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No Bizness Like Snow Bizness: Bastogne Battering Ram

by Russ Lockwood

Every road led to Bastogne, or so my maps showed, but I wasn't concerned with every road, just the one in front of me. And it was clogged with Col. Daniel's battalion of American armor. My own US battalion was Last-in-Line Louie.

My column writhed in low-gear agony seeking a way to broaden the front. Yet the evergreen forests and half-frozen streams offered no joy.

The table. Americans coming in from right. Main road starts in middle right of photo and parallel road is in upper right corner. Shellshock hill in middle of photo with Bois du Bowl above it. Village du Bowl in upper left and the exit road in upper left corner.

Even if I could branch off, the snow hindered off-road movement, tracked vehicles or no tracked vehicles. My half-frozen dogfaces would just have to wait until the traffic jam cleared.

Close-up of the Village du Bowl.

The Jam Before Bastogne

In this *Command Decision* (CD) WWII scenario, Daniel and I commanded a US battalion each, he mostly of armor and I mostly of armored infantry. We faced the wily German Oberst Marc, veteran of a thousand battles across Europe, who sought to delay our relief of Bastogne.

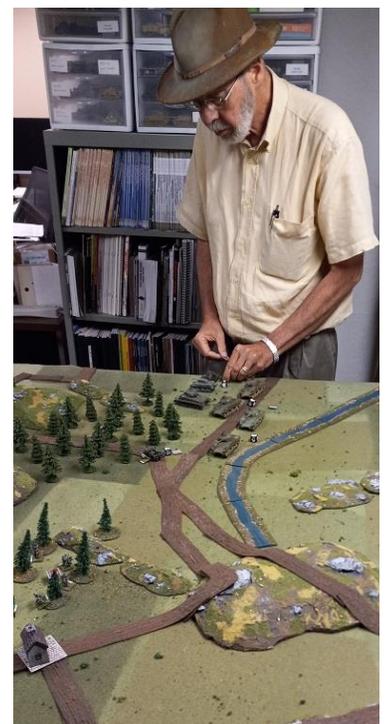
The road network ultimately passed through two German-held towns and plenty of woods and undulating terrain for the defenders to play hide and go ambush. A stream just waited for our tanks to cross, ready to swallow up any vehicle daring enough, or reckless enough, to try and ford its ice-covered width.

The US entry point was a single road. The terrain showed little room for a flanking action, but a parallel road was available across a relatively short stretch of open country.

Col. Daniel plots his entry on the main road.

The Commands

Daniel's command had two companies of Shermans and a company of half-track-toting infantry, plus some independent tank, armored car, and jeep recon platoons. I had the mirror opposite: two companies of half-track-toting infantry and a company of Shermans, plus a few independent jeep and armored car recon platoons. We each had some additional platoons, including a 105mm Sherman platoon. Three battalions of artillery supported our battalions.



Oberst Marc commanded a mixed battalion of STuGs, infantry, an AT gun, and some other platoons. A battalion of artillery supported his unit.

In the interests of saving time, Umpire Marc made the pre-game decision to fire US artillery by battalion instead of by individual battery. Otherwise, three US battalions plus a battalion of German artillery shots would be a lot of dice to roll.

Turn 3: The lead US tank is almost at Shellshock Hill. What's left of a German dummy infantry company scurries for safety (bottom photo).

US Armor on the Attack

The recon jeep platoon scooted onto the board first, and curled around into the woods where the Germans had set up a company. Or so we thought -- two stands disappeared into thin air. Aha! Dummkopfs.

Meanwhile, the Shermans rolled behind the recon, although Col. Daniel swerved off the road with a couple platoons to bring firepower on each side of the road.

One company swerved too close to the stream and ran into ever boggier ground. Daniel passed the die roll and swerved back onto the road. As we expected, the stream would effectively be uncrossable except via lucky die roll.

His armor battalion stretched offboard. I could only lean on the horn and try and hurry them along. Alas, it was not to be.

Turn 5: Col. Daniel takes Shellshock Hill and begins thinking about the Germans occupying Bois du Bowl. His column snakes off table at left.

Ambush?

Col. Daniel didn't get to be a colonel of CCA by being sloppy. He figured mines might be in the road, hence a need for a detour. As it turned out, no mines were on the central road that led to the first hill.

German artillery? That was a different matter. Marc had pre-registered artillery on the first crossroad and shells landed with a flurry of explosions. That forced the column to deviate off the road and slow down by about a third in the snowy fields.

Turn 6: Armor and recon prep to enter the Bois du Bowl.



Col. Daniel was also worried about ambushes, preferring a cautious advance to a zippy advance down the road. Moments passed without the scream of an AT shell heading for his Shermans. Many, many moments. It all slowed the advance.

Turn 7: US wins initiative and Daniel heads into the attack. Col. Marc (right) calculates the odds.

Shellshock Hill

He finally crested Shellshock Hill, in the middle of the table, with his lead Shermans on turn 5. As we needed to clear the road off the end of the table by turn 12 and he had not run into any Germans except the fake ones and the German artillery, it was not looking good to make the timetable. All those Germans in the towns were probably real. Those Panzerfaust Punchers would feast on Shermans if we headed into the village.

As Daniel's last tank (left) clears out, my lead recon troops enter the table. Daniel's black order cube shows one chevron (cautious advance). My order cubes show two chevrons ("Get outta my way, let a rabbit through!" warp-speed charge).

It became even worse as German artillery battered the platoons on the hill, suppressing them with concentrated bursts of salvos, but not damaging them.

Turns 6 and 7 found Col. Daniel massing troops against suspected German positions in the Bois du Bowl, a patch of woods on the outskirts of the Hamlet du Bowl and near the Village du Bowl.

Turn 7: Entry, Finally

Finally, on Turn 7, I was able to enter the board on the same road that Daniel had used. I knew it was pointless to follow on the main road, so I took off cross country to reach that parallel road. How I wish there was a connecting road because I could see that it would take me Turn 8 to reach the other road and Turn 9 to go over Hidden Hill and Turn 10 to get near the Village du Bowl.



Col. Marc drops the German artillery right where he's pointing!

Turn 8: Bois du Bowl

Finally, Daniel mounted his attack on the Germans within the Bois du Bowl. Panzerfausts took out a recon tank platoon and supporting German infantry eliminated recon patrols, but the US Sherman platoons proved mighty powerful and drove the Germans through the woods. However, if you thought tanks through snowy fields were slow, you should see them in snowy woods.

*Clear the Bois du Bowl!
Hamlet du Bowl seems empty,
but Village du Bowl (upper
right corner) hosts Oktoberfest.*

As the name of the German game was delay, so Marc retreated the two companies of infantry away from the US armor. They melted further into the forest and some crossed the parallel road into more forest.



Turn 8: Shellshock Hill

Gadzooks, all of a sudden, an anti-tank round hit one of the Shermans on Shellshock Hill. Some STuG with a little magic in its barrel took out a Sherman.

Turn 9: Cresting Hidden Hill

On the parallel road, I brushed aside a German dummy stand on the way to Hidden Hill.

Turn 9: Pressing the Attack

Daniel pressed on into the woods, but the German infantry fled faster than the tanks could advance.

Turn 10: Rat Patrol - First Platoon

That's right, I had two jeep recon platoons named Rat Patrol. Technically, that's Rat Patrol One and Rat Patrol Two. They were pretty cold in the snow, not baking in the desert as they were used to, but I needed them.

I sent RP One screaming along the road that Daniel had taken, one hand on the horn and one foot flooring the gas pedal. It isn't often that you can drive a full turn on a road the full distance, which I believe was 60 inches...

Nothing hit him. Not artillery. Not AT rounds. Not bullets. Nothing. He was the embodiment of Rat Patrol tactics: full speed and nothing touches 'em.

RP One also found nothing. No mines, no Germans. No nothing. At least we knew the flank was clear and he blocked the road should any errant Germans move onto the board to flank the attack.

Turn 10: Rat Patrol - Second Platoon

Meanwhile, RP Two motored in front of the tanks and halftracks heading along the parallel road. Nothing bothered the column as they went up and over Hidden Hill and into the mass of German infantry.

More fakes!

Only one company of the two that Daniel had driven from the original forest proved to be real. The German ghosts merged into the mists. The remaining platoons fractured under American fire and the survivors fled.

A perfect L-shaped ambush did some damage, but the Germans pulled back.

Turn 10 and 11: Shellshock Hill

The Shermans on Shellshock Hill continued to be targeted by a STuG with an attitude and an artillery barrage with little impact beyond suppressing a platoon. Remember that "Suppression" in CD terms means a platoon can still move and fight. Daniel trundled the tank off the exposed hill, to be joined by more of Daniel's armor.

Turn 11: Rat Patrol One

RP One continued its headlong rush at the Germans, showing the tankers how daring and bravado could conquer all. The platoon pulled into a vacant Hamlet du Bowl, intact and rarin' for more recon action.

Of course, it was easy considering that Daniel had basically shoved two tank companies into the open fields just beyond the hamlet. No German worth shooting would bother with a jeep when Sherman targets popped into view.

Turn 9: Rat Patrol Two crests Hidden Hill as Daniel continues his armor assault into Bois du Bowl.

Turn 11: Rat Patrol Two

The recon jeep platoon burst from the woods and swerved off the road next to Village du Bowl and headed across the bridge. The recon slid to a halt, nose to nose with a different STuG and near enough other troops. RP2 earned their pay as a volcano of fire erupted, but they survived unscathed. They shoved the gears into reverse.



Turn 11: Parallel Road

With RP Two accelerating toward the village and bridge, my Shermans went down the parallel road as far as they dared. The lead Sherman platoon didn't go anywhere near the panzerfaust-infested village. It needn't have bothered: The STuG at the bridge slammed a shell into it and blew the platoon apart. Bloody German trolls!

Turn 11: A Monster in the House

The Germans unveiled a Jagdpanther in a small hamlet. It was big.

How big was it?

It was so big, the gun barrel was as long as the hamlet. Yes, it was big.

How big was it?

It was so big, the hull was longer than two hamlets. Wow, it was big.

How big was it?

It was so big, firing its own length was considered medium range.

And fire it did, smoking a Sherman while shrugging off return fire. The Shermans would need a lot of shots, and some lucky ones at that, to flame this armored beast.

End Game

With only one turn left and no way to clear the road, we called it a game. Both sides were relatively intact: One German infantry company had been mostly eliminated while one company-equivalent of Shermans had been destroyed. Two other German companies were exposed as dummies and removed.



Turn 10: Rat Patrol One, horn always depressed, roars down the main road, up and over Shellshock Hill, and around the "V" for the longest move of the game. Rat Patrol Two and Sherman friends reach the Bois du Bowl (top middle) while Col. Daniel's tanks clear the Bois du Bowl.

It was an uneven trade-off and wily Col. Marc had done his job.

Historically, from what I can remember, the US raced up the road and was ambushed. The Americans "lost" an entire tank company trying to cross the stream as the tanks bogged down and needed to call AAA for a tow.

Thinking About the Scenario

We had a pre-game discussion about what the snow meant in the game. We used the *CD* rules that reduced movement. We probably should have ignored the snow since it forced the US to keep mostly on the road. Of course, that's kinda the point in a Bulge game in the middle of winter...

In retrospect, the first US battalion should probably have gone cross country to reach the parallel road and the second battalion should have gone straight. That way, both would arrive at the German main line of resistance at about the same time. Then it would be overwhelming two-battalion US power against one defending German battalion in the Village du Bowl. Balancing that idea is that bypassing the town with limited tanks would be a no go.

As it was, using the second battalion to outflank the German line proved too little, too late, to clear the road and get across the board in 12 turns.

Then again, Daniel took his time pushing across the table and spent too much time using armor to flush out the Germans in the Bois du Bowl. Can't blame him. As a veteran player, he knows better than to rush pell mell into the teeth of a defense, hence the caution.

From a gaming perspective, this is a tidy two-player game. As for a third player, he isn't needed for at least half the game. Even without resistance, swinging onto the parallel road and the van reaching the village took four turns. Aside from Rat Patrol One and Two, the battalion did little.

I'd start one battalion on the main road and the second battalion on the parallel road. That may not be precisely historical, but it would get the second US player into the game from turn one, not turn 7. Or, you could give the second US player a choice: arrive automatically behind the first battalion or roll a die to complete a "flank march" and arrive 1d10/2 (round down) turns into the game on the parallel road (having taken a different road off table, so to speak).

Keep the snow to ensure that the US remains mostly road-bound. Worth playing again...with refinements.

Thanks, Marc for hosting.

End of game. Rat Patrol One captures the Hamlet du Bowl. Daniel clears the Bois du Bowl. Rat Patrol Two crosses the bridge and defies death. The Jagdpanther (left) gives a Sherman (bottom right) a fashion makeover. Grey is "in" this battle...



Jagdpanther (image from web)

Jagdpanther

A total of 413 Jagdpanthers were produced from January 1944 by three manufacturers: MIAG in Braunschweig produced 268 from January 1944 until the end of the war, Maschinenfabrik Niedersachsen Hannover (MNH) produced 112 from November 1944, and Maschinenbau und Bahnbedarf (MBA) produced 33 from December 1944. Another 11 were produced post war. Three surviving *Jagdpanthers* are restored to running condition. Seven more are on display. – *Wikipedia*.



Play Ball: Yankees vs. Guardians

By Russ Lockwood

As the baseball playoffs were in full swing, Dan and I sat down to a game of *MLB Showdown*, a clever card game that has been discontinued since about 2005 – although Dan cracked the algorithm and used a spreadsheet to keep up on new players since then. The main player cards are like baseball cards with a big photo of the player, some personal information, and the game stats. Each player card also has a point value.

Bottom of the inning: Dan awaits my d20 roll pitch so he can learn which card his d20 roll will use. Rather than rotate the game mat each half inning, we leave the diamond in a neutral position with home plates at first, when I'm up to bat, and at third, when Dan's up to bat. Part of my line-up at bottom (blue-backed card represents the last man out from last inning). Dan's man is up and with no overturned cards in his lineup, the card (at third) is his lead-off batter.

The game itself is simple: The pitcher rolls a d20 and adds the pitcher's modifier. Compare the result to the batter's rating. If the pitcher result exceeds the batter rating, the "swing" result is on the pitcher's card. If not, the "swing" result is on the batter's card. In rough terms, the result is about 2/3 on the pitcher's card and 1/3 on the batter's card.

Then the batter rolls a d20 and looks for the result on either the pitcher's card or the batter's card. In general, the batter gets a favorable result (from a walk to a home run) about 2/3 of the time on the batter's card, but a 2/3 unfavorable result (an out of some sort) on the pitcher's card.

The player cards shift the odds based on how the players did in the season before, when all stats could be calculated. Some pitchers are stingy with hits but generous with home runs. Some batters are good at getting on base with walks, but not so much with extra-base hits. It's all distilled into the d20 results line at the bottom of the card.

Enter some variables. Each player starts with random strategy cards that apply in somewhat general situations, for example, batters add +1 to their die roll, or more specific situations, such as a pitcher will add +1 to the pitcher's die roll if a right-handed pitcher (as noted on the player card) is pitching against a right-handed batter. Some cards alter the d20 results, like turning a pop-up into a base hit. These strategy cards use the wide variety of baseball terminology like Rally Cap, Chin Music, and so on while offering the results you see at the game or on TV.

There's a bit more to it than that for specific situations like ground balls that may, but not always, result in a double play, or waving a runner around third and sending him home. It's quick, clever, and produces reasonable results, even with odds-defying runs of luck good and bad.

I don't know why the game ended – maybe low sales or higher royalties at contract renewal time – but it's a shame. The good news is that Dan's spreadsheet wizardry, a graphics template, and plenty of online photos allow for all sorts of current and historical matchups.

Dan and I played the teams that were on TV: The NY Yankees (me) and the Cleveland Guardians (Dan), albeit with a mix of current and past players. I confess I'm not a baseball fan, preferring football, but the *MLB* game is marvelous.



The company also put out a football game that used bar codes and a bar-code reader. Slide the offensive play pick into the reader and then the defensive play pick in the reader and read the results. The concept was fine...when it worked. The reader balked so often that a game was an exercise in frustration. You'd scan a card multiple times to hope for the best. Now, they could probably do a QR scan-game with a smartphone app, but back then bar codes were the best they could do.

I'll let Dan point out the finer points of the system and provide a game recap, including celebrities!

MLB Showdown 2022: Yankees vs. Guardians

By Dan

With the MLB playoffs in full swing, I invited Russ to play a game of *MLB Showdown*. The ALDS features the New York Yankees and Cleveland Guardians (formerly the Indians). Russ has played the Yankees in earlier games and leagues I've hosted. I normally play the Orioles, but today I assembled a Cleveland Guardians/Indians team to play against the Yankees.

MLB Showdown is a card-driven baseball game introduced by Wizards of the Coast in 2000, but discontinued after 2005. It went through several iterations as it tried to improve the game, finally settling on a consistent format in the 2003-2005 editions. I feel it's one of the best "baseball" games ever made. Although discontinued, it still has a loyal following with fans making their own cards (including me).

For today's game, both teams used celebrities to throw the first pitch in the First Inning:

Adam Sandler tossed the first pitch for the Yankees to Bob Hope while Charlie Sheen tossed the first pitch for Cleveland to Billy Crystal.

Celebrity Side Notes

Adam Sandler is an avid Yankees fan who has thrown out the first pitch at games and sat in the YES broadcast station during one or more games.

