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Books I've Read

Alamo of the Revolution: 1781 Fort Griswold

Dunkirchen 1940: The German View

The Lion of Little Round Top: Strong Vincent

The Dragon's Teeth: China Military

Ace in a Day: 8th Air Force Memoir

Pacific Profiles: Volume 6 P-39 and P-400

South Pacific Air War: Vol. 5 Crisis in Papua

Camouflage: Modern International Military Patterns

The Fire of Venture: Shangani Last Stand 1893

Borderlands of Great Empires: Transylvania 1541-1613

GI Collector's Guide: Volume 1

GI Collector's Guide: Volume 2

Defending Rodinu: Europe at War 20

Narvik and Norwegian Campaign 1940: Images of War

Zitadelle: SS Panzer-Korps Attack July 1943

The Royal Navy in Action: Art

Dodge WC54 Ambulance

US Army Diamond T Vehicles in World War II

Echo Among Warriors (Vietnam War novel)

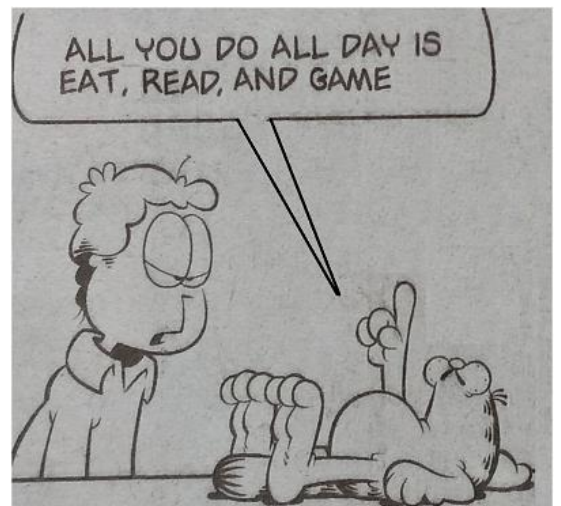
Viking Blood and Blade (Viking novel)

The Last Roman (Roman Empire novel)

Decebal Triumphant (Roman Empire novel)

Fitter: Sukhoi SU-22 in Eastern Europe (Duke H 23)

Spitfire: Supermarine Mk IX and Mk XVI (Duke H C01)



Wau-ee, Wau, Wow: WWII New Guinea Banzai Attack

by Russ Lockwood

This month's *Command Decision* (CD) WWII game was based on the Japanese attack on Wau in New Guinea. The Australians possessed the village of Wau and its airfield and the Japanese wanted it back. Robert and I were Japanese. Marc, Daniel, and Chuck were Australian. Jake umpired.

Tabletop battlefield: Japanese coming from the top of photo.



Each stand in CD is a platoon. The table was six feet by five feet. Figures are 20mm.

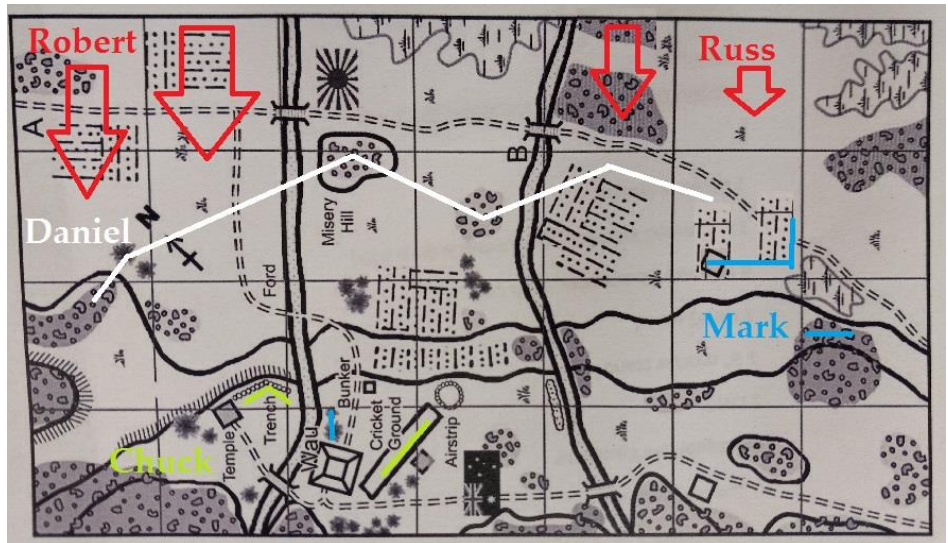
And the scenario map with opening positions. Japanese coming from up top.

Kanga Force

The Australians posted an infantry battalion of four companies -- with three platoons each -- as the outer crust of a defense in depth. A commando battalion with four companies, but only half the strength of a typical company -- two platoons instead of four -- formed the second line, but they were veterans. More troops, a company at a time, would fly into the airfield. The Australians also manned a pillbox at the edge of the airfield. Marc put a MMG platoon inside.

A variety of artillery supported the Australians, including a 37mm AA gun.

The Australians had to hang onto the airfield and Wau as well as a pair of bridges.



From l to r: Daniel, Marc, Chuck, Umpire Jake, and Robert.

Banzai Force

The Japanese started with two battalions, each with four companies of five platoons each plus a mortar and a couple medium MG platoons. A spare 75mm infantry gun platoon could be attached to either battalion. A third battalion with two more companies plus one Ha-Go tankette platoon made up the reinforcements.

One 105mm and two 75mm arty batteries provided support. A randomly appearing twin-engine bomber could also provide some support as well as preventing any DC-3s from landing during the turn it bombed.

The Japanese needed to grab the airfield and Wau as well as a pair of bridges.

Terrain

The area sported patches of woods and jungle jutting out from the elephant grass (which reduced visibility from 60 inches to 30 inches). A ravine surrounded Wau like a moat and would take extra time to descend and ascend unless by road. Some of the ravine, mostly on the Japanese right, was pure escarpment and impassable.

Wau was in the middle of the Australian edge of the table, with a temple complex (Built-Up Area) and a series of prepared positions at the end of the ravine. Fields also dotted the area, providing cover at the edges. Two streams channeled the attack, but were crossable at about half speed.

The Japanese Plan

Well, it was simple. We had to split our force in two, so Robert and I took one battalion each. His side (left from the viewpoint of the Australians, right from the Japanese perspective) had more open ground, but fields and elephant grass were on my (right from the viewpoint of the Australians, left to the Japanese) side, too.

We would drive onward and meet at the airfield. There was a time element, in that Australian reinforcements were based on a percentage roll, and the closer the Japanese got to the airfield, the lower the percentage for reinforcements.

All the Japanese troops were Experienced (Morale 9 in *CD* terms, which means a base roll of 1 to 9 passes morale, with a variety of modifiers applied that could raise or lower the number). Most of the Australians were also 9, but the Commandos were Veteran (a slightly better Morale 10).

The Attack

I brought on only two of my four companies on the first turn because they could only get through the first patch of jungle. The second turn found them at the second patch of jungle while the remaining two companies entered. I set up the mortar at the edge of the jungle so it could zero in on a patch of jungle I expected the Australians to inhabit in the center of the table.

My Japanese battalion advances from one jungle patch (right) to the next. You can just see one of Daniel's platoons across the road (top left).



I ranged in two 75mm artillery batteries and the mortar platoon on that central jungle patch. Sure enough, Australian troops were in there. By sheer luck, I picked off the command stand of the company. That caused a little command confusion. It takes a turn to shift command to another platoon stand in the company.

Robert (right) advances in double time, flinging platoons across the bridge onto Misery Hill (lower left). Chuck chuckles because he knows what's coming.

Meanwhile, the first company reached the edge of the jungle and looked out over the fields to find an infantry company dug in at the edge. A firefight erupted as we traded fire. I swung the second company to the left. It was elephant grass, but I needed to flank that company. Sadly for Daniel, his firing die rolls were pretty atrocious.

That center patch of jungle brought fire on my lead company in the jungle. A firefight progressed until I eliminated a second stand of the three, but Daniel passed his morale.



About mid-game. Robert keeps advancing while I eliminate the Australian company in the Jungle patch next to Misery Hill. With Robert tackling the hill, my flank was clear to continue the main advance.

Morale Check

I've explained about morale checks in past *CD* recaps, but I want to revisit the topic again. A company will take a check if it even sees enemy within 12 inches. However, cover like jungle usually adds 2 to the Morale level and seeing enemy infantry only subtracts 1. So a 9 + 2 (cover) = 11 Morale, -1 for enemy in sight is a 10 Morale -- they can't fail on a 1d10 roll.

Now, if you cause a platoon force back (-1) or an elimination (-2), you have a possibility of failure. The key here is that Morale checks ignore all other previous turns' results. You can pick off one platoon out of three on one turn and if you pick off one platoon out of the two remaining on the next turn, the Morale roll is exactly the same, even though the unit now suffered 66% casualties.

Daniel's company at the edge of the field holds up my battalion. The overturn stands are eliminated stands.

On the plus side, it's simpler. And when you read that a German infantry company would attack with only 60 men out of the couple hundred they were supposed to have under full TO&E, it can also be 'realistic' to have one platoon stand remaining of the company to hold out in full vigor.

On the minus side, the same number no matter what the total casualty level seems odd. If you inflict the same level of damage all on one turn, then the percentage for failing morale increases.

Meanwhile on the Japanese Right Flank

Robert pushed forward aggressively, driving towards and over the bridge on the way to Misery Hill. The firefight cost Australian and Japanese troops, but an Australian platoon held out.

Elsewhere in the elephant grass, Daniel's poor die rolls on my side of the table were reversed on Robert's side. My force was virtually unscathed, but Daniel slaughtered Robert's Japanese platoons.

Oh, Robert would pick off a platoon here and there, but Japanese casualties were horrendous.

On the plus side, Robert pushed a patrol within sight of the airfield.



See that Australian flag closest to the bottom of the photo? Marc's charmed commando platoon is adjacent and held out turn after turn of artillery bombardment. At least I cleared Daniel's company from the right hand side of the field.

DC-3 Incoming

Somewhere in there, the first DC-3 landed and disgorged a company of Australian reinforcements. Chuck moved them to the threatened flank opposite Robert, right in front of the temple and into the prepared positions. The Australians were feeling pretty good on that flank.

Banzai! Before Daniel's Australian defensive fire kills off two of the three stands.

Japanese Lily

We managed to pull the random Japanese bomber chit from the cup, interrupting the Australian air lift and giving us a chance to bomb the enemy. First, the Australians got to fire their 37mm AA gun, which missed (and cannot fire in the rest of the game turn).

Then, we designated the Temple complex as a target as it contained a nice, fat juicy British 75mm artillery piece in the BUA.

Missed.

Sheesh. This was not going well.

Marc's Luckiest Commando Platoon Says G'Day

I hammered one particular commando platoon on my far left for several turns' worth of artillery to absolutely no effect. Gunfire from my company platoons had no effect. Between Daniel's morale successes and my firepower failures, I was stuck at the jungle patch on the edge of the fields.

Finally, finally, finally, I managed to put enough firepower into that deucedly stubborn Commando stand to kill it off. About time.

Then I shot up Daniel's dug-in company, of which two platoons remained of the original three. They only slightly failed morale, but were pinned.

FYI: "Pinned" does not mean they are immobile -- the platoon stands can still move, just with detrimental modifiers to movement and firing. It really should be called "Annoyed."

Now was my chance, especially because Marc managed to pick off my second company's heavy weapons platoon.

Banzai!

We used the optional banzai rules. Basically, the company declares a banzai charge against an objective, which can be anywhere on the board. The Japanese platoons literally come together, side by side and touching, against the first enemy platoon in their path.

The defender gets the usual amount of dice, but each hit on the Japanese generates two die rolls, not one, for damage. The Japanese ignore fall backs -- only kills stop a banzai charge.

The Japanese get two dice per platoon for damage. At the end of the turn, all roll for morale per usual.

So, I designated Daniel's pinned company as the objective.

"Banzai!" I yelled and placed three platoons together on Daniel's defending platoon, careful to avoid artillery fire.



As his platoon was pinned, he rolled only one die instead of two. Sure enough, he rolled a hit on the die. That gave him 2d10 for damage to a Banzai charge, not 1d10.

He rolled a 9 and 0 (ten) for two kills!

Now? Now he gets hot dice on my side of the table?!

I only had my command stand left, but I still had 6d10 for damage. Each die means a 1-4 for no effect, 5-7 for fall back, and 8-10 for a kill.

I rolled the dice...five no effects and a miserable fall back!

Seriously?! That had to be one of the most inept banzai attacks of the war.

Daniel's platoon faded away back into cover. The other remaining platoon in the company followed.

As for my command stand, it failed morale and fled deep into the jungle patch. The only good news was that I had moved up my regimental command stand into the patch and would be allowed to rally the command stand next turn -- although it would take two turns to be fully available.

To add insult to injury, Robert also launched a banzai charge to clear some jungle and had the exact same situation and rolled the exact same result.

OK. Those were *two* of the most inept banzai attacks of the war.

Seven Turns of 12

It was about 11pm and in three hours we had completed seven of the scenario's 12 turns. That's about typical - half hour per turn. We had the option of doing another turn, but none of us thought it would make much difference.

We Japanese managed to take the two bridges, but the Australians held onto the village of Wau and the airfield. I never got that close -- if no enemy troops were on the table, it would take me two turns plus another two turns to navigate the ravine although capturing an Australian bridge near the village would negate that two turn delay. Robert was about a turn and a half away plus another two turns to navigate the ravine.

Umpire Jake called it a minor Australian victory.

Thanks, Marc, for hosting and Jake for umpiring.

End of game. I barely got across the road. Robert at least made it to the jungle patch just in front of the ravine. Of course, he did have the Japanese tankette. In the land of no AT guns, the tankette is king!



Persian Civil War: Ancients with *Warrior*

by Russ Lockwood

Warrior, aka the successor to *WRG 7.5* and earlier releases, offers a weapons- and armor-heavy rule set for the ancient era. To me, its forte is the Greek and Persian war era pitting the melee strengths of the Greeks against the missile strengths of the Persians.

The wall of fog doesn't block jokes, quips, or puns ... whichever that caused the chuckle. Clockwise from left: Keith, me, and Fred. Photo by Dan.

The last time we ranked these troops was back in 2019 (see the 8/23/2019 AAR), so it's past time when we needed to fire some arrows and dent some shields.

This scenario pits forces of Cyrus (Dan and Fred) against the forces of Artaxerses (Keith and Russ). We erected the ground fog (screen), set up our troops, and watched the ground fog lift.

The battles primarily proved to be Keith versus Dan and me versus Fred. I knew I was in trouble. Fred plays in the tournaments at HMGS conventions and was bringing Keith along for doubles matches at the tournaments. Dan used to judge tournaments. Me? I bumble along once per year in the great Greek versus Persian war games.

However, I did have a terrific strategy: If in doubt, roll well. Alternately, I had a secondary strategy to fall back on: If in doubt, hope the other guy rolls poorly.

How can you tell I have the least experience? My troops are all set up while the others fiddle with just the perfect placement. Clockwise from left: Fred, Dan, and Keith.

Set Up

I had a big patch of brush and woods in front of me with a barren gentle hill just to the right of that. So, the first thing was to position two units of good woods troops to advance into the tangle. I had one cavalry unit, so that went on my left to run and gun and delay on the flank.

My big three heavy units, two Greek phalanxes and the Persian Immortals, went into the center where it was clear. Sure, they'll have to chug up a hill, but no worries with the heavies. I screened them with some light bowmen and light javelinmen infantry. I placed a small unit of staff slingers way in front -- force march in *Warrior* vernacular -- to grab the hilltop and give time for my heavy infantry to march up.

Seams between forces are always important to figure out pre-game. Keith begins to deploy infantry in the center on the hill.



The Battle Begins

As the fog lifted, I saw an immediate problem: Fred placed two cavalry units to my one. Outnumbered and outgunned by horse archers is no way to protect the flank. I did the best I could, skirmishing my one cavalry unit, but his bow shot them to smithereens. What was left started to run away and never stopped running. That's not what I had in mind with the phrase "run and gun."

Keith (left) faces down the chariots while I try and figure out how one small cavalry unit will defeat two large ones. Photo by Dan.

To be fair, Fred had suggested a big counter move, which was a 50-50 die roll, and if successful, would keep my cavalry out of bow range for a turn. I preferred the sure move into skirmish formation. Skirmishing helped a bit, but the arrow storm rained thick upon me.

I turned an infantry unit to the flank. It was all I could do. My middle would have to break through Fred's troops before my flank was overwhelmed.

My woods-savvy troops advanced to be shot at by more bowmen. I took some casualties, but managed to chase the enemy bowmen back towards their line. I never caught them, but the near left flank was held. Everything was set for the center.

Over on our right, Keith's cavalry maneuvered against Dan's flanking cavalry, coming out the worst of it and fleeing for the home turf.

I've managed to grab the hilltop and proceed to force Fred (left) back, but he was only playing for time while Dan (right) held the center and swung around to crush Keith.

Center Punch

Keith placed his elephants on the hill in the middle and spread the rest of his force of infantry to the right. He advanced on the oblique. Frederick the Great would be proud -- if he was a Persian.

The elephants were important, for Fred had drawn up a big cavalry unit opposite my troops. Elephants cause all sorts of discomfort to horse. Go, Tantors, go!

My staff slingers held the top of the hill and shook out into a line. Archers with the elephants helped shower Fred's cavalry with arrows and stones. A great roll on my part caused considerable casualties and disorder. Take that, you Persian traitors!

I face down Fred's cavalry with some Tantor help as Keith advances. Photo by Dan.



Keith, pressing to enlarge the hole that appeared in the enemy's center from retreating cavalry, charged the elephants into the adjacent enemy infantry. The Tantors didn't break the enemy, but settled into a melee until bounced backwards. Unfortunate, that.

I didn't quite see what was happening at the time, but his near right flank was quite successful against Dan's Egyptians (which rolled that 1-in-36 "down 3" roll -- really, really bad in *Warrior* terms). Keith's troops pushed forward.

My bow and staff slingers pressed forward to take some more shots at Fred's retreating cavalry. My hoplites followed up as best they could, which wasn't fast enough.

On my near left, my bow-armed Immortals finally entered the battle with a missile volley against Fred's light bow. At first fairly useless, when I brought up the javelinmen to two-time the enemy bow, the result was spectacular. It didn't hurt that I had a good roll that time. The roll high strategy was working and the enemy bow retreated.

On my left, I charged the light cavalry that had bowed my cavalry off the board, but they nimbly evaded my peltasts. Fred's other cavalry, at first blocked by the retreating light cavalry, soon started to swing around my flank. I could see the flank starting to crumble.

My dilemma about one small cavalry unit facing off against Fred's two large cavalry unit (bottom). Keith (right) foils Dan's flanking movements (top).

Dan's Counterattack

Keith's good news continued as the Egyptians rolled yet another "down 3" -- but they were just, and I mean just, strong enough to survive. Keith's right flank collapsed as his cavalry scattered and Dan pressed onward. This was starting to look like a proto-Cannae.

