

Rank and File
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Editorial

Andrew Finch

Only a few short words this time. I would be grateful as always for some more material for the journal as I am currently running on empty. There are members who are using rules which are unfamiliar to others. It would be of interest to all members to hear about these. In this way, we all become interested in other games and new opponents, and through this new friends, are found.

Those who played in Vailavenu thoroughly enjoyed this game and I know that enough people are interested to make another game possible in the Autumn. I would like to devote a special issue of the Journal to reports on this game. These should be as biased as possible, so you can relive the way you think you smashed your enemies. Therefore please let me have your reports, as soon as possible while you can still vaguely remember what happened.

Men of Straw

Ian Foster

Upon reading the excellent battle report by Andreas van Vinckh in issue 90/3 of our august wargaming journal I felt compelled to research the four commanders involved to examine their further careers.

DEN-ISS THE RED-HEADED

A particularly vicious Turkish satrap whose demise was mourned only by the manufacturers of defensive positions. Cruel and heartless, he led his army by terror, bribery, threats, in fact every means possible other than from the front. The nature of his death gives pointers to both his courage and army loyalty. While advancing at the rear of 150,000 skilled troops, 20 rather stupid bandits ambushed the cook's wagon, whereupon Den-Iss called for the standard defensive battle formation. The ditch was dug and Den-Iss controlled the army from 8 feet below the surface. Losing sight of their commander the exasperated troops piled upon the ditch chevaux-de-frise, abatis, wagons-christians, in fact anything that would burn and set it alight, purely as a defensive measure, of course. Upon realising their tragic mistake the Turks did their utmost to douse the flames, sending for water immediately. The nearest river was not considered clean enough to be splashed upon the burning person of Den-Iss and further supplies from the Red Sea were ordered, a mere 230 miles away. These duly arrived the following week, by which time Den-Iss was a kebab!

My research did not turn up any martial descendants of Den-Iss, although I have heard of a red-headed commander during the Spanish Civil War whose military prowess was particularly undistinguished.

DIEGO DA FOSTA

This distinguished but militarily incompetent general surfaced during the Turkish wars, losing most of his battles but successfully passing the blame on to his subordinates. Blessed by supremely good looks and a sparkling wit he remained a favourite at the Spanish Court.

Given the command of a galleasse in the Armada he set sail with the intention of carving out a piece of England for his descendants to rule. Following the Great Storm his ship was wrecked off Dungeness point. Stumbling ashore with his men he claimed Romney Marsh for Philip of Spain. Elizabeth I on hearing of this small incursion of her kingdom took one look at Romney Marsh, told Don Diego he could keep it, and threw in parts of Sheppey for good measure.

Don Diego slips from history at this moment, but occasionally tall, good-looking blonde men are found on the marsh, these being said to be descendants of the great Don Diego Da Fosta.

AGA GUSH

Vinckh's account is the only known reference to Aga Gush in history, but his performance in this battle was so appalling it is hardly suprising that he was never heard of again. His descendants, however, crop up occasionally.

One Midshipman Theobald Gush was court-martialled on HMS Argus in 1812 for smoking in the powder store. In defence he said, "I was only looking for a quiet place for a fag, no harm in that."

A Crow Indian Scout called Jonathan Gushing Spring is reputed to have told Custer on the Little Big Horn, "the Sioux only wish to be friends, go back to the reservation and make leather belts for the tourist trade, perhaps Yellow Hair could come down here and give us directions." Verification of this has proved difficult as there were no survivors.

Commander Vivian ffoulkes-Gusshe told the Navy Board in 1875 that "Steam would never replace sail as it was impossible to pile coal sufficiently high to catch the breeze." He then handed in his resignation and became Conservative MP for Chingford where he spent the rest of his days trying to extend the vote to saddleback pigs.

So, as you can see, the surname Gush is really synonymous with military ineptitude. Should you come across a such-named gentleman endeavouring to command men, please call the social services who will remove him to one of our colleges for further education where no one will ever listen to him again.

QUEVAN SU LIVAN

While Aga Gush, though incompetent was quite harmless, Quevan was that dangerous creature, an inept general who thinks he is good. Philip of Spain soon realised how dangerous he was after Quevan declared war on Tasmania even though it would not be discovered for another hundred years.