Billy Crystal signed a one-day minor league contract to play with the New York Yankees. On March 13, 2008, Crystal led off as a Designated Hitter in a game against the Pittsburgh Pirates.

Bob Hope held an ownership position in the Cleveland Indians for 40 years. He made the *Sports Illustrated* cover on June 3, 1963.

Charlie Sheen played the role of ex-con and Cleveland Indians pitcher Ricky "Wild Thing" Vaughn in the film *Major League*.

Dan created custom celebrity cards. You'll notice that Bob Hope has more power than Billy Crystal – Bob only needs a 20 or more to hit a home run, while Billy needs 21+ for a home run. Adam and Charlie have identical pitching stats.

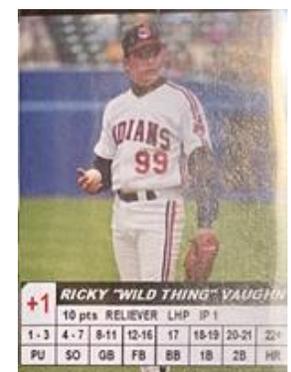
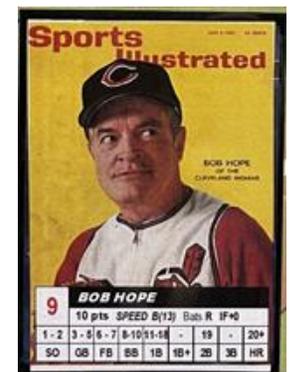
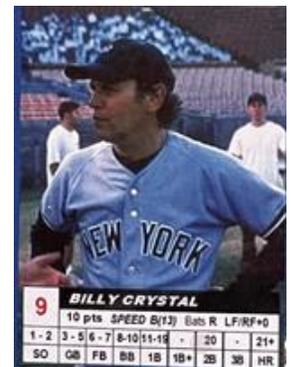
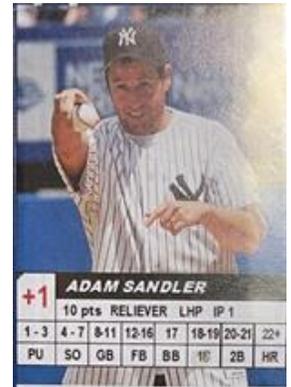
Team Cards

Both sides have a team of at least 17 players (4 starting pitchers, 3-4 relievers / closers, three outfielders, three bases, shortstop, catcher, and one or two back-up players (or a DH if an AL team is the home team). For leagues, we use a 20-player roster using the player card point values as a salary cap.

Position players are arranged in a row to represent the batting line-up. If the game is hosted by an NL team, the pitcher is the last player in the line-up. The visiting team bats first.

Each team arranges their starting pitchers in order (usually best to worst) and a single random roll determines which pitcher on each side plays.

The home team places his starting pitcher in the middle of the open space between the two rows of players. The visiting team places his first batter between his row of players and the home-team pitcher.



Basic Mechanics

The home-team pitcher rolls a d20 for the **Pitch**. The number rolled is added to the pitcher's **CONTROL** number for a final value. That value is compared to the batter's **ON-BASE** number: If it *beats* the batter's number, the batter will roll and consult the Pitcher's chart; otherwise the batter will roll and consult the Batter's chart. If the batter is a pitcher, roll on the opposing Pitcher's chart.

The Batter rolls a d20 for the **Swing**. The value is consulted on the chart determined by the Pitcher's roll to determine the play:

Out (PU): Pop-Up out. Runners do not advance.

Out (SO) : Strike out. Runners do not advance.

Out (GB): Ground ball out. If there is a runner on 1st base, the runner is OUT, and Pitcher rolls for a double-play attempt. Otherwise the Batter is out. Runners on 2nd and 3rd base advance one base.

Out (FB): Fly-ball out. Runners do not advance, but may attempt an extra base.

Walk: Walked the batter. Batter goes to 1st base. A runner present on 1st base when the batter walks will go to 2nd base.

Single: Base hit single. Batter and runners advance 1 base.

Single+: Same as a **Single**, but if 2nd base is open, batter has the option to go to 2nd as a 'steal without a throw.'

Double: Base hit double. Batter and runners advance 2 bases.

Triple: Base hit triple. Batter and runners advance 3 bases.

Homer: Home Run. Batter and all runners go home and score.

Double-Play Attempt: If there is a runner on 1st base when this result occurs, the runner on 1st base is automatically out ("cut off"), and the infield may attempt a double-play. Roll a d20 (or draw a card) and add the infield's "field rating", which is the value of the 1st baseman (1B +#), 2nd baseman (2B +#), Shortstop (SS +#), and 3rd baseman (3B +#). Compare the total to the batter's SPEED number. If the total is *higher* than the batter's SPEED, the batter is also out. Otherwise the batter is safe on 1st base.

Extra Base Attempt: If there is a runner on 2nd or 3rd base when a hit or an "Out (FB)" result occurs, the runner may attempt an extra base. The outfield rolls a d20 (or draws a card) and adds the outfield's field rating, which is the value of the centerfielder (CF or OF +#), the leftfielder (LF/RF or OF +#), and rightfielder (LF/RF or OF +#). Compare this total to the runner's SPEED (but add +5 to the runner's speed if the runner was on 3rd base and is trying for home plate, and another +5 if it's a hit and there are 2 outs at the start of this at-bat). If the total beats the runner's SPEED, the runner is tagged out. Otherwise the extra base attempt succeeds.

Strategy Cards

MLB Showdown includes the option for using Strategy Cards. I've customized an introductory game with a fixed number of Strategy cards that are available for both players to use. Each player starts the game with three markers (that players provide, such as beads, chips, or coins). A player removes a marker to play a Strategy card.

Both players gain a new Strategy Card marker at the start of each new Inning. Strategy Cards will indicate **when** they can be used, and a description of how it can be used. Many offer modifiers to the **pitch** roll or the **swing** roll, or allow a re-roll.

Starting with the defending team (ie: the one that is on the "field") a "Strategy Card marker" can be turned it to activate the following strategies:

Blue (Defense) Strategies: Can only be used by the team in the field.

Red (Offense) Strategies: Can only be used by the team at bat.

White Strategies: Can be used for any circumstance.

Examples:

Attempt to Steal 2nd or 3rd Base – The team at bat may play this card to declare that a runner will attempt to “steal” a base: the player for the team “on the field” rolls a d20 and adds his Catcher’s “Arm” rating (CA +#). If the total *exceeds* the runner’s Speed, the runner has been tagged out. Otherwise the runner is safe on the new base (i.e.: he has a stolen base). A runner on 2nd base that tries to steal 3rd gives the defending player a +5 modifier to the catcher’s throw, meaning it’s tougher to steal 3rd base.

Intentional Sacrifice Bunt – The team at bat declares that the batter will bunt and rolls on the pitcher’s chart. As long as the result is anything but a **PU**, the bunt sacrifice is successful: The batter is out, but the runner advances. On a **PU** result, the batter is out and the runner does NOT advance.

Intentional Walk – The Defense must make this his first strategy play (i.e.: he cannot play any other defensive card prior to deciding on an intentional walk), and if he *permits* the batting player to play a 2nd red strategy card, then he **cannot** decide to trade in a Strategy Card for an intentional walk (i.e.: he is committed to pitch the at-bat) – but he *could* play any blue Strategy Card in his hand as normal, even if it’s a card that generates a walk result.

[Note: As we’ve played a lot over the decades, Dan and I play with the three common cards available to us both plus the entire deck of strategy cards – shuffle, deal three to each player, and we each draw one from the deck at the end of every inning.—RL]

Play Ball...

After our celebrity appearances, which both generated outs, the opposing line-ups for today’s game are:

Yankees

Alex Rodriguez (3B)
Derek Jeter (SS)
Johnny Damon (CF)
Aaron Judge (RF)
Jorge Posada (C)
Gary Sheffield (DH)
Bernie Williams (LF)
Mark Teixeira (1B)
Robinson Cano (2B)

Dwight Gooden (P)

Guardians (Indians)

Roberto Alomar (2B)
Kenny Lofton (CF)
Juan Gonzalez (RF)
Manny Ramirez (LF)
Jim Thome (1B)
Travis Hafner (DH)
Victor Matines (C)
Omar Vizquel (SS)
Casey Blake (3B)

Jake Westbrook (P)

Highlights

Bottom 2nd Inning: Cleveland gets two men on-base but they are left stranded.

Top 4th Inning: The Yankees score first, but leave two men stranded after Gary Sheffield tries to score from second base and is thrown out at home.

New York: 1, Cleveland: 0

Bottom 4th: Cleveland gets their lead-off man on-base, but fails to get any more hits.

Top 5th Inning: Jake Westbrook gets into trouble, walking Derek Jeter and Johnny Damon gets a base hit. A double-play attempt is made that gets the Johnny Damon out from 1st to 2nd base, but batter Aaron Judge, is safe with a Jeter now on 3rd. Another walk and another single later, two runs score. After striking out Posada, Jake hopes to end the inning, but two more base hits by Gary Sheffield and Bernie Williams add two more runs before the last out.

New York: 5, Cleveland: 0

Bottom 9th Inning: After Casey Blake strikes out, Roberto Alomar gets a double. Kenny Lofton gets a base hit, allowing Roberto to score. Juan Gonzalez gets a walk, but Manny Ramirez strikes out. Jim Thome gets a base hit, allowing Kenny Lofton to score. The rally ends too soon when Victor Martinez grounds out.

Final score: New York: 5, Cleveland: 2

Dominion: A Trio

By Dan

After getting smoked in *MLB Showdown*, Russ and I tried a few games of *Dominion*, a relatively fast deck-building game. Each game is different as players try to figure out how to use the various cards' powers to collect coins and buy victory cards to win the game. I have assembled a long list (now over 500) of Kingdom set-ups from tournaments and recommendations from the game designer, Donald Vicarino.

Today, we tried:

2017 Championship Finals #3: Cellar, Pearl Diver, Tunnel, Count, Oracle, Hunting Grounds, Amulet, Gear, Messenger, Treasure Trove, Event: Banquet

The 2017 game in progress.

Dominion Strategy Season 7 #3: Mining Village, Salvager, Herbalist, Peddler, Horn of Plenty, Highway, Rats, Rogue, Sage, Soothsayer

Arts and Crafts (from *Guilds*): Laboratory, Cellar, Workshop, Festival, Moneylender, Advisor, Baker, Journeyman, Merchant Guild, Stonemason

The first and last games were very close, coming down to who gained the last Province, so you could say it came down to the luck of the draw. Russ has gotten his share of victories in the past, but was closed out this time in a clean sweep.

Dominion: A Triad of Loss

By Russ Lockwood

As long-time AAR readers know, I'm fond of this card game. The mechanics are simple enough to understand, but the shifting tide of card combinations produce an almost unimaginable number of modifiers, actions, and other variables that make no two games alike – unless you play with the exact same cards. As Dan has about a dozen expansion sets, that never happens unless we just agree to play the same set of cards. Otherwise, we roll a random number to pick from Dan's 500 or so set-ups.

Most games do come down to a one-card advantage, so they are close. Indeed, in one of the three games, I was but one coin short from purchasing the last Province victory card. Had I done so, I would have won by one single point. As it was, I couldn't and thus lost by the value of the Province card. Sure, I got smoked in one of the three games – sometimes you make bad decisions on card combos and they don't pan out, but the other two were close. The games last under an hour, so you just set up the next one. Hence, we were able to play *MLB Showdown* and three games of *Dominion* in about four hours or so on a weekday evening.



Dice Karma: WWII Chain of Command

by Mike

Russ, you would have enjoyed seeing me get a heavy dose, served by Dennis, of what I served you in our last game -- round after round of boxcars among the 5d6 command dice.

[Last time Mike and I faced off in CoC (see my 8/21/2022 AAR), Mike's predilection to roll two sixes (boxcars) among the 5d6 rolled meant he could take many free turns. I was smacked around like a henchman in a superhero movie. Although I was unable to make this game, Mike learned how dice karma works... -- RL]

At first, I won the initiative. I was pretty pleased with my situation getting two squads and a STuG on the table early on. I thought I would have the battlefield advantage by getting the highpoint and the one stone house building.

It didn't happen.

Dennis rolled boxcars of command dice in his first four phases. And then again in his sixth phase. It didn't help I rolled poorly whenever I rolled and by the time I started rolling happier dice, my STuG was immobilized and had nothing to shoot at.

Dennis had his squads in commanding terrain and his mortar bulls-eyed my panzer grenadier squad thrice, which pinned them and reduced their numbers by half.

My flame thrower team produced the only happy and spectacular moment for me late in the game when it crisped Dennis's six-guy detachment in the stone house.

Still, I enjoyed the beating...er...game.

Thanks for making this happen, Daniel.

Dennis surveys the situation. Photo by Mike.



HMGS: Cold Wars 2023

HMGS, Inc. is pleased to announce that we have confirmed the dates and location for Cold Wars 2023.

Cold Wars 2023

March 10 - 12, 2023

Valley Forge Casino Resort

Valley Forge, PA

On My Mind: A WWII Veteran's Final Flight

by Russ Lockwood

My father-in-law, Al, a WWII vet who was also called up for Korea, passed away this month. He was 96 and a half years old and led a long and productive life. He was an elementary school teacher by profession, a hobbyist photographer, and a family man who bundled them into a pick-up truck/camper to travel the country during summers. Sure, frailty and dementia crept into his later years, but on the whole, he had a pretty good run.

Al on Guam: October 5, 1945.

He never talked about Korea, because possibly, and I'm speculating here, he may have viewed it as an unwelcome interruption. He served in WWII, the Allies won the war, and now that he was graduating college on the GI Bill, he was off to medical school when he was called back.

He didn't talk much about WWII, either. Never attended reunions that I know of. Never displayed anything in the house. Like many others, he volunteered, did his duty, and came home.

But one night, he spoke about his WWII service, or at least his impression of it. I have no idea why, but my own dim memory suggests that it was either the time around when one grandkid had a genealogy assignment in class and asked him a lot of family history questions, or, it was around the time he wrote a book of anecdotes about growing up on a farm.

Either way, he spoke for a couple hours. I took no notes, hesitant to retrieve a pad and pencil lest I break his concentration, as he recounted a series of anecdotes in no particular order. I've arranged them in a roughly chronological order, although he did not provide any specific dates. The only one I can be certain of is his high school graduation in June 1944.

However, after his death I found his *My Life in the Service* notebook -- a sort of diary -- that had many dates, and curiously, a third of the pages torn out. They were obviously written on, judging by the pen marks on the scraps of pages in the binding. I don't know why they were torn out, but how I wish I could recover them. These pages are nowhere to be found amongst his other papers. Pity.

Volunteering

When Al turned 17, he wanted to volunteer for the military, but at that age, you needed your parents' signatures. They said no. You finish high school first and then you can enlist.

As a teenager, he shot and developed his own photo prints and bought the chemicals at the local drug store. One day, some woman was complaining that the store wasn't processing her photos fast enough for her liking. The owner asked him if he would print them up. He agreed and so began working to develop black and white photos.

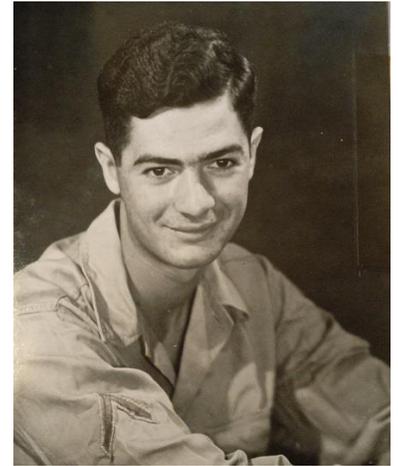
When he graduated high school, his father took him downtown to the military recruiting center around noontime. He wanted to join the Marines. "I figured I'd win the war all by myself," he recalled. But they had closed up for lunch. Next door was the Army. Being impatient, he joined up there.

He entered the service on August 22, 1944. At some point, he received a marksmanship pin with the 45 pistol. Much later, May 18, 1945, he earned a sharpshooter medal with the M-1 carbine.

The Army likely asked him if he had a job. He likely said photo developer at a drug store. He passed the aptitude tests and miraculously, the Army ultimately put him in a US Army Air Corp photography unit.

Al (rightmost) with unidentified buddies on Guam. I have no idea about the motorcycle gag.

First, Al had to go for training. He didn't talk at all about the training except for parachute training. He noted there



was very little training before the Army loaded them in a plane, flew up, and out the door they went. He jumped once and only once and that was enough. Lots of guys sprained ankles and some broke legs. "I never wanted to jump out of an airplane again!"

According to his diary, He was in "Co. B" at Fort Dix, NJ, from August 19 to August 29, 1944. He "didn't like it. Cold as hell. Food is slop." That's a curious statement about NJ weather in August...

Apparently, Al rode the train from August 29 to September 1. "Passed through PA, OH, IN, IL, KS, MO, OK, and TX. Saw the Mississippi [River], St. Louis, Cincinnati, Columbus, and Philadelphia. Would like to retrace same trip at my own leisure."

"I'll never forget Wichita Falls, Texas -- That is one place I want to avoid. Bushbarnette, Texas -- Like to go there again sometime."

He arrived at Sheppard Field in Texas.