In the center, Dan maneuvered his chariots to good effect and forced a morale check (waiver test in *Warrior* vernacular), which Keith's bow failed.

No doubt the doubt was catchy -- my staff slingers also took that waiver test and failed.

My troops kept advancing, but Fred played the delaying game, watching Dan slowly maneuver around the flank. A big evenly-matched, figure for figure, factor for factor battle in the woods with Keith was even until the rolls went Dan's way. Keith's units started to quake in their sandals (Shaken in *Warrior* vernacular).

A couple more whacks and Keith found himself with half his command either Shaken or eliminated. This automatically triggers Retreat orders.

The game was over. Cyrus' forces defeated the forces of Artaxerses.

Another view of mounted Armageddon.



Good Game

I never got the hoplites into battle, mostly due to Fred's continuous evasion, so my big juggernaut never applied its combat factors. I imagine Fred could've sent one of his cavalry units around my flank to the rear areas, but I had enough strong infantry to flip around and deter them from attacking.

My staff slingers and Keith's Tantor Force put a world of hurt on Fred's cavalry, which turns around and bolts for the rear. It was a short-lived advantage.

We were a little rusty with some points of rule nuances, but overall, most of it came back to us. We still had to look something or other up, but not too bad considering the complexity of the rules and the intervening years from the last game.

It was good to exercise the Greek and Persian troops again. May we do this again without waiting three years...extenuating circumstances or not. Thanks for hosting, Dan and good game, all.

Tantors (elephants) charge along with Keith's infantry against the Egyptians (right).



Ugly developments for our Artaxerxian forces.

Son, disordered and shaken is no way to go through a battle. You're on double secret morale probation.

Just about end of game positions.



Dan and I had been ruminating about older board wargames we once played a lot but now sit neglected. With an unexpected free afternoon, I told him to pick one and he chose Titan. --RL

Titans In the House: Someone Say Oldie Boardgame?

by Dan

When our scheduled multi-player miniatures game was postponed, Russ was still willing to come over and play one of the "classic" games. I was in the mood for *Titan* (hadn't played it in years), so Russ and I played *Titan*.



Dan (left) during the early going. The board offers a kaleidoscope of colors and more one-way paths than a labyrinth. Meanwhile, Russ (right) and his blue legions run around the board after Dan's red legions. Photo by Dan.

Titan is an all-day and all-night game if you play it according to conventional wisdom. I agree that it can be a long game. I never liked the elimination of a player when his Titan got killed while the rest played on, so I came up with "Team Titan" for 4-8 players (using two sets of boards for six or eight players). The game ends when one team has lost their last Titan.

But with only two of us, we played classic rules. We went over the rules and started. I believe we played correctly. The goal was to kill off the other's Titan.

The spaces dictate what types of units you can recruit for your legions. When you land on a three arrow space, you must move using that direction. Single arrows and curved protrusions are optional directional moves. Square protrusions are mandatory movements. You don't have to move a legion, but no movement means no recruitment. Early in the game.



As we recruited units into our legions, I eventually found Russ's Titan stack of six units. He parked it below a seven-unit Legion of mine sitting in the Tundra, blocking it from descending. I decided to attack.

Russ' Titan stack was a bit out of position. I had two other stacks close by that could reach his starting location, so he moved it and mustered to increase its strength to six units. We both had some tough-decision turns

where the die roll was sub-optimal, but I fared better, overall, with developing one good Legion with two Hydras, two Griffins and three Cyclops. In the short battle, I overwhelmed his Titan stack.

My own Titan stack on the other side of the board had a solid escort of two Minotaurs, two Rangers, and two Cyclops, but although Russ knew where it was, he did not have the forces needed to tackle it with even or better odds of success.

When you land on a space holding enemy, you fight the battle on the tactical board, transferring the units involved. Units may be blocked by terrain. The first number is the number of attack dice rolled. The second number is movement in hexes. An asterisk in the middle indicates a flying unit and a lightning bolt in the middle allows for ranged attacks. Otherwise, attacks are against adjacent units. We use the small markers to track hits. When hits equal the first number, the unit is killed.

Ding, Dong: Titan Calling

by Russ Lockwood

Dan drew up a game of *Titan* and we started out recruiting, which depends on what space you land on. You gotta move to recruit and my Titan didn't recruit too well.

The board and legions towards the end of the game.

On the one hand, you have to concentrate units to recruit better units, but on the other, if you split apart into multiple legions, you have a better chance of recruiting. Recruiting is public, but units are placed face down.

The trick is that you can only gain units to a legion by recruitment, never by dropping off and picking up a unit.

The board is also a series of one-way movements, which can drop you down to the outer ring unless you are careful or lucky. You can move up towards the tundra and mountains in the center of the board, but you must also have the right beasties in order to recruit up there.

The line-up of the last battle. My Blue Titan quakes with fear.

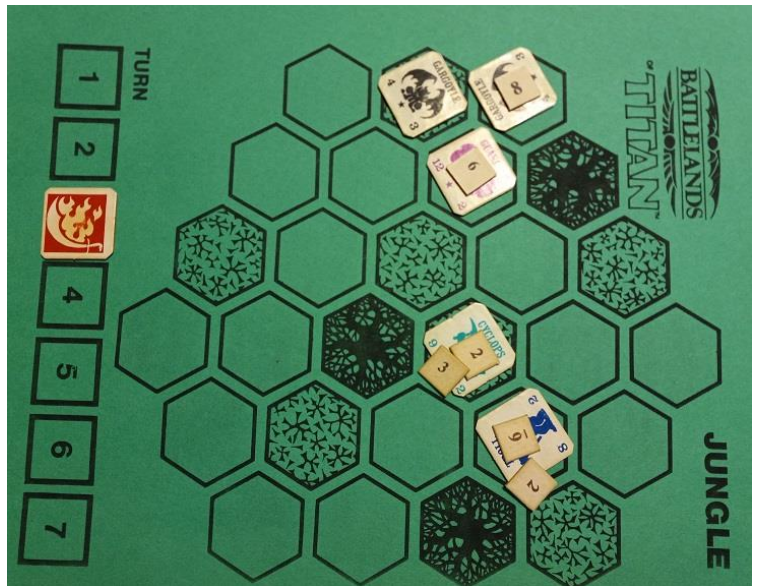
As every unit is placed face down, so you don't know what's in a stack per se, until combat. However, if you have a card-counting memory, you can kinda keep track of what legion recruited which beastie. Stacks split to form new legions, but the unit counting begins anew with each recruitment.

Many times, I couldn't quite get the right combo on the right space. I never got the recruit machine to gain the massive, combat-impressive creatures, although I was about even up with Dan in number of units if you looked at the board as a whole. Alas, not where it counted!

The one-way roads and my decisions when I found a fork in the road eventually brought my Titan stack in a spot where some legions of Dan's could whack him...and one did.

When stacks meet, they transfer from the main board to a battle board. Alas, my tactical acumen proved as good as my strategic acumen and my Titan expired.

A good game that only took 2.5 to 3 hours -- shorter than most *Titan* games.



Space Hulk: Smash and Grab

by Dan

I believe this is the first time my intrepid Space Wolves managed to complete a *Space Hulk* mission with modest losses (two of 10 fell during the mission), which is impressive as these were Space Marines (not Terminators). Linking up with the Blood Angel Terminator (Sean) outside the Reactor Chamber, two Full Moon Corps members went in to complete the mission as the Terminator covered them.

That's a lot of ground to cover for the Space Marines' forces. Photo by Dan.

I'm certain having three other squads (two Terminator and one of Space Marines) competing for the Genestealers' attention played a significant factor. Having above-average Action Point rolls also helped, along with alternating turns of unusually good and unusually bad shooting rolls that kept the local genestealer population manageable.

Switching Sides

In the second game, I was one of the genestealer players using the *Panzergruppe Guderian* method of bringing random "blips" into play and revealing them as the occasion demanded (as Fred did the first game). Fortune smiled on me as the second blip I committed to the Reactor Complex was the six-genestealer blip -- which probably did more damage demoralizing the Imperial Players after I revealed it than the creepazoids actually did in combat.

Fred's high water mark was his lead Terminator blowing away five consecutive charges with only a two-space distance between the marksman and the horde. None laid a claw on him, but his luck ran out when he advanced and only killed two more with several others waiting close by.

All the Imperial squads started well, but progress slowed to a crawl as more genestealer positions were revealed ahead of them, which probably intimidated some of the Imperial players. The slow progress allowed more genestealers to threaten from behind (with all the genestealer models John and Sean had between them on the board).

The Ultramarine Squad (John) was the first to feel the pressure, losing seven members of 10 after initial success at reaching the Reactor Complex airlock control room and opening the airlocks to the Reactor Chamber. The other three Terminator squads (Dylan, Fred, Keith) each lost two to three troopers shortly after, but at least managed to get in line-of-sight of another Imperial squad.

With all the Imperial squads at or below 50% and at least 15 genestealers between them and the Reactor Chamber plus more behind them, the mission was abandoned.

Thanks for the games, Sean. It was great to see everyone and game.



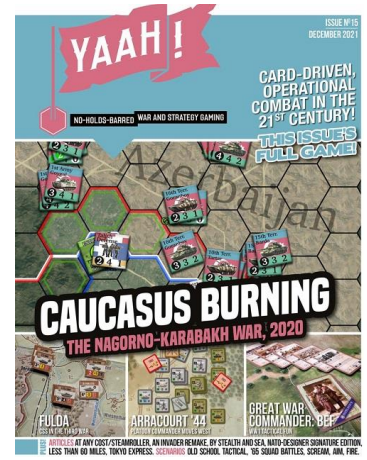
Caucuses Burning: UltraModern War

by Russ Lockwood

If you read my book review of *7 Seconds to Die: 2nd Nagorno-Karabakh War* (see my 04/02/2022 AAR or up on hmgs.org) and thought that would make for a good game, *Yaah! 15* magazine is for you.

The 96-page magazine includes the game *Caucasus Burning: The Nagorno-Karabakh War 2020* that simulates the 2020 war between Armenia and Azerbaijan. Units represent battalions grouped into brigades. Maneuver and attacks in the game are done via actions played from a deck of 54 cards, and each pass through the deck represents two days and nights of fighting, says the description. The game includes formations of T-90 tanks, BMP-equipped mechanized infantry, drones, cruise missiles, and squadrons of attack aircraft.

The magazine also contains articles with scenarios, game comparisons, and game analysis.



Y15 Arrived

Mark sent me a copy of issue 15 (December 2021). It is a glossy, full-color magazine, laid out with professional expertise with a modern feel. I'd prefer the serif font to be a tad darker or larger, but a) my grognard eyes probably need a tad more prescriptive help, and, b) you'd lose the modern look.

You can divide the mag into three parts: game analysis and reviews (with photos of games in progress), scenarios, and the rules for the game *Caucuses Burning*.

Games analyzed and reviewed are: *Fulda Gap*, *At All Costs*, *Steamroller Tannenberg 1914*, *Invaders Dimension X*, *High Frontier 4*, *Great War Commander*, *By Stealth and Sea*, *NATO Designer Signature Edition*, *The Dogs of War*, and *Tokyo Express*.

You get a full description of each game, highlighted mechanics, and sometimes the always-helpful comparing and contrasting with competing games. Tone is conversational and I'm pleased to report that not every game gets a breathless 'must-buy' review.

Kudos to the review of *Invaders Dimension X*, which is a Print and Play game where the reviewer explains the variety of steps he took to make it look like a professionally-produced game. Mind you, he's far cleverer than I ever hope to be with paper, printer, and Scrabble tiles, but he also explains how he did it.

The 10 scenarios are all for tactical games, including for *Old School Tactical*, *Platoon Commander*, and others. No *Squad Leader*, but you likely can convert the WWII scenarios.

The rules for the *Caucuses Burning* wargame run pages 72-87 with a QRS on the back cover.

There are no history articles. This is a magazine about games and gaming.

The Game

Dennis and I set up the game, with me as Azerbaijan and Dennis as Armenia. Each of us gets specific cards plus a couple of random cards from a common deck of 50 or so poker-sized cards.



Unpackaging photo of the game.

Each hex is 20km, each tank unit represents about 30 tanks, mechanized is about 30 vehicles and 400 to 500 troops, and an artillery unit is about 30 tubes.

Azeri setup. Armenians are on the other side of the white line.



The card-driven game has a player plopping down a card and performing the Action (top half of card). The other player has opportunities to play a card and use a Reaction (bottom half of card).

Attacks are performed by flipping cards equal to the attack strength and counting icons, some for the attacker and others for the defender. Hits on units get marked by chits and counters flipped over or removed.

Freddy Get Ready, Rock On And Then Unready

The rules explain how to turn from Ready to Unready, but seemingly not how to revive from Unready to Ready. There's a line about using an Action on a card, but Dennis and I found such Actions few and far between. In fact, only once in our game. Also, the rules specifically said an Action turns a unit to Unready, but it didn't say anything about a Reaction.

I asked and received clarifications from the designer. Actions and Reactions cause the unit to become Unready (and thus unavailable to do anything except be a target). Cards do indeed allow for reviving a hex of units back to Ready, but the more likely scenario is that the day ends and all units go back to Ready for the next day.

Note that the deck has two "Day End" cards. When both Day End cards are drawn, the day ends and a night turn begins. A night turn is just one card. After these get resolved, all Unready units are now back to ready -- except those that participated in a Night Turn attack.

Some special conditions apply to sort out conundrums about when you draw that second Day End card and when to play the Night Turn.

Azeri attack on Armenian forces at Marituna. We did some damage, but not enough. My two stacks become Unready after the attack.

The end result of all this card flipping is that your units ultimately grind to a halt waiting for the day to end. Add in the ability for undisrupted units to withdraw from an attack and you can have a lot of no effects other than slow decline during the turn to Unready immobility.



That's my biggest knock about the game. I look at the units and I think: C'mon, let's get going. Whatta ya waitin' fer? Sun down?

Technically, you're waiting for step 5 of a Night Turn, i.e. sunrise.

The Brilliant Part

Combat resolution with the cards impressed me because of the way it balances out the effects. I don't play a lot of card-driven games, but when you're flipping over the cards looking for hits on the target but hits on the attacker show up, it's a great little mechanic. As the designer controlled the card deck, he also controlled the hit allocations.

Sure, you can get in a run, but as we found, a lot of times you get as good as you give. The uncertainty of combat makes for great game tension.

Snipe and Tripe

The graphic for explaining the numbers on the counters is incomplete. We kinda figured it out, but it would have been more helpful for someone who never played the game to give the rules a final look through.

It would have also picked up the errors in the OB and on the counter sheet.

The Push mechanic needs a better explanation of the option of playing two Actions, and the option of playing Reactions to those Actions. Per the designer, "Unless the card says 'may,' assume it is a 'must'."

Regarding the Politics track, 'cross' is undefined. Does that mean getting to the space containing the red number? Or mean getting to the space beyond the red number? Per the designer, it means when you land on a red number. The Politics angle is handled smoothly once you understand the red numbers on the track.

These are all little nitpicks attributable to production pressures. They are not fatal. If you ever developed a wargame, you understand that you will never whack every production mole that pops up, try as you might.

Long Game

There are a lot of moving parts in an ultra-modern battle, even between two third-rate powers. Getting the right balance of land and air forces, especially in a war that used lots of drone strikes, is tricky. The cards help define that balance. It also reflects the realities of what it takes to prep and perform an attack and keep an offense going -- or a defense for that matter.

For the record, I'm not an ultra-modern gamer, or even a modern one for that matter. I define modern as anything after WWII. Of course, I'll also play any wargame. You never know what period or system will spark a new interest. The *7 Seconds* book about a small conflict in a limited area with the latest weaponry caught my imagination. Then I saw *Yaah 15* coming out. Kismet.

Caucasus Burning showcases all the challenges of third-rate powers trying to conduct a modern war in the hostile terrain in the back of beyond. The more you like card-driven games set in the ultramodern era, the more you'll like *Caucasus Burning*. Considering that Azerbaijan and Armenia are rattling swords anew, maybe the leaders should sit down and play *Caucasus Burning* before slinging bullets, shells, and missiles.

More info at Flying Pig Games website:

<https://flyingpiggames.com>



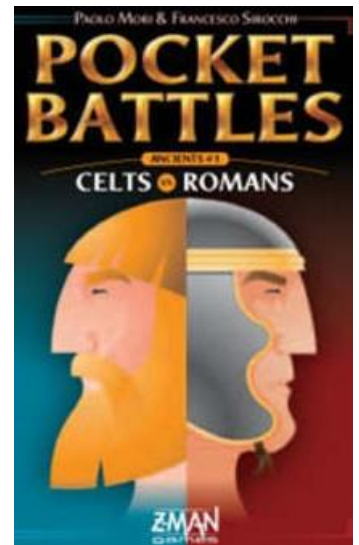
Pocket Battles: Celts vs. Romans

by Russ Lockwood

The entire *Pocket Battles* series is out of print. Dan notes this particular version, *Celts vs. Romans*, is similar to the other ones, such as *Macedonians vs. Persians*, although tweaked for the specific armies.

Your units are nice, thick 2x1-inch cardboard counters that are placed in a three-section wide (Left Flank, Center, and Right Flank) by two-section deep army area. A sort of no-man's land exists in the middle where attacks take place. Each counter is a group of troops, has a points cost, takes a number of hits (usually one for foot and two for mounted), and has a clever selection of black dice (melee) and white dice (missile) along the top. Counters can be brigaded together to form a unit, with the maximum number of counters that can be welded together to make that unit printed on the counter.

Some counters have a special icon -- this represents a special ability, like extra dice to hit, or being able to launch two charges per turn, and so on. The icons are what make the armies different from each other.



Command and Control

Each player gets seven Order chits. If a unit hasn't done anything yet, the player can use one of those chits to prompt a charge, a missile barrage, or a move. You can order the same unit to perform another action later in the turn, but then it would cost two order chits.

The chits also double as wounds -- if a unit takes a hit and can only take one damage, well, the unit is eliminated. If the unit can take two damage, the player can opt to use an order chit on the wound side. That saves the unit, but it also drains your pile of order chits. I'm not entirely convinced that damage to one unit decreases the ability of a commander to issue orders to other units, but the mechanic makes you think about immediate losses versus long-term orders and that's a good mechanic.

And we all can figure out that no order chit...no attacks.



Game the first at the start. I have the red Romans. Dan has the blue Celts.

Clever Combat

The phasing player announces a charge on an enemy section in front of the charging unit. The enemy player can use an order chit to intercept the charge with fire if the unit has white dice (missile) or any unit in the section being attacked. Or, do nothing and spend no order chit to accept the attack.

My Romans charge the Celts. Note the black (melee) die results – hits on 2 through 6, with two hits on 3s, 5, and 6s. Also note that the Centurion has the Reactive trait. The Green circular marker is the one order chit I had to spend to charge.

