exits. He put his Tiger I battalion on my near left bridge. I tried to keep my Sherman out of its way, and moved the M10 in long-range support.

My idea was to bring lots of fire against the central town block and then cross -- because crossing one at a time seemed suicidal.

*I bring concentrated fire against the PzIV.*

Crossing a bridge without artillery or air support proved easy enough until the shooting started. My Shermans were a  $d6 + 4 + 1$  (supporting fire) versus the defending Panther battalion at  $d6 + 5 + 1$  (woods). Not too shabby, but I never hit the Germans. PzIV was  $d6 + 4 + 1$  (woods) vs Shermans at  $d6 + 4 + 1$  (support), or even up.

As for the PzIV in the town, that was  $d6 + 4 + 2$  (town) vs  $d6 + 4 + 3$  (supporting fires), so a slight advantage for the US. About half the time I put hits on that unit.

The Tiger at  $d6 + 6$  came over the bridge versus the Sherman at  $d6 + 4$ . White Dennis put a hit on the Sherman, I rolled a lucky 6 on the simultaneous return fire to put a hit on the Tiger.

### Close Assault

Dennis scanned the chart, saw one of my inner right Shermans in the open, and charged two PzGren units into close combat. This was a surprise to us: PzGren was  $d6 + 3 + 1$  (support) vs  $d6 + 1$  -- Sherman walloped for two hits. My simultaneous return assault fizzled for no hits.



## Calling It

We called it after four or so turns. The single factor proved less granular, but faster in resolution. The close combat factor makes the pzgrenadiers and US armored infantry with the same factors the tough units to beat. Lee might want to renoodle some of those.

Certainly the Germans on defense can fend off 2:1 attacks without too much of a problem and gradually lose when facing 4:1 odds in town terrain. Also, this assumes that the US doesn't field its usual artillery and air advantage. I don't know what happens on the Eastern Front where they faced 5:1+ odds. It's coming along since the early days. I hope Lee continues to refine and playtest.

*Tiger Terror! The Sherman battalion slugs it out with the Tiger battalion.*

## Philosophy

When you get to this level, you need a certain amount of generalization and that's where the difficulty lies. So many units, especially the Germans, were broken up and assigned to other units in company and smaller sizes. Where do you draw the line between incorporation and exception? How much do you increase or decrease factors based on those attachments? What's the level of acceptable damage? How many levels of damage? How do you account for wholesale slaughter on the Eastern Front vs less so on the Western Front? What's the pain threshold for gamer fiddliness for "accounting" and other markers?

I've played a number of these battalion-base games that offer varying degrees of success in answering those and other questions. My *Snappy* WWII version has been continuously "Refined in Places" (more RIP) for a dozen years. You can see the number of WWII books I read to get the best feel I can for operations. And I'm taking my own advice about creating a rules set I want to play. Progress, if slow...



*On the far left, a Sherman and Stuart bum rush a PzIV in the woods to their detriment.*





The main board of the game. Start in Bag End and head to Mordor. The 16-space "light and dark" track is at bottom.

## LOTR: Cooperation Counts

by Russ Lockwood

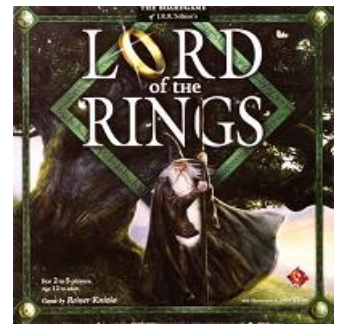
Stopped by Dan's for an impromptu Tuesday night game. We didn't have any plans and so scanned his shelf. I suggested an old favorite: *Lord of the Rings*. I couldn't remember the last time we played this cooperative game, but tonight was a good time to put it on the tabletop.

The funny thing is, the very first time we played this, I recall, rightly or wrongly, that Ed and Fred made this a four-player game. We thought this was a typical game where one player would be the winner, so we played that way, advancing our own hobbit agendas. I think we made it as far as Rivendell. Maybe.

Then we looked at all the boards and started paying more attention. Aha. We should cooperate in the spirit of the Fellowship. We made it along a little further, learning about the ins and outs of resource management (cards) of the game. Cooperation really does help.

Note: Dan and I played the *Friends and Foes* expansion, which adds a few wrinkles to the basic game as well as additional boards and cards.

Dan (Samwise) plays a card on the Bree board.



### Just Us Frodos and Sams

As there were only two of us, we played only Frodo and Sam. Randomly, I was Frodo, who had the special ability to be able to use any of the white-backed cards as wildcards, and Dan was Sam, who could only suffer a maximum of one negative result on the "head to the dark side" die.

