

RANK AND FILE

The Newsletter of the Tunbridge Wells Wargames Society
September 2000

EDITORIAL

With this issue I have more or less used up all the contributions on hand. Had there been more, it would have been longer. This issue introduces the 'For Sale And Wanted' section, and that for Reviews. Both of these should be pretty easy to contribute to. I would, as mentioned last month, like to re-introduce the last editor's idea of an 'Ask an Anorak' column, for enquiries and answers on military history, wargaming and model-making topics. Articles on wargames tactics, like Malcolm Dove's one this month, are interesting, and I still haven't had any battle reports. A report on the Painting Competition must also be due. Visits can be a good subject for a short article, as two junior members have shown. What about a few words, for instance, on the Beltring 'War and Peace' show? I know several of our members were there. There cannot be another 'Rank and File' until further articles and items come in.

NOTE FOR CONTRIBUTORS

The editor can and will type things out, so handwritten material is welcome, and we should be able to scan and use maps, drawings and photos. Of course typed material is easier to use and thus likely to appear sooner, and an e-mail attachment or 3.5 disc with the contribution as a Word document or as text only would be ideal, hugely reducing the labour involved for the editor (who should be able to handle WordPerfect documents too).

SUNDAY MEETINGS

August 2000

As usual in full holiday time, attendance was somewhat down, to about 14, but there were nevertheless several games. In 25mm the editor ran a Napoleonic game involving a French attack – which finally succeeded – against a stubborn British defence, while Tony Wyatt and Stephen Churchill matched Human Guards against Eldar Harlequins under Warhammer 40000 rules. There were two naval games: Andrew Finch and Clive McLeod using Pre-Dreadnoughts, and Alan Butler and Paul Colebrooke refighting the Battle of Lissa to Early Iron and Sail rules, with very attractive sailed vessels representing the Italian and Austrian fleets.

The painting competition was notable as the first in which ALL entries won 1st, 2nd or 3rd places, though all but one of the classes had several entries.

Russell Hanson revealed that he planned to spend the remainder of his retirement in Spain, the summers aboard his boat – sounds good. He should be there by the time you read these words, and I am sure that we all wish him good luck.

KEY STORM PROBE ! WE EXPOSE THE GUILTY MEN !

The senior members of this club are under the spotlight of our fearless investigative journalism this month – Lunchtime O’Booze reports:

We all know what the leading members of this club couldn’t organise in a brewery. NOW we know what kind of stall none of them could run ! A small group of senior members have been entrusted with the keeping of our keys, to the Hall and to the TWWWS cupboard. They have proved **unworthy of our trust** ! Although there are several sets of keys, the members concerned either fail to turn up to Sunday meetings, or when they do condescend to appear, have **neglected** to bring the keys with them. Things reached a **new low** at a meeting earlier this summer, when the cupboard could not be opened thanks to these **evil or incompetent scoundrels**, and the sacred Painting Competition, founded by our predecessors in the deeps of time, could not be held !

Can these **negligent incompetents** reform ? Or do we have to resort to punishment and if necessary **expulsion** to right this wrong and to bring our members the service they are entitled to expect ? What do **you** think ? What **punishment** would be suitable ? Write in - or if you recognise yourself among the ranks of the evil ones, confess your lapses to the Editor, and plead for forgiveness. REMEMBER – **we know your names** and will PUBLISH if you continue in your **vile ways** – THEN you will face the **justice of the people** !

ARTILLERY TACTICS IN ‘FIRE AND FURY’

By Malcolm Dove

Many club members have played Fire and Fury and know what a good set of fast moving American Civil War rules they are. This article looks at the ways in which artillery can be used. As in many periods, I find artillery is the most difficult arm to use effectively. This is because it takes time to set up and frequently having done so the target has either moved away or is out of firing angle, or the target is obscured by my own troops.

Essentially artillery – and I’m talking Fire and Fury here – can perform 4 main tasks, either to support an attack by weakening enemy units, or conversely to disrupt and break up enemy attacks, or to dominate enemy artillery by counter battery fire, or lastly to deny ground to the enemy.