The charging player gets one d6 for the attack no matter how many counters are in the unit, plus one d6 for charging. If a unit has a special icon that adds d6s, then add them too.

Here's the explanation of the Reactive icon.

You roll the dice and compare the results to the printed dice icons on the tops of the counters. Each time a die result matches a die icon on the counter, you score one hit against the enemy unit.

This means that instead of rolling a bucket of dice, you usually roll two dice in an attack and compare the results for hits. Any surviving enemy counters roll one d6 for their combat.

The initial impression is that the counters contain random dice icons.

Not so.

The key -- and the clever bit -- is grouping counters into units to even out the random aspect. Any counter can be part of any unit, but certain combinations, such as four legionnaire counters in one unit, maximize your hitting power.

I had one combat where I rolled 3d6 and got two 1s (no effect) and one 5 (score three hits). That wiped out the three-counter Celtic unit! Other times, whiff city.

Dice are dice, of course, but you can stack the odds a bit in your favor by carefully building units with the right mix of counters.

Game The First

The rules booklet has pre-made 75-point armies, so I just picked the first one on the Roman list and Dan picked one on the Celtic list.

I won the die roll for initiative. I charged the legionnaires in the center, did some damage, and withstood the counterattack.

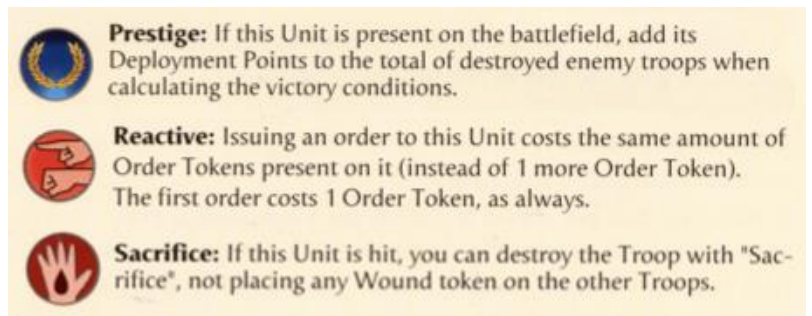
Then Dan picked a unit and charged and did some damage and took some. Back and forth we went until all out order chits were used and the turn ended.

On turn 2, I won the initiative die roll and plowed ahead, dealing out damage as about expected. Initiative is very important in this game, as the I-Smash, U-Smash nature of the combat mechanism means he who smashes early, smashes best.

I did get fortunate in that when I took losses and rolled my retaliatory die, I sometimes got two hits with the remaining counters. And I sometimes got double fortunate when Dan's remaining counters produced nary a hit on his retaliatory counterattacks.

When you lose half or more of your points, i.e., 38+ of 75, you lose. I'm not sure what happens if both lose 50%+ at the same time as it didn't happen in our games.

I won the first game, but it was relatively close.



Game The Second

With the rules better understood and some of the nuances of the icons figured out, we played again. I chose the second Roman 75-point army on the list, which was slightly different than the first army. I'm not sure what Dan picked, but we ranked our troops and had at it.

Once again, I won the initiative on all game turns. Once again, I got a little luckier than Dan, especially with the 3d6 for double 1s and a 5 that wiped out one of his units.

Why, yes, I did give a little shout of surprise and my fingers did a little happy dance on the tabletop. I won that game, too, and with a little more authority.

Interesting, Clever, and Lucky At Turns

The games didn't take too long -- maybe a half hour or so each. We agreed that winning initiative, especially on Turn 1 when you can really wallop the enemy, is key. As combat results are not simultaneous, one good roll provides an advantage. However, note that Dan found a wee rule that we misplayed.

You might mitigate it with ignoring the initiative roll on the second and subsequent turns and let whichever player who did not go last go first in the new turn. Dunno. Note that the Attacker can still use traits that don't require an Order.

Pocket Battles is a nifty little game for a quick battle. Note that the designer, Paolo Mori, also designed *Blitzkrieg* and *Caesar*, both of which I have reviewed and enjoyed for their clever mechanics.

Pocket Battles: The Celtic View

By Dan

Russ and I tried Celts vs Romans and played two games. Both were pretty fast, lasting two Battle Rounds each.

One thing we did wrong: The *Attacker* cannot use a Trait requiring an Order during the first Battle Round - but the *Defender* can. This is actually a big deal, as going first appeared to be a significant advantage. Allowing the Defender to activate a Trait might offset that advantage some, but we need to examine the rules some more.

The Romans were the *Attacker* in both games.







The Celts were crushed (even worse the 2nd game), but good dice on the Roman side and some bad dice on the Celtic side go a long way to explaining the results.

I'm not certain if the rules need a "tweak" to allow Intercepting units to roll the same time as the Charging unit, but that might be worth exploring as an optional rule.

All the nuances have not been realized, but I do like the game mechanics and quick resolution. I can see these rules lending themselves to a "campaign in a day" game.

I liked it so much I picked up an *Elves vs Orcs* set and downloaded a *Lord of the Rings* expansion for it via BGG.

A list of all the icons.

TRAITS	
 Auxiliary: Up to one troop with this trait can be added to any other Unit, regardless of Formation Value limits.	 Overwhelming: When this Unit is issued a Charge order and destroys the enemy Unit, in the same turn it must immediately Charge another eligible enemy Unit, without spending further Order Tokens. Works for one Charge, once per Battle Round.
 Disband: When this Unit successfully hits in Engagement or Shooting - but doesn't destroy the enemy Unit - the Opponent must place apart one of his unused Order Tokens, if he has any, as it was spent.	 Prestige: If this Unit is present on the battlefield, add its Deployment Points to the total of destroyed enemy troops when calculating the victory conditions.
 Double Order: Issue an order to this Unit to issue orders to other two friendly Units in the same turn, spending Order Tokens as usual. Resolve the issued order one after the other.	 Reactive: Issuing an order to this Unit costs the same amount of Order Tokens present on it (instead of 1 more Order Token). The first order costs 1 Order Token, as always.
 Excite: When issuing an order of "Charge", "Carry on Engagement", or "Shoot" to one of your Units, also issue an order to this Unit to get 1 further die in engagement or shooting. Active player only.	 Sacrifice: If this Unit is hit, you can destroy the Troop with "Sacrifice", not placing any Wound token on the other Troops.
 +x Engagement: When involved in an Engagement, this Unit rolls x additional dice.	 Scout: This Unit can charge a Unit in the enemy Front Zone without being intercepted or shot against.
 Fast: This Unit can be issued an order to perform an Action even if it performed a Unit Redeployment in the first phase of the turn.	 +x Shooting: When shooting, this Unit rolls x additional dice.
 First Strike: If this Unit is charged, it can roll to hit before the charging Unit.	 Skirmish: This Unit can intercept or shoot against an enemy Unit without spending any order on it.
 Fury: This Unit rolls one additional die in Engagement for each Order Token (not Wound) present on it.	 Slow: This Unit cannot perform a Unit Redeployment.
 Heal: Issue an order to this Unit to recover 1 Wound Token from any one other friendly Unit. The recovered Order Token becomes immediately available.	 Tough: If this Unit is hit, you can force the opponent Unit to roll again a single die that resulted in a hit.
 Impetus: When this Unit is issued a Charge order, roll 2 additional dice for engagement due to the Charge, instead of just 1.	 Wide Arc: This Unit can shoot on the Front or Engagement Zone of an adjacent Sector. Cannot shoot at a Charging unit.
 Leader: If this Unit is present on the Battlefield, the owner has 1 more Order Token available. Return the Order Token when the Unit is destroyed.	 +x Wounds: If this Unit scores at least 1 hit in Engagement or Shooting, it scores an additional Wound.
 Long Range: This Unit can shoot from the Rear of a Sector. This trait cannot be used for "Shooting against" a Charging Unit.	

Travel *Dominion*: Variation

by Russ Lockwood

I've talked about Dan creating a travel variation of *Dominion* because he wanted the game portable. The main difference is that his travel version uses only one of each type of kingdom card and places only five at a time on the tabletop. When a player buys a card, a replacement comes from the deck.

Otherwise, it plays the same, with the same strategy of trying to tune your deck to generate coin to buy victory cards. Of course, with only one of each card, you get some really innovative pairings.

See the yellow box top by Dan's elbow? All the cards basically fit in a box about twice as deep...with a little help from a rubber band across the top.

Game the First

I can't tell you who picked up which card, but I kept close until I wasn't. It came down to coinage and Dan is usually better at managing that than I am. It was a fairly close throughout most of the game, but Dan won comfortably.

Game the Second

I fell further and further behind as the game progressed. He was rather astute at recognizing opportunities, especially to get Platinum coins. That translated into bigger buys of Victory cards.

I ended up buying Duchies while Dan gathered higher VP Colonies. I think it was this game that he also managed a goodly concentration of orange cards, which usually give benefits over two turns, not one.

Man, I was caught, gutted, hung out, and smoked.

I enjoy the *Dominion* card mechanics. The travel variation is just as good as the full version, just with less baggage.



HMGS Historicon 2022: Wrap Up and Awards

By Joby Miller

We want to thank everyone who came out to enjoy Historicon 2022 and hope you had a great time. This year's attendance was 2,098, reflecting renewed momentum as we came very close to our 2019 count. A special thanks goes to everyone who contributed to making Historicon an enjoyable show, from the many game masters (GMs) who put on 500 awesome games to the 55 valued exhibitors and 60+ volunteers who took time out of their schedules to take care of all the vital "behind the scenes" work.

GameMaster Awards

The Historical Miniatures Gaming Society (HMGS) congratulates the GM awardees selected by their peer GMs at Historicon 2022. The HMGS Game Master Awards program is intended to recognize GMs for convention events that encourage others and exemplify the highest qualities of the historical miniatures gaming hobby.

Best of Show Award:

Test of Honor - The Yamashiro and the Sea by David Hill

Best of Theme Award

The Battle of Ravenna 1512 by Martyn Kelly

Pour Encourager Les Autres (PELA) Awards:

Selected from all historical miniatures events throughout the convention:

Encirclement of Kiev Ukraine by Scott Caldwell (1:285 Micro Modern)
Badges - We Don't Need No Stinking Badges by Ivor Evans (28mm Western)
Ia Drang Valley, 1965 - 'Move out, Company B', by Mark Fastoso and Little Wars TV (20mm Modern)
Test of Honor - The Yamashiro and the Sea by David Hill (28mm Samurai)
Counterstroke at Stonne, Northeast France May 15, 1940 by Patrick LeBeau (28mm WWII)
Atlantic Wall D-Day by Greg Whitaker (28mm WWII)
A Village for the Taking," by Bradley Pflugh (28mm Dark Ages)
Burnside Bridge Battle of Antietam by John Wilk (15mm American Civil War)
The General is Dead by Joe McGrath and LARD America (20mm WWII)
Hail of Fire: Ville du Pont Breakthrough by Brandon Fraley and Dillon Wall (15mm WWII)
The Battle of Ravenna 1512 by Martyn Kelly and WAMP (28mm Renaissance)
Battle of Trenton by Tom McKinney and Little Wars TV (10mm American War of Independence)
Leonardo Da Vinci and the Prince of Foxes by Jeffrey Wasileski (28mm Renaissance)
Operation Avalanche - Battle of Salerno 1943 by Josh Beck and Little Wars TV (3mm WWII)
Mourir Pour Cao Bang by Patrick Berkebile and LARD America (28mm French Indochina 1954)

The GM Award Judging Teams are veteran GM's led by previous award winners, all of whom devote their personal convention time as volunteers. GM Judges for Historicon 2022 included Mike Bassett, Chris Biel, Annemarie D'Amato, Steve Boegemann, Dino Diakolios, Mike Fatovic, Matthew Fridirici, Glenn Kidd, Jeff Kimmel, Scott Landis, Jim McDonald, Jim McWee, Bill Molyneaux, Robert Mosher, Pete Panzeri, Bill Rutherford, Kalissa Skibicki, John Snead, Joe Swartz, and Tom Uhl.

HMGS Legion of Honor Battle Stars

A "Recognition Award" selected for achievement by HMGS Legion of Honor members Mike Fatovic, Bob Giglio, and Glenn Kidd.

Operazione C3/Herkules - The Invasion of Malta 1942 by Bruce Weigle (3mm WWII)
Check Your Six - Marauding the Marauders by Paul Meyer and NOWS (1:144 WWII)
Have Gun Will Travel by Doug Fisher and friends (20mm Western)
Encirclement of Kiev Ukraine by Scott Caldwell (1:285 Micro Modern)

Congratulations to all the Award winners. Really outstanding work! -- RL.

HMGS Annual Meeting: Progress

By Russ Lockwood

HMGS held the annual member meeting during Historicon at the top of the tower on Friday night. Consider all the following to be preliminary information based on my notes at the meeting and some official e-mails previously sent. HMGS will release the official version.

A number of awards were handed out for contributions to the hobby. The HMGS web site will hold the list at a future date. John Spiess was on hand to accept his award. I think it well-deserved, but then again, I've played in a couple of his epic dark age and medieval games and you've read about his Next Gen efforts.

HMGS 2022 Board Election Results

The Election Committee is pleased to announce the results of HMGS, Inc.'s 2022 Board Election. Vote-Now.com LLC conducted the Election and sent out 1,371 ballots to Members (active as of April 3rd, 2022; the date of the Special Membership Meeting). Vote-Now received 403 ballots (29.4%) by the deadline of midnight, June 21st, 2022.

For Board of Directors, July 2022 to July 2024 (in order of votes received):

Candidate	Votes	% of cast	
John Hollier *	309	76.7%	* John returns as president.
Steve Robertson	234	58.1%	
James Russell	212	52.6%	
Jon Lundberg	206	51.1%	
Michael Pederson	169	41.9%	

HMGS Finances

As of the end of June, HMGS has about \$452,800 in assets, but some bills were yet to be paid.

Mythicos Steps Up

Kudos to Mythicos for stepping up to run the Jersey Devil Painting Contest at the show.

Historicon Attendees

John noted that 2021 Historicon (Fall-In) attracted just under 1,700 attendees. As Joby noted, total attendance for Historicon 2022 was 2,098. The dealer area boasted 55 exhibitors, up from 40 at 2021 Historicon.

It may be me, or it was the orange shirts, but more volunteers seemed to be in evidence. When I floated by the registration area, lines were short and attendees were being helped pretty much immediately. Certainly my registration experience was flawless.

Future HMGS Shows

The board continues to investigate venues. Much depends on open dates, rates, facilities, and so on.

Fall In 2022: Committed to Lancaster Host, aka the Wyndham, in its new version.

Cold Wars 2023: Nothing decided yet. John discussed the myriad of details a contract can contain. For example, including adequate staffing for the on-site restaurants and bars and flexibility of bringing in catering and food trucks. And you thought it was just "Book a hotel, Dano." More to it than meets the eye.

Historicon 2023: Back at the Lancaster Convention Center. A small deposit has already been paid to hold our date. In case you're wondering, the Marriott has 400 rooms, of which 300 were part of the HMGS room block. The Holiday Inn had 15 rooms under the HMGS room block.

Fall In 2023: HMGS is looking at locations outside Lancaster, PA, but isn't ruling out Lancaster, either.

In case you're wondering, HMGS needs 80,000 to 100,000 square feet for the convention, preferably with a hotel attached and others in near vicinity. That hasn't changed -- we're a tabletop hobby. Many hotel conference centers top out at 50,000 to 60,000 square feet and the space might be scattered instead of nice central locations. Again, such recons include discovering open dates, rates, conveniences, and so on.

Blitzkrieg: Two Fast

By Russ Lockwood

I can't believe it. I failed to take a single photo of the two *Blitzkrieg* boardgames Renaud and I played. The games were obviously too fast playing. Indeed, they are. Not quite the 20 minutes the boxtop proclaims, but a half hour or so. I think we spent just as much post-game time analyzing the boards and counter draws as actual playing.

This tile (or really large counter) placing game is an abstract version of WWII. A number of fronts contain a number of icons, and as you fill up a row, you get VPs. The icons provide benefits, like extra counters, VPs, or remove a counter from your opponent.

At first I concentrated on "bombing" Renaud to remove his counters, but he gained 'em back as fast as I could remove 'em. Then I just concentrated on filling rows for VPs.

As the Allies, I thought I had lost, as I barely got to 25 VPs ahead of Renaud, who powered to 30 VPs. Then he read the fine print...As the Axis go first, if the Allies get to 25, they automatically win. Huh!? Whattaya know!

In the second game, same sides, we were again neck and neck. This time, I concentrated on placing tiles so I can get extra high-tech tiles, as they have higher point values. Again, I squeaked past for the win with 25 VPs.

I promise to get photos next time. You'll just have to settle for a Feb 2020 photo I took of my solo game.



On My Mind: Do You Think I Read Too Much?

by Russ Lockwood

Hello. My name is Russ. And I am a Readaholic.

I'm not sure that's a word, but I'm going to use it anyway because I enjoy reading. Is there such a thing as too much reading? Maybe?

As I tell folks, I don't watch much TV. I'd rather open a book and try to learn something new about one historical topic or another. So I do.

I came across this short article in *Lithub* the other day: *Was It Ever Possible For One Person To Read Every Book Ever Written (in English)?*

I wonder if it's possible to read every military history book ever printed in English...



What the heck is this graphic for? If you read on, I link Harlequin romances to wargaming...sorta...

Writing and Reading

The *Lithub* article says "Tolkien wrote *The Lord of the Rings* in 11 years, which means that he wrote at an average pace of 125 words per day, or less than 0.085 words per minute. Harper Lee wrote the 100,000-word *To Kill a Mockingbird* in two and a half years, for an average of 100 words per day, or 0.075 words per minute. *Since To Kill a Mockingbird* is her only published book, her lifetime average is 0.002 words per minute, or about 3 words per day.

Some writers are substantially faster. Author Corín Tellado published thousands of romance novels in the mid to late twentieth century, turning in a book a week to her publisher. For much of her career, she published well over a million words per year, giving her an average of 2 words per minute over most of her lifetime."

In general, writers produce somewhere between 0.1 and 1 word per minute, says the *Lithub* article.

Hmmm. Two words per minute? I don't think I'm that fast. One word per minute sounds right.

"One word." Wait. I just typed two words in four seconds. That leaves me another 56 seconds to think up another word gag. But I just typed 17 more words, leaving 22 seconds. Wait! Does a number count as a word?

Don't you just gag on time conundrums?

Write A Book A Week?

I read a Harlequin romance novel once. Not exactly my type of book, but I recall it was really short in length and popular in the 1980s. And it was sitting there and I was waiting. I don't recall the subject or plot, but even so, to me, writing a book a week means pounding out words as if you're unconscious. Sheesh, I thought the milled *Star Trek* novels were written quickly.

I couldn't find a specific Harlequin romance novel involving wargamers, but I found a romance novel cover with toy soldier in the title. Close enough. No, I haven't read it.

Writing a book a week would be a challenge. The average paperback (4.25 inches by 7 inches or so) contains about 300 words per page -- obviously dependent on font size, distance of separation between the lines, and size of margins. So, 100 pages would be about 30,000 words.