Each board represents the journey to a location, with spaces along three paths (and four paths in Mordor): hiding, walking, fighting, and friendship. The paths contain items that are good (shields, life tokens, and allies) and bad ("head to the dark side" die and foes).

Each board also contains a separate track with fixed events -- almost uniformly bad, but with some goodies (like allies) sprinkled in if you can meet certain criteria for tokens and cards. A set of randomly shuffled square cardboard tiles get flipped to set off a progression of events...but...some tiles are good and help advance you on the

paths. About 50-50, but a nice tension to the game. The key is that if you flip an event tile, after you perform the event, you flip over another tile, which may be another event or a good tile.

Sauron and the hobbits are represented on a separate "light and dark" track. If the Sauron "tower with the eye" and a hobbit figure are in the same square, the hobbit gets turned to the dark side. If Sauron grabs the hobbit with the ring, game over. At first, all are far apart, but as the game goes on, the two sides inevitably get closer...

Other nuances apply, but the gist is to somehow manage and play your cards to advance along several paths while mitigating the bad events.

## To Bree and Beyond

A two-player game offers more challenges than a four-player game, in that two players only have half as many cards as four players. Since card play includes cooperating to toss in a certain amount of resources, four players give you more leeway. It also spreads the danger of dark-side results among the four hobbits.

Technically, there can be a fifth hobbit -- Fredegar "Fatty" Bolger -- in the game. In the book, he knew of Frodo and the ring, but stayed home. In the game, he can go adventuring.

The first thing to do is read the events so you can prepare for some of them. Some are "do this or suffer consequences." So, making sure you have the necessary cards, tokens, and so on becomes an integral part of success.

We didn't do too badly on the Bree board and arrived in Rivendell to a resupply. Then it was on to the Mines of Moria. Here was a tougher challenge, but we managed to make it to Lothlorien.

*The Moria board.*



Fun fact:

Orlando Bloom

had a part in the British murder mystery series *Midsommer Murders* and lived at a farm called "Lothlorien." He played a human, not an elf.

Anyway, at some point, we satisfied a requirement to play cards containing 12 fighting icons to skip the Helm's Deep board and go directly to Shelob's Lair. We thought that a good idea, and like Frodo and Sam, we headed into the Lair, albeit with depleted hands of cards.

We actually made it out alive thanks to the use of the ring. In game terms, you can play the ring once per board to skip up to four spaces on any path. You roll the "dark side" die, subtract however many pips are showing from four, and that's the number of spaces. Dan rolled the blank face of the "dark side" die and we skipped ahead four spaces, bypassing some bad spaces in the process. Huzzah!

## Mordor

We made it to the Mordor board, counted our cards and resources, and blitzed the path to Mount Doom as quickly as we could. We used the ring trick for a couple spaces, watched our hobbits edge towards the Sauron tower as Sauron edged towards us. We played Gandalf cards. We played special cards. We played regular cards.

With the last "dark side" die roll, we tossed the ring in and won the game.

Still a neat little game. The cooperative aspect follows the theme of the books (and movies).

## ***Space Base: Light Speed Variant***

*by Russ Lockwood*

We tried the Light Speed variant of this clever game. I've already explained *Space Base* (see above), so I'll just describe the variant.

This gets you started quicker with more cards. You get 15 credits and a starting hand of a half dozen cards: five Level 1 cards and one Level 2 card. You can buy as many as you want with the 15 credits and save any credits not spent. The person with the most credits remaining goes first.

In our first game, we each had one credit remaining, so we diced off for first. I won and we proceeded to buy cards, tuck them onto and under our boards, and so the game went.

The main aspect was that I kept rolling "9" on 2d6...which just happened to be Dan's big card pile. He piled up the credits, piled up the VPs, and smoked me for the win.

In our second game, I could hardly roll anything over 6 and the big asset cards were at 8 and higher. I used the slide cards as best I could to boost the die roll, and had some luck there, but that's a two-step process. I did get closer at 20VPs, but Dan scored the 40+ VPs needed for the win.

Still a clever game.

## **Odd Google Result: US Army Eval of USSR Army**

*By Russ Lockwood*

While searching for something else entirely, found this odd result: 1983 US Army evaluation of Soviet Army. It's a PDF of a manual. For those interested in Cold War info, here's a start.

