

Rank And File

Volume 1, Issue 2

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Editorial

Firstly, I must apologize to all readers of Rank and File, due to technical difficulties, in the form of a dead PC, this is the first edition for some time. However, your editor now has the technology to produce your newsletter which I hope you will all support.

As your editor has also done his back in, it looks as though he will have plenty of time to type out any articles you want others to read.

As we have some catching up to do, this issue will be nice and thick, let's hope they all will.

Rules;— are meant to be rewritten or ignored,..

By Huw Griffiths

Why do wargamers need luck? We already know what happened... Napoleon lost his Waterloo, Mac Arthur lost the Philippines but the United States won the war.

Once we accept that we are not all "sealed nutters", dressing up our toy soldiers and simply re-enacting a battle, we have to make the compromise of realism against playability. The only way to truly compare your skill as a military commander with someone else is to join the army, rise to a command position, and start a war. Fortunately most hobbyists don't go to these extremes.

As a gamer, you can create or re-create any army. By studying battle

references, tactics and other bumph, you can assess the performance of your troops, and everyone else's and write yourself some rules. More usually, you can go out and beg, buy or steal a set of rules written by somebody else.

Some rules are quick, easy to play; all tanks were created equal, even though some were more equal than others. The outcome of a Tank vs. Tank combat as predictable as flipping a coin.

Alternatively, some rules, falling more into the "role-playing" category, provide a greater feeling of "realism". Each model soldier represents one real man, with his own capabilities and, each is fired and moved in turn. Obviously, this is as close to reality as we

can seriously achieve but it is just not realistic for larger engagements.

To re-fight a large battle or to answer the ultimate question, what if? We need two things: a figure scale by which we can put several thousand men into the field, using only a few hundred models; and a set of parameters (or rules) which will allow us to pit the forces against each other, taking into account our assessment of their likely performance.

Luck has always been a feature of the real and the wargame battlefield. For the lack of anything better and allowing easy use, wargamers generally use the roll of one or more dice, of various shapes, to represent this vital factor.

For the duration of the battle and for some time before and after, we are "Napoleon", "Rommel" or "Yamamoto", the commander on the spot. On the outcome of the next engagement lies the future of your nation. As we are making command decisions, it is not enough to rely upon the roll of the dice, the flip of a coin or the turn of a card.

However, given that with poor troops, in a poor situation, a brilliant commander can win and an unlucky commander can still snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, skill and luck must each play their part. The only remaining question is, at what level do we pitch the rules?

Given any scenario, it should be possible to make an educated guess as to which side should win. The Old Guard should beat Spanish line, the Yamato should sink the Bismark and a fire breathing dragon should make toast out of a goblin.

If the outcome is not predictable, give the two sides equal factors. However, If firing a broadside from an age of sail battleship takes an hour, we are not going to get a result, unless we have a week to play. If the calculations to advance to contact and melee between two Napoleonic Battalions takes 20 minutes, someone's going to get a headache. ☹.

In order to gauge the success of any set of rules, they must fill three criteria:-

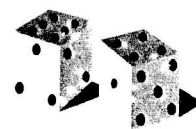
1. *Enjoyment*, nobody pays us to do this and, if you would rather have you eyes poked out with red-hot needles, the game is going to fail.

2. *Perceived Realism*, here we have an almost total imponderable, and it is up to **YOU**.

Unless you re-build the Yamato and the Bismark, you will never really know the outcome. Among your fellow players and your peer group, you must decide the relative strengths of a unit or model.

3. *Playability*, whether or not you have unlimited time to fight an engagement, the battle must fit the time-scale.

These factors will without doubt be the most difficult to reconcile into your realism /playability ratio. We must tailor our rules to fulfill the parameters above, if the rules don't allow this, change them! The people who wrote the rules are probably gamers and they fulfilled their own criteria. We must not think of rules as some form of "sacred-cow" which must remain as the author's first draft. If you don't like them, rewrite them in order that you do.



"Luck has always been a feature of the real and the wargame battlefield".

"nobody pays us to do this and, if you would rather have you eyes poked out with red-hot needles, the game is going to fail."