By November 11, 1944, he was in "Co. K" at Fort Belvoir, VA, presumably for advanced training. He graduated on February 3, 1945. Not everyone passed. Al's friend Jim washed out Dec. 27, 1944, sez the diary.

I found a 1984 article reference to a "ten-week course in photogrammetry was instituted at the Navy Photographic Interpretation Center in Anacostia in February 1944." (Photogrammetric Engineering & Remote Sensing. Vol 50 No. 9 p 1313-1318). It seems the Army followed roughly the same schedule.

From there Al went to Stuttgart, AR, a date says February 16, 1945, with the 357 Engineer Aviation Topographic Co. He was promoted to PFC on April 11, 1945.

On a train headed for the west coast. He was not impressed with the Red Cross. "At a railroad station, we'd stop to stretch our legs. When you'd stop at the station, the Red Cross would charge you for coffee and donuts, whereas other outfits did not."

He was in Laramie, WY on May 4, 1945 and then to Kearns[?], UT, to the Overseas Redeployment Depot. Up to Seattle, over to Honolulu, and then to Eniwetok, Saipan, and finally Guam and his assignment with the 949 Engineer Aviation Topographic Co, 35th Photo Tech Unit.

He didn't say anything about the ship transport, but he had a photo of the Mary Lyon.

The SS Mary Lyon. It may have been his ship or a ship similar to one that transported him across the Pacific.



I don't know the exact day of Al's arrival on Guam, but according to a history of the 949th, the initial sea trip from Seattle to Guam took 29 days in total (p12). That would put Al in Guam around June.

The history of the 949th says that July 1945 saw a changeover in personnel with one-third leaving and "the arrival of new men from the states who came to fill the vacancies" (p14). Maybe he was in that batch?

On Guam

Guam is 30 miles (50 kilometers) long and 4 to 12 miles (6 to 19 kilometers) wide, giving it an area of 212 square miles (549 square kilometers), sez Wikipedia.

The Navy landed them on a beach in Guam at night and he bedded down on the beach. "Come morning, we discovered we had slept with the dead. There hadn't been time to clean up the beach."

(I have a bit of a time problem with this statement. Guam was officially captured in August 1944, with expanded airbase construction started August 15. Soon thereafter, B-29s started long-range bombing runs. If he mustered in at Fort Dix in August 1944, and his entries were accurate, he didn't get to Guam until around June 1945.



I'm not sure bodies would still be on the beach, unless tide and/or weather churned the sand to expose them. Yet it was obviously traumatic enough for him to remember. -- RL)

Al said he usually did a six-week shift: two weeks in the plane flying photo missions, two weeks developing photos, and two weeks off duty. Not that you could do much on the island, so he figured he might as well work.

A beach on Guam. The rugged terrain held a Japanese surprise.

He did learn a lesson about leisure time:

One day, he met a fellow he knew from back home who had lived three blocks away. The fellow was in the Marines and asked if Al wanted to tag along on patrol. The island was supposedly safe, but there were Japanese hiding on it. From time to time, the Marines would do sweeps just to be sure. Al agreed.

Al walked along with the Marine, talking, when all of a sudden, he heard an explosion, and then was hurled backwards through the air until he hit the trunk of a tree. A piece of shrapnel from a mine or boobytrap had split his chin. Al didn't know if they got the enemy or not, but one Marine was killed and a couple wounded.

He was taken back to the hospital and patched up. He never went out off base after that and carried the scar throughout his life.

(He did not mention what happened to his buddy Marine. -- RL)

Recon Runs

Al was in B-29s as a photographer in the photo recon unit, not the bombing unit. He once asked, "Do you know what the difference is between a bomb run and a photo recon run?"

B-29s head to Japan.

He answered his own question. "On a bomb run, you fly over the target once, drop bombs, and fly away. On a recon run, you fly over the target, turn around, move over a bit and fly over the target again, then you turn around, move over a bit, and fly over the target again...and again until you've flown a grid pattern so that all photos overlap. You had to fly at a certain altitude and speed and the cameras had to be pointed at a certain angle. If they don't get you the first time, they take more shots while you fly the gridline. You felt like you were in a shooting arcade."

B-29s over Japan, with Mt. Fuji in the background.

I am not sure of the procedure, but it may make sense that a recon plane would accompany a bombing mission and split off for the photo shoot of either the next target or a previous target. This would take more time than a one pass bomb drop and so the recon trip home would be all by itself.

Presumably, most times his plane made it back without too much damage. However, sometimes, the damage was far worse. "The B-29 flew on, but nearing the airbase (*presumably Guam?* -- RL), the landing gear did not work, and no one wanted to jump. We were all going down in the plane."

The pilot set the plane down on the beach near the airfield.



Which B-29?

I don't know. It's probably in the records. Best I can find without research is an inflight shot of the engineer with a caption that mentions the "Challenger" and a photo of the aircraft "Challenger."

Photo labeled "Our Crew." Maybe the Challenger, maybe not. Bottom row (l to r): Ed Miller and Alfred Hambden. Top row (l to r): Fred England, Bob Purcell, Tom Myles, and Bob Sandmeyer.



Shot Down Again

Another time, the damage over Japan was far worse.

The Japanese "worked us over pretty good. We had two engines out and we were slowly losing altitude."

So the pilot said to toss things overboard to make the plane lighter and help keep it flying, maybe back to Guam, but maybe only to coax more miles out of it. "We tossed everything that wasn't nailed down, including the cameras and film. Nothing worked. We were going down."

The Challenger.

Once again, no one wanted to jump. They all stayed with the plane.

There was another reason, too. The tail gunner. He didn't have a scratch on him, but if the plane went in the water, he was doomed.

In the early B-29s, the rear gunner got into the plane from the outside. They'd put up a ladder and he'd climb into the rear gun position. Then the mechanics would use a wrench to lock him in. When the plane landed, the mechanics unlocked the hatch and out the gunner came.

As the stricken plane slowly descended, there was nothing else to toss overboard. Once again, no one wanted to jump, so they rode the plane down. Just before they hit, the rear gunner asked the crew to tell his parents goodbye and that he loved them. Then the plane hit the water in a huge spray.

For such a big plane, it sank in about 30 seconds. There was just enough time to trigger the life rafts. "You never know how big the Pacific is until you're in the middle of it in a life raft," Al said.

The pilot had radioed their position and kept HQ apprised up until the crash landing in the water.

Standard procedure at the time was to position submarines and PBY flying boats along the bomber flight path to pick up any crew from planes forced to ditch. But they were a single recon plane, not a bomber stream, so that safety string was not available.

Fortunately, a general in a PBY was flying to Australia and diverted to pick them up. It was the only time Al got to Australia.

Alas, Al never left the base. Two days later, he was on a plane back to Guam...



Engineer position on B-29. Unidentified engineer.

Atomic Developer

It was towards the end of the two-week stint developing photos in August 1945 when an officer carrying a film canister entered the film developing tent accompanied by armed MPs. The officer handed the canister over and wanted it developed immediately. Only this officer had a strange command: Develop the photos upside down.

Normally, Al noted, you develop photos by transferring them to various chemical baths, watching them develop before pulling them out to dry.

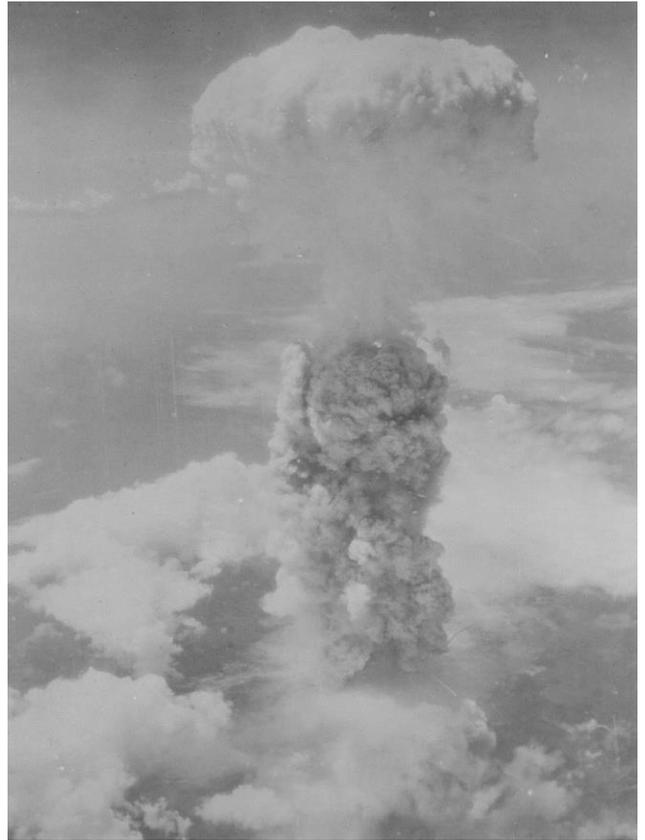
"I told him upside down's not the way it was done," he said. "It's a visual process."

The officer asked whether it took the same amount of time per photo. Generally, yes...

The officer would not take no for an answer. Develop them upside down, not right side up, the officer ordered and then threatened Al with jail and a trip to Leavenworth prison.

Top secret film? And the officer insisted on staying in the darkroom with him.

"I thought he was crazy, but an order's an order. I developed them upside down by timing the process, or as best I could," Al said. "However, curiosity got the better of me, and when his back was turned for a moment, I slid one of the photos, a duplicate, under the tray."



Caption says Nagasaki. Did he take the shot or was this, not the Hiroshima photo, the photos developed upside down?

He finished up the batch, handed them over with a passing warning about not blaming him if the photos are not as good as they could be. The officer and MPs left.

"I waited and then looked at the illicit photo -- it was a big cloud, sort of mushroom shaped. I had no idea what it was other than a real big bomb," he observed. "Of course, now I had a photo that could get me sent to Leavenworth, and I couldn't just leave it here and couldn't toss it out. So I slit the cover of a book and slid the photo inside, then sealed up the cover, and made sure I never lost the book."

He later learned that it was the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima. The *NY Times* and other newspapers carried the news story about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Aug 7, 1945. As for the secrecy of the photo, the *Daily Mail* ran the photo on Aug 7. The photo of the Nagasaki atomic bomb ran August 12 on the front page of the *Washington Post*.

(So much for secrecy... -- RL).

Caption reads: Stepinoff (left) and Dr. Ralph Marks of Columbia University who worked on atom bomb. They stand in front of the 35th Photo Tech Lab.

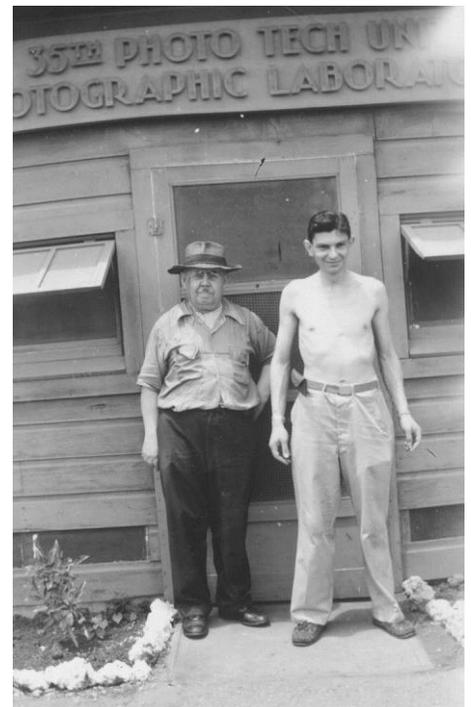
Sack Rat Serenade

Apparently, the US military ran a radio station for its troops on Guam. I'll let Al tell about it.

"Station WXL1 at 2:45 on the island of Guam. The MC in a quiet, sleepy whisper usually opens program with remarks of this kind.

'Good evening Sack Rats. Time for bed. Let's take off these clothes. First the shirt. That's it. Now the pants. It would be easier if you took off those Boondockers (combat shoes) first. Now crawl into that mosquito netting and relax. Rest those weary bones and listen to the Sack Rat Serenade.'

"The serenade was 15 minutes of uninterrupted music. Sleep inducing music.



"Before the program closes, there is a Sack Rat poem by the MC and a few remarks. Ah, prose at last. That word prose means a lot. Too bad I can't explain further. Censorship, you know.

"Now for the Sack Rat Poem:

'A girl and a GI,
were saying goodbye.
Said the girl to the GI,
I want you to give me,
something to remember you by.
He did. They named it Junior.'

"Good night, Sack Rats. Pleasant dreams. Don't tear the mosquito netting."

B-29 maintenance.

Whatcha Think About Officers?

The diary had a section called Officers I have met. Alas, it had no dates, but most of the ones he dealt with during training were listed as "swell" or equivalent. As for the ones specifically on Guam listed below, I can only guess what "C.S." really stood for...

Col. George Holloman. "A real man. A swell Joe who gets things done." He would later be killed in a B-17 crash over Formosa on March 19, 1946 along with Major General James Parker, says a note.

Col. Leonard Rodiach (?): "Easy going. Damned swell."

Col. Conrad Harbid or Harbial (?): "Easy going. Easy to get along with."

Col. David Morris. "Friendly as a puppy."

Maj. Raymond Mays: "Slightly C.S. but OK."

1st Lt. Theodore Edwards: "A C.S. little prick. Is adjutant."

1st Lt. Raymond Dominge: "Sort of a C.S. Leaves you alone, though."

1st Lt. Robert Felsburg: "A good Joe."

Col. Holloman.

Towards the End of the War

At some point, he was assigned to the HQ Squadron of the 20th Air Force.

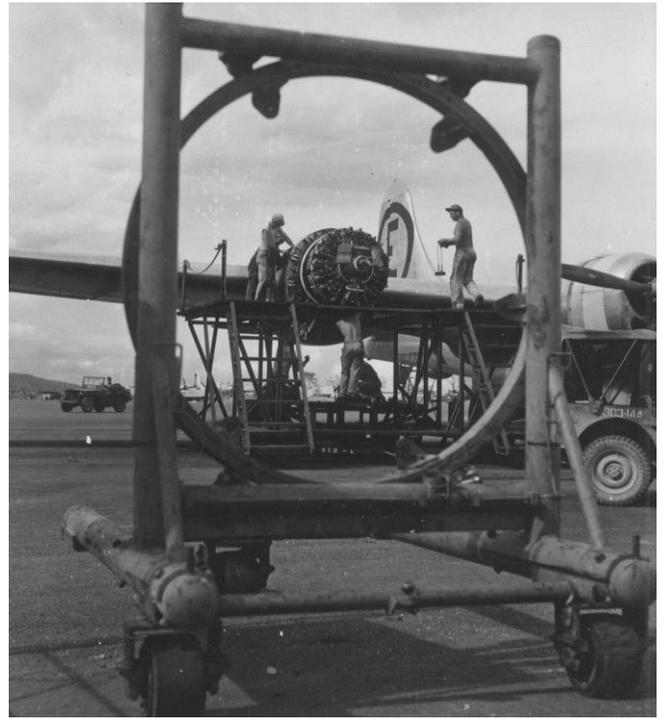
According to his diary, on August 30, 1945, he received the Good Conduct Medal and Pacific Theater ribbon, along with a "Meritorious Services plaque." Yes, plaque.

B-29 at Harmon Field, Guam. Art Holdsworth near the nose of the plane.

Surrender Ceremony in Japan

After the atomic bombs, "some general showed up and asked me if I wanted to go to Japan for the surrender ceremony."

(I don't know if this was the same general that



picked him up in the middle of the Pacific, but considering he was in a HQ Sqdn, apparently got along with all the colonels, and recently picked up awards, maybe he stood out for selection. Or, he was low photographer on the totem pole, everyone else wanted to go home, and Japan was in the wrong direction. Thus he was the one left to represent 20th AF. -- RL)

Japanese sign the surrender document.

He agreed and found himself on the *USS Missouri*. His photos show a variety of dignitaries at the ceremony, along with some notes. One of his photos of the ceremony was used in the 949th history (p75).

(I often thought that it would be an interesting geometric exercise to use the angles of his photos and angles from other photos to triangulate his position and maybe find a photo of him. From his photos, he seemed to have moved around to at least three different positions. -- RL).

According to his diary, on October 10, 1945, he was promoted to Technician/5 (above PFC and below corporal).

Nimitz signs document, with MacArthur, Halsey, and King standing behind him.

On February 3, 1946, he was back on Guam, according to an entry written by a buddy named Dave, who mentioned that he was departing Guam "next Friday."