<https://irp.fas.org/doddir/army/fm100-2-1.pdf>



*Being naughty on the tabletop can be oh so nice!*





# Books I've Read

By Russ Lockwood

**American Revolution 1775-1783: Atlas of the Battles and Campaigns.** by David Bonk & George Anderson. Hardback (Horizontal: 12.2x9.2 inches). 242 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *From Reason to Revolution # 112*

What a marvelous examination of the American Revolution by wargamers who appreciate two things often lacking in military history books: good maps and OOBs with numbers.

The book lists 110 battles, call it from Bunker Hill to Yorktown, plus strategic maps and a couple of naval battles. Just about all of them are a two-page spread: Text on the left and map on the right. Sometimes the maps are half pages, sometimes full pages. Numbers embedded in the text relate to points on the map so you can follow the action. Letters and numbers relate units from the OOB (with numbers) to positions on the map.

Can you ask for anything more?

Not really, but I will anyway.

Contour lines. Heights are represented by darker and darker shades of green, which is great, but I don't know the height of the hill or ridge. And I suspect the same green shades represent different heights on different battle maps.

That said, I can still envision setting up a scenario on a tabletop using layers of hill to represent the differing shades on the map. It'd just be nice to know the height so I can slug the hill layers to the rules set. I'm assuming that Bonk's tactical gaming masterpieces at HMGS conventions use those same maps.

The oversized book contains 118 color maps, 20 color illustrations (mostly uniforms), and 16 black and white illustrations.

A couple typos I found while skipping around the battles. At the Battle of Princeton, I believe Clark and Clarke (p62) are the same person. The operational NJ map shows the correct Pennytown (p53) while the tactical map for the Battle of Trenton (p55) shows the modern name Pennington.

Fun Fact: McConkey's Ferry (Johnson's Ferry) is now known as Washington's Crossing. The Swan Historical Foundation runs a museum on the NJ side (Park entrance off County Route 546) with a collection of over 1,200 Revolutionary War artifacts. The original Continental marching path from the museum to the ferry (now a vehicle weight- and size-restricted bridge across the river) is "intact" and includes period houses. SHF website: <https://www.swanhistoricalfoundation.org/shf-collection.html>

Anyway, I've often carped about military history books lacking good maps and/or OOB numbers so I can set up a tabletop scenario. If only all military history books had this level of cartographic genius and OOB detail, I'd be a happy camper. If you have any interest in the American Revolution, here's the book for wargamers. Fantastic. Well done.

Enjoyed it.

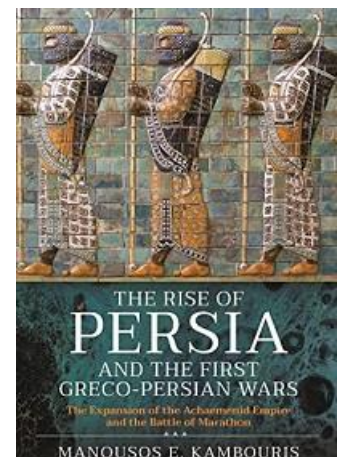
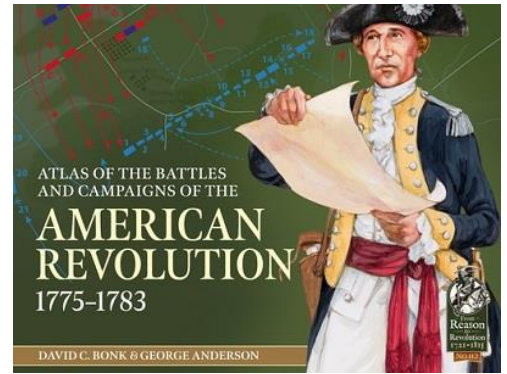
**The Rise of Persia And The First Greco-Persian Wars.** by Manousos E. Kambouris. Hardback (7.0x10.0 inches). 225 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *The Expansion of the Achaemenid Empire and the Battle of Marathon*

For decades, I've battled across tabletops with either Greek or Persian troops in Greco-Persian War-inspired scenarios with *WRG 7th* and now *Warrior* rules. While I'm not a big fan of these rules for other periods, count on me for Bronze Age clashes between missile- and melee-centric troops. Come to think of it, it's time for a classic battle, as the last two were of Persian Civil War back in March 2023 (see the 3/25/2023 and 9/26/2023 AARs).

For all that tabletop warfare, I don't really know much about Darius, much less about how the Persian Empire came to be. Here's a book that meshes Herodotus with a plethora of other sources, written and archeological, to generally explain the formation of the Persian Empire, its response to Ionia and other various revolts, governmental military processes, and campaigns against Scythia, Thrace, Egypt, and Greece.