I have looked at each of these tasks in turn and made suggestions how they can be best employed, but it is important to remember that terrain can change everything and there can be no absolute sure-fire tactics. Also one must be flexible in approach to a game, you might have to switch from attack to defence and back again and recognising the change is critical .

Defensive Artillery

Artillery is most effective when firing canister (4 inches), therefore you should ensure that you position it so that the enemy must come within range and that your guns have survived to fire. An over concentration of guns will make it suicidal to attack that point in the line, so the attack will fall elsewhere unprotected by artillery. Therefore, I recommend that when playing on the defensive, batteries should be attached individually to brigades and spread out along the line.

In one campaign game the Confederates amassed a huge concentration [16 or 17 batteries] of guns behind entrenchments on one flank. The Union promptly masked the guns with a few dismounted cavalry at long range – which being skirmishers are harder to hit - and attacked at the other end of the line, overwhelming the unsupported units at that end.

Where several batteries can concentrate on one target, or be spread over many, I usually opt to fire at different targets. My reason being that if a ‘10’ is rolled for firing all the batteries on one target will be out of ammunition and either restrict their firing to canister [4 inches] or withdraw for 2 turns to re-ammunition. Either way it gives the attacker an opportunity to get in close with suffering fire. The alternative argument is that be concentrating on one unit it can be severely hurt and rendered ineffective. I disagree because even though one brigade is out of the fight any attacker worth his salt will bring sufficient reserves to replace it.

Artillery in Attack

Unlike being on the defensive, you know where the intended point of attack is to be, so concentration is a benefit. Ideally the guns should be firing from a flank or on a hill so that they are not masked by advancing brigades until the last moment, though from experience I know this is not always possible. While the attack is at long range, the principal priority is the enemy artillery a silenced battery is out of action for at least 2 moves, which gives a chance for your brigades to close. At close range the priority still must be guns, if they can canister your attacking brigades, otherwise weakening the target brigades will assist you.

The tide of battle will, you hope, move away from artillery on the offensive, consequently players should be prepared to forego some ineffectual long range fire to allow their guns to advance. Forward batteries can be used to weaken centres of resistance or to break up counter attacks. Ideally batteries should leap frog each other, but again talking with the benefit of hindsight, I find this inordinately difficult to achieve.

Counter Battery Fire

Wellington always frowned upon counter battery fire as being unproductive. This may have been true in the Napoleonic wars, but it certainly was not during the ACW. I think that, unless closing to close combat, the first priority for attackers is to dominate the enemy artillery. The defender will have to react to the attack on his guns, so will have the dilemma – silence the guns or break up the attack – your call!

Limbered artillery gives a +1 firing modifier and consequently I would always give it high priority. One effective tactic to keep your artillery intact while either while advancing or if defending, is to put a brigade in front of it which masks it until it is read to fire, at which point the brigade falls back on the guns.

Denying Ground

I have seen this tactic used several times, once very effectively against me. It consists of deploying so many guns that an area of the battlefield becomes untenable to the enemy. Clearly for this tactic to succeed the guns must have a clear line of sight for some distance. When this was used against me the Confederates refused their entire right flank and held it with one division and 4 or 5 batteries. Although I had sufficient forces to eventually overwhelm the flank guard I had to advance carefully to avoid excessive casualties. This effectively took me out of the game, meanwhile the Rebel left flank launched an all out attack our weaker right.

Denying ground is a risky tactic, because you weaken your artillery elsewhere. In the game mentioned above our left wing commander – Terry Shoebridge – was able to use his guns to assist his defence without them being silenced. Although the South made headway they did so only at cost and eventually the game was drawn.

I hope you found this article interesting and if there is any club member who would like to try these rules out I will only be too happy to organise a game.

If you think I am talking rubbish – a not uncommon occurrence – then please write a counter blast, the Editor will be happy to publish it I am sure, otherwise I might just write another article on cavalry tactics!

VISIT TO YPRES

By Michael Page

In war gaming it is very easy to forget how bad life was often like for front line soldiers, as it is impossible to take into account this fact when recreating battles and campaigns or if so to display it effectively. Trips to the battlefields have made sure that I will never forget this fact.

Recently I visited the Ypres area in Belgium as part of a school battlefields project; the main focus being upon understanding the conditions in which the battles of The Great War were fought.