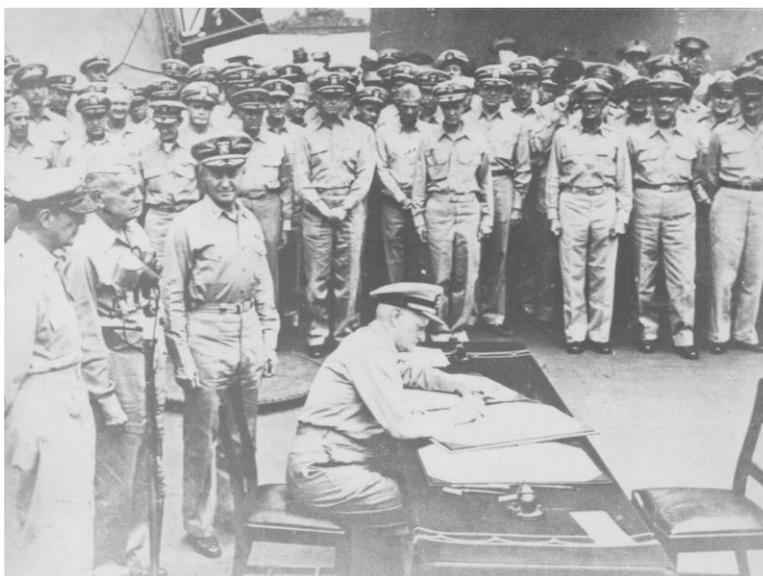
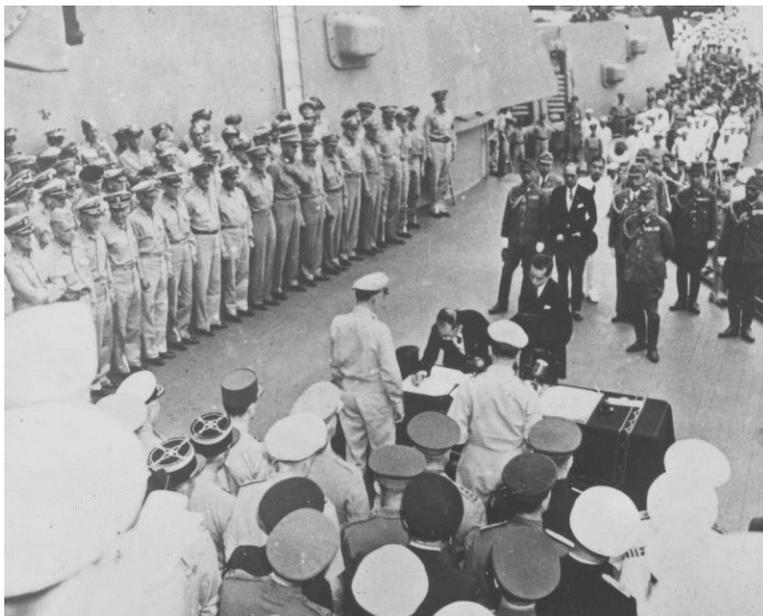
On February 6, 1946, he was promoted to Technician /4 (skipping Corporal and below Sgt). On February 8, 1946, he was promoted to "Buck Sgt" (Sergeant). On July 10, 1946, he was promoted to Staff Sgt, skipping Technician/3.

Home

I don't know the date, but Al was assigned a ship and sailed home...along with a samurai sword he must have picked up in Japan.

He was accosted by an officer on the ship who was "confiscating" samurai swords -- no doubt for his own display at home -- and demanded he turn it over. Al said he had to get it. He retrieved it from his duffel bag, walked to the stern of the ship, and tossed it into the sea. Somewhere at the bottom of the Pacific is his samurai sword.

Caption reads: An oil depot fire on Guam caused by Japanese bombers.



Discharged, he attended college. He secured a place at Georgetown University.

One day, Al headed off to class in the early morning when he met a gentleman talking a walk, who said hello while passing. As he thought about how the gentleman looked rather familiar, a few men in suits raced after the fellow. That's when it hit him. It was President Truman, who was out for a walk as the Secret Service chased after him.

Wrecked planes on Guam.



Soon, Al would be recalled for the Korean War, which put an end to his dreams of a medical career -- by the time he got back, he felt too old to restart med school. His diary has a number of references to him as "Doc" and "Doctor" by his buddies. He went for his masters in teaching and taught elementary school for the next four decades.

I am guessing, but I don't know, that he applied to college and was accepted by Georgetown University for a pre-med program, but duty called and away he went to serve in the Pacific. He must have let his buddies know he was going to GU, hence they called him "Doc" and so on. He attended GU after the war.

Cemetery on Guam.

Filling in Blanks?

That was it for Al and WWII. Despite some gentle prodding, including giving him a *B-29 Walk Around* photo book in an effort to unlock some other memories, he never was so expansive as that one night.

I admit I'm guesstimating events that I just don't know enough about. It's likely that I could track down additional details by delving into the USAF archives in Montgomery, AL, to see if I can fill in some of the blanks...and unlikely I'll ever get down to Montgomery again. Or maybe it's the Army archives at Carlisle, PA. I guess I'd have to know which service got the archives.



Al was one of millions that served during the war. Regarding his part in it, as far as he was concerned, he had a job to do and did it.

So this will have to do as a recap of his WWII service.

I found this official US Navy photograph of the surrender ceremony on the web. It is similar to where Al was standing, but just to his left. Somehow Al must have also moved from the top of a catwalk or turret down to the deck and near the platform on the upper right corner of this photo to get a shot of Nimitz signing the document.



Middletown Military Museum: Photo Visit

By Russ Lockwood

On our way to SnapCon VIII at The Portal in Manchester, CT, Dan and I stopped off at the Middletown Military Museum in Middletown, CT, just south of Hartford. It's a one-room museum in an octagonal building tucked away in Veterans Park.

It's a tad hard to find as street signs and Google Maps tended to disagree, but find it we did. You can tell you arrived when you see the Huey helicopter mounted outside the building.

The Huey recognizes a secret unit during the Vietnam War that operated out of Laos to help rescue downed US pilots. The museum is trying to organize a center for the unit, with the helicopter being the first step.

Secret unit memorial in front of Museum.

We were met by Ken McClellan, formerly LtCol McClelland according to the note on the wall next to his uniforms, who showed us around.

Everything in and around the display cases is well labeled, and a small section of shelving houses a variety of military history books.

The displays run roughly clockwise around the museum, from French and Indian War through his uniforms. It'll take some time to work your way through the numerous items in the display cases as your eyes feast on one item after another.

The helicopter from the other angle. Dan admires the view.

The cases contain a significant number of model kits of various ships and aircraft. You'll also find a wide variety of medals upon the walls, all neatly mounted and labeled. Pay attention as you wander around. Lots of nooks and crannies.

I guess we spent about an hour or hour and



a half overall, although some of that was just chatting.

Check the website for museum hours and directions. Well worth a stop if you're in the Hartford area.

Entrance looking left.



Back of the museum looking right.

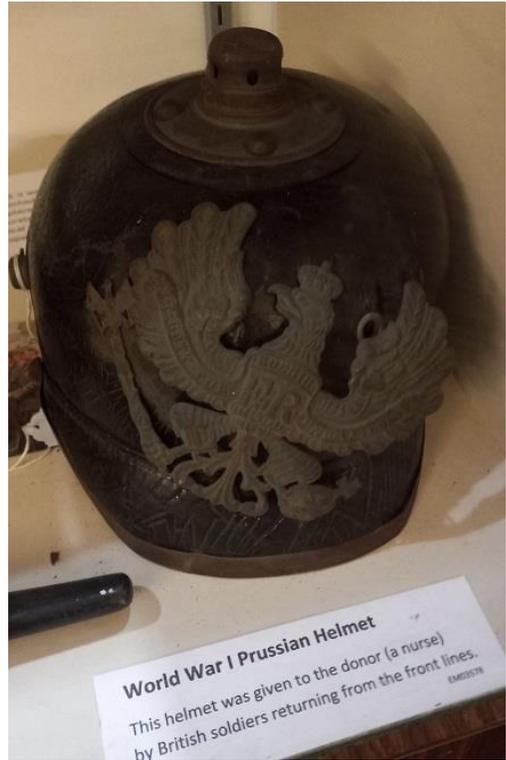




Reproduction Charterville Musket.

46th barrel Charterville Musket
 Reproduction from Dale Gun Works, Union City TN with leather sling and leather flint pouch.
 The barrel of this musket has no rifling, making it a less accurate firearm than the North Rifle, also displayed.
 This musket does have a flash guard around the flash pan, which would reduce the powder flash when the weapon is fired. The flash guard would have been added after purchase.
 On Loan from the Estate of Mark Mocarski. wsmwp

WWI Prussian Helmet had seen better days.



World War I Prussian Helmet
 This helmet was given to the donor (a nurse) by British soldiers returning from the front lines. LMS0278

WWII aircraft models.



WWII ship models (top left to bottom right):

USS Missouri, Bismarck, Prince of Wales, and Yamato.



Blood Chit – China-Burma-Theater

WWII

This miniature Taiwan/Republic of China flag has an attached cloth embroidered with Chinese writing. It is known as a "blood chit". Airmen carried the blood-chit in the China-Burma theater. If the airman crashed or bailed out behind enemy lines in China, the writing promises a reward for an airman's safe return to Allied lines. Belonged to Sgt Albert J. Ruops, US Army Air Corps.

Domain of the Golden Dragon - Ruler of the 180th Meridian

Traditional ceremony conducted when a sailor first crosses the equator.
This certificate was presented to Louis Peter Giordano, U.S. Navy, aboard
the U.S.S. Childs, Sept. 15, 1939.



Equator-crossing certificate.

Models of WWII German firepower on tracks.



Books I've Read

By Russ Lockwood

Wargaming Campaigns. by Henry Hyde. Hardback (7.4x10.0 inches). 526 pages. 2022.

This big, thick tome contains everything you'd ever want to know about creating and running a wargame campaign. Some of it is pure unnecessary overkill -- I'm thinking of all the map-making expertise (as shown on the front cover) -- but even if you skim through this and other parts that may not pertain to your campaigning vision, you still can glean a wealth of advice that may help you and your gaming buddies tackle a campaign.

By considering an ever-increasing checklist of ideas, you'll find that you'll need to put in the effort to come up with the same detailed campaigning that Hyde seems to do. Old school used to be with paper and PBM, but new school (Chapter 11: Digital Campaigns) uses digital maps and PBeM.

Of more import are the ruminations of what an umpire needs to consider when creating and running a campaign. Hyde edges towards considerable detail in his campaigns -- he prefers Imagi-nation campaigns -- and it must be wonderful to game in his world. Reading between the lines, most players respond to such details. It likely makes for better after action reports, too.

The book includes campaign rules (Chapter 3: March to Glory), mostly of the land variety but can be paired with Chapter 9: Naval Power and Chapter 10: Air Power. You'll get insights into logistics, personalities, and especially tips and techniques to make a coherent whole. The most valuable chapter to me was Chapter 2: Campaign Generalship -- an overarching examination of what campaign topics need to be addressed. Runner up is the discussion about weather (Chapter 8), especially a fascinating 6x6 grid for determining and tracking weather and weather changes (p326).

Of course, the main problem with campaigns is how to keep them going beyond the initial excitement or after one side suffers a significant loss. Presumably, if you use the advice within, all players will remain gung-ho no matter what...um, well, maybe...

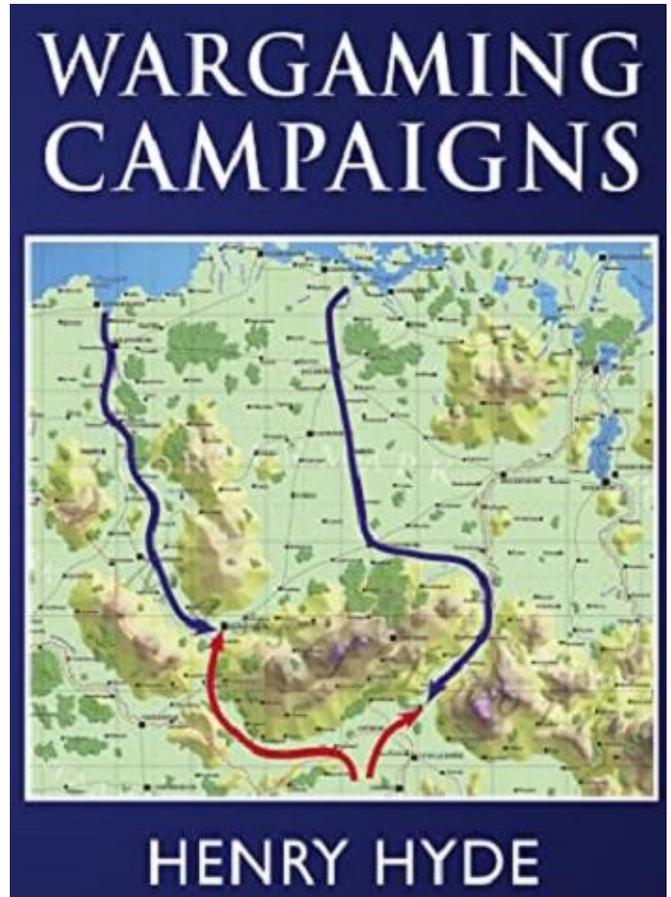
Indeed, sometimes I question the validity of his advice. The most egregious example: "Though I have not seen it, I am informed there is an excellent board game...I would suggest if you find a copy, grab it!" (p401). Sorry, but if you haven't seen it, you shouldn't mention it until you do. I wondered about other mentions, but I'll pass that off to over-exuberance.

One possible typo: "An assault by the Blue Team...targeting the outskirts of a major town...held by Blue." (p411) I suspect it was held by Red. Other than that, clean. Kudos to Pen and Sword editor Phil Sidnell, who happens to be a wargamer (p184).

The book contains 98 color photos, 13 black and white photos, 76 color maps, five black and white maps, and two black and white illustrations. The unnecessary overkill part I mentioned above is the how-to Photoshop advice for mapmaking. As someone who has used Photoshop extensively, Hyde's advice is far beyond what I did for MagWeb and I suspect beyond most gamers, too. My thought, and I'm now paging through this section anew, is that this would make a great separate book on creating wargame maps. The artistically inclined would go nuts for it.

At first read, I summarized the book in a flippant "1/3 brilliant, 1/3 maybe-maybe not, and 1/3 unnecessary," but in re-reading parts of chapters, I've revised my calculation to be "30% brilliant, 30% useful, 30% maybe-maybe not, and 10% unnecessary overkill." That 30% brilliant and 30% useful is worth the price of admission.

Enjoyed it.



The 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion: Fighting on Both Fronts. by Samuel De Korte. Hardback (6.4x9.5 inches). 227 pages. 2022.

This unit history delves into the training and deployment of an all-black tank destroyer battalion to Europe during WWII. In this case, the "fronts" refers to the Western front as well as the discrimination front. The book also contains information about the two other all-black tank destroyer battalions sent to Europe (827th with M-18 Hellcats in France and 679th with towed guns in Italy).

Activated in 1942, it took two years for the 614th to finally be sent to Europe. Using towed AT guns, it performed with distinction mostly alongside the 103rd division in France, earning respect in a series of hard-fought actions. Appendix C lists the various awards and medals earned by the battalion during its service.

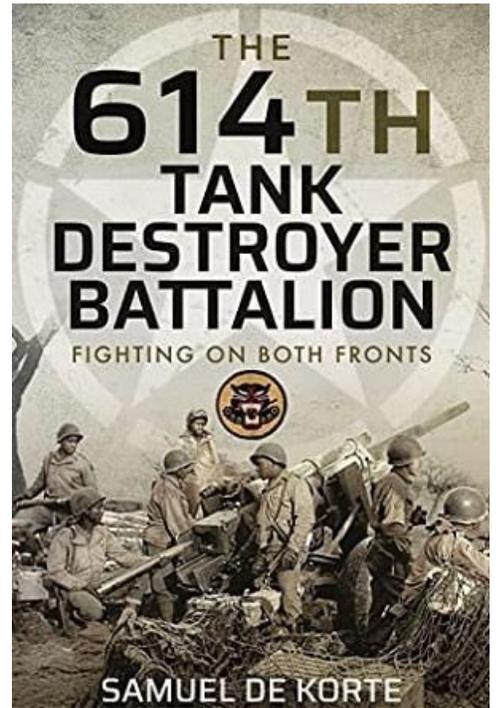
One typo: "Start Sergeant" is probably "Staff Sergeant" (p200).

For tabletop gamers, the chapter on the Battle of Climbach includes OBs and two battle maps would make for a nifty scenario. One interesting tidbit for all you scenario designers: when the unit came upon a road with felled trees, it took a half hour to clear the obstruction (p62). No engineering unit required.

The book contains 26 black and white photos and two black and white maps.

The book offers a well-researched and fast-paced account of the unit's service, from activation and training through combat and deactivation.

Enjoyed it.



Black Lion One: TopGun Trailblazer. by Donald Auten. Hardback (6.4x9.4 inches). 184 pages. 2022.

This biography is the sequel to *Roger Ball*, which I had not read, and follows Capt. John Monroe 'Hawk' Smith from his posting as CO of TOPGUN air fighting school to XO, and later CO, of VF-213 "Black Lions" squadron aboard various aircraft carriers.

It's a nice, readable bio of peacetime training and actions with a squadron full of F-14 Tomcats. If you think it's just hopping into a jet and flying missions, think again. You'll get a taste of what it's like to run a squadron.

The book contains 16 color photos and 13 black and white photos.

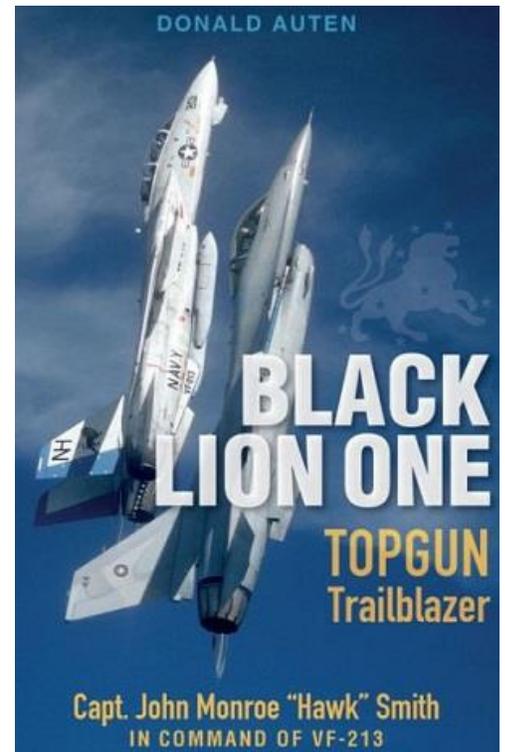
Smith never was involved in dogfights with MiGs, but often in paperwork dogfights over spare parts, rotations, and squadron leave after deployments. Apparently, the US Navy had a system of shuffling parts and people around to maintain deployments, although maintenance often seems to be on the short side.