It contains a marvelous description of troop types, weaponry, armor, and battlefield uses -- all cross referenced with various sources. One key aspect was Darius' reformation of the tax system to be systematic and heavy, especially on the Ionian Greeks after their revolt against the satraps (P77). In short, the Greeks revolted because of taxation without representation.



Darius perceived four main threats against him: Scythians, Thracians, Indians, and Greeks. An invasion of Scythia proved disastrous, against Thrace successful, the Indians generally kept to their side of the border, and that left the Greeks. The Greek colonies popping up everywhere represented a Pan-Hellenic, Mediterranean-centric state in the making. Hence the campaign against the Greek colonies on islands on the way to the mainland...with the Battle of Marathon as its culmination.

Marathon receives an intense examination, including the Greek line of march, the Persian cavalry efforts, and infantry units' dispositions. The theory is that the 'thin' Greek center was supposed to give way using 'backsteps' while the strong flanks pressed forward, regrouped, and hit the Persian center from behind. Hannibal at Cannae gets the better press for this successful tactic, but Miltiades at Marathon may have an earlier claim.

The book contains 14 color Google maps of marching routes and battle locations, two black and white photos, 13 color photos of weaponry and re-enactors in kit, and 10 color and black and white illustrations.

If I had one slight nit, it's the overabundance of Herodotus and author reference numbers inserted into the text. I get the need to footnote a source, but the parenthetical numbers and publishing dates get annoying -- mostly because it slows down the superb analysis of the prose. I get the academic consequences of not citing references, but endnotes would not break up the text.

Nevertheless, for those interested in Persian military history, this is an excellent book -- not too long, not too short, nice prose, and thoughtful analysis.

Enjoyed it.

**The Winter Campaign in Italy:** Campaign 395. by Pier Paolo Battistelli. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 96 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *Orsogna, San Pietro and Ortona*

This latest volume in the *Campaign* series follows the usual format with chronology, commanders, sitrep, forces, and campaign events. It's a breeze to read and covers a short time frame during the WWII Italian campaign, with the Allied goal of grabbing Rome by Christmas 1943.

That might have occurred had Rommel's plan to defend only northern Italy been approved. Instead, Kesselring convinced Hitler to back a plan to defend most of the Italian peninsula.

The book concentrates on three main battles of the general Allied advance: Orsogna, San Pietro, and Ortona. Each one gets a mini-OOB down to battalion level, which enhances the main theater OOB that goes down to the regimental level. Detailed battle descriptions dive down to the company level within the towns and surrounding areas.

The book contains 66 black and white photos, one color photo, six color maps, three color two-page action illustrations, and three two-page 3D maps (one per battle). The latter could be so much better in 2D without the awkward 3D effect because you can't really tell the elevation differences -- crucial info for setting up a tabletop scenario.

It's another *Campaign* winner.

Enjoyed it.

**Revolutionary War Forts:** New York. by Michael Garlock. Hardback (8.2x10.2 inches). 160 pages. 2023.

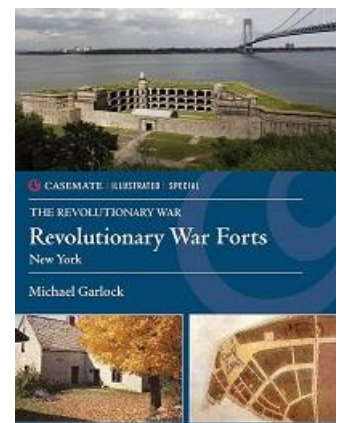
Subtitle: *Casemate Illustrated Special*

This survey of the fortifications in New York State combines current photos with period maps and drawings to provide a quick overview of 23 forts, some of which do not exist today.

As the subtitle indicates, it's wonderfully illustrated with 32 black and white illustrations, 47 color illustrations, 12 black and white photos, 54 color photos, 17 black and white maps, and 18 color maps.

All the major fortifications are covered, including Ticonderoga, Stanwix, Oswego, Niagara and Crown Point as well a number of lesser-known ones. You can certainly start creating your own tabletop forts from the images and game some of the actions described.

One odd fort out: On the map (p10-11) that pinpoints the NY forts, one (Fort Washington) is correctly located in Pennsylvania. It's outside the NY state border, while forts in New Jersey and Connecticut are not depicted on the map.



One typo: "1777after" is missing a space.

One text gaffe: In a description of how US General Benedict Arnold used British Major Andre as a go between to try and surrender West Point to the British. Andre was captured heading back to his lines and the incriminating letter found. The book contains this sentence (p62): "Andre...found guilty of spying and subsequently hanged, while Arnold was not long in following him to the gallows."