The first site we visited was the 'In Flanders Fields' Museum in the Town of Ypres. It is a new museum and is full of wonderful exhibits of World War I weaponry, uniforms, maps and other essential pieces of equipment needed to wage war. In fact most of the exhibits have been dug up by

local farmers in their annual 'Iron harvest' - a real hazard if you come across an unexploded shell or grenade!

Unfortunately, not every exhibit has corresponding English text but a great deal do. I was surprised to discover that the most extensive use of sandbags, notably by the Belgian Army, was drainage purposes - not shrapnel and bullets. Also I viewed some particularly gory pictures of wounded and dead horses, a horror that I had previously been ignorant to.

Shortly afterward we travelled to Tyne Cot Cemetery - named by the Northumberland Fusiliers due to a resemblance between local cottages and those of Tynside - in the now tranquil countryside surrounding the town.

Tyne Cot is the largest British war cemetery, containing 11, 871 graves and the names of 35, 000 soldiers that have no graves, officially missing. 356 graves were in place before the War's end by order of the designer Sir Hubert Baker. I personally thought the cemetery to be a very appropriate resting place for our soldiers due to it's distinct view that all are equal in death. Features such as officers being buried alongside men, the high level of maintenance for each grave and equal spacing between graves communicates this point extraordinarily well; the War graves Commission help to fulfil this task to the present day.

Amongst the graves lie two German bunkers that the soldiers hoped to take. Not surprisingly, nearby some of the six VC winners buried at Tyne Cot rest - Sgt. McGee and Capt. Jefferies.

On the New Zealand wall of the missing three names stand out for unusual reasons. Kjoss, Paisley and Slaymaker all served under different names, perhaps because they were wanted men or had something to hide. None the less, they died for their country and for her allies.

In complete contrast to the atmosphere of Tyne Cot is the German cemetery, Langemark. Here the atmosphere is much more sombre due to huge oak trees placing the area in constant darkness. Opposite the entrance 4 statues of German soldiers stand, who look as though they are paying their last respects.

A small chapel lists the names of 1500 Reserve Corps, which consisted entirely of poorly trained and equipped students. Stones mark where 10, 143 men are buried - 3, 836 are unknown. The Kameradengrad is a mass grave of 24, 834 men. Next to this are the graves of 9, 475 men.

This cemetery had the greatest effect on me because it was that of the enemy and I learnt that only in the past three years had German relatives begun to visit the scene. A more chilling thought was for the thousands of Jewish soldiers who had died for their country seemingly to no avail as less than 20 years later the Nazis would rise to power and persecute their race.

The final destination for the trip was Menin Gate which is a memorial to the missing in the Ypres Salient between 1914 and 1917. 54, 896 names of British and soldiers of the empire are recorded. The memorial was built after the war and since 1928 the Last Post is sounded at 8pm by the Ypre Police.

I will never look at war in the same way now I fully understand what soldiers of both sides must have endured. I felt humbled to be in the 'presence' of so many brave men who I, and many others, owe so much to but cannot repay.

PAINTING COMPETITIONS

The unknown entrant whose Eldar Squad leader was second in class 4 in May was Tony Wyatt, who thus needs to be credited with some more competition points.

I do not appear to have any other information on Painting Competitions this month. Perhaps those responsible could pass it on for the next issue ?

LESSER KNOWN ARMIES OF WORLD WAR II

By George Gush

CHINESE NATIONALIST ARMIES – PART THREE: AIR SUPPORT AND ORGANISATION

AIR SUPPORT

Russian:

Russia supplied 4 Russian-manned squadrons in 1938, 2 bomber and 2 fighter, as well as supplying 400 aircraft to the Chinese air force. Types included:

SB-2 bomber. (there was a Frog/Novo plastic kit, still found in some dealers' stocks, and MPM do one with Chinese decals, I think in resin).

I-16 fighter (Matchbox/Revell kit)

I-153 Chaika biplane fighter (A-Models and SMER kits)

American Volunteer Group:

Curtiss P-40 fighters (several kits including Airfix/Revell).

Also had some bombers, but I haven't discovered what types.

Other Chinese-used aircraft:

Fiat CR32 (Supermodel kit).