The conditions aboard the *USS America* raised more than a few eyebrows when the air squadron had to form a 'Ship Habitability Improvement Team' (acronym) to buy and install its own toilets to fix half the head, plus unclog the urinals, replace mirrors, and fix the air conditioning (p59-60). Changing ship supply officers and captains introduced new leadership that eventually sorted out problems.

The laugh-out-loud funniest anecdote involved a cold, wet Marine who thought it would be more comfy to guard a fully-loaded F-14 from inside the cockpit -- only he didn't know how to raise the canopy (p78). Give that marine credit for obliviousness as he found and unraveled a lanyard (a lanyard? Yes, a lanyard) and gave it a yank. That triggered an explosive charge that sent the canopy skyward. And that triggered all sorts of alerts that raced up the HQ food chain.

The prose rolls along as you follow Smith to his retirement.

Enjoyed it.



The Battle of Lissa 1866: From Musket to Maxim 18. by Quintin Barry. Hardback (6.8x10.0 inches). 255 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *How the Industrial Revolution Changed the Face of Naval Warfare.*

This fascinating work needs the title and subtitle reversed, but I'm guessing the Helion marketing department figured a "Battle" in the title would sell better than what would otherwise might be deemed an academic work. All you need to know is that this is the 18th volume in the marvelous *From Musket to Maxim* series and that Barry authored the inspiring *Crisis at the Chesapeake: 1775-1783* (see the review in my 7/28/2021 AAR or up on hmg.org).

Hence, the Battle of Lissa gets consigned to the back of the book while the development of steam-powered ironclads receives an exemplary overview. The first canal-based steamship was in 1779 (p20), while the first British Admiralty-purchased steamship was the 212-ton, 80hp, *HMS Monkey* in 1821 (p21). Robert Fulton designed the first steam-powered warship, the *USS Demologus*, built in 1815 for the War of 1812. The war ended while she was in sea trials (p20).

The naval arms race between countries proves fascinating as countries decided between sailing ships and steamships in the years running up to 1866. The American Civil War with the combat between the *Merrimack* and the blockade ships proved quite convincing, especially when the *Monitor* arrived for the first ironclad battle.

Back to Lissa. After the Austrians probed Ancona (Italy) with a naval raid, the Italians replied with a foray across the Adriatic Sea designed to capture the Austrian island of Lissa. A bumbling Italian commander, Admiral Carlo Persano, almost doomed the expedition from the start, but the Italian fleet made it to the island. The Austrians sent a relief fleet and the Battle of Lissa commenced.

Barry weaves a detailed tale of command successes and failures on both sides from the initial Italian bombardment of the island to the naval battle that convinced the Italians to retreat. Ironclads and wooden sailing ships participated in the maneuvering and shooting, all wonderfully recounted and accompanied by regional, local, and battle maps. The regional and local maps usually have scales, but the time-slugged battle maps do not. The text fills in distances for what the maps display, so you can get a sense of scale for tabletop battles.

The book contains 19 black and white photos of commanders and ships and 11 color maps (six regional and local maps and five battle maps).

One typo: missing space (p27). One odd word: "pacific" might be more accurate as "pacifistic" (p41). One editing snafu: Funky punctuation in a heckuva awkward sentence (p139). None are fatal.

The recap and analysis of the battle (p161-211) are interesting in their own right, but the development of warship technology and resulting arms race in the first two-thirds of the book proved utterly fascinating. Well done.

Enjoyed it.

Armies of the First Sino-Japanese War 1894-95. (Men At Arms 548). by Gabriele Esposito. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 56 pages. 2022.

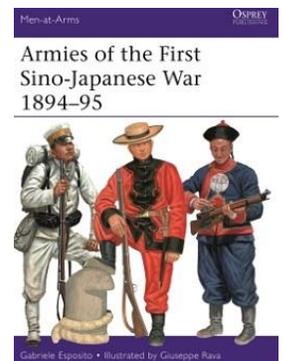
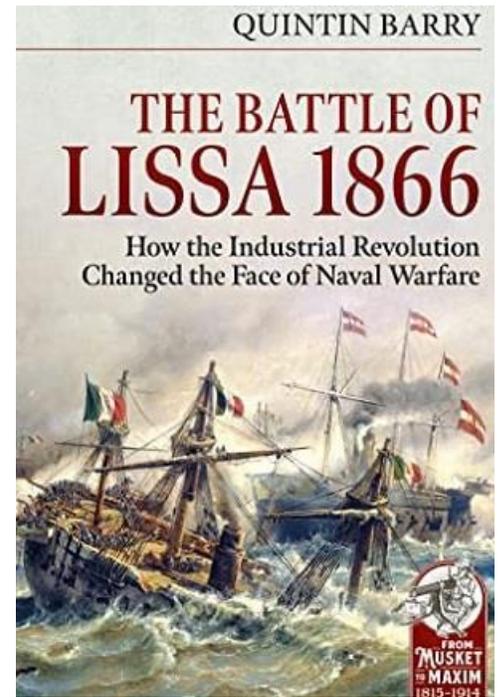
Excellent summary of the OOBs, organization, and top-level operations of the armies mark another contribution to the superb *Men-At-Arms* series. Per usual, the eight-page, color center section provides uniform details for a variety of troops -- 21 soldiers on both sides plus three tribesmen who opposed the Japanese conquest of Formosa (Taiwan).

Granted, I never knew much about this campaign, but that's what overviews do -- help you understand a particular period or campaign. The text does a stellar job of it, too, including a one-page chronology summarizing the main events of the war that saw Korea and a variety of islands ceded by China to Japan.

The booklet contains 11 black and white photos, 22 black and white illustrations, the previously mentioned 24 color illustrations of soldiers' uniforms, and one color map.

You'll need better maps to put on a tabletop battle, but here's hoping Esposito follows up with a *Campaign* booklet.

Enjoyed it.



An Invincible Beast. by Christopher Matthew. Softcover (6.2x9.2 inches). 513 pages. 2022 reprint of 2015.

Subtitle: *Understanding the Hellenistic Pike Phalanx at War*

This examination of everything pike phalanx covers armor, weaponry, stances, numbers, organization, tactics and combats of the Macedonian phalangites in considerable detail, including comparing and contrasting the author's version of a pikeman and his unit with other scholars' views.

The exceptional analysis goes point by counterpoint by counter-counterpoint. As the author is Australian, all measurements use the metric system. For example, the pike was usually 576cm in length and weighed 5.5kg (p91).

Of note is the interpretation that the pike unit had three formations: close order "defense" with 48cm between pikemen, loose order "offense" with 96cm between pikemen, and open order "march" with 192cm between pikemen (p142). A considerable amount of time and pages cover formation changes.

The author's theory is that pikes were used to press against an enemy's shield to keep them at bay, with killing shots only taken when a high percentage chance of stabbing an enemy occurred. He noted that the most experienced officers were stationed at the front of a unit, both to keep order and to supply experience at holding and thrusting at the enemy. A detailed look at combats against enemy troop types (skirmishers, hoplites, chariots, legionnaires, elephants, and other phalangites) proves interesting.

Alexander the Great essentially used hammer and anvil tactics against the Persians, with the pike being the anvil and the cavalry being the hammer that aimed at the enemy commander. Most histories mention six of Alex's pike units with named commanders. The author calculates the frontage of these merarchiae at 256m each, or about 1.5km for all six side-by-side (p343). Each merarchiae was composed of four sub-units called chiliarchiae arranged side by side within those 256m, but the width of the six merarchiae (768m for all six units - p361) can be halved by narrowing the frontage by about half when necessary. Likewise, phalanx width can be doubled if the depth is halved, but this shallow formation lacked the mass and momentum for an offensive action.

The book contains 59 black and white illustrations showing positions, formations, and maneuvers, 20 black and white photos of re-enactors and archeological evidence, and 19 numerical tables.

It's all quite fascinating, with considerable "if this, then that, but what about..." logical dissections of the historical record as well as modern efforts to recreate the ancient phalangite and test a variety of theories. You won't look at a block of Macedonian pikemen on the tabletop the same way.

Enjoyed it.

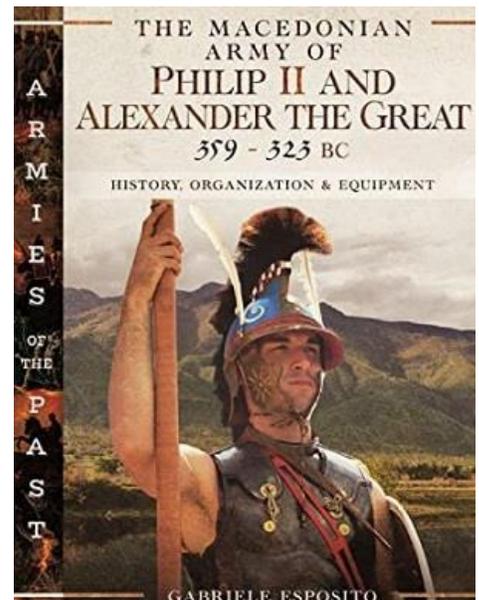
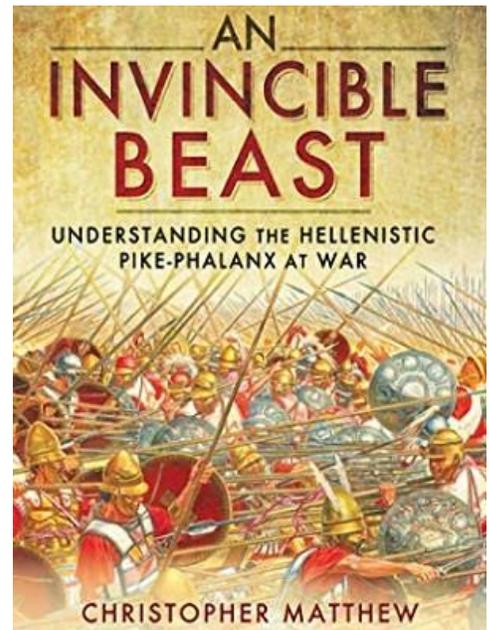
The Macedonian Army of Philip II and Alexander the Great 359-323 BC. by Gabriele Esposito. Hardback (7.1x10.0 inches). 143 pages. 2022 reprint of 2020 book.

Subtitle: *History, Organization and Equipment*

Overall, most of this book contains an overview of the campaigns of Philip II and Alexander the Great. How much of this is new to you depends on how much you've read about the Macedonian Army in the past. In my case, I didn't find anything new for me. Indeed, it follows the traditional narrative found in hundreds of other Alexander the Great books. However, if you're just getting into the period, you will find much to ruminate on.

I had just read *An Invincible Beast: Understanding the Hellenistic Pike Phalanx at War*, which examined the pike phalanx in excruciating detail and with delectable analysis of its organization and operation. Macedonian grognards will enjoy *Beast*-level detail, in part because it's four times the length.

Yet all will enjoy *The Macedonian Army's* 90 color photos, often full page, of re-enactors representing various types of foot soldiers. Esposito's books are often centered around uniforms and he delivers here.



Obviously, two different foci between these two books. *An Invincible Beast* is the book for those seeking greater understanding about pike phalanxes in particular, while the *Macedonian Army* offers a great choice for those seeking a general overview of Alex's army.

Enjoyed it.

The Cornfield: Antietam's Bloody Turning Point. by David A. Welker. Softcover (5.9x9.0 inches). 356 pages. 2022 reprint of 2020 book.

This detailed account of the battle over the Cornfield at Antietam covers brigade and regimental movements across the ACW battlefield. This book only covers the Union right flank and center and barely mentions the center and left flank. More importantly, he examines the Cornfield-area attacks and counter attacks through the eyes of the commanders and what they knew -- and what they didn't know.

And most of this is supported by 26 maps, with scales, with unit positions and movements. Pair these maps with the OOB in the back and hello wargaming scenario!

Caveat 1 is that the OOB (down to regiment and battery) does not list troop numbers, but Appendix 2 (casualties by regiment) can be used to ferret out such info using the "engaged" numbers per regiment.

I recall buying the map dissected in the book, probably at the battlefield long ago. The full map covers the entire battlefield. The 26 maps here use small sections paired to the text.

Caveat 2 is that sometimes the maps showcase only the units being discussed and leave off neighboring units. Still, fantastic map use. Right up there with *The Battle of Znam: 1809* (see the 7/31/2020 AAR or up here on hmgs.org).

A couple of non-fatal typos in the reprint: "armies so near each other as to be able to hear each other walk" (p54) is probably talk; and "only a feint shadow" (p62) should be faint. I chuckled when I read about Hood's "massive division" (p109) that only had about 2,000 men. Only later did I realize that Greene's division had only 2,404 men (p144). However, XII Corp had 7,500 men in two divisions (p135 and p274-276) and DH Hill's division had 5,500 men (p139). Massive might be a little too exuberant.

The book also contains 16 black and white photos and illustrations of minimal value. Some of the images showing changes in elevation that could hide regiments from enemy fire can be helpful. That is also tough to replicate on a tabletop.

As for the cornfield, you'd need some sort of legacy terrain to replicate the diminishing hidden line of sight value of cornstalks that eventually get shredded. Anyone who's wandered around a Halloween corn maze can appreciate line of sight difficulties.

Yet it's the incredible detail of the text that powers this book to excellence. Sometimes, you lose track of the bigger action as you follow individual regiments, but the command perspective brings it all back together. Marvelous.

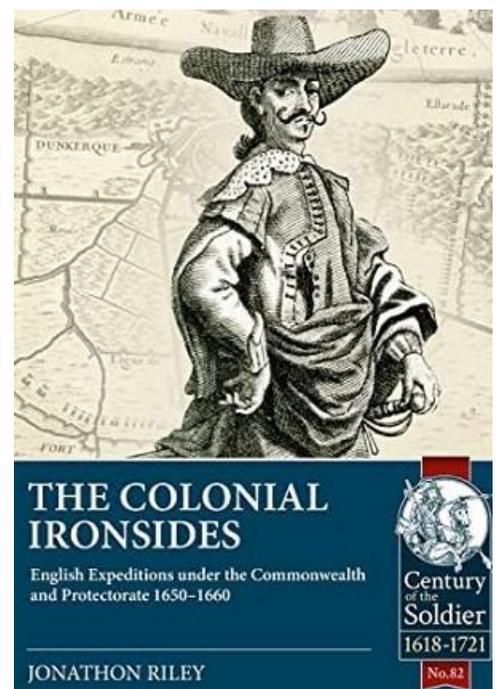
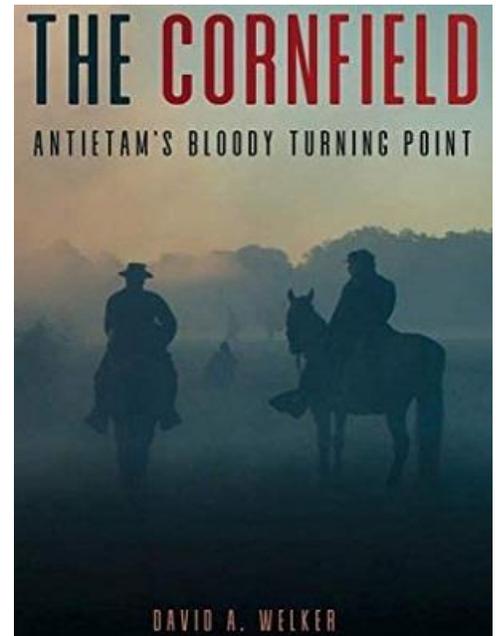
Enjoyed it.

The Colonial Ironsides: Century of the Soldier No. 82. by Jonathan Riley. Softcover (7.0x9.8 inches). 384 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *English Expeditions Under the Commonwealth and Protectorate 1650-1660*

Although a somewhat obscure area of interest, this recap of British expeditions to convince Royalist colonies to accept Parliamentary authority offers a dandy scenario generator within limited territories -- usually islands. The Isles of Man, Scilly, Jamaica, and Jersey provide fertile ground for the tabletop, not to mention Acadia (Nova Scotia). Let's also not forget mentions of a British army in Flanders and the 1658 Battle of the Dunes (starting p261), including a magnificent period map (p279) that labels each unit (p280-281) for a magnificent OOB.

Speaking of OOBs, Riley certainly warms the heart of wargamers



by providing OOBs at the end of just about every battle or operation. The OOBs are quite extensive, with individual officer names and sometimes with numbers. Impressive research.

Of note is the logistics factoid that an army of 30,000 in Europe would consume only 15% of the food gleaned from a territory of 7 miles by 65 miles (p123). This is part of a longer analysis of logistics of the period.

Some typos: "he was forces once more abroad" should be "forced" (p38). "Son John" should be "Don John" (p243), "Heir" should be "Their" (p271), and missing space after a comma (p309). Nothing exactly fatal here, but a bit sloppier than usual.