Arnold was never hanged. He escaped to the British, made a Brigadier General, and ultimately left the US to live in Canada and England. He was arrested in the West Indies by the French on spying charges and threatened with hanging, but was never actually hanged. He died in London.

Finally, yet another plea not to shrink the font. Each chapter starts with the first paragraph in normal sized font and the rest of the text follows in small font like an Osprey *Air Campaign* booklet. If this is some sort of trend, I hope it ends with this volume. This is the first of four volumes on forts. Demand a larger font throughout for grognard eyes.

It was tough reading, but the images are the main draw.

Enjoyed it.

**Carthaginian Armies of the Punic Wars: 264-146 BC.** by Gabriele Esposito. Hardback (7.0x10.0 inches). 152 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *History, Organization & Equipment*

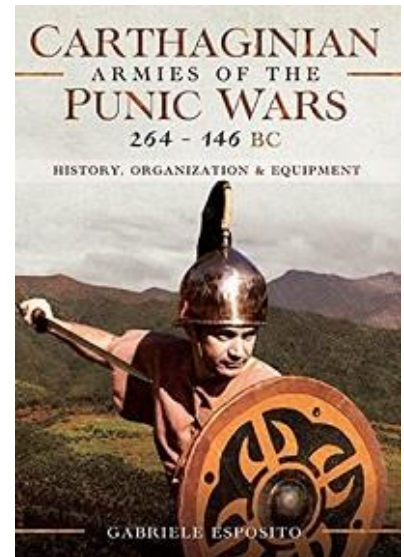
Another volume in the series covers the Carthaginian military and its Italian allies, with an emphasis on uniforms. All the major players are here: Carthaginians, Numidians, Iberians, Celts, and a variety of 'Italic Peoples' such as Samnites, Ligurians, Oscans, Lucanians, and Campanians.

You get the full panoply of weapons, armor, and associated equipment. The text does well to explain formations and fighting styles.

The book contains 80 color photos of re-enactors plus four plates of color uniforms (12 infantry figures in total). These will help you paint up a Carthaginian and allies army.

Another well-done volume.

Enjoyed it.



**Great Britain And the Defence of the Low Countries 1744-1748.** by Alastair Massie. Softcover (6.7x9.7 inches). 263 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *From Reason to Revolution No. 116*

Subtitle: *Armies, Politics, and Diplomacy*

Of the three topics listed in the above subtitle, the book focuses on politics and diplomacy. Armies? Not so much, except how military events influence politics and diplomacy. Campaign maneuvers receive some attention, but battles (Fontenoy, Rocoux, and Laffeldt) get a half page description, a one-page map, and no OOB. This is far less a tabletop scenario generator than campaign ideas generator -- if you can unwind the prose.

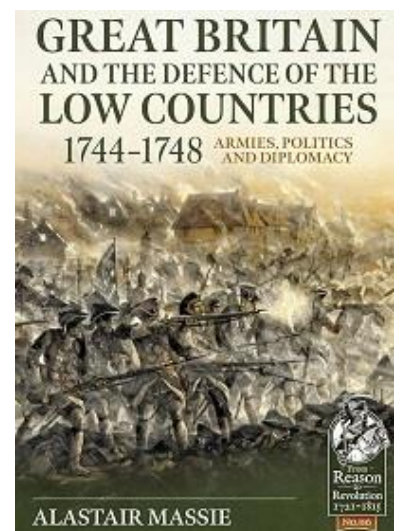
Massie seems incapable of writing a simple declarative sentence. Whatever point he's trying to make gets lost in a bewildering array of comma-separated clauses, asides, and awkward phrasings worthy of 18th century source material.

According to his bio, he received an Oxford PhD and spent 30 years at the Army Museum, eventually becoming the head of research. This book is thorough on the topic, but in the Prologue, I read this is a dusted-off thesis from 40 years ago. Ah. That explains much. Pity. I know little of the period, but it seemed an interesting topic to dig into.

The book contains nine black and white portrait illustrations and seven black and white maps.

I didn't read this from cover to cover. I only made it to page 35 and then skipped around, but the prose continued to baffle me. Sorry, but tedious at best.

If you have greater patience than me and a yen for the political and diplomatic maneuverings of this period, here's your book.



**P-38 Lightning vs Bf 109: Duel 131.** by Edward M. Young. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *North Africa, Sicily and Italy 1942-1943*

The latest volume in the *Duel* series follows the typical *Duel* format: chronology, design and development of each aircraft, pilot training and tactics, sitrep, bios of two main aces, and lots of combat descriptions.