"If you don't like them, rewrite them in order that you do"

Once you begin playing a new set of rules, you will almost inevitably find something not to your taste. Discuss this with your peers, should you decide that Tarquin the Mage is immune to the effect of Dragon's Breath and that the Glostor Gladiator and the FW190 are combat equals, why should I care? All that I would ask is that you make rule changes clear before the game, and not as "Halitosis" the Dragon is about to exhale in Tarquin's general direction.

Except for those "gits" who enjoy arguing every point and will pull up the most obscure reference to support their claim that the enemy's troops could not, would not and never did ... because... Our main concern should be enjoyment, there will be arguments and disagreements but we should not enjoy them. If we cannot resolve our differences within about two minutes, ask someone else or roll a dice for now and sort it all out in the pub later.

Ask An Anorak.

Did you know?

The National Army Museum, Chelsea provides a question answering service.

The Museum will answer any question, as far as it is able for a £5.00 fee

Questions can be phoned in, if you provide details of a payment card.

Simon Comben.

Report on the TWWS Sunday Meeting February 1st 1998.

By George Gush

There were 24 people present, so it seems our new Speldhurst venue, though somewhat less accessible than the old one in Southborough, has not put people off. We have also recruited several new members as a result of the 1997 Open day (and, as I write, it seems possible that we have done the same in 1998). There were also a notably good number of entries for the painting competition, and no less than 7

games in progress.

Two of these were set in World War II, but involving different scales and sets of rules: Tim Freeman and Hugh Munro were using 1/76th models to 'Sichelschnitt' rules, which involve the use of playing cards drawn for off-table support etc., while our Secretary and Alan Butler favoured 1:300, using 'Spearhead' rules. It

would be nice to have some articles on rules for 'Rank and File' as we seem to have a lot of people experimenting with different sets, not only for World War II.

The Napoleonic period is another popular one, and here there were again two games. One was to my rules and used a rather unusual snow setting with Russians against French, mainly to allow the use of my Napoleonic Russian supply sled !

The other Napoleonic game was a large one to the Shako rules, in which units are single stands and casualties not removed. This was organized by Paul Hookway, using his beautifully painted plastic figures, and also involved Philip Morton, a recent recruit and our youngest member.

John Hurst was running a game to his pre-dreadnought rules, involving a pre-1914 clash between the German and British empires. These rules are quick and simple, and well worth a try if you have any interest in naval warfare; quite suitable for a novice if you have no experience.

There always seems to be one large 15mm Ancient game to DBM rules, and this meeting was no exception; Terry Shoebridge's Macedonians were taking on Ian Foster's Seleucids. Finally, we seem to have few fantasy games, but normally at least one science fiction one - in this case futuristic gang warfare rather than a military engagement.

Overall, this was an encouragingly lively and well-attended meeting.

Report on the TWWS Sunday Meeting, 1st March, 1998 By George Gush

Even better attendance than last time, with 26 people. Another encouraging trend was in the painting competition, with no less than 20 entries. The new method of running it and awarding prizes certainly seems to have increased interest. This is the best level of entries we have ever had in numbers, and more than one person remarked that the overall quality of entries was also higher than in the past.

The number of games was up to nine - really about as many as the hall will accommodate. These were predominantly World War II encounters - Dennis Redhead running an early Russian front game in 1/76th, and Russell Hanson a Desert

one in the same scale. Paul Colebrook and others preferred 1/300th scale, while our Secretary and others took to the air!

Next in popularity were the Napoleonic Wars, with two 25mm scale battles. It was striking that while the above-mentioned games used several different sets of rules, I believe that all of them had been written by club members. This speaks well for the involvement and inventiveness of our membership, though I suppose it could be an obstacle for someone arriving from another club - still, we play lots of widely-used commercial rules too; at this meeting represented by the usual large Ancient battle to Wargames Research Group DBM rules.

*"It would be nice
to have some
articles on rules
for 'Rank and
File' as we seem
to have a
lot of people
experimenting."*

*Have you
bought, played,
or acquired a
new computer
game?
Would you write
up your
experiences and
give marks out
of 10 for
Playability and
Enjoyment.*

Thank You

Come to that, some of our club rules are commercially available too; John Hurst was running a game to his excellent Pre-dreadnought set, which is one such.

The final game was a Fantasy one, contra-

dicting what I said last time about SF being more commonly played at our meetings. This was a very attractive looking naval game, using ships which had the look of Renaissance galleys.