The book contains 45 black and white illustrations, 39 black and white maps, and two black and white photos.

This one book might be enough to start you on a brand-new period, although you'd need another book for uniform colors and such.

Enjoyed it.

On Spartan Wings. by John Carr. Softcover (6.2x9.2 inches). 176 pages. 2022 reprint of 2012 book.

Subtitle: *The Royal Hellenic Air Force in World War Two*

This gem of a reprint offers a full 1940 OOB of the Greek Air Force on the outbreak of war with Italy -- and boy oh boy is it a hodge podge lodge of aircraft. The Greek AF budget was always an afterthought and it showed. I had to look up the "Arado AR240 heavy fighter" (p128) - never heard of it, but then again, you learn something new every day if you keep reading history books.

You can pull a number of dogfight scenarios from these pages and the matchups provide a welcome break from typical Hurricanes and Spitfires vs. ME-109s.

While the Greek AF held its own against the Italians, the Germans were another story. Better aircraft, more aircraft, and greater experience took its toll as the Greek AF relocated to Crete and then Egypt. The Greeks had to rely on the British for aircraft in North Africa.

Of note is the Communist infiltration within the AF, especially among ground personnel. One serious mutiny was put down while in North Africa. Despite the troubles, the AF finally followed up Allied advances into Italy and then returned to Greece to help toss out the Communists. It's an interesting part of history you don't often read about.

The book contains 20 black and white photos and two black and white maps.

Enjoyed it.

The Supersonic Bone: B-1 Bomber. by Kenneth P. Katz. Hardback (7.0x10.0 inches). 375 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *A Development and Operational History of the B-1 Bomber*

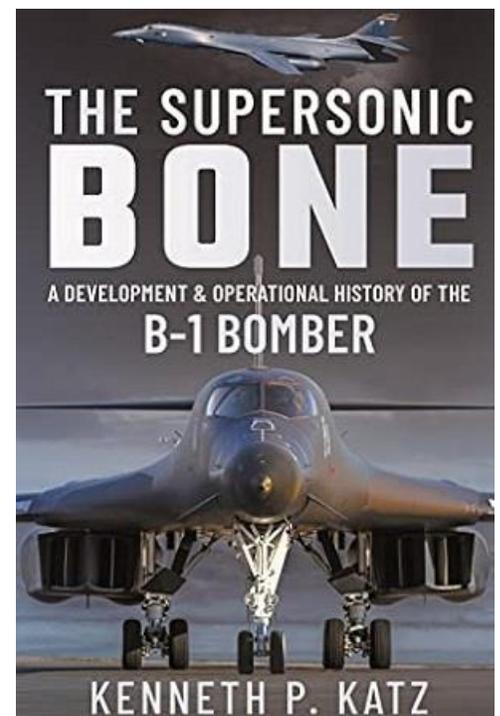
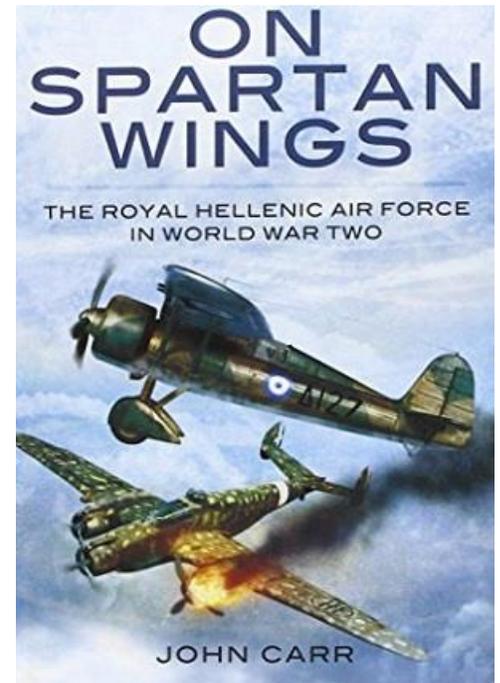
This history of the B-1 Lancer bomber, successor to the B-52, receives a full examination of design, development, cancellation, and re-installment of the program.

It offers a system-by-system analysis and delves quite a bit more into the technical aspects than I ever needed to dive into. As I am not much of a modern gamer, I skipped around a bit. Modelers will likely appreciate all those close-ups of various parts of the plane and its weaponry.

The book contains 348 color photos, 20 black and white photos, six color illustrations and one black and white illustration.

I found the program's political jockeying around its cancellation and re-instatement interesting, which sometimes has more to do with posturing and quid pro quo than all those technical specs. The operational history of use in the Middle East and Afghanistan proved interesting.

Ties go to the author. Enjoyed it.



We Were Never There: Volume 2 (Europe at War 17). by Kevin Wright. Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 90 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *CIA U-2 Asia and Worldwide Operations 1957-1974*

This sequel to *Volume 1 - Europe at War 14* (see the review in my 7/28/2021 AAR or up on hmgs.org) continues the coverage of CIA aerial activities during the Cold War.

The missions cover overflights of the USSR, China, North Korea, Tibet, Vietnam, and the Middle East. Most were of the image and signals collection variety to help the CIA understand enemy capabilities. Missions are often accompanied by a map showing the route -- it's a nice touch.

The USSR shooting down Powers' U-2 makes the most headlines, but the Chinese must have yawned -- the Chinese shot down four of 'em and reassembled the wreckage into a display in Beijing (China). They even escorted one of the captured pilots to view their anti-air and jigsaw puzzle handiwork (p20).

From 1956 to 1969, the CIA lost 42 U2A/Bs, or an average of about three per year (p73). Of the 42, 30 were lost to training accidents. The aircraft was upgraded to a C model and then to a much improved R model.

The book contains 47 black and white photos, 36 black and white maps, one color map, nine color aircraft profiles, four color photos, one color uniform illustration, and one color equipment illustration.

One U2 was even launched from an aircraft carrier and landed on one, albeit with damage. With the emergence of satellite imagery, the need for overflights diminished. Mission by mission, you get a good picture of aerial spy efforts.

Enjoyed it.

Czechoslovak Arms Exports to the Middle East (Middle East at War 43). by Martin Smisek. Softcover (8.3x11.8 inches). 104 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *Volume 3 Egypt 1948-1989.*

This third volume of the title topic continues the often contentious Czech sales of weaponry to Egypt (*Volume 1 (Middle East at War 39)* is in my 01/31/2022 AAR and up on HMGS.org), due to the USSR placing restriction on its pass-through weapon sales.

A lot of shady deals worthy of spy novel fare, or a set up for a spy RPG, cropped up with the USSR participating in the financing and the Czechs offering transshipment services. Lots of credit and bartering constituted the main deals until the Soviets decided to cut out the Czech middlemen.

That led to the Czechs setting up military training schools. The book's concentration on training course materials makes for dull reading.

The main takeaway was that the Czech instructors complained about the laziness of Egyptian students -- until they started to expel the laziest of students. If you're into schooling and curricula, here's your book. Otherwise, not so much.

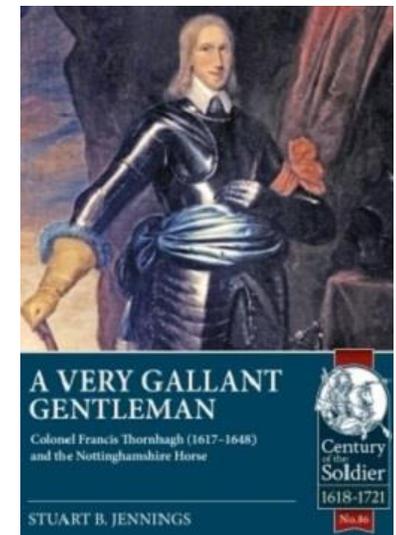
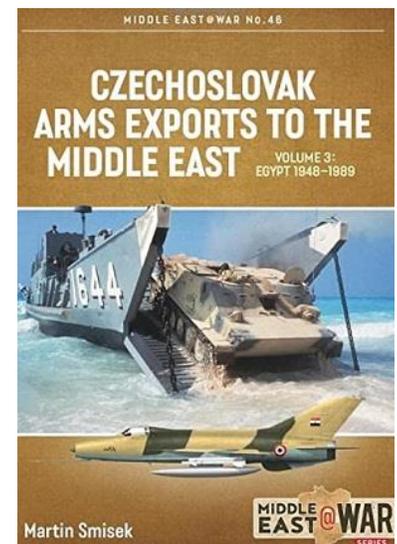
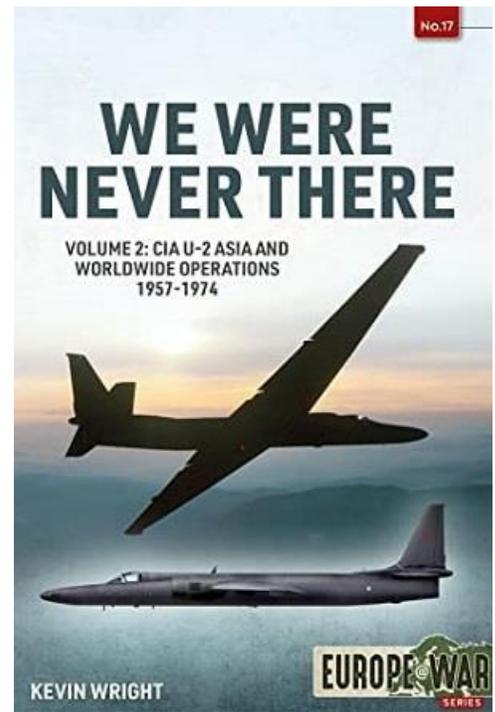
A Very Gallant Gentleman: Century of the Soldier - Number 86. by Stuart B. Jennings. Softcover (7.1x9.8 inches). 104 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *Colonel Francis Thornhagh (1617-1648) and the Nottinghamshire Horse*

Biography of an upper middle-class gentleman during the English Civil War who commanded the Nottingham Horse regiment raised by his father.

Siding with Parliament, he and his cavalry fought in a variety of battles and skirmishes during the ECW. As this is a biography and not a battle book, this account centers on his role and provides minimal information about the clashes. Still, you might glean enough information for a skirmish action.

Competently written, the bibliography shows extensive primary research



into the man and period.

One typo of a fatal variety: The Scots army that marched south either cost 31,000 pounds per month (p61) or 21,000 pounds per month (p70). The Nottingham monthly portion of this cost is the same (273 pounds 10 shillings and 5.5 pence) in both spots.

The book contains 16 black and white illustrations, four black and white maps, and 16 black and white photos.

This bio offers considerable insight into the life of a prosperous gentleman during the war, including an overview of life in 1600s England and the non-battle implications of command during a civil war.

Enjoyed it.

US Navy Armored Cruisers: 1890-1933 (New Vanguard 311). by Brian Lane Herder. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 48 pages. 2022.

At the tail end of the ironclad era, the US built 15 armored cruisers (p10) to counter other countries' armored cruisers. Probably the most famous US armored cruiser was the *USS Maine* -- the ship sunk in Havana Harbor to help kick off the Spanish-American War. After construction started, it was reclassified as a "second-class battleship" in 1892 and then in 1920 was reclassified back again as an armored cruiser (p5-6).

As they were capital ships, the original names were after US states, but the US Navy changed the names from 1911 to 1920 to cities, reserving the state names for then-modern battleships.

The booklet covers development, construction, specifications, and operations, including battle versus Spanish Navy off Cuba in 1898, WWI convoy duty, and interwar support during actions in Caribbean and Far East.

The booklet contains 32 black and white photos, three black and white illustrations, four color illustrations, eight color ship profiles, two color action illustrations, and one two-page, cut-away illustration of *USS Montana*.

Of note, on Nov. 4, 1910, Eugene Ely flew an airplane off the modified *USS Birmingham* to land in Virginia -- first time an aircraft flew off a ship. On Jan. 11, 1911, Ely landed a plane on the modified *USS Pennsylvania* -- first time that happened, too.

Interesting tidbits include the dramatic loss of the *USS Memphis* to a freak storm and the *USS Milwaukee* to a storm while helping to salvage a grounded submarine on Samoa Beach, California.

Enjoyed it.

Nakajima B5N Kate: Monographs 79. by Dariusz Paduch. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 94 pages. 2021.

Covers the design, development, specifications, and operations of the Kate during WWII. As for the latter, the attack on Pearl Harbor receives a most exhaustive look of its performance as bomber and torpedo plane, with a plane-by-plane, bomb-by-bomb, torpedo-by-torpedo description of attack vectors, hits, misses, and damage. Wow.

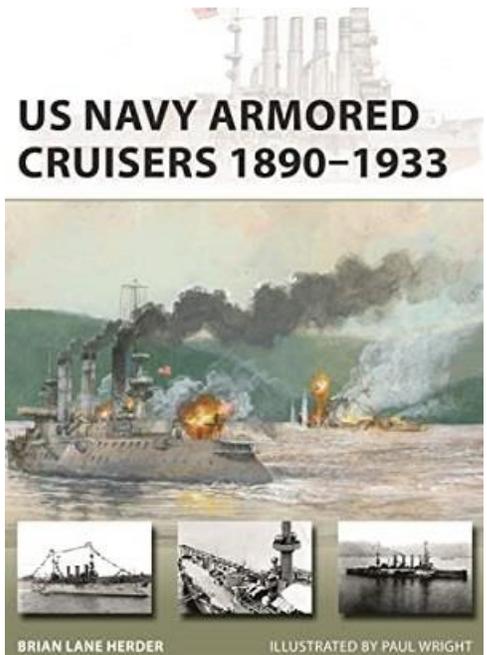
Briefer recaps cover actions at Philippines, Indian Ocean, Coral Sea, Midway, Solomons, and Philippines Sea.

The book contains 135 black and white photos, two black and white illustrations, 17 black and white scale drawings (1/72 and 1/48), and 15 color aircraft profiles.

Enjoyed it.

The Mikoyan-Gurevich MiG-3: Volume 1 - Monographs 80. by Dariusz Paduch. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 72 pages. 2021.

I had the sense of deja vu while reading this because a considerable portion of the book centered around the development of the various engines before settling on the one used in the MiG-1 and MiG-3.



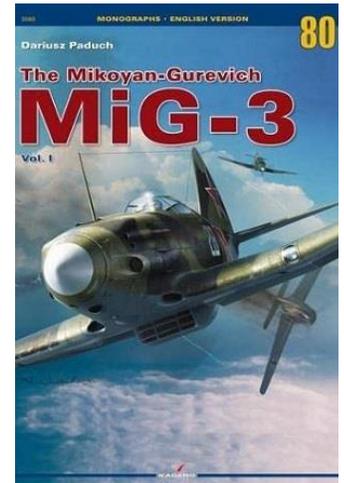
It took me a while to remember and locate, but the same author wrote *Monographs 76 -- Lavochkin LA-5: Volume 1* (see my review in 1/31/2022 AAR or up on hmgs.org) -- that devoted much space to engine development. The MiG 3 doesn't receive specific coverage until page 38. Now, if you haven't read the LA-5 book, you're golden as you work your way through contemporary developments in the 1920s and 1930s. If you have, skip to page 38...

From that point on, you get considerable information about the I-200 (later MiG-1 and MiG-3) aircraft's design and development. The English is a bit stilted, but the facts are presented in detail. Some typos, but none fatal.

The book contains 97 black and white photos, six black and white illustrations, and eight color aircraft profiles offering summer and winter 1941 camouflage patterns.

The text ends with Barbarossa and presumably *Volume 2* will pick up the narrative from there. Hopefully, it will not duplicate text from the second volume of the LA-5 book.

Enjoyed it.



Boeing (McDonnell Douglas) F/A-18 E/F Super Hornets: Volume II - Monographs 82. by Salvador Mafe Huertas. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 92 pages. 2021.

Subtitle: *4+ Gen Strike Fighter & EA-18G Growler Multirole and Electronic Attack*

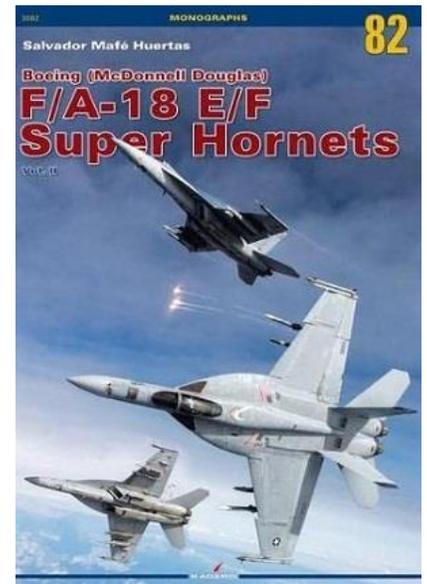
I have not read *Volume I*, but *Volume II* seems like a massive cut and paste job of official press releases and recycled *Janes Defense Weekly* snippets. I suppose there's some value in concentrating all of these in one book and supporting the text with lots of US Navy photos, but any insight is minimal.

It didn't help that this contains a massive DTP screw-up where an apparent sidebar of text (p47) is duplicated in the main text word for word (p46, p49-53). Kagero releases some great books, well, not this cut and paste job in particular, but the company suffers from a considerable number of problems in its production process. Some of it is just editing: the company needs to hire an English-language editor to smooth out the prose and whack typos, but this whopper should have been caught by anyone who actually read the text.