It also needs to be 96 pages long instead of 80. I have no idea why Osprey's aircraft books use a tinier font than the *Campaign* books -- the excerpts are particularly hard to read without squinting. Put a page of this *Duel* booklet versus the *Campaign* volume and you'll immediately see the difference. Expanding the number of pages would help expand the font. My grognard eyes would thank you.

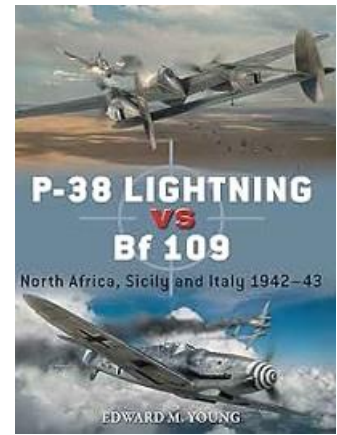
That said, the information is good, from the technical to the personal, as the 109s more than held their own against the Lightnings. Much had to do with pilot experience, but also, as the technical section explains, with the slowness of a twin engine fighter to get into a roll versus the single engine.

A nice statistics and analysis section sums up the overall performance. Luftwaffe 109 pilots claimed 360 Lightnings shot down, but the actual number was 183. USAAF pilots claimed 345 109s shot down, but the actual number was 55-60, with perhaps a few more that were identified as shot down by B-17s and B-24s (p72).

The book contains 53 black and white photos, one color map, six color aircraft profiles (three P-38 and three 109), one color two-page action illustration, and 10 color illustrations of aircraft subsystems and pilot tactics. This volume does not contain any aerial ribbon illustrations as with other volumes.

Over the years, I've read a number of Ospreys featuring the ME-109, so the new info factor was limited, but the P-38 proved full of new info, and that was welcome.

Enjoyed it.



**Soviet Motor Gunboats of World War II: New Vanguard 324.** by Przemyslaw Budzbon. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *The Red Army's 'River Tanks' From Stalingrad to Berlin*

Actually, the timeline covers from the 1920s when the gunboats were designed by the Soviets after the Russian Civil War to the 1990s when the last generation was retired -- although one was still working a river in 2022. The Soviets started original production in the 1920s. Most were sent to the Amur River on the border with China.

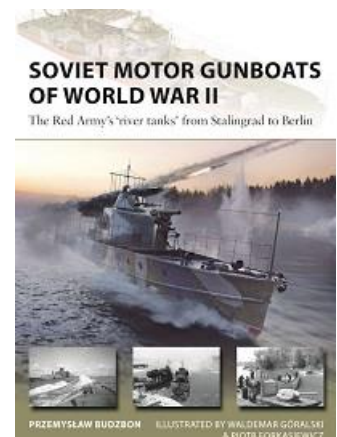
The 1930s saw more shipbuilding, although the ineptitude of central planning meant that the tank turrets envisioned for the gunboat were not released to the Navy. They made do with what they could get and even included rockets. Indeed, the Soviets downgraded the Navy to a subset of the Red Army.

The USSR built 644 gunboats of all types from 1936-1991 and 161 were sunk during WWII (p45). Many river ops are described in various combat actions, offering insight into a little known part of the Soviet force, or at least little known to me.

The book contains 38 black and white photos, one color photo, 26 black and white illustrations of boats, eight color boat profiles, two color two-page action illustration, and one color cutaway illustration of gunboat BK-324 (Project 1124) in 1945. The color profile includes camouflage patterns.

The first time I ever heard about such gunboats was back in the 1970s when punching out the counters for GDW's *Drang Nach Osten*. It's taken decades, but now I know why such counters were included.

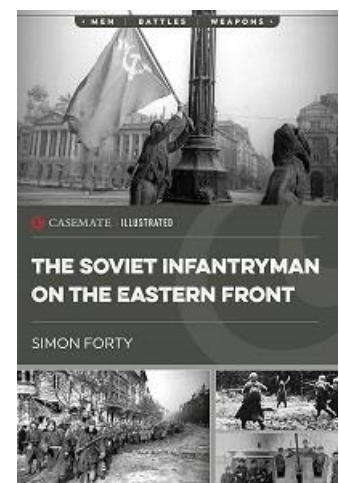
Enjoyed it.