Quevan gained his self-imagined military prowess from a correspondence course, reading extensively from Julius Caesar, Homer, and Livy. Imagine his disappointment when he found that they were all dead, but applying their tactics rigidly he reached a new record in ignominious defeats. He found that the pike block and the phalanx could be interchanged, but fighting his mounted arquebusiers in testudo formation is still remembered with hilarity by his enemies. His crowning ignominy was the "Wooden Camel of Algiers", an idea copied from his reading. I am sure you know the story, well, so did the Arabs. They obligingly dragged it into the city and, giggling mightily, set light to it. Sixty seven gullible Spaniards were roasted alive, but Quevan leaped into captivity. Now the Arab is a pitiless gaoler, but he is not stupid, realising what a total moron they had captured they gave him arms and a good horse, a guide, gold and their best wishes and sent him home to Madrid as fast as possible, reasoning that it was better that he stayed in the Spanish command structure. They feared he would be replaced by somebody more intelligent and their fears were justified as he was replaced, by a gerbil, a considerable improvement.

Quevan was last heard of at the time of the Armada. Asking Philip for a responsible command he was made Capita de Manuro, charged with collecting the droppings of the horses carried by the fleet. The Great Storm cast him up on the shores of Ireland but he was not immediately killed by the natives who recognised a kindred spirit when he asked if the place was Madagascar. To this day his descendants find their way to England, indeed one is a member of this club, but don't talk to him as he thinks he has joined us to learn Esperanto and we don't want to disillusion him, poor fellow.

Military Trivia

Ian Foster (compiler)

- 1) In which war did the Battle of Isandlwana occur ?
- 2) In which century were the Wars of the Roses ?
- 3) Which war reporter did Louis Botha capture in the Boer War ?
- 4) Which famous fighter plane did R.J.Mitchell design in 1936 ?
- 5) Which air force rank is equivalent to an army major ?
- 6) At which battle did Miltiades lead the Athenians to victory ?
- 7) Who fought the Punic Wars ?
- 8) How many Punic Wars were there ?
- 9) Scientists were working on the Manhattan Project in 1942. What was it ?
- 10) Two articles of clothing originated in a 19th Century War, name the War and the articles.

A visit to the Imperial War Museum

Andrew Finch

One Saturday morning while on my way to friends, I decided to start early and allow myself time to take in a museum in London. I aimed to get there as soon after opening as possible before any rush started.

Since the fire there has been extensive refurbishing and there is now an entrance fee of £3.00 per Adult. I was struck by the changes because I had not been there for fifteen years or more. You immediately enter the large exhibits gallery with audiovisual displays for certain items of particular interest in the areas of land, sea, and air warfare.

There are separate galleries downstairs dealing with the First World War, the Inter War years the Second World War, and later conflicts. A proper gallery is being constructed at present for this last category. In principle you follow a sinuous course round display cabinets covering campaigns and other aspects of the conflict in question. There are uniforms, weapons, models, memorabilia on display. Please note that if you have young children there are warning signs before you enter the Belsen exhibit.

I rather miss the gallery of ship models which used to be near the main entrance and was always my favourite part of the museum, but there are quite a few on display in the campaign displays.

There are special displays for which extra payment is required, when I went the Blitz Experience was being run. There is also a simulated bomber raid on a French target in 1944 (payment required) and a WWI trench experience involving sight sound and smell (indeed the smell could be detected next door in the Gents as well). These special displays run at certain times and you are alerted to them by the public address system.

I approved very much of the art galleries dealing with particular artists or themes (on the ground floor) and the separate WW1 and WW2 galleries on the second floor.

There is a cafeteria on the ground floor serving drinks and snacks, and a shop, which offers literature, posters, books etc. Unfortunately the stock is really aimed at the casual visitor rather than the serious student.

How to get there

The easiest method is by train to Waterloo East then to take the Bakerloo line south to Lambeth North. When you leave the station there is a road going straight ahead of you (church on left). Follow this to the traffic lights, turn left, and the museum is across the road on the right.

Hidden Movement

Tim Freeman

Whilst playing a Command Decision game an old wargame problem re-appeared, that of hidden movement. Our umpired game was German vs Americans set in the Ardennes. The table was thickly wooded with numerous hills. The only way through was by a road which zigzagged across the board. The Americans were in two battalion strength, although only one battalion's support weapons were deployed on table. They had no vehicles at the outset and were holding a number of defensive positions starting at a village/hamlet in the centre of the table and working back to the American baseline.