I just pulled up the Word file for my August 2022 AAR and used the Word Count function: 25,279.

Really?

I write an 84.26-page paperback book every month?

It was a longer AAR than usual, but that's still a half a Harlequin romance novel.

No, really. Honest. For giggles, I went to the Harlequin website and looked. Apparently, they have 12 different categories with word counts from 50,000 (Desire) to 75,000 (Historical).

Hmmm. Well, I am using 8.5x11-inch pages, but there are offsetting photos. Oh yeah, and it's non-fiction, although I include some purple prose now and again. And like I promised, I just sorta linked Harlequin romances to wargaming. You are soooo welcome.

What About Reading Speed?

The article says, "The average person can read at 200 to 300 words per minute. If you were to read for 16 hours a day at 300 words per minute, you could keep up with a world containing an average population of 100,000 living Harper Lees."

Ummm. OK. Not sure of the math, but somebody used a calculator. Meanwhile, a friend of mine, curious as is his nature, totaled the page count of all the books I read in a couple of the previous month's AARs and came out at about 4,000 or 4,500 pages per month.

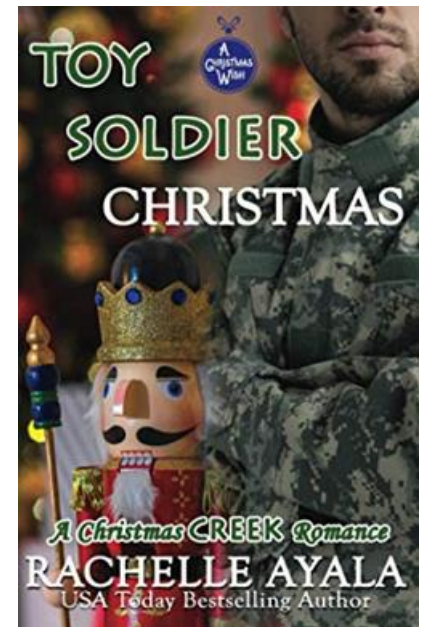
To find the page count of a book, I use the last printed number. Of course, the page count I quote includes the bibliography (OK, I do read these) and the index (er, no). Often, because forewords (yes) and introductions (absolutely) number pages using lower case Roman numerals, they are not counted in the page count. I do include center image sections pages, if not represented in the numbers pages.

That's only about a couple hours per day of reading, which is about right, over the long haul of a month.

How Many Books are Published?

In 2004, sez *Publishers Weekly*, nearly 200,000 books were published, with a grand total of 32 million unique titles in America's collective libraries. Only about two million of them (about 6%) were in print. Perhaps another 20%, mostly the oldest books, were in the public domain and legally free and clear to be scanned and put online.

Fast forward to 2021. *Zippia* asserted that including self-published and commercially published titles, over 4 million new books were published in 2021. Children's fiction is the most popular genre of books sold. In the U.S., approximately 1,700 independent bookselling companies are operating 4,100 stores. Total U.S. book sales hit 825.7 million units in 2021 across all print sales — an 8.9% increase from 2020.



Can I Read 'Em All?

The *Lithub* article noted the magazine *Seed* estimated that the date at which there were too many English books to read in a lifetime was around the year 1500 and has continued rising rapidly ever since. The number of books by *active* English writers crossed this threshold shortly thereafter, around the time of Shakespeare, and the total number of books in English probably passed the lifetime reading limit sometime in the late 1500s.

Dang! I'm 400 to 500 years too late.

Of course, the military history topic is a small subset of the total number of books. Hope springs eternal.

Category Sales 2021

Publishers Weekly noted, "In adult nonfiction, the small travel subcategory, which was hammered in 2020, when few people traveled, had the biggest increase last year, with sales up 23%. The business/economic field had the second largest gain, with sales rising 19%. Those gains helped to offset a 17.9% decline in sales of autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs."

The numbers show 2021 adult fiction sales rose to 174,190,000 books, up 25.5% from 138,840,000 in 2020.

Medium added, "The biggest growth within adult fiction came from graphic novels and fantasy. Sales jumped 109.3% and 45.3%, respectively, in those subgenres."

2004 Sales of Individual Books: 99 Or Less?

Publishers Weekly noted that in 2004, 950,000 titles out of the 1.2 million tracked by Nielsen Bookscan sold fewer than 99 copies. Another 200,000 sold fewer than 1,000 copies. Only 25,000 sold more than 5,000 copies.

The average book in America sells about 500 copies. Big blockbusters are a tiny anomaly: only 10 books sold more than a million copies, and fewer than 500 sold more than 100,000 copies.

Then came a 2022 factoid from the Penguin Random House/Simon & Shuster merger and subsequent anti-trust lawsuit that claimed 50% of the 58,000 trade titles sold just 12 or fewer copies per year.

As a *CounterCraft* article noted...um...maybe. One book generates multiple ISBNs -- hardback, softback, e-book all have different ISBNs, and tallying sales includes books published in previous years that are warehouse queens. They all get reported, but tallied separately. Sales usually start strong upon release and then taper off.

It's All Good By Me

Obviously, given the number of military history titles I review, the book industry is in good health with no shortage of specialty topic books that appeal to us gamers. I'm sure the authors I correspond with are deeply interested in sales figures of their books. They keep writing, so they must be doing OK.

As a reviewer, I hope to bring military history books of interest to your attention and tell you why you should take a look...or why you shouldn't. If you've been following the 900 or so reviews I've written, you should have an idea of my preferences. I'll bet they're pretty much any reader's preferences: great research, great prose, and great presentation. I guess I can't read 'em all, but it doesn't stop me from trying.

And it all starts with sitting down and opening a book.

Sources:

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PS: If you've read the AAR this far...10,985 words sez the Word Count function.

Brax's Bug Bash: *Traveller* RPG

by Russ 'Brax' Lockwood

The campaign continues with hybrid gaming: GM Sean and players Fred, John, and Dylan were live while players Dan, John, Keith, and I were on Zoom. The following purple prose, with input from Dan (photo at right), covers a number of three-hour sessions.

Brax woke up in his cabin aboard the *Harrier*. He rolled from bed and called up the main viewscreen. A giant ship hung in space. He queried the computer for more details. There floated the fabled 50,000-ton megafreighter in the Marmaduke system.

"Whaddaya know," he exclaimed, sinking into a seat. "The old man's info was good."

He panned his view around. A Scout ship also floated nearby. He grinned. "Two for the price of one."

Brax eventually made his way to the command center and the rest of the crew. "Hello, all. I seem to have missed something."

"You sure did," Wendell chided. A chorus of groans echoed the sarcasm.

That's when Brax noticed some of his fellow adventurers sported new medical patches. "And that was?"

"The whole ship is infested with bugs," Wendall said.

"Yeah," Anton chimed in. "Nasty human-sized bugs that spit acid and claw out your innards."

"And they can take damage and keep on coming like nothing you've ever seen," Gaines added.

"Dead bodies all over the place," Cormac said.

"Eviscerated," Dr. Sparks corrected with more enthusiasm than his comrades thought necessary. Dirty looks flared in his direction.

"Do we know what they are?" Brax asked.

Anton suggested running a DNA profile on whatever pieces of the creepazoids that the crew wore after that last scrum and run the results against history found on the Inter-Galactic Net.

Dr. Sparks analyzed a bug bit for basic structure and sent the results to Anton's computer station.

"Nothing in the IGN," Anton answered. "But our own database kicked out a match. Remember that spidery thing we ran into at the abandoned space station? When we grabbed the pirate pilot?"

"Yeah. Nasty bug."

"This ship's full of 'em."

The Running Battle

Brax nodded automatically, but remembered how tough that one bug proved to be. "So when you say 'full,' how many do you really mean?"

"We don't know, but we encountered a dozen. Maybe 15."

"And you lived?"

"Not without getting hit in some tight spots," Anton noted.

"We entered via the front port airlock," Wendell explained. "The power was off, so we headed aft to the engine room. They hit us when we got there and chased us all the way back to the ship."

"Next time you go, I'm coming, too," Brax said. "I know we all take turns guarding the ship, but it seems like you need some more firepower."

"Especially with some queen. We only saw it for a moment, then we ran."

The group quieted with their own memories of the battle.

"So, what else did you see?" Brax asked.

"Mostly a cargo area with lots of crates," Wendell answered. "We didn't check 'em, but makes sense being a large cargo ship."

"We need a manifest," Anton interjected.

"Great," Brax said. "Where do we get one?"

Wendell snorted. "The bridge. Where else?"

"Hey, for the millionth time, I'm Army. Sink Navy!"



"Yeah, yeah. Got a plan, field marshal?"

"Yeah," Brax grinned. "Enter through an airlock closest to the bridge and loot the computers. Then we stomp the cockroaches. I want that ship for a mobile base!"

The group posed a variety of opinions. Coleman was all for grabbing the Scout and leaving the accursed ship. Others wanted to loot some of the cargo and leave.

Brax wanted to capture the ship. "We have to at least try. There must be a way to kill off the bugs *en masse*."

Planning

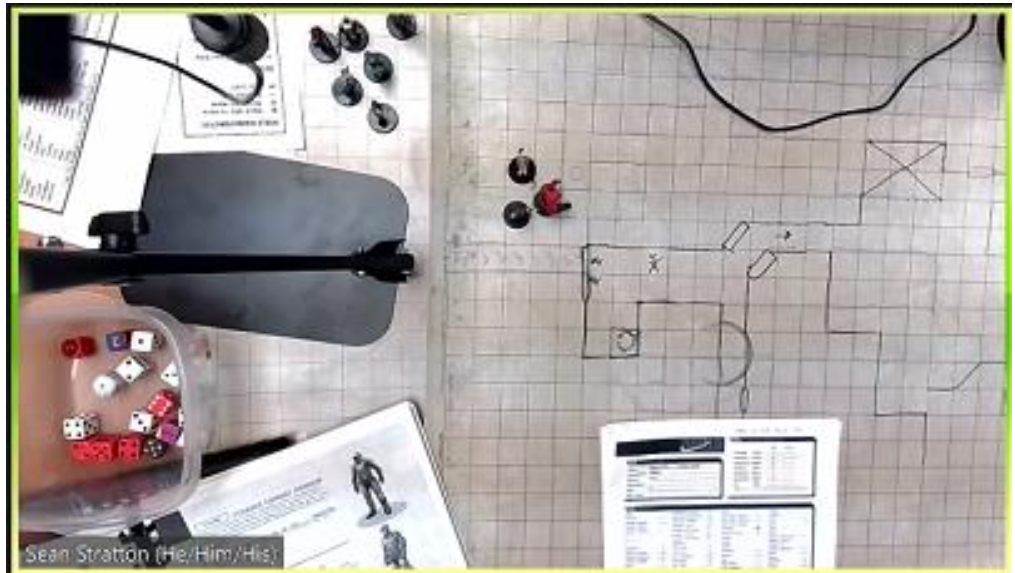
The planning for the digital smash and grab proved to be a *tour de force* in micro-management. To Brax it was simple. "We enter, kill anything that tries to stop us from downloading data, and kill everything that tries to stop us from leaving."

After much discussion, the end result was an entry sandwich, with the scout docked in between the *Harrier* and the freighter to form two choke points in case the bugs tried to board the *Harrier*. Gaines and Hardcastle, still recovering from injuries from the initial foray to the engine room, would guard the portal. The rest would head inside.

The Incursion

Brax led the boarding party through the airlock, with Anton, Wendell, and Cormac following. Coleman would bring up the rear with a strict admonition not to fire his fusion gun when crewmates were in front of him.

Zoom screen grab of GM drawing map of our path to the bridge. Brax is the red figure in the lead.



Coleman just chuckled and patted his

PGSM gun, or BMGS gun, or SFBMG gun, or whatever it was called. None of the party could quite remember the acronym. "We'll just refer to it as a BMFG," Brax said. "The B stands for Big, the G stands for Gun, and the MF stands for...MegaFire. Yeah, that's it.

The group entered from the top airlock and found a 200-ton Free Trader parked in a forward cargo bay. "See?" Brax motioned towards the window. "We can use this as a base."

Oh yes, he took a victory lap in his head.

Cormac rigged explosives on a main door, just in case the bugs used the corridors.

They dropped down to the next level, Brax still in the lead. He swiveled his head and pointed his laser gun down corridors and towards vents. The blood was everywhere, but he ignored all but the mission to get to the bridge.

The rest of the group must have been amazed at his prowess, for they hung back at the stairs.

"Anyone coming with me?" Brax goaded.

They shuffled forward and all met at the doors to the bridge. With no power, the doors did not open automatically, but Cormac used the emergency manual crank to them open.

No bugs inhabited the bridge, but crew bodies showed they had been there. The eviscerations bathed the bridge in blood and the party avoided stepping on any of the remains. Cormac cranked the door shut, but Brax wanted it slightly open so he could see down the corridor.

"You're up Anton," Brax said.

Anton carried the portable fusion battery down to the forward console and plugged in. It took him a few moments to ensure the connection was good. No sense blowing up the console with a faulty linkage. The bridge console powered to life and he started the download onto a data crystal.

"Can we secure the bridge?" Wendell asked as he looked around the carnage. The vents had been breached, which is likely how the bugs entered the room. He fidgeted with the shotgun.

Coleman looked around. "Not unless we plug the vents."

"Note to self," Brax muttered. "When designing ships and lairs, always divide the one human-sized air vent into multiple small vents."

The chittering began.

"What's that noise?" Brax asked.

"That's right," Wendell said. "You weren't in the engine room fight. That chittering means the bugs are coming."

"Hah. Like drums from the deep," Coleman quipped.

Apparently, Brax and Wendell were the only ones who took heed of the chittering, for they were the only ones not surprised when a half dozen bugs burst from the vents. Anton remained focused on the download.

Brax sidestepped and drilled the nearest one, blowing a fine fist-sized chunk out of it that would kill the average human. But this was no human. The bug shrugged off the damage and clawed at Brax. He tapped into his vast unarmed combat experience to sidestep again, causing the bug to miss. Then Brax drilled it again into a lifeless carcass.

Wendell blasted the nearest bug with his shotgun, but like Brax's laser, the hit only seemed to damage the bug instead of kill it. The bug clawed back, but missed. Wendell dropped his one-shot shotgun and drew his pistol.

A bug swiped Coleman with a claw, but his armor saved him from damage.

Cormac wasn't so lucky. The bug sliced through the armor to wound him. That angered Cormac and he went full auto with his carbine, putting worlds of hurt on three bugs, but not killing a one.

Wendell and Sparks both hit, but for little damage.

The next bug spit acid at Brax, but his armor saved him anew.

Anton, finished from his download, brought about his one-handed shotgun and fired. Pellets chewed the ceiling but missed the nearby bug.

Dr. Sparks dove out of the way, frustrating the bug trying to eviscerate him. The second bug attack was successful and Sparks' blood trickled out of his combat vacc suit.

Coleman leveled his BMFG fusion gun at the nearest bug, fortunately out of line of sight of his fellow adventurers. He tapped the trigger and a burst of plasma lit up the bridge and surrounded the bug. The hit was almost twice the output of Brax's laser and the bug vaporized.

Coleman whooped, but Wendell barked, "Don't point that at us humans!"

The bugs continued their mindless assault. Another fusillade of fire finished off the already wounded bugs and the last survivor fled back into the vents.

The group decided following it was a bad idea.

Exfiltration

"Whatcha say, Anton? You got everything?" Brax asked.

"Got the schematics and log. Ship sensors are intact, but without power, not much beyond minimal life support is working. With an emphasis on minimal. The manifest has Imperial high-level encryption."

"Good enough. Crack it later. We've overstayed our welcome."

"Hang on," Dr. Sparks called. "I need to apply first aid to Cormac and Coleman. And me, too."

"We need to go," Brax insisted.

"Gimme a minute."

Brax cranked the bridge door fully open and kept an eye on the hall. "I don't know if we have a minute. Let's go. We can patch on the ship."

Dr. Sparks would not be moved and applied temporary patches. Anton took advantage of the extra time to download security imagery. Everyone else stayed alert for bugs.

Dr. Sparks finished the rush quik-stitch job and slapped on the last patch to stem the bleeding. "That'll get them to the ship."

"About time," Brax muttered. "Follow me."

The group exited the bridge, and though tempted to go exploring, did not relish another encounter with bugs, especially if the survivor brought lots of friends.

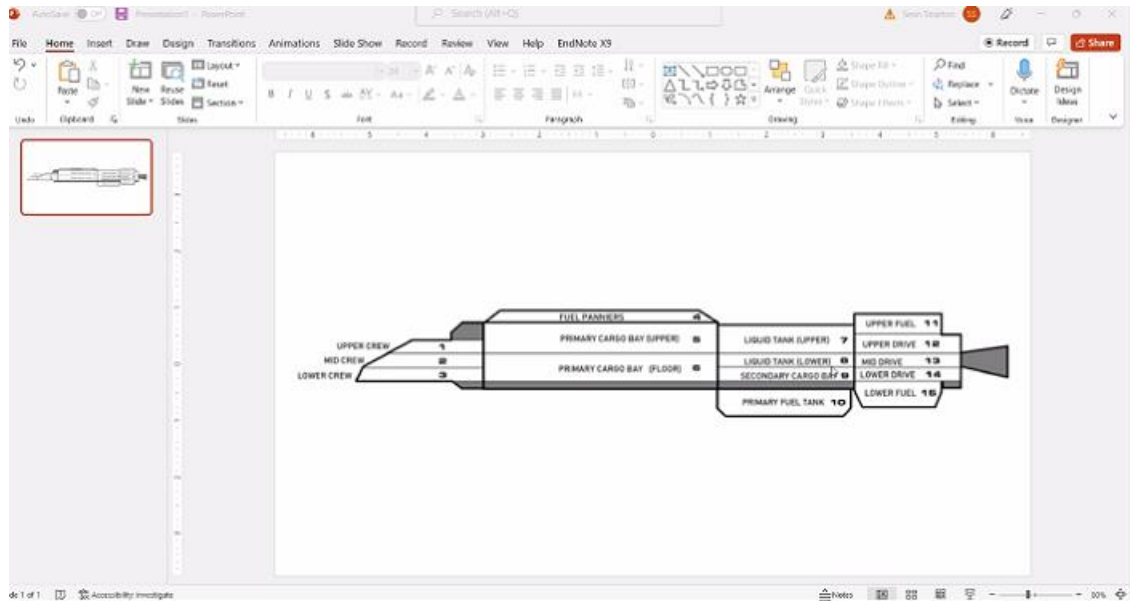
With enhanced wariness balanced with a need for speed, they headed back to the *Harrier*. Cormac deactivated his IED along the way. Wendell slid into the pilot's chair and detached the ships from the airlock and drifted the ship away to a safe spot.

The Download

Anton fed the data crystal into his computer station aboard the *Harrier* and punched the icon for the manifest.

Zoom screen grab, GM shares map of megafreighter.