Gladiator I (36) Airfix and Matchbox kits)

Curtiss Hawk II and III biplane fighter-bombers (over 100 bought, and others manufactured in China) (there is an MPM kit of the Hawk III, and a resin one of the Hawk II by RS, both with Chinese Nationalist decals).

Dewoitine D510 monoplane fighter (I there is or was a Heller kit)..

Northrop Gamma 2E single-engined light bomber (resin kits by RS and Dekno, with Chinese decals).

Breda 27M (resin kit by KRAK Models with Chinese decals).

Henschel Hs 123A ground-attack biplane.

Potez 25 elderly biplane recce/bomber, used in '20s and '30s, probably still in use against the Japanese (HIT kit and Czech Master resin one).

Martin 139 twin-engine bomber (9)

Breguet 273 (Dujin resin kit)

Boeing P26 'Peashooter' monoplane fighter. There used to be a Revell kit of this.

US types supplied to the Chinese in 1942 included:

100 Vultee P-66 Vanguard (there is a Czech 'Sword' plastic kit of this with Chinese decals).

108 Seversky P-43 Lancers (MPM kit, I think in resin, also a vacuum-formed kit by Rareplane).

131 B-25c (Mitchell) bombers (Italeri and Matchbox make B-25 plastic kits but not necessarily this mark).

Chinese Nationalist Aircraft Colours and Markings:

Aircraft had Kuomintang 'sun' in blue and white on wings, and (from top) six blue and five white stripes on rudder (Tally-Ho Decals make Chinese Nationalist markings for Curtiss Hawks II and III, I-153, I-16, Dewoitine D510, Fiat CR32, Henschel Hs123A and Gladiator).

Most common finish seems to have been dark olive upper surfaces, with light grey or blue, or sometimes dark olive under surfaces, but some aircraft, including P26 and Northrop could be in overall silver. Others were overall silver or light blue with upper surfaces mottled in olive green.

CHINESE ARMY ORGANISATION

It is worth noting that the Chinese army was even less likely than others to have its formations up to strength, fully equipped, or organised in the official manner.

Infantry at the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War, in 1937:

Infantry:

Squad: Sergeant and 10 men. Probably intended to have one LMG per squad. There were also some rifle-grenade launchers; in the 1940s two, in the first squad of each platoon.

Platoon: Lieutenant and 3 squads.

Company: Captain, HQ with bugler, messengers etc, and 3 platoons.

Battalion:

HQ: Lieutenant-Colonel and 3 other officers, messengers etc.

MG Company: 3 platoons of 2 squads each. Squad had 1 MMG, 2 NCOs, 4 riflemen, and 10 unarmed men to man MMG and carry ammunition.

Three Rifle Companies.

Regiment:

HQ: Colonel and about 10 officers, buglers, messengers, nurses, stretcher-bearers, etc.

Special Service Company (HQ guard; like rifle company).

Mortar Company: six 82mm mortars. Organised like MMG Company (above).

Signals Platoon: about 50 men with switchboard and 10 field telephones.

Transport Platoon: about 50 porters.

Litter Platoon: about 50 stretcher-bearers.

Three Infantry Battalions.

Infantry Brigade:

HQ: 13 officers and 29 men.

Two Infantry Regiments.

Infantry Division:

HQ: 79 officers, 147 men; including medical section.

Special Service Company (HQ guard; like rifle company)

Artillery Battalion: three batteries, each probably with four or six Field or mountain guns, 5 officers and 170 to 200 men. In the 1940s there were supposed to be two batteries of 75mm field guns and one of 105mm howitzers.

Engineer Battalion: HQ, and 3 engineer companies, each of 3 platoons of 3 squads of 16 men each, with pioneer tools; about a third had rifles.

Transport Battalion: HQ and 2 companies each with about 150 porters, carrying 90 pounds each.

Signals Battalion: HQ with 1 radio company and two field-telephone companies.

Two infantry brigades.

(Total about 11,000 men).