**The Soviet Infantryman on the Eastern Front.** by Simon Forty. Softcover (7.0x10.0 inches). 128 pages. 2023.

This *Casemate Illustrated* booklet covers the uniforms, weaponry and equipment of the USSR infantry in WWII in detail, with additional information about formations and practices that I found quite useful and interesting.

An introduction recaps USSR infantry combat and Operation Barbarossa. The main section of over 50 pages details the panoply of the soldier. The last



section covers strategy and tactics.

For painters, the Soldier section provides just about everything you need as a resource for your tabletop troops. It's a fantastic visual reference with solid text support.

For scenario designers, I appreciated the details, even if pulled from manuals or outside evaluations, of deployments. For example, Infantry Division supply was about six to seven miles behind the front lines and could support an attack at up to 12-18 miles from the depot. "Mobile supplies" would extend that in six- to nine-mile increments. (p90). Note that a little later on, the miles of supply support would be listed at 18-22 miles (p94). One or the other is probably right, or the numbers were obtained from two different sources, but it is a contradiction.

A regiment of three battalions on the march requires (presumably by-the-book manual value) a space two miles wide by five miles long (p108). Rifle battalions would attack on a 1,500 yard frontage and defend a zone 2,000 yards by 1,500 yards (p107).

OK, so that's less than useful in a skirmish game, but of much use with a platoon and above per base game.

The booklet contains 75 black and white photos, 11 black and white illustrations, 87 color photos, 24 color illustrations, and two color maps.

I don't wish to be a moaner and groaner, but the fonts could be larger for my grognard eyes. The first paragraph of each chapter is perfectly readable, but then the text shrinks to squinty-land. Don't even get me started on the san-serif fonts in the sidebars that are very light and even more difficult to read.

The layout folks need to stop looking at the text on a computer screen with 150% magnification and start looking at the finished printed product. You know the main text font is small when it's the same size as the excerpts. Editorially, you can lose a bunch of the excerpts if it helps increase the font size. I don't mind at all. I get plenty of excerpts in other books.

Enjoyed it.

**The German Infantryman on the Eastern Front.** by Simon Forty and Richard Charlton-Taylor. Softcover (7.0x10.0 inches). 128 pages. 2023.

This *Casemate Illustrated* booklet covers the uniforms, weaponry and equipment of German infantry in WWII in detail, with additional information about formations and practices that I found quite useful and interesting. Yes, that's a cut and paste sentence from the USSR infantry book. This volume is identical in format and approach, except this book covers German infantry.

You get the same glorious images (hip, hip, hooray) and the same small fonts (Booooo).

You also get the same great recap of deployments. The Advanced position with recon elements is 5,000m to 7,000m in front of the Main Line position, with a slightly increased strength Outpost line 2,000m to 5,000m from the Main Line position (p107). That comes from a US Army handbook and I suspect that is an optimum deployment, but the concept of Advanced, Outpost, Main Line, and defense in depth should help those with scenarios in mind.

The booklet contains 109 black and white photos, 21 black and white illustrations, 23 color photos, 29 color illustrations, and five color maps.

For East Front fans, these two go hand in hand.

Enjoyed it.

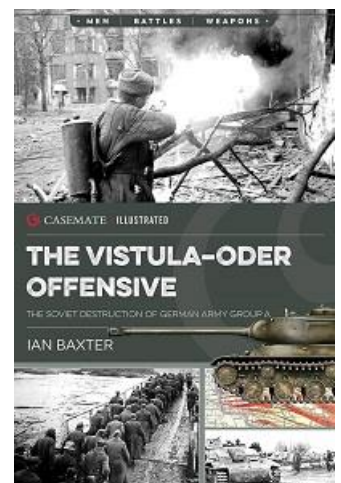
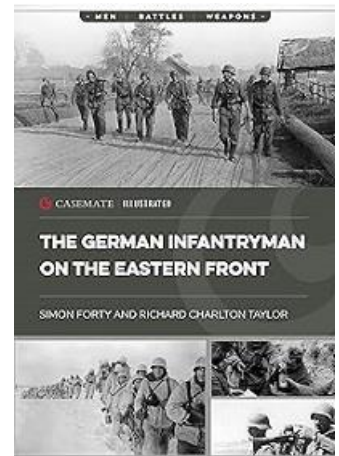
**The Vistula-Oder Offensive.** by Ian Baxter. Softcover (7.0x10.0 inches). 128 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *The Soviet Destruction of German Army Group A 1945*

The subtitle is a bit of a misnomer. After overview chapters on the German Army and the Red Army, the booklet starts with Bagration (June 1944) and ends just before the assault on Berlin (April 1945).