The Germans at unknown strength began with a recce probe which the Americans were able to drive off. Next a company of assault guns and infantry "appeared" before the American position. They used hidden movement through the woods until they burst through the trees! After an exchange of fire the Germans were pinned and unable to advance and the Americans chose to withdraw. Unbeknown to the Americans the Germans were able to recover their morale and occupy the buildings (which was their objective) and they had won in only 5 or 6 moves.

The Americans withdrew to a hill and then to woods behind that. Another interesting aspect of the hidden movement factor was that the Americans suspected that the Germans were looking for a path through the previously imagined impassable woods. This proved to be the case and the American attempts to stem this advance came to nothing despite an heroic charge by Stuart light tanks. The Americans had by this time received reinforcements in the shape of a light tank company which was deployed across the front in order to keep the German advance under observation. A second medium tank company was also deployed but was not used in action.

The point with hidden movement games is that in order to preserve the "hidden" element map moves have to be made, usually on two maps. The actual positioning of the units is difficult because fields of fire and "facing" are important. There is always a temptation in this type of game, particularly in my case, to put my forces on the table only to be told by the umpires that "you don't have to do that". The alternative to this is to deploy all units on the table with both sides observing only those units which can be seen under observation rules being used. Despite the best will in the world if you see an enemy column approaching but the rules only allow you to see it at a certain distance, you would naturally start to deploy to face this threat instead of being totally surprised by it.

One suggestion made at the time was to use clear plastic overlays, one for each side, with movement marked on the overlay. Both would be placed on the master map and movement and combat would be worked out from these. This would perhaps speed up the game and I suggest you try it the next time we do a hidden movement game.

Ed.: Using a clear overlay is by far the best way of recreating the reality of the situation. If each side has a number of real and dummy units marked on the overlay, you can also dispense with the umpire. In addition, you could recreate each encounter as it happened individually (on a smaller table than normal - the table being the length of the visibility range at the time of the encounter). If one side wanted to avoid the contact they could withdraw from the table and redeploy within a certain distance on the map. There are all sorts of ideas here which we could examine, and maybe find the answer to this wargamers' nightmare.

Answers

- 1) The Zulu War
- 2) The 15th Century
- 3) Winston Churchill
- 4) The Spitfire
- 5) Squadron Leader
- 6) Marathon
- 7) Carthage and Rome
- 8) Two
- 9) The Atomic Bomb
- 10) Crimean War, Balaclava and Cardigan

Book review: "On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War." Col. Harry Summers,
1982

George Gush

This is not a "wargamers' book" in the sense that it deals with tactics, weaponry, uniform or the detail of war; it is entirely on the level of war-, or even defence-, policy, grand strategy or strategy, but it is very interesting, particularly as it has become the US Army "bible" since Vietnam; certainly echoes of its ideas seemed to be apparent in the Gulf War.

It deals with Vietnam primarily in terms of the principles of Clausewitz' "On War". Colonel Summers on this basis argues that the American army in Vietnam followed a defensive strategy, (although often with offensive tactics) and that as Clausewitz states, simply denying the enemy success cannot win a war unless there is some reason to suppose that time is on your side. For example, this might be that you can build up for a future offensive, that he will give up or run out of resources, that it will give time for others to assist you. If anything the opposite was true in Vietnam, thus leaving the Americans fighting essentially without a military objective.

From the point of view of US war policy, he argues that constitutionally, historically and on grounds of ideology the USA cannot commit its forces seriously unless public opinion is behind the action. Thus a fundamental problem in the Vietnam War was the failure to arouse public opinion and the resultant gradual commitment of forces up to a serious scale but without that support (he says this was a deliberate decision by President Johnson, who was afraid that commitment to war would destroy his social policies, the "Great Society", as commitment to World War 2 had ended Roosevelt's "New Deal").