A larger manifest icon popped onto the screen, but no other information appeared. He ran standard encryption cracking software to no avail, and then started on his own cracking software.



The rest of the crew watched and listened intently, but all they heard was a muffled grunt of disappointment from Anton.

He twitched his thumb against the console, deep in thought, and drew upon esoteric computer knowledge. His fingers flew from icons to keys and back to icons, each command a subtle nudge to pry open the secrets of the manifest.

"Aha! Eureka!" he barked. "Like I rolled a 12 on two die six!"

The screen flared for a moment with a corporate logo, then blanked. A second later, the original manifest icon reappeared.

"What was that?" Wendell asked.

"I don't know," Anton answered in confusion. A small code displayed in the lower right corner. Anton read the code and leaned back in the seat. "It would take centuries to crack the protection even with my software."

The Crimson Permanent Assurance Company was no closer to learning what was in the massive cargo hold than they had been on first boarding.

Anton pulled up the security footage. The crew watched the loading of 20 containers, all marked with biohazard symbols, plus a variety of other containers marked as electronics. Fast forwarding through the imagery, they saw one bug break out of a container, followed by 20 to 30 more. Through the shattered remains, they saw shelf after shelf of eggs.

"Uh-oh," Wendell moaned. "There must be a thousand bugs on that ship."

"It's like a horror movie in space," Cormac noted.

"How many did we kill? 30? 40?"

"There's got to be a better way to kill those bugs," Brax said.

"Poison gas?" Wendell suggested.

"Virus?" Dr. Sparks countered.

"No. Beats and shouting," Brax proposed.

"Oh yeah, like that's going to work," Coleman complained. "You're crazy."

"No, no, no. Seriously. We just have to find the right Memorex frequency to explode their heads."

"Memorex what?"

Brax turned to the previous effort to turn on the engines. "You said you kept hearing chittering, but in your head, not through the comms or microphone pickups. So, these things must be operating on some sort of frequency. We find that wavelength, pump up the volume, and 'Bob's your uncle, what's the frequency Kenneth' and we lower the sonic boom."

"That *may* be feasible – at the very least it could function as a scrambler to inhibit their ability to communicate." Anton offered.

"You're crazy," Coleman reiterated. "Let's just take the treasure and get out."

"What treasure?"

"The scout ship. The one that looks like a narwhal."

Brax chuckled and pulled up the schematics. "Yeah, good name."

Wendell leaned over and joked, "Almost. We need to punch a hole in the bow for a laser. Then it will be a narwhal."

"We'll put it on the list," Hardcastle chimed. "Now that we have a name for the scout, how about the bugs?"

"Brax may be onto something," Wendell mused. "We have enough people with electronics skill and two ships' worth of electronics spare parts. And Dr. Sparks can work on some sort of nerve agent."

"It'd be better if I had a sample," Sparks noted. "And I need some additional medical equipment."

"The freighter has a med bay. We can go there," Anton recommended.

"So, we pursue a two-pronged strategy."

Expedition MedBay

Brax again led the party into the freighter, finding a lone bug performing a patrol. Anton switched on the Sonic Oscillation Boom-Box (SOBB) and the bug chittered like crazy before bug screeches popped over the comms. The bug raced away at full speed.

"Well, whaddaya know?" Brax asked. "That worked. What was the frequency of the SOBB?"

"57.7."

"Of course. It may not make their head explode, but it'll give us an edge when we need it," Brax figured. "Maybe with a ship-wide broadcast... How about... "

Jo-Jo was a bug, who thought he was a cricket,
Heading out to Montreal.
Jo-Jo thought the ride, would be his fortune ticket,
But he's splattered on the wall.

Get back,
Get back,
Get back to where you once sang songs.
Get back,
Get back,
Get back before it all goes wrong.

Too late, Jo-Jo."

"Now? A Ruttles ditty, really?" Wendell complained.

"What?!"

"If we're going to sabotage the beastie bugs, we need something a little more distracting."

"Brax, entertainment is *not* your calling, despite your positive can-do attitude," Anton added. "But I won't stop you if you decide to provide a live one-man concert in the cargo bay for your hundreds of would-be fans among the giant mutant creepazoid audience on that freighter."

"Sheesh," Brax said. "Everyone's a critic."

They wove their way to the MedBay door, cranked it open, and looked inside. No bugs. Brax motioned the others to enter and he took up a guard position at the door with a view up and down the corridor.

Dr. Sparks got to work checking and taking supplies while Wendell covered the vent in the ceiling. Anton checked the computer and DNA analyzer, plugged in the portable fusion battery, and started to download data.

Like the other rooms, crusted blood was splattered everywhere. The cold sleep chamber has been burst from the inside out. The remains of a freighter crew member rested inside, his or her chest, it was difficult to tell, burst open with ribs spread.

They had not been there long when the chittering started.

"Should we turn on the SOBB?"

"No, keep it in reserve... If we need it. Let's see what comes."

Brax saw two bugs advancing down the hall. "Wrap it up. We gotta move!"

He raised his laser rifle, sighted through the scope and fired. He hit one center mass, but like on the bridge, it kept coming. Both performed an acid spit, but the armor held tight.

At this moment, a bug popped out of the vent inside the MedBay. Wendell fired and hit, but this bug was also a two-hit wonder and dropped to the floor. It sliced a bloody furrow through Dr. Sparks before the three of them could blow it to pieces.

Out in the corridor, Brax fired again at the wounded bug. It dropped to the deck, a fist-sized hole through its chest ending whatever diabolical life it had led. The remaining bug disappeared back into the vent.

Cormac staggered against the wall with a groan.

"You hit?" Anton asked.

"No, but I heard a voice inside my head urging me to join the hive."

"Great, do you get a membership crystal?" Brax spat. "Let's go, the neighborhood is getting crowded."

"I need to patch Dr. Sparks," Wendell argued, grabbing and opening a med kit.

"Can we do this later?"

"No, he's cut bad. Good thing we're in MedBay."

"Hurry up."

"Dammit Brax, I'm a pilot, not a doctor."

Wendell read through the emergency instructions in a MedKit and applied the fuser to the wound to stop the bleeding. Next went a hearty helping of disinfectant and then the auto-suture patch. It wasn't more than basic medic work, but it would do well enough.

They grabbed canisters needed to hold the nerve gas plus various portable medical equipment.

Back to the *Harrier* they all went.

Death Support

They let a day go by to relax and heal, not to mention cooking up the nerve gas and filling the cylinders, then headed back into the freighter.

The trip to the Life Support system proved uneventful. Anton assessed whether the portable fusion battery would be sufficient to power the system.

"Well, it was worth a try, but we'll need to turn on the main power plant in the engine room to get the Life Support system to properly ventilate the freighter with whatever type of poison or nerve gas we want to introduce to kill off these things."

Sparks dove into the machinery to evaluate what they could adapt for delivering the neurotoxin. The cylinders were attached and triggers set. They snuck away without any encounter when Anton stated: "Before we go, the Captain's Quarters should be nearby? Maybe he has the key to crack the encryption code on the manifest files."

Captain's Quarters

Brax hurried up the corridor to the quarters. He slung his laser rifle over shoulder, and looked at the emergency door crank. "I don't have time for this," he muttered and used the power armor's strength to rip the door open.

Inside, they found the captain, dead from his own hand. Wendell and Anton searched the room. Wendell, wise in the ways of a captain, found a hidden safe while Anton found an ID crystal on a chain around the captain's neck. Sure enough, the crystal opened up the safe. Various personal papers, including his star licenses, and an emergency crystal with 1,000 credits were in the safe. Wendell took it all.

While Anton downloaded all he could from the console, he also rifled through the drawers and storage units. He found the captain's personal data unit and pocketed it for later examination.

Brax again scanned the corridor, noticing movement at the far end. He thought he saw a bug, then noticed that Coleman wasn't in the vicinity. "Where's Coleman?" he asked.

"I'm down at these crew lockers," Coleman answered. "You never know what you're going to find."

Brax sighed. Ugly fugly buglies were likely on their way and he's poking in lockers. "I'm twitchy enough to shoot at shadows," he grumbled. "I suppose stranger things have been found in stranger places."

With the Captain's Quarters looted, the group made their way back to the *Harrier*.

"Hey Coleman, you coming?" Wendell shouted.

"One second. Not done yet."

"You know that bugs are on the way."

"Yeah, but you never know--"

"What?"

"Bingo. A case full of data crystals."

Wendell loosed a sarcastic "Great. Can we go now?"

Just before leaving the freighter, a wave of headaches swept over the party. All fought it off except Dr. Sparks and Brax. They staggered but the worst was soon over, leaving residual pain as they stumbled to the *Harrier*. Wendell detached the ships and floated a safe distance from the freighter.

Brax and Sparks retired to their staterooms to shake off the effects of whatever had hit them. Anton joyfully suggested, "Take a *Tylenol*, not an *Enditall*."

Brax grunted as he entered his door opened and closed.

"I guess it was payback for the music," Brax ruminated as he drifted off to sleep. "Wait until they get a load of our improved model."

A Closer Examination

Brax awoke refreshed. He carefully cleaned his armor and weaponry and performed standard maintenance -- a little dinged, maybe, but fully intact and functional. He topped off the energy on both armor and laser rifle.

Anton began his computer foray into the Captain's data unit and the retrieved files.

"Get a load of this. The company, Git'erdoneCo, if it really was the company and not some covert Impossible Mission Force, packaged up these bugs for a one-way trip into Catmandu territory. The idea was to offload the cargo and let the bugs hatch and kill off the planet, if not the entire Aslan Empire," Anton explained.

"How stupid. Like this could be contained?" Wendell spouted. "Like there's no trade between empires?"

"How about the encryption?" Cormac asked.

"No go. The documents in the Captain's safe were not originals, but a redacted copy. The encryption code was in the redacted part. I didn't find a key, if there is one on the freighter. That was the best place to find such a key, whether on his body or in his quarters, but I strongly suspect we won't find that encryption code now."

"How about the Captain's log and private journal?"

"Typical mostly. The misjump screwed the engines, but the crew eventually put everything back into working order. Oh yeah. This freighter is only 20,000 tons, not 50,000 tons."

"Only? Well, good enough for us."

Anton continued. "Your source did make the blind jump in the pinnace and the freighter made a blind jump here. They shut down the engines for more maintenance when the first eggs hatched."

"We can calculate the incubation time from the security footage and log entries," Dr. Sparks postulated. "It's been five or six years, so I expect all the eggs have hatched. The question is whether more eggs were laid in the crew, and did they hatch. My guess is yes."

"Then the lone bug we encountered was a scout who hitched a ride to find more beings for egg implantation?" Brax mused.

"Maybe," Sparks hedged. "We'll have to go over the security footage and entries to be sure about the timing."

"In the meantime, we got the gas in place and the SOBB working," Wendell checked off. "All that's left is to bring the ship around to the stern of the freighter, enter the airlock lift, and get into the engine room to restart the power. Then flood the decks with the nerve gas. If their heads don't explode from the beat and shouting, the gas will burst their lungs apart."

"Or melt their insides," Sparks chattered with far too much enthusiasm.

Who's This?

Just as the party was about to leave the scoutship *Narwhal*, some flashing status light caught Wendell's eye. He investigated further, finding a cold sleep pod occupied. "How could we miss a body on the *Narwhal*?" he asked.

"Is it human?" Carlsbad asked.

Wendell peered through the small window. "Sure looks like it."

Dr. Sparks started the rejuvenation process by pushing a button. Meanwhile, Wendell started a computer search for information about the name logged to the capsule. He found 15 aliases, including one linked to the director of intelligence.

The grilling started as soon as the unknown body cleared the side of the pod. The answers proved as vague as the aliases. The party soon recognized training to resist interrogation. The best they could extract was the name Watchtower, who last remembered his retirement soiree from some civilian job.

Right.

"Well, he comes with us onto the freighter," Wendell declared. "Got a weapon?"

"Yeah. Stowed laser rifle and a blade," Watchtower replied.

They were found and returned to him. The party shuffled to the airlock.

"Coming Coleman?" Wendell asked.

"Not yet. I have to recalibrate my BMFG," he answered.

"Should we wait?"

"Nah. Let's go," Carlsbad said. "He can catch up."

"What about it, Sparks? Ready?"

"No. I have to recalibrate my medical scanner."

"Cormac?"

"Doublechecking ammo," Cormac said. "I'll catch up."

Brax began to get a queasy feeling. Missing the top weapon and the top doc and a rather handy gunhand? Going into a bug battle with an unknown human? He got on the lift anyway. There was a 20,000-ton freighter to capture.

First or Last Entry?

The ride up the lift took forever. Brax had been uneasy at the way that headache had come over him in the last foray onto the freighter. He hoped his head wasn't going to be the one that exploded. Brax also hoped Coleman would clear his firing lane before lighting off the BMFG.

If Army operations taught him one thing, it was that plans rarely survived contact with the enemy. So much depended on whether the party's patchwork of human ingenuity could overcome planned artificial evolution.

The rest of the party fidgeted as well, each checking weapons anew.

The lift slowed to a halt as the ceiling doors retracted. Brax swung his laser rifle through his firing arc, finger on the trigger, ready for any bug that was in the area. The party rose into the engine room and the lift floor finally sat flush with the engine room floor.

"Third floor," Brax announced.

"Power tools, ladies lingerie, bug hunts."

"I don't want to hear: *Clean-up, Freight Elevator*" Anton replied.

Map of the Engine room.

It's Raid

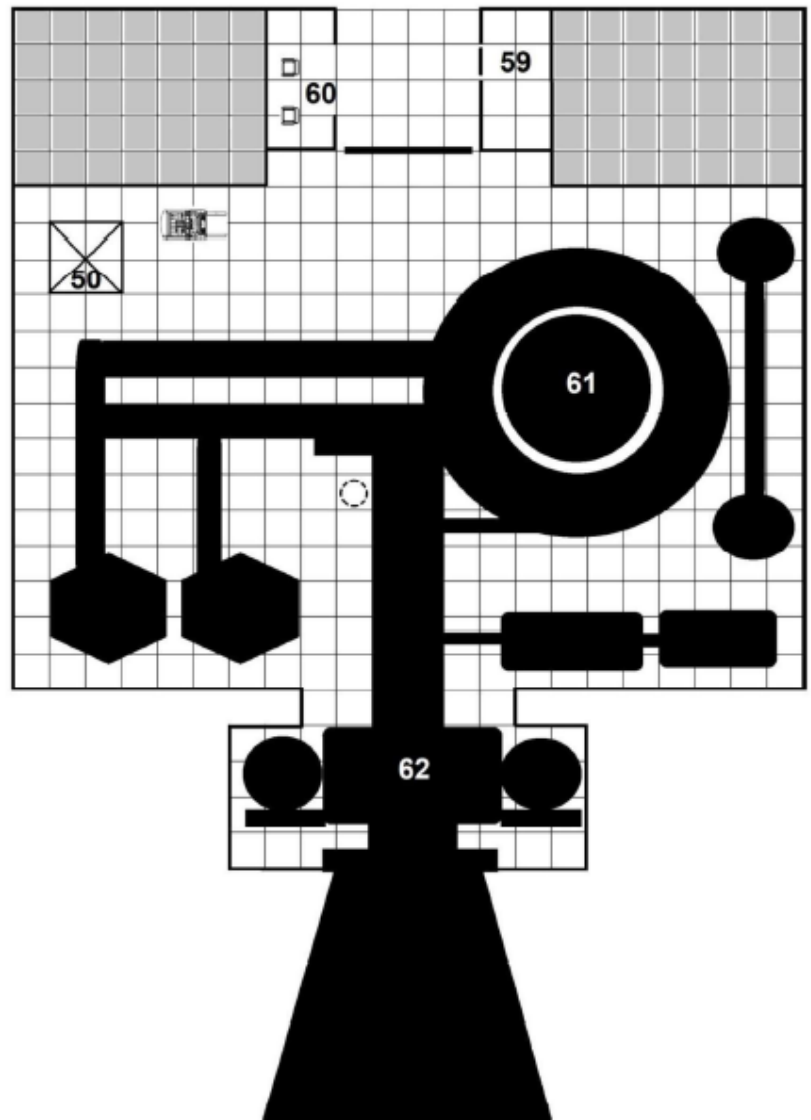
They moved off the lift to find the bugs waiting for them: three perched atop a line of some sort feeding the fusion reactor.

The comms were once again down as the lift ascended. And the SOBB clicked on, but didn't emit anything, much like the comms. They switched comms to old school microphone and speakers.

Carlsbad swiveled and shot, getting a hit on the one the bugs. Anton pulled the one-handed shotgun and fired, spraying pellets around but without touching a bug.

Brax drew a bead on the middle bug until its head filled the scope. He squeezed the trigger and a bolt of light blew the head off the bug. He watched the carcass fall. "I dub thee, Headshot Harry."

Watchdog, Wendell, and Gaines all hit, with Gaines' shot killing off another bug.



That's when the hive sprang into action. Two jumped from the lift shaft, seven crawled from out of the shadows. Three leapt from the fusion shaft.

Meanwhile, screech echoed around their minds as the big bug tried to compromise their minds as before. At one point, Brax hallucinated that Anton was a cat. "Anton, you've changed," Brax observed, then yelled, "He's an Aslan spy! He's an Aslan spy!"

Fortunately, the hallucination passed. The party continued their grisly quest.

Carlsbad shot again for a hit, but the bug remained standing. Anton drew his chainsword and sliced at one to no avail. Watchdog hit but the bug shrugged off the damage.

Brax pivoted slightly to the next bug on the feeder line. "I dub thee Headshot Harold," he quipped as he fired. The bug took the same blast to the head as the other one, but survived. Brax peered anew at the bug. It proved a slightly different color than the previous bugs. Uh-oh. Brax's confidence slipped a tad.

Wendell and Gaines hit anew, but damage the bug they may, but not enough to kill it.

The bugs charged into melee. They missed Anton and Gaines, but hit Brax and Wendell. Fortunately, armor saved the two and the battle continued.

A Bed Bug with Delusions of Grandeur

The Big Bad Bed Bug emerged from the fusion shaft and made for the party. It was twice the size of any of the man-sized bugs. The melee was about to become even more interesting as it missed Carlsbad with a sweeping hook.

Carlsbad struck again and dispatched his targeted bug. Anton struck with the chainsword, killing his bug. He then started to fiddle with the SOBB to switch it to the speaker system. Watchtower hit again and killed his bug.

Brax, locked in melee, thought fast. He pulled a thermite grenade and tossed it behind the line of bugs. It exploded with a flash of fireball, burning the clutch of bugs and engulfing them in flames. While the damage was not quite as concentrated as a single laser shot, it killed off a wounded bug and put a world of hurt on a larger number of bugs – and even Bed Bug.

Wendell used his shotgun for a hit. Gaines fired his carbine for a hit, then dropped it and pulled his knife.

The closest bugs fled in a fiery frenzy, running and swatting at the flames. But there were more bugs to take their place. Three hit Brax only to find their claws and acid no match for power armor. A claw found a weak spot in Gaines' armor and stabbed him.