Sure, anyone who reads my AARs will find typos, too -- typical of a one-man publishing band. As I've noted before, every writer needs an editor. That goes quadruple for a publishing company.

The 181 aircraft photos and illustrations offer some nice photo-op shots, 10 color aircraft profiles provide markings, and 12 pages of black and white drawings offer cockpit layouts and exterior system placements -- although here again, pages are duplicated.

For modelers of this plane, you have at least one other specific reference: *Boeing F/A-18E Super Hornet: Kit Build 5* (review in my 03/29/2021 AAR or up on hmgs.org). You can also look at its predecessors: *Boeing F/A-18 A/B and C/D Hornet: Duke Hawkins 8* (9/27/2020 AAR or up on hmgs.org).



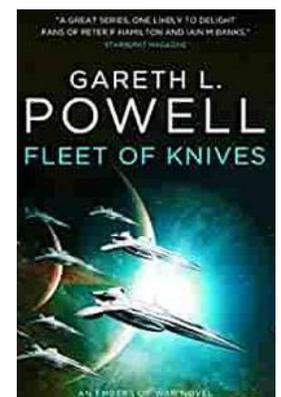
Fleet of Knives: Embers of War Novel. by Gareth L. Powell. Paperback (4.1x6.9 inches). 423 pages. 2020.

The Trouble Dog, an AI-aware spaceship, tracks down a distress signal from Lucy's Ghost, another AI-aware spaceship that was attacked by a creature from another dimension while in hyperspace. Somewhere in there the Marble Fleet decides humans are too warlike and will attract the attention of something even bigger and badder than the Marble fleet -- so the fleet heads off into human space to destroy all warships and eliminate all FTL travel. And the Trouble Dog is also a trouble-maker, so the Marble-ites gun for it during its rescue mission.

It probably would make more sense if I read the first book, as I have no idea why a derelict ship can support a herd of lobster-monsters -- although I do get a hint of lobster-on-lobster cannibalism. It seems that there is a third book.

Found this sequel to a book I did not read in a discount bin. It's OK.

Ties go to the author: Enjoyed it.



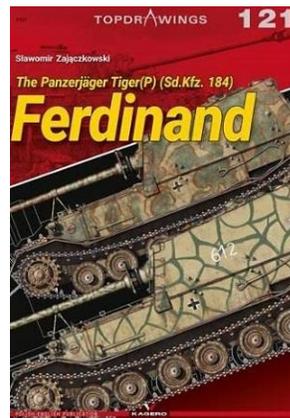
PzJager Tiger (P) Ferdinand: TopDrawings 121. by Slasomir Zajaczkowski. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 20 pages. 2022.

The text, half in Polish and half in English, lasts a quarter page in each language, but you buy *TopDrawings* booklets for their scale drawings, not the text.

The giant German WWII Ferdinand debuted at Kursk and did well as a tank destroyer, although mechanical problems caused a considerable number of losses through abandonment.

The booklet contains 35 black and white 1/35 scale drawings and 10 color profiles. In addition, a 11.4x15.8-inch pull out sheet contains seven black and white 1/48 scale drawings, 18 black and white 1/72 scale drawings.

For the scratch builder or modeler looking for scale drawings of this massive tank hunter, here's the booklet.



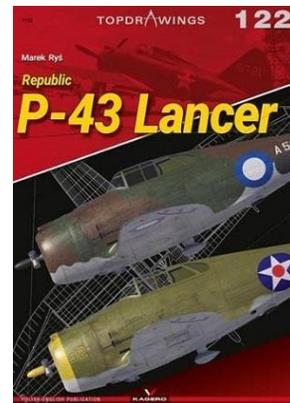
Republic P-43 Lancer: TopDrawings 122. by Marek Rys. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 20 pages. 2021.

As with all *TopDrawings* booklets, the text, half in Polish and half in English, is a quarter page in each language. But you don't buy the booklet for its prose.

The WWII US P-43 had a limited production run of 259, of which Australia received eight and China received 108. Although withdrawn from the main fronts at the outbreak of the war, some models were still flying combat in Burma in 1943 (p1).

The booklet contains 21 black and white 1/48 scale drawings, 21 black and white 1/72 scale drawings, and 10 color profiles. In addition, a 15.75x22.75-inch pull out sheet contains 14 black and white 1/35 scale drawings.

For the scratch builder or modeler looking for scale drawings of this plane, here's the booklet.



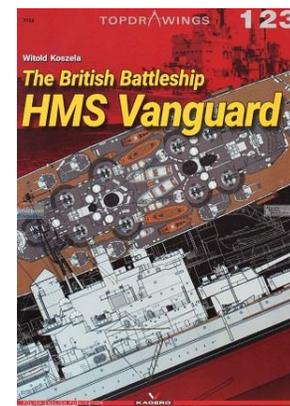
British BB HMS Vanguard: TopDrawings 123. by Witold Koszela. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 20 pages. 2021.

As with all *TopDrawings* booklets, half the text is in Polish and half in English. Each language gets a half page. But you don't buy the booklet for its prose.

This battleship took from 1941 to 1946 to be built, missing WWII, but subsequently serving as a training ship and the ship that transported the Royal Family on an overseas trip. The ship was scrapped in 1962.

The booklet contains 57 black and white 1/200 scale drawings of the ship and various systems, 42 black and white 1/100 and 1/200 mixed scale drawings of various components, one black and white photo, and two color ship profiles (top and starboard). In addition, two 18.00x25.25-inch pull out sheets contain 10 black and white 1/400 scale drawings and two 1/400 color drawings.

For the scratch builder or modeler looking for scale drawings of this battleship, which might be useful in a hypothetical WWII extension scenario, here's the booklet.



Dornier DO 335 Pfeil A: TopDrawings 124. by Marek Rys. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 20 pages. 2022.

The push-me, pull-me WWII German aircraft with an engine in the front and an engine in the back gets the *TopDrawings* treatment with limited text, half in Polish and half in English, of a quarter page in each language. As noted before, you don't buy the *TopDrawings* booklets for their prose.

Produced in limited numbers and with limited combat during the war, it's still an interesting looking plane.

The booklet contains 45 black and white 1/72 scale drawings of the plane and components, four color photos of the plane on display in a museum, and six color profiles. In addition, three 15.75x22.75-inch pull out sheets contain 12 black and white 1/48 scale drawings and seven black and white 1/35 scale drawings.

For the scratch builder or modeler looking for scale drawings of this plane, here's your booklet.



Guide to German Night Fighters in WWII. by Eduard Manuel Gil Martinez. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 140 pages. 2021.

Subtitle: *The Night Defenders of the Reich*

This short history of the German night fighters provides a micro-history of each Gruppe as well as short overviews of each aircraft the Germans used to intercept Allied night bombing raids. The various schemes used to detect bombers and vector fighters receives a look, as well as the counter-efforts the Allies used to foil the radar-directed defenses.

Of particular interest was the description of 'Fernnachtjagd' missions that sent German night fighters over Britain often to attack bombers on their return. They proved successful, but Hitler ordered the end of such missions because it wasn't stopping the bombers (p6).

The book contains 212 black and white photos, 42 black and white illustrations, and eight color aircraft profiles.

Sadly, typos rear their ugly head, including: I'm not sure what "motived that the number" means (p7); "nigh fighters" is missing a "t" (p10); "ant radar" should be "any" (p10); "if shoot down" should be "shooting" (p25); "War World 2" needs a word swap (p64); "indeed it was worst aircraft than" should be "a worse" (p86); "Me 210s were hand over" should be "handed" (p87); and "After tested it, it" should be "testing" (p108). Other technically correct, but awkward phrasings, dot the text -- if Kagero is to reach the next level, it needs to hire an English editor to find and fix typos and smooth out the prose.

Combat tactics, weaponry, and night fighter efforts by other Axis powers, including Japan, are covered. The performance comparison chapter (p122-124) covering speed, range, and so on is worth the price of admission for game designers. If only Kagero could shed the typos and often awkward prose... Still, the overview and info within is excellent.

Enjoyed it.

Russian Cruiser Askold: SuperDrawings in 3D. by Aliaksandr Sukhanevich. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 140 pages. 2021.

A couple pages of text outline the history of this cruiser that escaped Port Arthur during the Russo-Japanese War to be interned by the Chinese in Shanghai and was later released back to the Russians. It served in the Eastern Mediterranean in WWI, but was seized by Britain in 1917. The Soviets didn't want it, so it was sold to Germany for scrap.

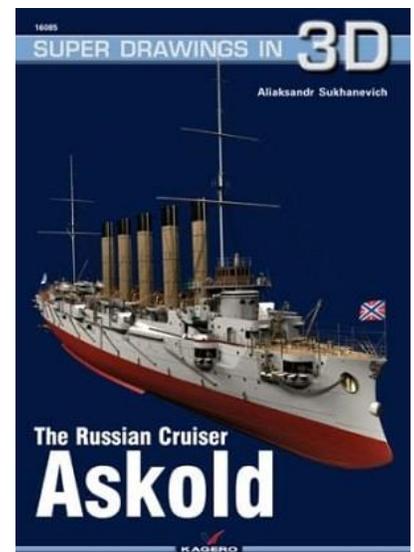
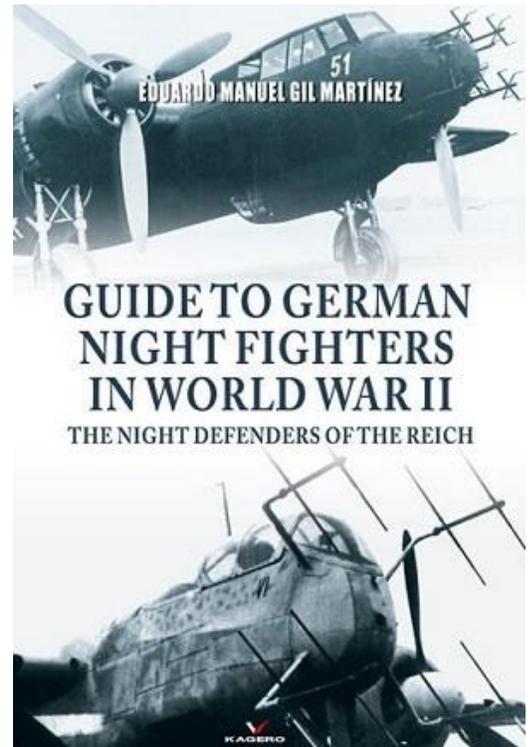
The 129 3D color illustrations are marvelous for those wanting an intensive look at the cruiser and its systems from a variety of angles. A separate 19.9 x 26.75-inch pull out sheet features three 1/200 scale drawings of the full ship on one side while the flip side contains five 1/100 scale black and white drawings of the tower, three 1/150 scale black and white drawings of the central superstructure, 10 1/50 scale black and white drawings of the guns, and three 1/100 black and white drawings of the small steamer boats.

Modelers will enjoy the 3D look.

Junkers JU-88 A-4: Club 1/48 - Number 1. by Sebastian Piechowiak. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 46 pages. 2022.

Although this is the number one booklet in a new series, it generally follows the already established *Club 1/72* format...only in 1/48 scale. This booklet covers the building of a JU-88 A4 with 74 magnificent color photos of its step-by-step model construction, including use of aftermarket photo-etched parts.

It also contains a complete list of paint colors and coatings, glues, decal liquids, brushes, and tools. Another five color photos shows them all -- rather clever and helpful I expect, although my modeling days are long in the past.



One hiccup: I was interested in reading how he used putty that hardens via ultraviolet light (p8), although there is no associated photo showing exactly how and where he applied such putty. I am guessing that it might be obvious to a modeler.

One suggestion: Fewer of the 33 sepia-toned photos that really don't do much for comparisons. Leave them as black and white and use fewer, larger, and sharper photos. As this is only the first in the series, I expect such to be refined as the series continues.

The two color photos and the four color aircraft profiles offer a far better idea of a final product. A section of 3D color illustrations is also much appreciated: 10 of the MG 15 guns, four of the oxygen cylinder, four of the pilot's seat, and six of the wheels.

Also included is a 2.3x4.9-inch masking foil with 70 cutouts -- handy for modelers using airbrushes for painting, I expect.

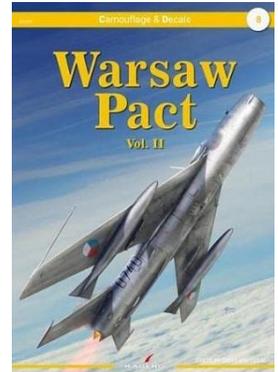
If 1/48 is your scale and JU-88 A4 is your aircraft, modelers can't go wrong with this booklet of techniques. Enjoyed it.

Warsaw Pact Volume 2: Camouflage and Decals 8. Edited by Damien Majsak. Softcover (8.25x11.75 inches). 39 pages. 2021.

This is a painting guide to Cold War jets, not a book, as it offers no text other than captions.

It does contain 64 color aircraft profiles: six MiG-15, six MiG-17, seven MiG-19, 10 MiG-21, 17 MiG-23, 16 MiG-29, one Lim-2, and one Lim-5. Two of the MiG-29s are in Soviet colors, but the rest are from Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany.

The decal sheet contains 60 decals (guessing 1/72 and 1/48 scale) for Poland, Czechoslovakia, and East Germany. No Soviet red stars are on the sheet. Modelers may likely find this more interesting than general readers.



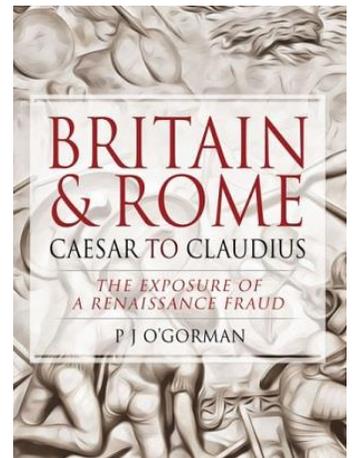
Britain & Rome: Caesar to Claudius. by P J O'Gorman. Hardcover (6.5x9.5 inches). 208 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *The Exposure of a Renaissance Fraud*

The 'fraud' refers to the writings of Tacitus and Cassius Dio -- O'Gorman insists that Tacitus and Cassius Dio are fakes: "contrived illusion...and historical fiction." (p36)

To summarize: John of Salisbury wrote a 12th century work about tyranny and among the authors cited, listed Serenus, Tranquillus, and Tacitus -- translated into English as Serene, Tranquil, and Silent. Later, Peter of Blois clued into the first two puns, but missed the third.

The late 1300s to early 1400s saw a contemporary struggle between monarchy and pope in addition to a split within the Roman Catholic Church. From that point on, a pair of Renaissance writers created fake 'classical' texts -- Tacitus and Dio -- as propoganda to influence the papal schism and monarchies' reluctance to send funds to Rome.



The resulting texts used *Caesar's Commentaries* as a template to alter the history of the Claudian invasion of Britain and insinuate rebellious groups have no hope of defeating Rome and they better start toeing the line and forking over the tribute funds. Thus, works by Tacitus and Cassius Dio are Renaissance-era propoganda fakes.

O'Gorman relied on a British text -- ignored by Renaissance writers and classical scholars -- to recount the 'real' story of the Claudian invasion. He spent considerable effort cross-referencing sources, pointing out anomalies in the texts, and surveying archeological evidence, or lack thereof, to support his argument.

In the British texts, Claudius' invasion of 43 AD fails badly and the Emperor cuts a deal to marry off his eldest daughter to King Arivargus, calls his son Britannicus, and leaves the decimated legionnaires behind as laborers for British infrastructure. In exchange, Rome received lucrative trade deals and the Orkney Islands.

I know. O'Gorman is not coloring within the lines. He's not even on the page. Is this the ravings of a madman or the insight of a genius?

In a sense, this is an extrapolation of his dissertation work on the political, military, and diplomatic events of the time. Indeed, I found that recap fascinating once he stopped using his dissertation as the text and started writing actual prose.

O'Gorman cites 17 primary sources and a slew of secondary sources and uses pages 139 to 189 to print excerpts from Caesar, Suetonius, and various other classical sources, including Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12th century transcription of an ancient British history.

I'm not familiar with the intricacies of the publishing history of Roman and Greek works. I've certainly read enough of 'em as an amateur ancient history buff. Ancient text translations differ from translator to translator.

The odd part about Tacitus is his description of the Battle of Mons Graupius (83AD). In my admittedly non-academic research for a tabletop battle, I didn't find a reference that anyone has ever found the battlefield. Roman marching camps, yes, guesses, yes, but a big excavated battlefield? No. That's always been a nerdy bother of mine the same way no one has found a trove of buried Carthaginians below the pass Hannibal took through the Alps. So, lack of evidence doesn't specifically mean an event did not occur.

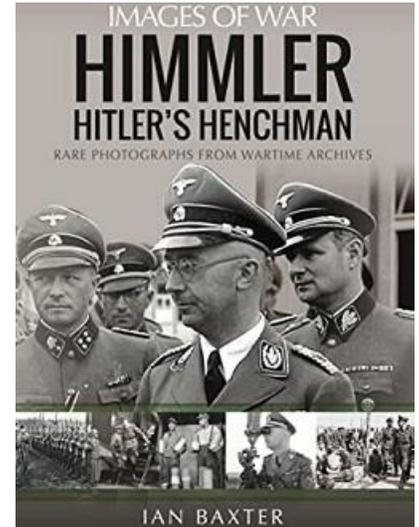
On the flip side, how did Rome grab so much of Britain without resorting to subjugating the Britons by warfare as it did other tribal areas? Trade relations only go so far for Imperial Rome. Somebody would have wanted to make a name for himself. If not Aulus Plautius, then who?