On the level of military command, his case is that two factors adversely affected the war:

The first of these was the emphasis - almost fanatical - for "counter-insurgency" (preparing to counter Communist guerilla tactics) which came in with, and was partly created by, President Kennedy. This was seized on by a US Army looking for a role in an era when nuclear weapons suggested (at least in the eyes of the USAF!) that ground forces might be obsolete, Summers says that this emphasis led to a misreading of the war, which took Vietcong insurgency rather than North Vietnamese military power as the main problem, and led to the US Army being committed to a guerilla war for which its training, tradition, and strengths were not suited (and which could hardly be won by a *foreign* army anyway), while North Vietnam was left unchallenged except by air attack. Broadly his view of a possible successful strategy is that the US Army should have been committed to "cordon off" North Vietnam. This would probably have involved the occupation of parts of Laos and Cambodia and possibly Thailand, but not the escalation risk of direct attack on the North, and would he says have meant the commitment of far less troops since they would have had an essentially conventional defensive role. Deprived of Northern support, he thinks that the Vietcong could have been dealt with by ARVN forces, keeping the US Army (and US TV) clear of the "dirty war" aspects of countering guerillas.

The second factor was the "business administration" approach of the Pentagon, associated with Robert Macnamara. As Summers sees it, this was fine when it came to procurement and book-keeping, but was also applied, by an army of systems-analysts, to military command and strategy, where it was disastrous. As he says, in business it makes obvious sense to commit the MINIMUM resources necessary to a particular job; the logic of military command is quite different - using the MAXIMUM resources is not wasteful but essential in order to minimise losses. The business approach might have been one factor in trying to fight a limited war with minimal forces, which contrasted sharply with America's past methods - massive commitment to direct attack on the main objective - and was probably a factor in failure. An officer corps "infected" with business-management attitudes is also seen as a disastrous result of this approach (though I suspect the 6 month command tour system in Vietnam, which more or less ensured men serving under unfamiliar commanders, was probably an equal defect). An interesting book, whether or not its analysis is correct. Tunbridge Wells library got it for me, and would no doubt do the same for anyone who would be interested in reading it.

Recent Meetings, An occasional report

George Gush

December 1990 - the AGM

The new club terrain now fills the cupboards in the back room. Members are free to use all or any of it for games at the hall, but are reminded to make sure that they don't inadvertently take it away with them; it is NOT for use elsewhere without specific permission from the Committee; this would be forthcoming for members doing demonstrations etc. rather than for ordinary wargames use. While on the subject, there seems at the time of writing (March 91) to be a green cloth belonging to the club missing; can you please check and if you have it RETURN it right away!

Another club acquisition was on display, the 15mm Ancient armies designed for DBA simple ancient rules. They are beautifully painted and available for anyone to use at meetings; we have suitable terrain and copies of the rules too. Don't be put off because you have never played Ancients, or never played these rules, they are ideal for the beginner, can be learned in 10 minutes or so and a game played in half an hour, so would fit in well on a Tuesday as well as a Sunday meeting; several members such as Clive McLeod and Malcom Dove are experienced in using the rules and I'm sure wouldn't mind giving you a helping hand to start.

Our Chairman, Ian Foster, had some of his splendid home-built terrain on display, including a mouth-watering medieval castle and Italian hill fort or walled village. Ian sells his buildings at very reasonable prices, and would probably be prepared to make special pieces for anyone interested.

There were about thirty members present this month, and games included two 1/76th World War 2 contests, one a Russian front game to Gush rules, with the advancing Russians rigidly programmed as to direction and objective, in an attempt to follow up the "national characteristics" ideas described in an earlier Rank and File. The other was an interesting game by Ian Foster and Tim Freeman, set in Normandy 1944, with Germans using captured French tanks against paratroopers holding a bridge. This used the Command Decision rules.

There were two naval games as well. In one, Russell Hanson, Ken Bulmer, Tony Wyatt and Peter England were involved in a large First World War engagement, using the "Beat to Quarters" rules, while the other was a 1:3000 Napoleonic naval game using "Man O' War" rules.

At this point History gave way to fantasy etc; our treasurer (hush!) was seen taking part in "Dungeonquest", the back room saw a huge Warhammer 40,000 game with MILES of "tower blocks", and Alan Butler had the "Mighty Empires" kit which is most intriguing, including beautiful map hexes and super little plastic one-piece model cities, forts and armies, which Alan had of course painted beautifully; there are all sorts of campaigns and things which one could use these bits for. How about a few words for the magazine, Alan ?