Bed Bug was smart enough to see that Brax was the prime target and shifted away from Carlsbad. A feeble parting shot did nothing.

Fire in the Hold

Brax never gave one thought to using thermite to exterminate bugs. As the flames grew, the surrounding area caught on fire, including the outside of the hydrogen feeder line to the fusion reactor. As limited in power as the reactor output, it was still functioning.

Wendell expressed horror because he understood what happened when fire reached pure hydrogen. "You're going to turn us into the sun!" Wendell yelled.

"We got bugs to worry about!" Brax shouted back.

Carlsbad, now alone and unhindered by attackers, located the emergency power shutoff and fire suppressant system and raced towards them.

The Bug With the Hug

Bed Bug flailed at Brax with a pair of pincers, one of which dug through the armor. It was almost enough to fell him. Power armor or not, he wobbled as he tried to parry the rapid pincer attacks.

Brax grunted in pain, gritted his teeth, and tossed another thermite grenade. It exploded on target and more flames engulfed the bugs, including Bed Bug.

"What are you doing?" Wendell screamed. "You'll blow us up! You're crazy!"

"Oh, stop worrying," Brax yelled, although it came out as a faint rasp. "The future will take care of itself!"

Carlsbad shut down the fusion reactor and triggered the fire suppressant system. We thought a gas would emerge to tamp out the fire, but instead, old fashioned foam spewed from various nozzles. Just how old was this freighter?

This freighter was old...

How old was it?

It was so old, it sported historic license plates.

This freighter was old...

How old was it?

It was so old, it ran on an Eighth Ray.

This freighter was old...

How old was it?

It was so old, it was a featured artifact on *Ancient Aliens*.

No matter, Carslbad's fast action prevented an explosion.

Wendell thought about tossing a grenade down the gullet of Bed Bug, but used his shotgun instead. A good thing, too, for he fumbled in his hesitation and shotgun went off barely missing Brax's head.

Creepazoids attack. Image from web.

As Gaines dispatched his bug, the rest of the little bugs burned into crisps. Only Bed Bug remained.

Bed Bug continued to burn, but swung a pincer into Brax, injuring him even more. Brax staggered, now bleeding from two punctures. He felt tired and the first trace of blackness passed before his eyes before he blinked it away.

Then, out of the lift sprang Cormac, his carbine on full auto with armor-piercing bullets. Three bursts tore chunks out of Bed Bug. Ignoring Brax, the big bug moved to attack Cormac.

As the big bug left, Brax breathed a sigh of relief, but also knew what was in store for Cormac and his lighter armor. Brax unveiled his ace in the hole: the quadri-shotgun fist perched on the power armor. He triggered them one after another, but his wounds made him too slow. He only put a tiny wound, hardly felt, into Bed Bug. Brax mentally kicked himself. In his light-headedness, he got greedy for hits. Next time, if he could remember, he'd fire them all off at once and concentrate the blasts.

Wendell fumbled anew and suffered a jammed round in his carbine. Gaines hit but with no apparent effect.

Bed Bug continued to burn, but it was still healthy enough to put a pincer through Cormac's armor. As he staggered backwards, he retained enough to control to slap in a fresh magazine and empty the armor-piercing bullets into the bug.

With one last screech and then a whimper of pain, Bed Bug fell. Cormac fired another magazine into its head to make sure it stayed dead.

The comms came back on line. The SOBB, too.



Medic!

At this point, Coleman finally arrived with his BFMG.

"Now?" Brax exclaimed. "Nice of you to join us."

"I was wondering what was happening, but since nothing came over the comms, I figured you had it well in hand."

"No news is good news?" Anton asked. "The fact that you couldn't hear the 'game' on comms didn't strike you as *not* normal?"

Brax took a knee on the floor, his head swimming from blood loss. He opened up his power armor as Watchtower arrived to patch the wounds. Whatever Watchtower's skill level, he staunchly stopped the bleeding. "Best I can do," he noted. Brax sealed himself back into the armor.

Anton attended to Cormac and also managed to stop the bleeding. Wendell tried and failed to stem the blood loss of Gaines, but Watchtower took over to correctly patch up Gaines. They were all rush jobs, but the wounded needed the attention.

Carlsbad and Anton looked over the fusion reactor. The bugs had done damage -- some superficial and some requiring effort. Fortunately, the parts locker was full and the tools were available. They considered speed of repair versus quality of repair and type of repair. With bugs on the loose, the life support repairs took priority. The canisters of toxic gas needed to be triggered...and soon.

A couple members of the party used portable welders to obstruct vents and other openings. It may not make a fortress, but it would offer at least a bit of a delay. Others hacked the security system for camera coverage and to operate the robot repair vehicles remotely.

Brax swayed as he stood on overwatch, then dropped to a knee. Patched he may be, but he still felt lightheaded. He'd need a session with Dr. Sparks, more effective meds, and a long rest to get back to normal. At least the painkillers were killing the pain.

He heard all sorts of time estimates to get the reactor fixed. He knew nothing about ship systems, but he hoped they concentrated on Life Support first to see if the gas release would work. Certainly the SOBB was nullified by Bed Bug. Anton's switch from comms to speakers took too much time -- need to rig a simple switch for next time.

Anton, Watchtower, and Carlsbad worked on the reactor. They gradually fixed enough to bring power back to the ship. It was stopgap and jury-rigged, but it worked. Propulsion was another problem, but at least they had internal power.

Moment of Truth: Gas 'Em Anton

Anton pushed the Life Support button. The system blinked on and immediately generated an error message.

"What's the error message, Anton?" Wendell asked.

Anton scanned the panel and chuckled. "Toxic gas in the system." He slapped the override.

Then, a comm relay clicked in and started broadcasting.

"I thought we deactivated the emergency beacon," Gaines said.

"We did," Brax confirmed.

Anton ignored the two and funneled his attention into tracing and stopping the signal. It took three long minutes.

"People are going to know the ship is here," Coleman sighed.

"Not outside the solar system," Brax noted. "There is no FTL comms. And not for a while, if at all. Given the cargo, it's likely a specific frequency. And given the size of Git'erdoneCo, it'll probably be buried within a massive amount of communications. It might take six months for someone to notice, if ever."

"Yeah, but pirates like us inside the system might know about it," Wendell interjected.

"If they were listening to that specific frequency, and bothered to note it as significant," Anton proposed. "And an individual ship would need something else to triangulate on. A difficult proposition."

Brax shrugged. Anton was the comms expert.

"We'll heal and rest and prep. It'll take at least a day, maybe two, for the gas to diffuse throughout the ship," Anton noted.

Meanwhile, security cameras showed the gas taking effect. The bugs started dropping like flies...except for what looked like the Queen of the brood. It was three times bigger than the 'little' bugs.

Books I've Read

By Russ Lockwood

Alamo of the Revolution. by Jerald P. Hurwitz. Softcover (5.5x8.25 inches). 164 pages. 2020.

Subtitle: *Benedict Arnold and the Massacre at Fort Griswold*

New London, CT, proved to be a hotbed of American Revolution privateers, which captured more than 500 ships during the war (p15). The capture of the NYC-bound HMS Hannah, loaded with gunpowder and luxury goods, proved to be the spark that ignited Brig. Gen. Benedict Arnold's 1781 expedition to clean out the pirate base.

While Arnold led about 800 troops to sweep the virtually unmanned forts on the west side of the river and burn most of New London to the ground, Lt. Col. Eyre landed with 750 troops (40th and 54th regiments and 4th Battalion of NJ Volunteers, with some artillery) to attack Fort Griswold, undermanned by only 160 or so troops.

Hurwitz weaves a fascinating tale of American bravery -- and a bit of cowardice -- defending against a British attack that lacked scaling ladders or axes. The Brits carried the fort with an old-fashioned infantry rush aided by some ad-hoc assault techniques.

The resulting storming of the fort resulted in the massacre of most of the American garrison, in large part due to a chance shot at the American flag. Hence the reference in the title to the Alamo.

The book contains 16 black and white photos (many of the fort today), six black and white maps (helpful for those wishing to refight the battle on a tabletop), and five black and white illustrations.

The surrender of British troops at Yorktown soon thereafter put an end to the war and overwhelmed news of the battle around New London.

For American Rev tabletop buffs, skirmishing on the west side of the river combined with storming the fort on the east side of the river would make for an entertaining game. For history buffs, the smooth prose makes for an enlightening read.

Enjoyed it.

Dunkirchen 1940: The German View. by Robert Kershaw. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 352 pages. 2022.

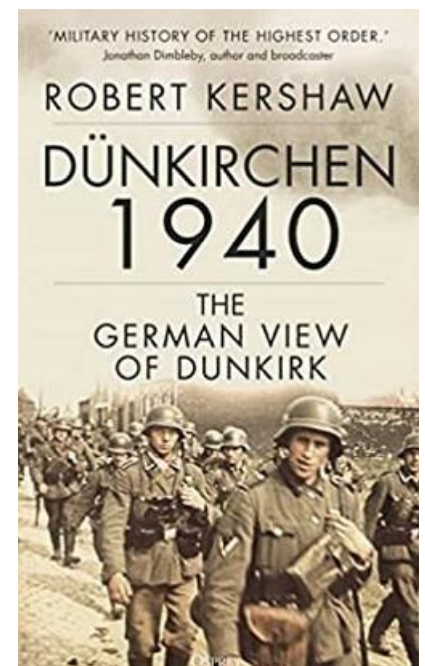
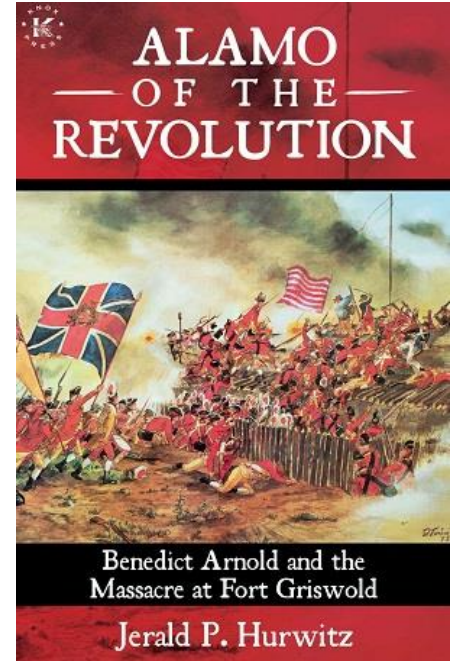
Usually, you get the British view of the 1940 evacuation of British and French troops at Dunkirk. In this book, you get the German view and it's an interesting view.

About half the book covers German operations from the invasion of France to the siege of Dunkirk. It's the typical mix of operational reports, letters, and memoirs to describe and explain the attacks and counterattacks roughly up to the order to halt the panzers. The back half of the book covers the cordon around Dunkirk and the sea, land, and air attacks on the defending British and French.

Conventional wisdom defines the panzer halt as the key component and it certainly contributed to allowing Allied defenses to solidify around the port. Yet other factors, including depleted infantry manpower of panzer divisions, lagging infantry divisions, and logistics shortages dogged the German attack. These are all magnificently explained using German sources with a few Allied sources sprinkled in.

One overriding reason for the German panzer halt was that "Blitzkrieg gave every indication of outrunning political direction" (p108). That one sentence, with supporting evidence, encapsulates the idea that Hitler and his High command feared losing control of an army that prided itself on individual initiative.

Then comes other details: opened floodgates meant the British and French only had to defend half to two-thirds of the perimeter (p318) and thus funneled German attacks; the weather favored the Allied embarkations and stymied German air attacks for the four crucial days of May 29 to June 1 (p315); the loss of air superiority as the RAF



stepped up defense of the beaches; and increased French defensive vigor combine to explain the high German casualties around Dunkirk.

Another point: German troop withdrawals for the attack against the remainder of France meant only 10 German divisions prosecuted most of the siege. Think about that: the Allies evacuated 350,000 or so troops, plus lost 40,000 French prisoners (p306). That's about 400,000 troops on defense at one point in time or another -- the Germans were outnumbered.

One text quibble: During the German blitzkrieg to the coast, the Allies only planned 15 counterattacks and launched 11, with half taking assigned objectives but none having any impact on the German advance (p89). Yet, what about Arras? It temporarily stalled Hoth's XVI Panzer Corp (p93) and contributed to near panic in the German high command as well as provoking the panzer halt. Had Arras used all its intended tanks and troops, the setback may have been more than temporary. But that's best left to wargaming.

The best humorous anecdote: A British major drives out of La Cappelle to warmly welcome German troops, only to be taken prisoner. He initially thought them to be Dutch troops on the counterattack, only to observe the swastikas on their uniforms (p106).

The book contains 42 black and white photos and eight black and white maps. I would rather ditch the photos and include 42 more maps, but that's me with an eye for a tabletop battle and to better understand movements described in the text.

One interesting factoid: During a discussion about German sources for Dunkirk, German post-war accounts were relatively few, mostly because all the troops were sent to the Eastern Front and suffered horrendous losses. By the end of September 1941, the German Army in Russia lost 500,000 men -- 30 divisions -- or equal to all of 1940's Army Group B that had crossed France and taken Dunkirk.

Well written and well researched it offers another view of the Dunkirk evacuation. For the British view, see *Dunkirk Evacuation Operation Dynamo* (review in the 6/26/2020 AAR or up on hmgs.org).

Enjoyed it.



The Lion of Little Round Top. by H. G. Myers. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 204 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *The Life and Military Service of Brigadier General Strong Vincent in the American Civil War*

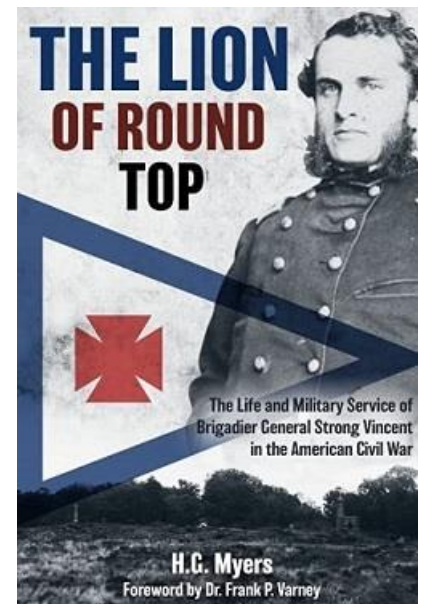
Biography of the brigade commander who acted swiftly to secure Little Round Top. Sure, Col. Chamberlain of the 20th Maine gets the lion's share of credit for repelling the Confederate attack, but the story seems more nuanced than popular hype. After all, Jeff Daniels played Chamberlain in the movie. Who played Vincent?

The details of early life weave into the Civil War as competence at organization propels him up the regimental ranks and into brigade. During McClelland's Peninsula drive on Richmond, Vincent fell ill with "Chikahominy Fever" (p48) and left the 83rd PA, ultimately ending back in Erie, PA, for recovery.

Returning in time for Fredericksburg and regimental command, he ascended to brigade command in May 1863, just in time to learn the business of a brigade before heading to Gettysburg.

The key moment at Gettysburg for Vincent was the rallying of the understrength 16th Michigan, which had shattered and began heading for the rear. Using a riding crop, he thrashed more than few soldiers back into line with just enough strength to hold on until the 140th NY arrived to hold the line (p118-119).

Alas, Vincent got carried away and leapt upon a boulder to exhort his men "Don't give an inch, boys!" A minie ball tore through his groin, hip, and thigh. It was a fatal wound.



Meanwhile, the 20th Maine made its fateful charge. Chamberlain went on to become a legend, in part to his re-writing -- and embellishing -- of his official report that was later used to compile the Official Records of the War of the Rebellion (p150). There's more to this story than this point, and the book delves into it with references and details.

Well researched and readable, *The Lion of Round Top* provides insight into the making of a brigade commander that excelled at Gettysburg.

Enjoyed it.

The Dragon's Teeth: Chinese People's Liberation Army. by Benjamin Lai. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 320 pages. 2022 reprint of 2016 book.

Subtitle: *Its History, Traditions, and Air, Sea, and Land Capabilities in the 21st Century*

Reprint combines Chinese and English sources to offer an overview of the Chinese military. The first two chapters cover the history of the post-WWII military while the rest offers a roughly chronological evolution of air, sea, and land forces and their equipment. Sidebars zero in on personalities and specific equipment over the last 75 or so years.

Plenty of little conflicts dot the post-WWII era, including against the USSR, India, and Vietnam. The modernization of the military included reducing the number of military personnel and associated academies while increasing the technological sophistication of equipment. Extensive appendices offer considerable tabular data.

The book contains 61 color photos, six black and white photos, nine color illustrations, seven color maps, and one black and white map.

One typo: an extra backslash (p58).

China keeps looking backwards as an aggrieved victim of territorial loss and its modern efforts serve to reclaim that territory. Like Germany in the 1930s, it gobbles up Hong Kong, Macau, and other territories from the democracies without triggering a world war. China doesn't want a war with the US the way Germany didn't want one with Britain and the West, but in 1939, Poland was a grab too far. I suspect Taiwan would be a grab too far today.

China's first fear is a vibrant society with freedom of speech and other democratic values. Its second fear is a multi-national war against it on all sides. Taiwan may very well be the same land grab too far that triggers a united military response. You won't find much about its first fear, but you'll find plenty about how the Communists are dealing with the second fear.

Enjoyed it.

Ace in a Day: The Memoir of an 8th Air Force Fighter Pilot in World War II. by Lt. Col. Wayne K Blickenstaff. Hardback (6.3x9.3 inches). 340 pages. 2022.

Originally written as a novel, it was turned into a non-fiction memoir. Where necessary, editor Graham Cross added footnotes to clarify events and facts in the text.

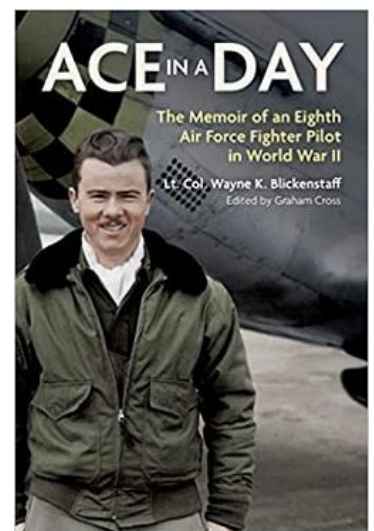
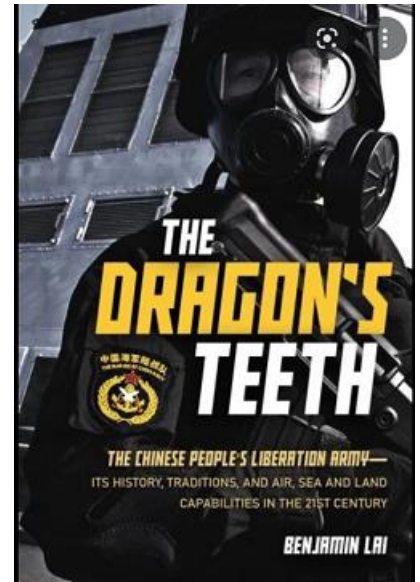
Eminently readable, it offers a cockpit-level view of the war, from training to combat, from a pilot who flew 133 missions (456 hours and 55 minutes of combat). He managed to have seven of his aircraft shot down -- but not with him in it, but by other pilots who used the aircraft (p243). When he rose high enough in the ranks, he instituted the rule that no one else flew his plane but him.