The Eastern Front in Wargames By George Gush

I recently borrowed, through my local library, a very interesting book for anyone interested in warfare on the Eastern Front in World War II. Called "Fighting in Hell; the German Ordeal on the Eastern Front, it was published by Greenhill Books in 1996, but was originally written just after the war as part of American preparations for the Cold War. Obviously German generals had then the most up-to-date experience of the methods and capabilities of the Soviet forces, so the Americans got a number of ex-Axis commanders to produce this account for the instruction of American forces. One (Von Senger und Etterlin) seems to have taken the opportunity to research and write some books of his own, but three produced accounts on which the book is based. Thus, despite the slightly sensational title, the book is not about the 'German ordeal' but is a very interesting account of Red Army methods, strengths and weaknesses in the Second World War, from those at the receiving end.

Clearly it is not without prejudice; the authors tend to see Russians as 'semi-Asiatic' people who, unlike superior Westerners, are 'primitive' and 'act by instinct', but nevertheless it has much of interest, quite a lot of which could be incorporated in wargames rules or scenarios.

Generally the Soviets are seen as very

dogged and persistent, both in attack and defence. One example given of the latter is an isolated room in the citadel of Brest-Litovsk, the occupants of which held out for 'many days' against a German division despite the employment of 'the heaviest firepower'. It would be easy to give the Red Army a morale plus - in defence at least - for a wargame; however, the authors so stress the unpredictability of Russian reactions in that they were also prone to sudden panic flight or surrender, especially in the earlier part of the war. Perhaps a morale test where the Red Army are unlikely to fail but collapse if they do, might fit the bill.

Assaults tended to be well-directed at the strategic or operational level, being directed against weak places in the German line, but at the tactical and small-unit level were marked by dogged and unimaginative persistence rather than flexibility or initiative. Again these weaknesses were less evident in the later part of the war. In wargames terms this might be simulated by making Russian forces strictly subject to pre-game orders about direction of attack etc., while Axis ones are freer in this respect. The Russians are described as seeing unit boundaries as a 'wall' and taking no notice of or action towards, anything beyond. I have tried games in which Russian forces in an offensive were not allowed to reverse their

*"an isolated
room in
Brest-Litovsk,
held out for
'many days'
against a
German
division."*

direction of movement, even temporarily, and this did give an effect not unlike that described. If you restrict the Soviets in this way, it becomes possible to set up a game where small Axis forces have a chance against much larger Russian ones, which was usually the case (even towards the end of the war it cost eight Russian casualties to inflict one German one).

However, again it isn't as simple as that, since the German commanders saw the Russians as being particularly skilful in certain respects, despite the shortcomings mentioned. Firstly, assisted by the very thinly-spread Axis defence, the Red Army were outstanding at infiltration; using darkness and camouflage to creep up very close to German positions before an assault, or to get right through the German line and dig in behind it. Secondly, they were very quick to develop and exploit a bridgehead, which could be actually across a river, or just an advance position behind the German line of the kind mentioned above. The German commanders said that if such a dangerous Russian toehold were not eliminated at once, it would not be eliminated at all.

In wargaming terms these factors might apply most to battle scenarios rather than actual rules. A Russian player might be allowed, for instance, to mark on a map one or more secret and concealed infantry positions behind the enemy lines, to be revealed later in the game.

Other Red Army strengths were in overcoming the difficulties of movement in Russian terrain, and in creating defences in such terrain. I hope to deal with these in a follow-up article.

Other than infiltration attacks as mentioned, the Russian infantry generally attacked en masse, with very large numbers on a narrow front, but such attacks were seldom co-ordinated so that all the attackers arrived as a single wave. More often a series of uncoordinated attacks developed, which the Germans could defeat in detail. In a wargame this provides another method of pitting weaker Axis forces against stronger Russian ones in a balanced scenario. The Russian players could write their orders beforehand in terms of lines of advance, but then have to dice for the arrival of individual formations.

The Russian commanders often persisted in attacks after the Germans would have broken them off, causing at best unnecessary losses, at worst leaving their weakened forces to be encircled and lost to a German counter-attack. The authors do not speculate, but one suspects this may be self-preservation - the fate of a Soviet commander accused of not pressing an attack strongly enough was likely to be unpleasant.