The AGM sees one of our twice-yearly painting Competitions, with £5 vouchers as well as trophies for the winners. Results this year were:

Class 1 (Fantasy etc):

1st Barry Russell (Yellow things)

2nd Mark Summers (Ultramarines - Blue things)

Class 2 (Historical units):

1st Grant Tiller (25mm Neapolitan Napoleonic Infantry)

2nd Tim Freeman (1/76th WW2 British Infantry)

Class 3 (Other Historical entry):

1st John Tutt (8th Army Diorama)

Business Meeting:

This is not the place for full minutes, but the main business of the meeting (after the return unopposed of all the Officers and Committee - no perestroika here!) was to vote out the proposal to raise the subscription to pay for additional Sunday meetings by 19 to 12, though it was agreed that the club might run one or two extra meetings, the cost to be borne by those attending.

January

There were about 28 members present and some interesting games. One was "The Peasants are Revolting" organised by our editor and others, a skirmish involving various bands attacking Ian Foster's very attractive castle; Andrew had D&D type floor plans on hand to cover fighting inside the fort. *Ed.: See short article elsewhere in this magazine.* I ran a Napoleonic Peninsula game, the Attack on Jerboa, in which a strong French force failed to overcome a bottleneck in terrain and harassment from the British Navy and Spanish Guerillas on their way to overwhelm a weakish Spanish garrison; Paul Colebrooke was the victorious Spanish commander. A huge 25mm Napoleonic game run by Ken Bulmer and Peter England was trying out the "Playable Napoleonic Rules" of Barry Edwards, while other unusual rules in use included those from my book "An introduction to Wargames" for a medieval skirmish, and Don Featherstone's for an ACW game run by Ivor Metcalfe in the back room, where there was also a 1/76th WW2 game using the club 15mm terrain blocks, cunningly spaced out to give a river down the centre. Malcom Dove played Clive McLeod using WRG 7th Edition ancients, while Dave Cooke organised a Space Crusade game. Chris Sherman announced a proposed one day campaign set in the Arthurian period. It supprises me that writers in wargames or wargames society magazines so often write as if all club wargaming consisted of one-to-one games with equal armies played to standard commercial rules. One wonders if they ever attend any actual wargames club meetings.

February

I ran a large game to try out and familiarise players with my new "Early Warfare" rules which cover Ancient, Medieval, and Renaissance periods, and these were also in use by Dennis Redhead and Mark Summers for an Italian Wars game. Dave Cooke was running an Advanced Hero Quest game, "like Dungeons and Dragons but more violent!" was his description) and there was another of these in the back room, along with a large Science Fiction game; Further still into the murky depths our intrepid reporter glimpsed the usual Warhammer - in this case Skaven and Goblins versus Dwarves, or so he was told by a mysterious hooded figure. There was an impressive WW2 to the Tactical Commander rules (PLEASE can we have a review of these rules !), a medieval WRG game based on a scenario, Command Decision in France, 1940, and a 1:200th Korean war game to home-brewed rules - very unusual and interesting, and again well worth an article if the author would oblige!

Who's Revolting ?

Andrew Finch

The idea behind this game was to have an enjoyable game which allowed any number of players, all with their own individual reasons for being involved. Each player had his own objective, be that the physical occupation of a place, obtaining certain items of loot, whatever.

The rules are based on a man to man system with **losers** knocked down rather than killed (unless the knocked down man is then killed outright) which allows prisoners to be ransomed for gold. Of course one man may have gold as an objective, another may have numbers of men under arms.

The armies were built up on a points system so that to start with all were equal. Each normal man has a number of hit points, which could be recovered with rest (one move not moving per point). Leader types had extra advantages due to training, wealth, equipment etc. Magic was not permitted, though a belief in pagan ritual or in Christianity could have an advantage. Having the village priest on your side in the game concerned was an advantage in morale and in recovery of points (the power of belief).

Each player, as I mentioned, had his own objective. He could (if he was foolish enough) reveal this to another player, he could form an alliance, be treacherously betrayed, bribed, etc. In addition it was possible that one player had sympathisers in the enemy army, who would turn coat and open the gates at a given signal.

The combat system was rough and ready, allowing certain damage for weapon types, which eroded the hit points. This system was similar to that used in D&D. Troop types had a to-hit chance which varied with the opponent and their own training.

I am planning another devious game for the July meeting, so if anyone is interested, please let me know. The more the merrier as far as I am concerned.

The idea above allows for fantasy contingents to take part, but remember that magic works under strict limitations (mainly morale effects).