He trained on a variety of aircraft until he flew P-47s and later P-51s in combat. When sent over on the *Queen Mary*, he shared a room for the five-day crossing with nine other lieutenants. The ship, built to transport 2,300 people, held 16,000 on his crossing (p79).

The book contains 62 black and white photos and five color aircraft profiles.

Most of the missions involves bomber escort, with fighter combat if the Luftwaffe rose to intercept. He provides vibrant descriptions of his personal air to air combats as well as the ground-attack missions. He was indeed credited with five victories in a day (March 24, 1945), which is half his 10-victory total. He also delves into his daily activities when he wasn't flying, which are equally as interesting to get a good picture of life as a US WWII fighter pilot.

Enjoyed it.



Pacific Profiles: Volume 6. by Michael John Claringbould. Softcover (6.9x9.9 inches). 120 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *Allied Fighters: Bell P-39 and P-400 Airacobra - South and Southwest Pacific 1942-1944*

Another in the excellent series of books covering a squadron-by-squadron, plane-by-plane history complete with extensive camouflage and markings illustrations. Considering that the patterns were far from uniform, aircraft buffs seeking accurate Airacobra imagery will treasure this book.

It contains 96 color aircraft profiles (plus insets of nose art), 78 black and white photos, seven color photos, two color maps, two color diagrams, and three color illustrations.

As you read through the descriptions, you'll find a number of anecdotes, such as when a P-39 dropped a bomb so low, the blast blew off both its wings (p63), and how different squadrons transitioned out of the P-39/P-400 aircraft -- 35th Fighter Squadron went to P-40s (p27) while 36th Squadron went to P-47s and then P-38s (p36).

You also get an overall feel for aircraft losses -- to me, most came from accidents, not air combat losses.

You can find my reviews of the first five volumes posted at hmgs.org or in my AARs: *Volume 1 Japanese Army Fighters* (AAR issue 1/31/2021); *Volume 2 Japanese Bombers 1942-1944* (3/02/2021); *Volume 3 A-20 Havoc* (5/03/2021); and *Volume 4 US F4U and Volume 5 IJN Zero* (both 01/31/2022). *Volume 6* is another winner.

Enjoyed it.

South Pacific Air War: Vol. 5 Crisis in Papua. by Michael Claringbould and Peter Ingman. Softcover (6.9x9.9 inches). 236 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *September-December 1942*

Analysis of flight logs for Allied and Japanese squadrons provides considerable information about air operations over Papua and New Guinea in late 1942. It tells of plane by plane missions, with losses and combat results, all the while comparing and contrasting both sides' accounts for an accurate depiction of losses.

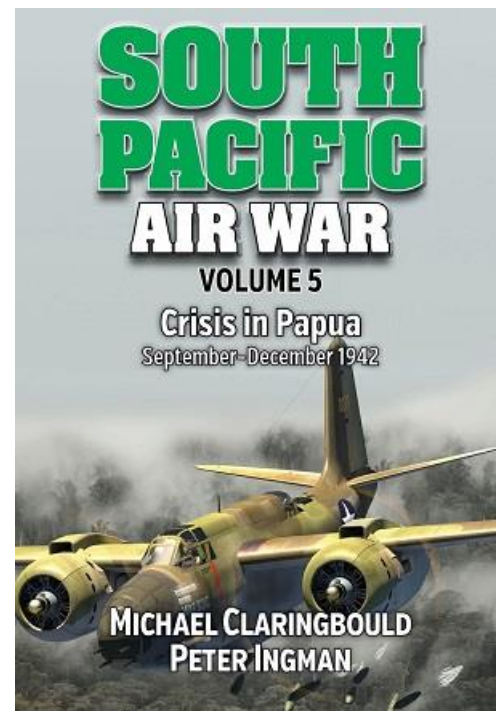
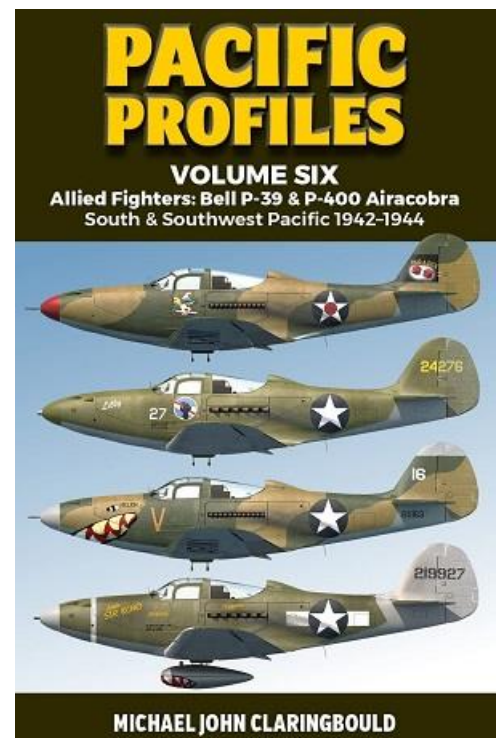
I have to chuckle that the book tracks bombs dropped or bullets expended for most missions. Yet when air missions are sent out with only a couple or few bombers, or fighter sweeps with a flight or two, you appreciate the accuracy of the transcription as well as the flavor of combat. You can pull dozens, if not scores, of small scenarios from the pages.

You'll start to realize just how horrible weather can be in and around the island, with both sides suffering weather-related delays, cancelled missions, and aircraft losses. Some pilots are noted as MIA even today.

On the flip side of all this accuracy is that the text starts getting repetitious as you move through the book. It starts to read like transcribed log books. But then you happen upon an interesting anecdote and you realize the fascinating information buried within. So you keep reading.

Account after account describes how B-17s and B-24s hardly scored any hits on ships sailing the ocean. A postwar USAAF study found that B-17 bombs hit less than 1% of targeted ships (p215) -- but also got that 1% lucky at times. Now, that's a repetitious game mechanic -- for heavy bombers attacking ships, roll percentile dice. On a 100, you score a hit. Reported near misses don't seem to have done any damage.

The appendix details every aircraft lost by Allies (115 aircraft of all types) and Japanese (51 aircraft of all types). There's also a chart of cumulative aircraft losses (Allied 476 lost vs. Japanese 286) covering the first year of



the war from Dec 8, 1941 to Dec 31, 1942 that stitches together the numbers from the first four volumes with this volume (p226).

I have not reviewed the first three volumes in the *South Pacific Air War* series. You'll find *Volume 4: Buna and Milne Bay 1942* here at hmgs.org or in my 3/29/2021 AAR. Note that Claringbould has a third series called *Pacific Adversaries*, of which I reviewed *Volume 2: Japan vs Allies (7/31/2020 AAR or up on HMGS.org)*; *Volume 3 - Japanese Army vs US (1/31/2021)*; and *Volume 4 1943-1944 (7/28/2021)*.

That's a pretty good account of his WWII Pacific Air War expertise that has carried through in *Volume 5*. And don't forget the *Pacific Profiles* series.

Enjoyed it.

Camouflage: Modern International Military Patterns. by Eric H. Larson. Hardback (8.8x11.4 inches). 482 pages. 2021.

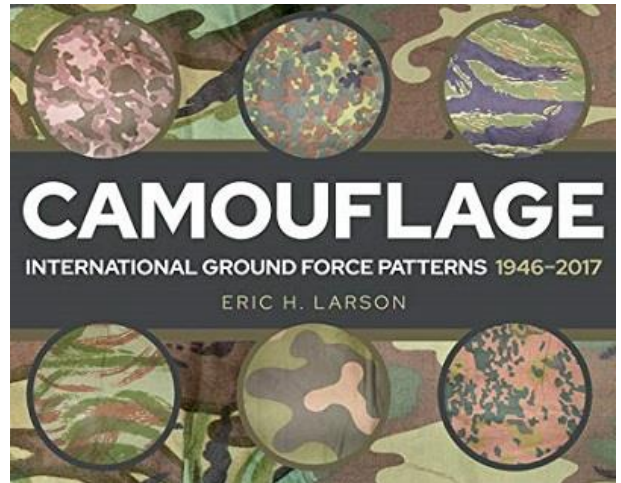
This photo-intensive book covers the uniform camouflage patterns of 198 countries. The Introduction says the book covers post-WWII, but the vast majority of the photos look from the modern era. It specifically does not cover experimental patterns -- only those in wide use.

Each country gets a short intro, including the camouflage patterns used by its military, followed by photos of troops as well as close-ups of various patterns (as depicted in circles on the cover).

I didn't count the photos, but the book claims over 600 and I'll say that seems about right. Each comes with a descriptive caption.

This is a one-stop dream reference for painters of modern miniature soldiers.

Enjoyed it.



The Fire of Venture Was in His Veins. by David Snape. Softcover (7.2x9.75 inches). 175 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *Major Allan Wilson and the Shangani Patrol 1893: Rhodesia's 'Custer's Last Stand'*

I'm becoming ever fonder of the *From Musket to Maxim 1815-1914* series for its level of detail about battles known and obscure. This is Number 20 and quite an interesting record of a British Victorian-era conquest that suffered a tactical reverse and a strategic success.

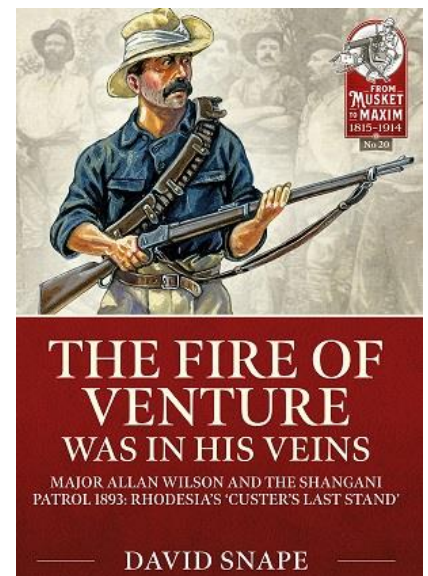
About the only thing I'll say about the 'Custer's Last Stand' reference is guess that some executive in the Helion marketing department panicked and made someone stick those words on the cover. For the record, Wilson had about 20 guys trapped and overrun by AmaNdebele warriors. It's more like making a mountain out of an anthill -- that's an inside joke unless you read where one trooper was standing during the last stand.

In any case, the book covers the Forbes expedition of a couple hundred troopers and mercenaries tracking down the elusive King Lobengula and trying to capture him to put a stop to the war and grab some territory, or at least exclusive rights to minerals and agricultural lands. Cecil Rhodes was involved in a land grab, the British government allowed a free hand more or less because he was footing the bill for empire expansion, and the AmaNdebele sat on primo land for agriculture and cattle grazing.

The book contains 42 black and white photos and illustrations, three black and white maps, and two color uniform illustrations -- a 'Combined Column' trooper that's also on the cover and an AmaNdebele warrior that fields Zulu-like gear and attacks with Zulu-like tactics.

It's all magnificently told, especially if you, like me, know nothing about this expedition. A good little Victorian-era campaign is within these pages, or at least a battle or two. A hodge podge of British troops and adventurers, lots of fierce warriors, and Maxim MGs and a 7 lber artillery piece would make for a cracking good tabletop game or three.

Enjoyed it.



On the Borderlands of Great Empires: Transylvanian Armies 1541-1613. by Florin Nicolae Ardelean. Softcover (7.2x9.75 inches). 175 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *From Retinue to Regiment 1453-1618 Number 12*

FRtR is another Helion series that impresses me, with this one covering Transylvanian armies. I did not see any references to Vlad or to Dr. Frankenfurter.

Transylvania morphed from province to independent entity to vassal state of the Habsburgs and Ottomans, depending on which empire was in the ascendency. A plethora of political and military revolts made this state rather unstable, with numerous princes, nobles, and Diet members opposing each other. Yet the armies often acquitted themselves well in the field against all foes, internal or external.

This book covers it all, including organization, weapons, armor, equipment, allegiances, and intrigues. A fortress-by-fortress and town-by-town examination of their importance and garrisons adds to the appeal of the book.

The book contains 15 black and white illustrations, eight black and white maps, and eight color uniform illustrations.

Campaigns and battles get a nice overview for the last half of the book. You can pull a few battle scenarios from the pages, especially those accompanied by the plain, but acceptable, maps.

Enjoyed it.

GI Collector's Guide: Volume 1. by Henri-Paul Enjames. Hardback (9.3x12.6 inches). 272 pages. 2022 reprint of 2008.

An incredible collection of photos is a catalog of equipment use by US soldiers in the European Theater of Operations. It covers infantry, armor, airborne, mountain, military police, engineer, signal, chemical, medical, and chaplain personnel, and with a separate section for female personnel.

Each individual item gets a color photograph. For example: 11 photos of headgear, 15 photos of helmets, seven photos of canteens, 11 photos of canteen covers, and so on and so on. Boots, pants, typewriters, weapons, medical kits, radios, cases, pans, tents...

I admit, I didn't count the photos, but if you figure about eight or so items per page on average, that's about 2,000 photos. The amount of time it must have taken to assemble and photograph everything is likewise incalculable.

There are even the patches from the fictitious divisions General Patton "commanded" prior to D-Day.

It is amazing how much industrial might it took to outfit a soldier. Sure, not every item for every soldier, but do enough math in your head for the millions the US outfitted and your head will hurt.

Excellent photos. Excellent reference.

Enjoyed it.

GI Collector's Guide: Volume 2. by Henri-Paul Enjames. Hardback (9.3x12.6 inches). 272 pages. 2022 reprint of 2008.

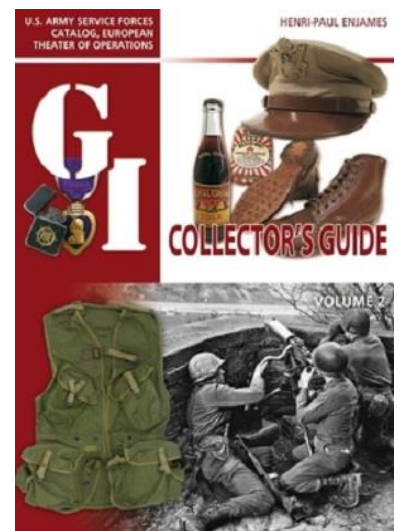
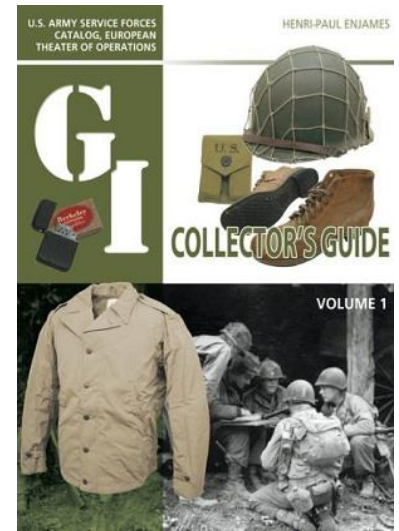
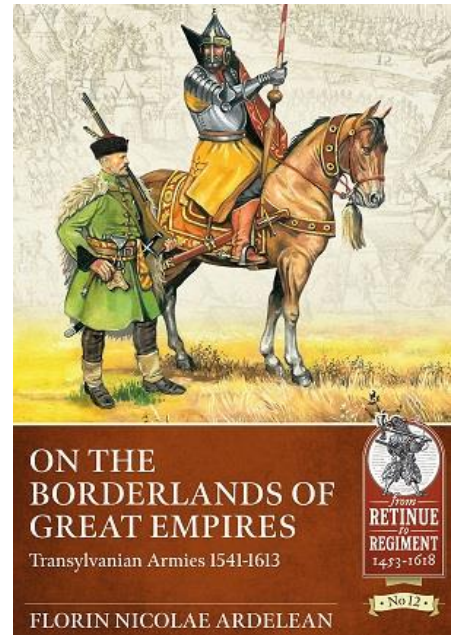
According to the introduction, the first volume was so well received, people contacted him with items not in the original volume.

Lots more equipment, publications, documentation, female items, military police, signal, and POW items. You'll also find sections on draft and training camps.

It seems that even more items per page are included, like maybe 10 per page, and even more on many pages. I'll call it 2,500 photos.

Again: Excellent photos. Excellent reference.

Again: Enjoyed it.



Defending Rodinu: Europe at War 20. by Krzysztof Dabrowski. Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 80 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *Volume 1: Build-Up and Operational History of the Soviet Air Defense Force 1945-1960*

I admit I didn't know where Rodinu was, but the introduction noted it's a Russian word roughly equivalent to "homeland" or "Mother Russia" or something like that.

This initial volume covers the air defense of the USSR from US and Allied intrusions from after WWII to 1960. According to the US, the first overflight was RB-29s over Siberia on August 5, 1948 searching for concentrations of bombers intended as a sneak attack (p20). According to the Soviets, two US aircraft penetrated 6km into Soviet airspace on April 5, 1946 (p21).

Naturally, the Soviets continued to develop AA, SAMs, and jet interceptors to attack US and British aircraft overflying Soviet and Soviet-controlled territory.

Forget Francis Gary Powers, the first downing of a US aircraft was a B-25 that flew over Ukraine and was shot down in autumn 1949 over the Black Sea near Odessa (p21).

One typo: "Col. Stanton T. Smith was relieved" should be relieved (p29).

The booklet contains 80 black and white photos, eight black and white maps, one color map, and 21 color aircraft profiles.

You can pull a few scenarios from the pages, such as P-51s vs. La-11s and four MiG-15s vs two F9 Panthers being more competitive than if MiG-15s actually intercepted individual RB-29 or B-47 aircraft.

It reads OK in a just the facts ma'am way. It provides a litany of Western incursions into Soviet airspace and the responses that ranged from bumbling to effective downing of aircraft by Soviet fighters and SAMs.

Enjoyed it.

Narvik and Norwegian Campaign 1940: Images of War. by Philip Jowett. Softcover (7.5x9.7 inches). 230 pages. 2022.

The *Images of War* series always contains an interesting collection of black and white photos and illustrations. How interesting depends on your interest in the topic. In this case, it's the German 1940 invasion of Norway, although it also includes the invasion of Denmark as part of the Scandinavian campaign.

The book contains 329 black and white photos and one black and white map. A few of them I've seen before, but the vast majority are new to me. They cover air, land, and sea actions.