So, what about the premise about a failed Claudian invasion? I don't know, but it's a fascinating 'new' (at least to me) examination and interpretation of old texts. It remains beyond my ken to call this an academic breakthrough or a selective twisting of facts to fit a premise, but as an exercise of brain cells, quite interesting to consider.

Enjoyed it.

Himmler: Hitler's Henchman (Images of War). by Ian Baxter. Softcover (7.4x9.7 inches). 119 pages. 2022.

I'm trying to be objective as to why anyone would want a photobook of this Nazi, but I'm not succeeding. Contains 19-page overview bio plus 157 black and white photos of him shaking hands and touring camps and other facilities.



Operation Market Garden (BattleCraft). by Ben Skipper. Softcover (8.3x11.7 inches). 64 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *A Bridge Too Far*

Aimed at modelers, this follows the same format as the first *BattleCraft*, *The Battles of El Alamein* (see my review in the 08/21/2022 AAR or up on hmgs.org), in that the booklet includes a historical overview and modeling builds of four aircraft, vehicles, etc.

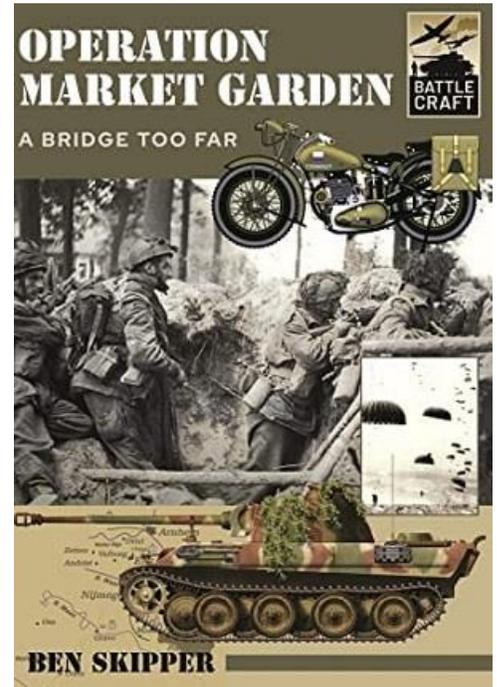
The history part (p1-38) offers a pretty good overview of the operation along with 102 black and white photos, two color photos, and four color maps. The four are:

A27M Cromwell tank with 2.5 pages of development and operations history (including eight black and white photos, two color photos, and two rather dark color profiles) and 3.5 pages of advice on modeling kits and a build of a 1/35 Tamiya kit (five color photos of box covers and accessories and 10 color photos of the finished kit).

Pz V Panther G tank with 2.5 pages of development and operations history (including nine black and white photos, three color photos, and two color profiles) and 4.5 pages of advice on modeling kits and a build of a 1/35 Tamiya kit (six color photos of box covers and accessories and 10 color photos of the finished kit).

Kettengrad (hybrid motorcycle-half track) with 2.5 pages of development and operations history (including four black and white photos, six excellent color photos of a restored vehicle, and two color profiles) and 3.5 pages of advice on modeling kits and a build of a 1/35 Das Werk (Dragon) kit (eight color photos of box covers and accessories and nine color photos of the finished kit).

Triumph Motorcycle with 2.5 pages of development and operations history (including eight black and white photos, four color photos of a restored vehicle, and two color profiles) and 4.5 pages of advice on modeling kits and a build of a 1/9 Italeri kit (seven color photos of box covers and accessories and nine color photos of the finished kit).



As I mentioned before, this booklet uses the same page count as a single-vehicle or aircraft or ship study in other *Craft* booklets, but tackling four vehicles, aircraft, or ships means far less attention to detail and analysis about competing kits and the tips used in building one of them. It dilutes the strength of the booklets' premise.

My modeling days are long gone, but this just doesn't have the wealth of information that a single-topic *Craft* volume offers.

I'll still give a tie to the author, but it seems a *Craft* concept too far. Enjoyed it.

The Fighting Colours of Richard J. Caruana: Malta. Softcover (horizontal 8.3x11.7 inches). 64 pages. 2021.

Subtitle: *50th Anniversary Collection*

Subtitle: *2: Malta George Cross*

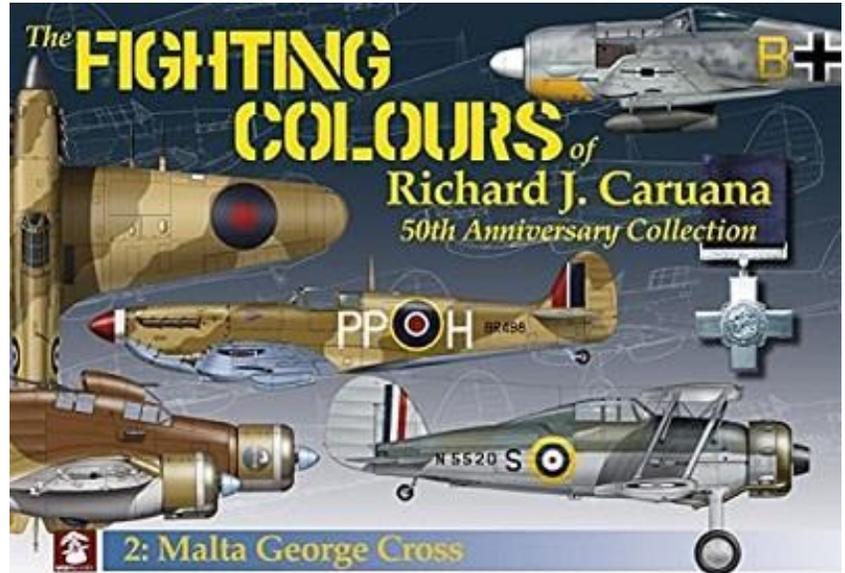
No author or editor listed, but this celebrates the aviation artwork of Caruana that has been in print in a variety of spots for the last 50 years. It's a fantastic collection of WWII Malta-based or Malta-attacking aircraft of British, Italian, German, and US planes with lots of camouflage designs.

The booklet contains brief bios of selected British pilots and seven pages of historical reference, including OOBs for 1940 and 10 black and white photos.

The genius of Caruana's artwork resides in 203 color aircraft profiles of all the great fighters and bombers used for attacking and defending Malta plus 46 color nose art designs. Most are side profiles, but included in the total are top-down views and the occasional bottom-up views.

It's a magnificent painting guide to the Med.

Enjoyed it.



Soviet Pistols (Weapon 84). by Leroy Thompson. Softcover (7.25x9.75 inches). 80 pages. 2022.

Subtitle: *Tokarov, Makarov, Stechkin, and Others*

If you are into USSR pistols, such as those mentioned in the subtitle and also Smith & Wesson and Nagant models made in the USSR, here's your overview.

Pages 4-33 cover development and technical specifications while pages 34-60 cover use and operational anecdotes from WWII to modern era.

Of note, the SPP-1 was a four-barrel, underwater pistol of the 1960s and 70s that fired darts not bullets (p33). The range varied by depth: just under surface was 17m while 40m below was only 6m. Now, there's a handy little gadget for your SMERSH operatives...

From 1986-2007, cosmonauts carried a Makarov PM and a special three-barrel TP-82 Cosmonaut Survival Pistol. The top two barrels were 40-gauge shotguns and the bottom fired a 5.45mm round (p52).

Er, why? Not much defense with only three barrels. Maybe prevent an insurrection or defection? Last-resort suicide device in case of major malfunction? Or did the commies watch one too many *Alien* movies?

I wonder why they stopped carrying. More compact weapon? Is there an armory on the International Space Station filled with phasers and blasters? Or did someone make the luggage go through a metal detector?

Pages 61-75 cover outside-the-USSR production of the pistols, the next two pages cover limited edition pistols, the bibliography is on the next two pages, and the last page is the index. Gun enthusiasts rejoice.

Enjoyed it.



British Aviation: The First Half Century. by David Willis. Hardback (horizontal 8.6x10.0 inches). 192 pages. 2021.

Subtitle: *In Colour*

The book covers 165 aircraft, almost always one per page, with a color photo, or a colorized version of a black and white photo, showing off the plane's form and style.

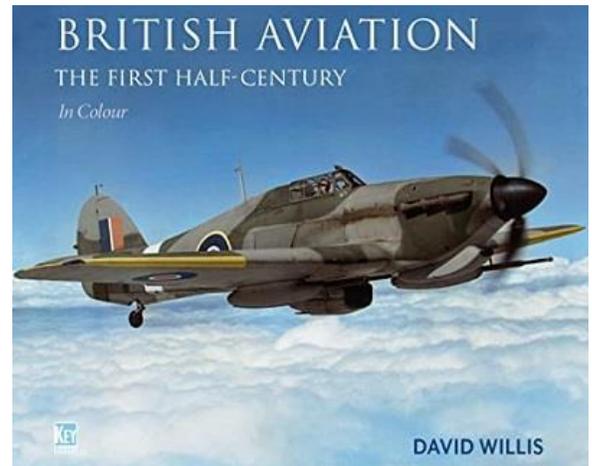
A short paragraph offers a bit of history for each aircraft. No specs, and indeed, I found the caption's font too skinny and light of ink, but you can look up more info elsewhere on the web. Decade by decade, the book shows off one marvelous image after another. It is more art than science.

While I certainly have seen images of the more famous aircraft, it's all the rest of them that prove utterly fascinating. Page by page, you can trace the evolution of design.

Seaplanes, biplanes, four engines, two engines. What a collection. How about an autogyro the precursor to the helicopter? The Brits had two types: Hafner AR.III (p97) in 1935 and the license-produced Avro 671 Rota (p122) in 1934. Also includes the Royal Airships Works R101 dirigible (p82) and a pair of gliders. Most of the colorized photos also include a postage stamp version of the original black and white.

For us wargamers, you can pick an obscure plane to use in back of beyond scenarios. Some are one-off prototypes and others yielded limited production, but the book provides a visual jumping off point. I'm not sure where you can find a model of the troop carrier Vickers Victoria or the passenger plane DeHavilland Hercules, but you never know. I do know I enjoyed paging back and forth through the book.

Enjoyed it.



Villers-Bocage: Through the Lens. by Daniel Tayler. Hardback (horizontal 8.5x12.0 inches). 88 pages. 2021 reprint of 1999 book.

Subtitle: *Of the German War Photographer*

What a fantastic reference for a tabletop scenario about the battle in the village of Villers-Bocage. This tank by tank account follows the attack by Britain's 22nd Brigade, 4th County of London Yeomanry (Sharpshooters) tank regiment and 1/7 Queens infantry battalion into Villers-Bocage and the subsequent German counterattack that included Tiger ace Michael Wittmann.

A, B, and C Squadrons of the Sharpshooters drove into and through Villers-Bocage. Each Squadron consisted of one Sherman Firefly and three Cromwell IV tanks, plus the Squadron HQ of one Cromwell VI (95mm gun) and two Cromwell IV tanks and some recon troop Stuarts. The 1/7 Queens rode in on universal carriers and half-tracks, along with its support company of towed 6pdr AT guns.

The Germans counterattacked with Pz IV tanks from Panzer Lehr division and Tigers from SS Pz-Abtl 101, the latter including Michael Wittmann. He managed to destroy 12 tanks, 13 carriers, and two AT guns in a 10-minute period (p76), not to mention stopping 22nd Brigade. Further combat occurred until the British retreated out of the village back to a Brigade Box, which also was abandoned in the face of a German counterattack.

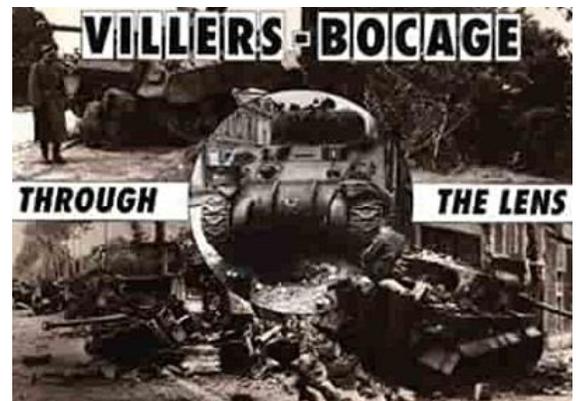
Of note to me, Sgt. Stan Lockwood, who may or may not be distantly related, commanded B Squadron, 2nd Troop, in a Sherman Firefly. His tank allegedly fired at Wittmann's tank and forced it to withdraw (p30). No further action for him, except when attempting to withdraw, his tank stalled and would not restart. Sgt Moore drove up, the crews hitched up the tank, and Moore's tank dragged Lockwood's tank back to safety.

In a bit of a surprise, infantry of the 1/9 Queens inside the town disabled two Tiger tanks using the much-maligned PIATs (p65).

All of this is explained in the text and supplemented by 111 black and white photos, 23 black and white maps (with common scale), and seven black and white illustrations. Plus, there's a three-page compilation overlaying 100 mini-photos atop the map and three pages of visual OOBs.

Great package that can be translated into a great tabletop scenario. Better yet, the aerial photos can be used as a reference for terrain surrounding the village. Fantastic.

Enjoyed it.



Meat Grinder: The Battles for the Rzhev Salient 1942-43. by Prit Buttar. Hardback (6.3x9.5 inches). 464 pages. 2022.

Another in Buttar's highly informative books on WWII covers the Soviet offensive against the Rzhev Salient in 1942 and 1943. Per usual, his research and prose combine for a smooth and balanced look at the planning, battles, and adjustments on both sides.

The battles proved to be a 'meat grinder' -- certainly for Soviet troops, but also for the German 9th Army. Once more, the Soviets suffered casualties at about a five or six to one ratio by showing tactical inexperience and a slavish following of orders.

The Germans' tactical expertise shines, but quantity is still a quality by itself. The idea that German battalions would launch attacks and counter attacks with only a hundred or so troops is beyond belief, yet they did over and over again. The successful use of ad-hoc formations with rear-area headquarters and signals troops to stop Soviet attacks should prove challenging to replicate on a wargames table.

You do have to keep being reminded that Soviet divisions were not at full TO&E status. Alas, many of the status descriptions of high-level formations such as divisions and corps use fuzzy adjectives such as heavy losses and battered remnants and such. Some descriptions use percentages and some numbers, but these are at the low end of platoons, companies, and battalions. Maybe the surviving records don't have actual numbers, but I miss the hard numbers.

Here's a good hard-number example: An unspecified Soviet division attacked German trenches for two months, but between the defensive small arms fire, artillery barrages, and Stuka attacks, the USSR 711th Rifle Regiment had only 200 men left of original 3,000 (p220-221). This is the sort of hard numbers I miss.

A couple of factoids: USSR's 30th Army attacked on a six-mile (10km) frontage with 1,400 artillery guns, mortars, and rocket launchers while 29th Army attacked on a "slightly narrower" (4 miles? 5 miles?) frontage with 900 guns and mortars (p185). An interesting tidbit: The Red Army tried a new tactic: Main artillery barrage followed by aircraft-laid smokescreen, brief rocket bombardment, and the main troop assault (p191). Aircraft-laid smokescreen? Don't think I've ever seen that in a rules book...

On July 28, 1942, Stalin issued Order 227 that formed blocking units of NKVD troops to stop the shirkers and retreaters from abandoning the front lines. In the next three months, 650,000 troops were intercepted, of which 1,000 were immediately shot and killed and 26,000 arrested. Presumably, the rest were returned to their units. Of those 26,000, a little over 10,000 were court martialed and executed and the other 16,000 sent to penal battalions (p216). I'm guessing those are numbers for the entire Eastern Front, not just the battles around the Rzhev salient, but the prose didn't specify. The unpopular order was quietly abandoned by the end of 1942.

The book contains 17 black and white maps, with scales, that help you understand the positions. The 38 black and white photos are in a center section.

I would have liked an OOB as an appendix, either the summer phase or the winter phase, or preferably both. And preferably with hard numbers. It's a shortcoming in an otherwise comprehensive look at the battle.

Being a wargamer, I would have preferred that OOB instead of the constant excerpts that often dominate the pages. I know he's done the research, but I can only take so many memoir and unit report excerpts complaining about the weather and supplies and deadly fire and shooting and being shot and so on. It gets repetitious, gratuitous, and interrupts the main prose.

Buttar offers smooth prose and a real talent for analyzing and describing battles and campaigns. The right excerpt at the right moment enhances a narrative, but too many and you stumble away from the prose and infuse the narrative with a herky-jerky cadence. He's pushing that dividing line, here.

German casualties in the salient during the first phase of summer 1942 Soviet attacks ran to about 40,000 by the end of August, while Soviet casualties were between 192,000 to 300,000 depending on the source (p223).

German casualties from Nov 25 through Dec 31 1942 during the Soviet Operation Mars attacks were another 40,000 to 45,000, while Soviet casualties were another 200,000 (p369). Presumably, 1943 casualties are similar.

Buttar delivers another winner, but to offer some advice: more analytical Prit, please, and less memoirs by Hans, Sergei, Fritz, and Vasily. And an OOB with numbers. Sure, such items can be found elsewhere, like Nafziger files, but it'd be nice to get one with the Prit seal of research. Yeah, I'm still looking forward to the next Buttar.

Enjoyed it.