The authors give conflicting views of Russian reconnaissance; scouting of smaller units is said to have been poor, and in winter affected by lack of good ski troops (the Russians, unlike the Scandinavians, did not normally ski, and were short of skiing equipment as well as training). 'On the march', however, presumably at a rather higher formation level, reconnaissance was 'quite good'; the main methods mentioned are scouting with armoured cars, and use of the local civilian population, especially boys. Because of the latter factor, the Germans often took the locals back with them in a retreat.

"the fate of a Soviet commander accused of not pressing an attack strongly enough was likely to be unpleasant".

The Red Army made much use of snipers (they actually had sniper battalions !) and had plentiful anti-tank weapons; the authors say that, while co-ordination between infantry and artillery or tanks was not good, at least early in the war, the Russian infantry could never be separated from their anti-tank guns, which, in the absence of enemy armour, were used as artillery support for the infantry. Their weapons in general were good. Russian

mortars were considered much superior in quality and quantity to those of the Germans in the earlier part of the war, and their submachine guns are also said to have been superior to the early German ones, especially under cold condition, when German troops preferred captured Russian SMGs to their own.

There is a continuation article from George awaiting publication.

"German troops preferred captured Russian SMGs to their own."

TWWS Painting Competition 25/4/98 Meeting.

Class 1 "The Olde Worlde."			
1st.			3 Points
2nd./Bye	R. M. Somerville	French Infantry 1680-1700	2 Points
3rd.			1 Point
Class 2 "Modern Times."			
1st	C. Avery	Pz. IV H (1:300)	3 Points
2nd./Bye	D. Redhead	Italian Black-shirts	2 Points
3rd			1 Point
Class 3 "Other Worlds."			
1st			3 Points
2nd./Bye	Chris Avery	SF Police response team	2 Points
3rd			1 Point
Class 4 "Command Groups."			
1st	R. M. Somerville	Duke of Marlborough	3 Points
2nd./Bye	D. Redhead	Italian M 13 Command Tank	2 Points
3rd	Chris Avery	Earth Force Officers	1 Point
Class 5 "Monsters and Machines."			
1st	R. M. Somerville	Celtic Chariot	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Chris Avery	Cant Z1007 (???ed.)	2 Points
3rd	Hugh Munro	ME 109	1 Point

TWWS Painting Competition 1998 Meeting. 05

Class 1 "The Olde Worlde."			
1st.	Paul Hookway	Skirmish Line	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Simon Comben	95th Rifles	2 Points
3rd.	Eric Hall	Combined Swiss Battalion Spain	1 Point
Class 2 "Modern Times."			
1st	Chris Avery	Panther Battalion	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Hugh Munro	"BEF" Section	2 Points
3rd			1 Point
Class 3 "Other Worlds."			
1st	Paul Hookway	Death in the Snow	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Chris Avery	Hi Tec Troopers	2 Points
3rd			1 Point
Class 4 "Command Groups."			
1st			3 Points
2nd./Bye	Chris Avery	Battalion HQ Italy W.W.II	2 Points
3rd			1 Point
Class 5 "Monsters and Machines."			
1st	Hugh Munro	"BEF" carrier	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Chris Avery	G'KAr	2 Points
3rd	John Hurst	Alien	1 Point

TWWS Painting Competition 1998 Meeting. 06

Class 1 "The Olde Worlde."			
1st.	Simon Comben	British Hussars	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Rod Somerville	Geronimo's Apaches	2 Points
3rd.	Hugh Munro	16th C Organ Guns	1 Point
Class 2 "Modern Times."			
1st	Rod Somerville	W.W.I French Artillery	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Paul Hookway	1939 Recon Group	2 Points
3rd	Hugh Munro	W.W.II German Infantry	1 Point
Class 3 "Other Worlds."			
1st			3 Points
2nd./Bye	Hugh Munro	Space Marine Tanks	2 Points
3rd			1 Point
Class 4 "Command Groups."			
1st	Rod Somerville	Mexican General 1848	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Russel Hanson	Turkish HQ group 1916	2 Points
3rd	Hugh Munro	W.W.II German Command group	1 Point
Class 5 "Monsters and Machines."			
1st	Rod Somerville	Viking Long Ship	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Frank Bradbury	Chaos Lord	2 Points
3rd	John Hurst	Ironclad Gloire	1 Point