Offensives covered are Stanislav and Lvov (July 13-27, 1944), Sandomierz (July 28-August 29, 1944), and Defense of the Vistula (Sep 1944-Jan 1945). Then the Vistula-Oder Offensive (Jan 12-15, 1945) runs from page 68 to 86, followed by Upper Silesia (Jan 17-26 1945) and Advance to Oder (Feb 2-Apr 16, 1945).

Hence, all offensives covered are rather short -- just the facts ma'am. The OOBs are of limited value for the tabletop crowd. Most are down to Corp/Army level, although the six-page Battle of Berlin OOB goes down to divisions in places.



Per usual, the photos and other illustrations are stars of the booklet. The booklet contains 151 black and white photos, two black and white maps, one color map, 15 color vehicle illustrations, and six color uniform illustrations. Also per usual, the font format follows the others with perfectly fine sized font for the opening paragraph of a chapter and small fonts for the rest of the text.

This volume is a little too broad for my tastes, but for those wanting a starting point for the last year of the war on the East Front, this can be useful.

**Hitler & Poland.** by Norman Ridley. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 272 pages. 2023.

Subtitle: *How the Independence of One Country Led the World to War in 1939*

I was amazed at all the diplomatic and political scheming that went on in Europe in between the world wars, and even more so considering all the treaties, pacts, and agreements proposed, rejected, and signed among the major and minor powers. What I thought of as a relatively static 20-year dictate from the Allied powers via the Versailles Treaty turned out to be multiple roiling tempests that continuously threatened the so-called peace.

It's all marvelously explained, including the all-important motivations of the prominent diplomats and politicians of the time. Of interest are years' worth of cross-border incidents between Poland and Germany -- which explains the use of such a deception on Sept. 1, 1939. You can add Polish border clashes with Lithuania, too.

The Poles were sometimes their own worst enemies as they tried to balance the territorial ambitions of Germany, USSR, and Lithuania. They placed a fast and loose European shell game, usually revolving around Danzig, and including a successful coup by Jozef Pilsudski. The Western Allies slowly withdrew support over the decades, even as they tried other schemes to contain Germany and the USSR.

The book contains 16 black and white photos and eight black and white maps.

A few typos, one major: Polish uprising in Poznan on 27 Dec, 1918 had fighting continuing until 16 Feb, 1917 -- not sure what the dates are supposed to be. Other sentences read "Beck agreed the treaty" (p131) and "France agreed a security loan to Poland" (p145) are missing the word "to" after agreed. Also: "Polish soils would be considered" is likely "would be."

The subtitle seems to me to infer that Poland caused WWII, as if Hitler and Stalin would be appeased if Poland ceded some frontier land. Nothing could be further from the truth. The dictators wanted what they wanted and performed their machinations and gambles. Poland was in the middle, unable to modernize much in an increasingly mechanized military world.

Enjoyed it.

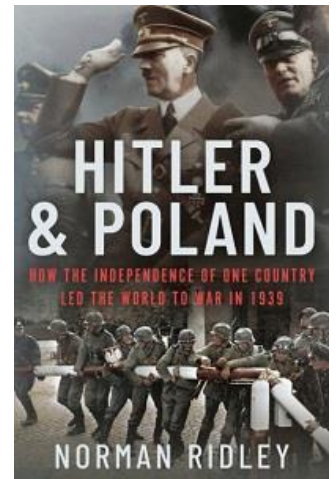
**German Field Artillery of WWII: New Vanguard 325.** by Steven J. Zaloga. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2023.

The usual Zaloga attention to numbers makes this a nice addition to the rest of my artillery books. For example: The Germans fielded 105 mechanized battalions of artillery and 1,060 horse-drawn battalions of artillery. The artillery of an infantry division was allotted 1 unit of fire consisting of about 250 rounds per 105mm gun and 150 rounds per 150mm gun (p39) and that was considered sufficient for 20 days. And it was for Poland and France (p40), but when the Germans headed into the USSR, by Sep 1941, they were consuming 2 units of fire per month (p41). On D-Day, June 6, 1944, the Germans along the beaches fired off 1 unit of fire in one day (p44).

This is the sort of detail we've come to expect from Zaloga and Osprey. The front half of the book examines the main artillery pieces and how they were used -- handy if you're thinking of scenarios.

The booklet contains 45 black and white photos, one color photo, seven color profiles of guns and vehicles, one color illustration, one black and white illustration, and one color two-page action illustration.

Enjoyed it.



## To Wargamers Everywhere: New Year's Toast

May your new year offer less drama and better karma.