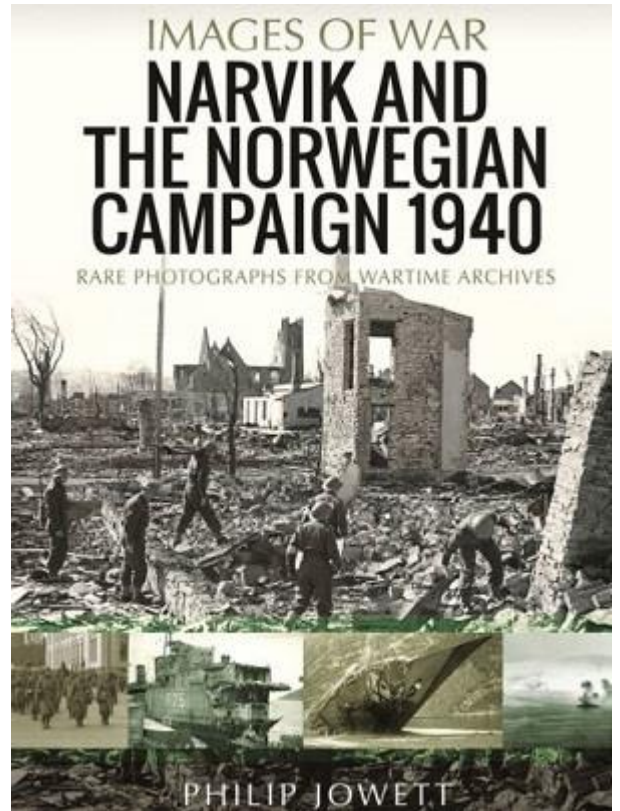
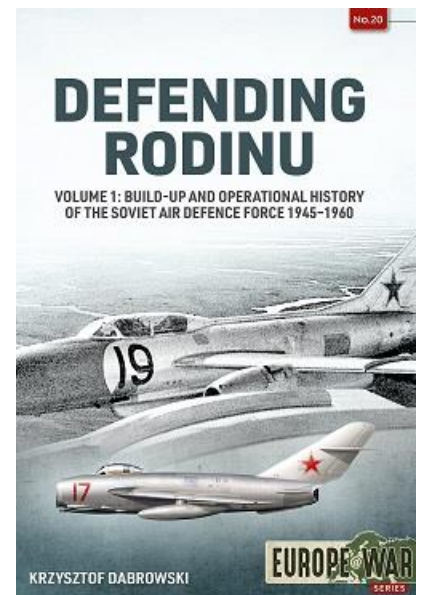
One quibble: In one caption, "290 specialists" reinforced German forces via the Swedish border (p195), but in another caption "160 specialists" arrived as reinforcements from Swedish border (p200). If these are the same group, then the numbers don't match. If not, it needs to be made clearer that two groups arrived.

Some favorite photos: Hudson A28 crew holding a cage with carrier pigeons "in case the wireless failed." (p152). No word if someone in flight tossed out a bird in what would be the world's fastest pigeon.

A Pz I with four German infantry crouched behind it trying to deal with a Norwegian roadblock (p109).

Three Neubaufahzeug Nb Fz heavy tanks that were pre-war prototypes shipped up to Oslo to awe the natives, but ended up having to be used in combat (p93).

Enjoyed it.



Zitadelle: SS Panzer-Korps on the Attack July 1943. by Massimiliano Afiero, Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 96 pages. 2022.

This photo book taps German sources, especially SS photographers, to document the Kursk offensive in July 1943. Photos come from Bundesarchiv, US National Archives, and elsewhere. While I've seen a few in other books, many are new to me.

The 303 black and white photos provide a reference for modelers. Obviously, the larger the scale, the more useful this book, especially for kit bashing. The photos offer a bell shape of clarity, likely due to original sources.

Seven black and white maps complement the text offering an overview of each day's action. Snippets of first-person accounts, army orders, and tactical reports dot the text.

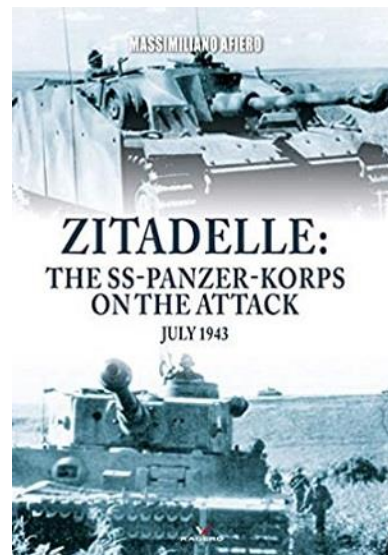
A couple typos: Chapter heading reads "13 June 1943" when it should read 13 July 1943 (p77). "ngineers" is obviously missing an "E" (p84).

While most photos are of, call it 'rear-area' activities or portraits, the somewhat blurry photo of a German soldier rising from a foxhole and tossing some sort of anti-tank grenade at the side of a T-34 is pretty impressive (p72). I don't know if this is a staged propaganda photo or not, but if it isn't, that's one nervy grenade tosser and one nervy cameraman.

Also, a Soviet POW has an unusual camouflage smock with large blobs (p85).

I know...another Kursk book, but while the text isn't exactly compelling, the photos are.

Enjoyed it.



The Royal Navy in Action: Art From Dreadnought to Vengeance. by John Fairley. Hardback (8.8x11.25 inches). 150 pages. 2022.

The heart and soul of this book is the 98 color painting depicting various ships and actions of the British Royal Navy from WWI to the Falklands. Eight black and white sketches are also included.

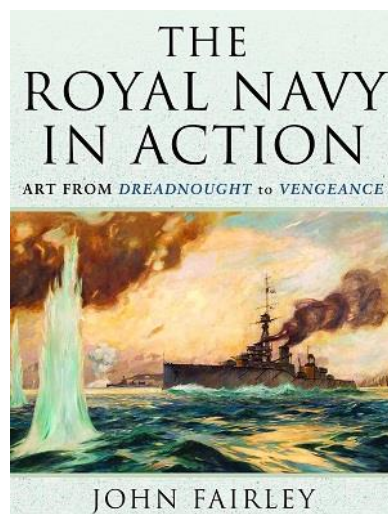
Like most art books, beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so some may find the impressionistic art intriguing while others prefer the super-sharp detailed imagery.

The text explains the paintings and puts the subject within the context of the battle or campaign. Naval art is wonderful in itself, but the explanations and anecdotes offer details that a painting on the wall of a museum can't fully bring to light.

One possible typo, or at least a Britishism I'm unaware of: "Pohle leased off the first torpedo..." might be better stated as "loosed" (p4).

The paintings come from a variety of sources, including the Imperial War Museum, National Maritime Museum, National Museum of the Royal Navy, and private sources. It's a fantastic artistic journey through the 20th Century British Royal Navy.

Enjoyed it.



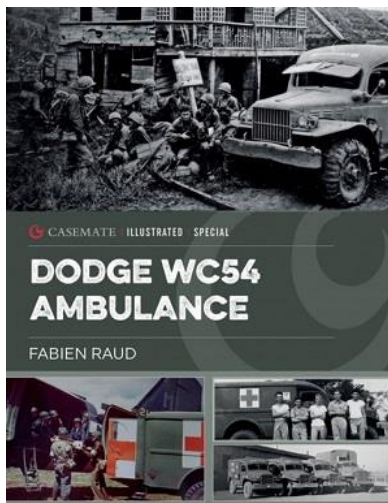
Dodge WC54 Ambulance. by Fabien Raud. Hardback (8.2x10.25 inches). 159 pages. 2022 reprint of 2021 book.

This *Casemate Illustrated Special* covers the WC54, which the author rebuilt, so his knowledge base is hard won.

The 240 color photos, 213 black and white photos, and 43 black and white illustrations offers the ins and outs of the vehicle, including technical manual excerpts. Literally, he covers down to individual nuts and bolts -- this may be even more detailed than modelers need, but vehicle buffs will rejoice.

For those with 6mm (1/285), you probably won't use a lot of the information. Yet the larger the scale of your model, the more you'll appreciate the details contained within the pages of the book.

Enjoyed it.



US Army Diamond T Vehicles in World War II. by Didier Andres. Hardback (8.2x10.25 inches). 159 pages. 2022 reprint of 2021 book.

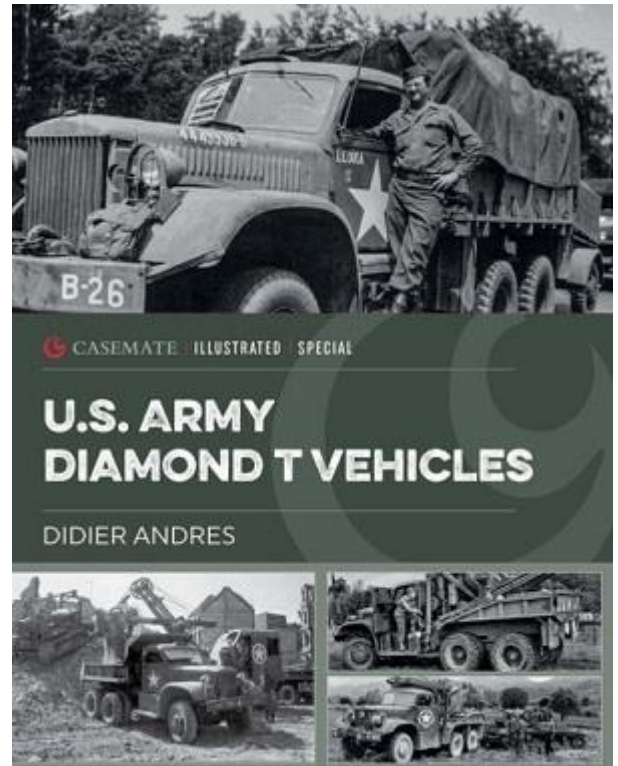
This *Casemate Illustrated Special* covers trucks built by the company Diamond T, which got its start in 1905, produced Liberty trucks for WWI, and then built tens of thousands of trucks in various versions for WWII.

The trucks included cargo (4 ton), wreckers, dump trucks, liquid tank trucks, cranes, prime movers (tank transport), and even half tracks. It's all covered in 301 black and white photos, two color photos, 14 black and white illustrations, and five color illustrations.

Plenty of diorama inspiration within. One photo (p51) shows a wrecker version hitching up a Pz III to tow to...somewhere. Pages 154 to 157 list a photo and technical specs for each of the 17 variants covered in the pages.

The more I delve into production numbers of all the different types of items, from toothbrushes to aircraft carriers, the more I am amazed at what US industry produced in a short amount of time. With so much of our factory production outsourced to foreign countries, I wonder if we could pivot from consumer to military production as quickly today as we did for WWII.

Enjoyed it.



Echo Among Warriors. by Richard Camp. Softcover (6.0x9.0 inches). 261 pages. 2022.

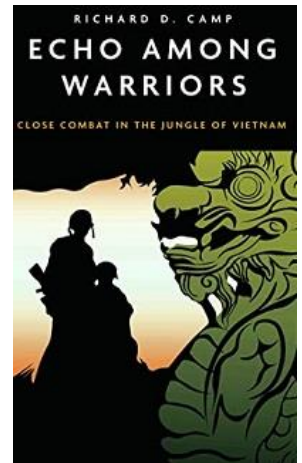
Subtitle: *Close Combat in the Jungle of Vietnam*

This novel starts and ends with a US Marine Corp Lima company facing off against a North Vietnamese Army battalion. The odds are again' the USMC, but grit, leadership, and air and artillery support help the company battle against overwhelming odds.

As such, there is so little backstory about the characters, it seems too generic to make me care about any of them. The book contains a "Roster of Personnel" (p.ix to p.xv) with a paragraph of backstory for each main character, but the info dump lacks the finesse of weaving the background into the story arcs.

That said, the combat scenes in the jungle are well-written and carry the authenticity of a USMC veteran author (1962-1988). So: excellent technical details, but weak character development.

Ties go to the author. Enjoyed it.



Viking Blood and Blade. by Peter Gibbons. Hardback (6.2x9.3 inches). 323 pages. 2021.

The novel concerns a teenager named Hundr, which translates as Dog, taken by Vikings as a lad and now a 'bail boy' on a ship. He is a bastard, which generates insults and disdain until he wins a challenge fight and becomes an oarsman. His speed and fighting prowess generates friends and enemies as he follows his Jarl into battles in Northumbria and elsewhere.

The battle scenes are nicely done, with shieldwall and berserker tactics predominating. Let's not forget warrior maiden Valkyries and Ivar the Boneless make an appearance or three. Unlike the TV show *Vikings*, Ivar is not a cripple, but an agile, two-swords fighter of exceptional ability as well as being Ragnar Lothbrook's son.

This self-published book has some paragraph formatting problems, but nothing that is fatal.

Nicely defined secondary characters, the glimmering of character development for our main character Hundr, and enough peril, double-crossing, and battles make this novel fit for a Viking saga.

Enjoyed it.



The Last Roman. by B. K. Greenwood. Softcover (5.5x9.5 inches). 292 pages. 2021.

The novel follows Marcus Gracchus, a centurion who grabbed a spear and stabbed Jesus on the cross, with his thrust making him immortal. He hopscoches through time working for the Roman Catholic Church, participating in a variety of historical battles. Whenever he dies, he rises from the dead in a grave...somewhere. Immortals are fast healers when wounded and if dead his resurrection occurs after three days -- unless the body is completely obliterated or decapitated.

He has a team that also became immortal, although Doubting Thomas ultimately doubts everything, hies off after the 1453 Siege of Constantinople, and in the modern era wants to use cloning to bring Jesus back and replace his soul with that of Satan's. It makes more sense over a course of a couple hundred pages.

Props for the idea of using a different type of tech to bring down the Church.

So, *Highlander* meets *Da Vinci Code* meets *Deadpool* in a schizophrenic story, but it's well written enough to keep you reading.

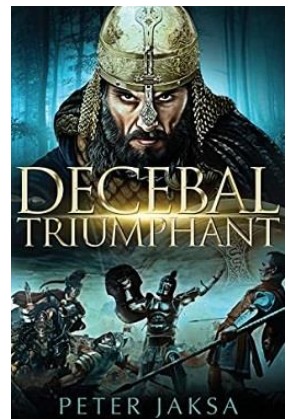
Enjoyed it.



Decebal Triumphant. by Peter Jaska. Hardback (6.2x9.3 inches). 291 pages. 2020.

Self-published novel follows Dacian King Decebal and his efforts to repel Roman invasions of Dacia in the late first century CE. The period flavor reflects intensive historical research, which offers gaps that Jaska fills in with authenticity.

The plot offers sufficient battle scenes worthy of a good tabletop game, although I wouldn't say anyone would be inspired to make a movie trilogy out of the three novels that make up the *Decebal* cycle. The writing is acceptable overall, although I found it lackluster in the beginning and a bit stronger at the end, but not quite strong enough to make me read the sequel..



Fitter: Sukhoi SU-22 with Air Forces in Eastern Europe (Duke Hawkins 23). by R. Pied and N. Deboeck. Softcover (9.4x9.4 inches). 137 pages. 2022.

This past-its-prime fighter is still in service with Poland with 12 single-seat and six dual-seat jets (p7). Not bad for a '60s-era fighter.

The usual cornucopia of color photos, often close-ups, cover the fuselage, swing wings, cockpit, landing gear, tail, engines, maintenance and ordnance. As I noted before, *Duke Hawkins* books are excellent references for the military modeler.

Only glitch is a missing caption (p49).

This book sports 313 color photos in a number of camouflage patterns. The larger your scale, the more impressed you will be with the details you can create with paintbrush and aftermarket kits.

Enjoyed it.



Spitfire: Supermarine Mk IX and Mk XVI (Duke Hawkins Classics 23). by R. Pied and N. Deboeck. Softcover (9.4x9.4 inches). 113 pages. 2022.

All the *Duke Hawkins* aircraft photo books have been of modern aircraft, but their track record obviously got them invited to photograph Supermarine Spitfires Mk IX and Mk XVI in all the close-up detail you've come to expect from the series.

It follows the same formula of in-depth photographic coverage of fuselage, swing wings, cockpit, landing gear, tail, engines, maintenance and ordnance. It contains 267 color photos and sure provides more access than visiting a museum or airshow. It's a modeler's delight.

One typo: "was one of the most economic ones" should be "economical" (p17).

One interesting photo (p46) of the gunsight on the Mk XVI: it has a selector switch for specific targets. For ME-109s and FW-190s, set

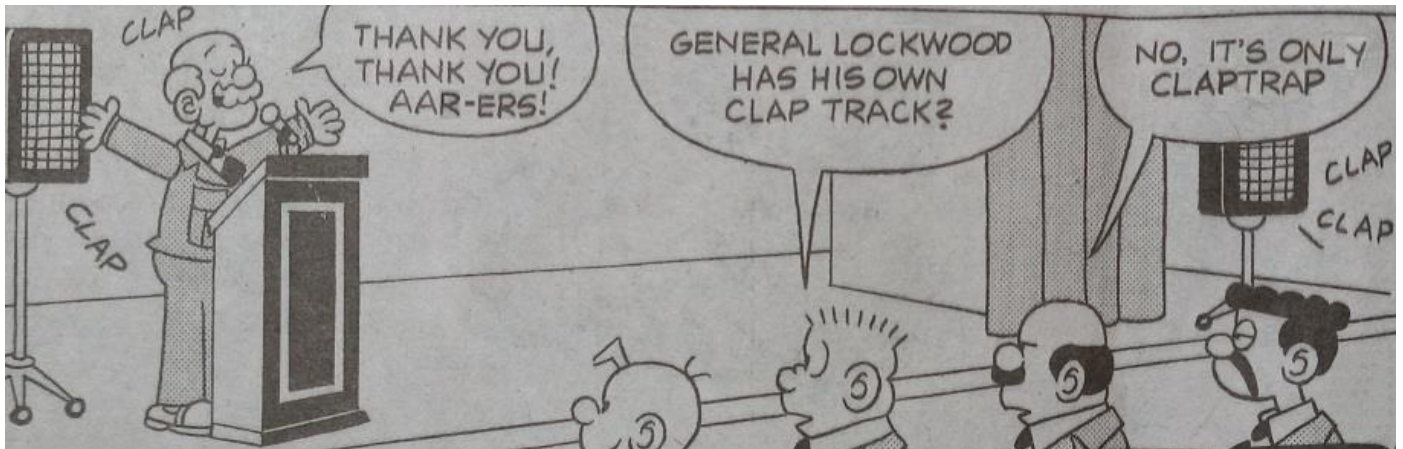


the switch at roughly the three o'clock position. For ME-210s and ME-310s at the one o'clock position. For JU-88s at the eleven o'clock position. For FW-200s at the nine o'clock position. I guess if you ran into a ME-262, it was Miller time (that would be five o'clock and back at the O-club).

This is the first in the new Classic series and notes a total of 39 Spitfires are still airworthy (p110) against only 12 Hurricanes (p108). I wonder if a Hurricane will be the next volume?

Enjoyed it.

For the record, the Word Count function says 23,123... I'll stop now...



Gratuitous photo of Persians Behaving Badly...

Skirmishing can't help my outnumbered cavalry.



Stop? Nobody expects the Word Count Inquisition! 23,135 words...