TWWS Painting Competition 1998 Meeting. 07

Class 1 "The Olde Worlde."			
1st.	Eric Hall	Dutch Guard Lancers	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Ian Foster	French Ordnance Artillery	2 Points
3rd.	Huw Griffiths	Russian Militia Opolchenie	1 Point
Class 2 "Modern Times."			
1st	Andrew Finch Paul Hookway	G4M Betty Aircraft German 105 mm Battery	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Huw Munro Alan Butler	W.W.II Germans 1/300 Russians	2 Points
3rd	Russel Hanson	German 105 Artillery team	1 Point
Class 3 "Other Worlds."			
1st	Alan Butler	Martian Snatch Squad	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Chris Avery	SF Jaeger Squad	2 Points
3rd	Hugh Munro	Vindicators	1 Point
Class 4 "Command Groups."			
1st	Simon Comben	Wellington and ADC	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Alan Butler	Cadian Lt Commander	2 Points
3rd	Ian Foster	Burmese Elephant	1 Point
Class 5 "Monsters and Machines."			
1st	Alan Butler	IJNS Kumano	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Hugh Munro	A 13 'B' 3RTR 1AD	2 Points
3rd	Simon Comben	Cromwell (?) Mine Clearer	1 Point

TWWS Painting Competition 1998 Meeting. 08

Class 1 "The Olde Worlde."			
1st.	Alan Butler	French Line Infantry	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Ian Foster	Pancerni	2 Points
3rd.	Clive McLeod	Tartar Light Horse	1 Point
Class 2 "Modern Times."			
1st	Chris Avery	Semovante M40/75 SPG Bn	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Alan Butler	Russian Infantry 20mm	2 Points
3rd	Andrew Finch	Hayabusa Oscar 1943	1 Point
3rd	Hugh Munro	BEF 1940	1 Point
Class 3 "Other Worlds."			
1st	George Gush	HoTT Nomads	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Alan Butler	Street Gang with Transport	2 Points
2nd./Bye	Frank Bradbury	Spectral Flyer	2 Points
3rd	Chris Blackman	Eldar Night Wings	1 Point
Class 4 "Command Groups."			
1st	George Gush	Napoleonic French Staff	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Ian Foster	Polish General	2 Points
3rd	Alan Butler	"Buck Darkheart"	1 Point
Class 5 "Monsters and Machines."			
1st	John Hurst	G O J I R A	3 Points
2nd./Bye	Hugh Munro	A 13 Mk I	2 Points
3rd	George Gush	Piaggio P108	1 Point
3rd	Chris Avery	LCVP US W.W.II Pacific	1 Point

Painting Competition League

Alan Butler	46
George Gush	41
Chris Avery	37
Hugh Munro	30
Rod Somerville	25
Paul Hookway	18
Simon Comben	11
Ian Foster	10
Chris Blackman	8
Eric Hall	6
Frank Bradbury	6
John Hurst	6
Russel Hanson	6
Andrew Finch	5
Dennis Redhead	4
Huw Griffiths	2
Clive McLeod	1

Tunbridge Wells Wargames Society

The preferred format for articles for Rank & File is as a Word document (97 or earlier) 31/2" or Zip cartridge or as a paper copy sent to the editor.

Typewritten articles are preferred but I will type-up hand written script.

Email: *to be advised*

Competition!

Can anyone suggest a new logo for Rank and File, the logo will hopefully reflect one or all of the aspects of our Society.

I understand that the technology is available to scan in a piece of art work. There may even be a prize as well as having your name in print.

Looking Ahead



The Society

The Tunbridge Wells Wargames Society, (TWWS) tries to meet one evening a week and (usually) the first Sunday in every month.

The Weekday meetings were held in the Imperial Public House, Southborough, unfortunately, the Pub is now being refurbished, but it is hoped to start weekly meetings again soon.

The Sunday meetings are held in the Speldhurst village hall between 14:00 and 19:00 traditional wargames, with model soldiers, using a large selection of rules, periods and figure scales are most popular at the Sunday venue.

The Thursday meeting usually has smaller games such as DBA., Hordes of things, Skirmish games etc., although there are usually traditional games as well.

Until the end of the year, the Sunday meetings will be on the following days:-

- 13th September
Not 12th as previously advised.
- 11th October
- 8th November
- 6th December