This applies to 10 divisions reorganised in 1937; others were liable to be as weak as a quarter of this strength. Chinese artillery tended to be hoarded centrally by Chiang Kai-Shek, to strengthen his political control, so mortars were the main support weapons met on the battlefield. In the 1940s, infantry divisions were reduced to about 7,000 strong, with only 3 regiments, but with an added recon company, later battalion. Anti-tank companies and mortar battalions were added to some divisions. Infantry companies were given a fourth platoon with two 60mm mortars.

American-organised Divisions:

Three divisions were reorganised in 1943 and two more in 1944; these were supplied from India and fought in Burma. They followed the general lines above, with three infantry regiments, but had an anti-tank squad in the battalion HQ, and presumably a more generous scale of equipment.

Cavalry.

China had, in 1942, no less than 6 cavalry corps of four divisions each, plus four independent brigades. Earlier, Infantry divisions normally had an attached cavalry squadron, and some may have retained them into the war against Japan.

Cavalry Squadron: (1928)

HQ with Major, bugler, 4 messengers etc; 4 platoons commanded by Lieutenants, with 3 squads each. A squad had a sergeant, a corporal and 12 troopers.

Cavalry Regiment: (1928)

Four squadrons.

Presumably larger formations would be organised similarly to infantry.

Other Arms:

By 1942 the Chinese had independent artillery, heavy mortar, armoured, anti-aircraft, anti-tank and motorised regiments, but I have no details of strength or organisation, except that an artillery regiment had three battalions of three batteries each. The Americans equipped several Chinese tank battalions in Burma.

WEB SITES OF INTEREST

From Malcolm Dove:

<http://userwww.service.emory.edu/~rarjet/redcav/index.html> a useful site with detail of Russian cavalry and cossacks, WWI and Russo-Polish War.

<http://www.freewargamesrules.co.uk> links to free wargame rules.

<http://www.btinternet.com/~david.manley/naval/ironfire/ironfire.html> lots of good stuff about naval warfare.

FOR SALE AND WANTED

Philip Morton has £150 worth of Epic 40,000 models to sell for about £20 to £25. See him at a Sunday meeting.

George Gush has a number of books for sale, all in very good condition, virtually as new:

Battle for the Fiords: NATO's Forward Maritime Strategy in Action. Eric Grove 1991
(reports exercises like actual battles; concerned with naval/military/air strategy in the North) £2 ono

Duel for the Sky. Christopher Shores 1999
(ten crucial air battles of WW2. Large, well illustrated, card cover) £2-50 ono

Spearhead for Blitzkrieg. General der Flieger Paul Deichmann; intro by Alfred Price.
(German account of Luftwaffe development and tactics in ground support) £3 ono

World War Two AFVs: Armoured Fighting Vehicles & Self-Propelled Artillery. George Forty 1996
(Published by Osprey; all main powers, lots of photographs) £2-50 ono

Military Modelling Guide to Military Vehicles. Robin Buckland 1988
(Paperback; covers available kits & models, modelling, colour schemes; some 3-view plans): offers

The Army of Saxony 1805-14. W.J.Rawkins
(Photo copied booklet. Rather faint but legible and has very complete info on Napoleonic Saxon uniforms) 50p

ALSO *Third Reich WW2 Board game, complete* Offers

See address under Notes for Contributors (above) or see him at Sunday Meeting

REVIEWS

In this section you can help other club members by writing a few words on wargame-related products that you have tried. These could include figures, paints, scenic items, materials, rules, books, board or computer games. Even a very brief comment can be useful to someone wondering whether or what to buy.

'August 1944' by Robert A. Miller. Praesidio Press Paperback. 1996 ed; first printed 1988

In many ways I found this an interesting book. The author's thesis is that August 1944 saw one of the critical battles of World War II, in which the Allies moved from a restricted beachhead to destroy the German armies in France. He takes the unusual method of dealing with events day by day, each chapter being one day, rather than the more usual division into particular topics or operations, and although this, as he admits, can have its drawbacks, it is very effective. You get a real sense of the changing situation and how this led to new command decisions which affected the whole campaign. The book is particularly good in showing the thinking and disagreements that led to such decisions and is generally strong on the strategy and command side.

Robert Miller served in the US Navy in WWII, in the Pacific, and only turned to military history after retiring from business. I think this amateur background shows a bit in one of the faults of the book. He constantly insists that the methods of the American breakout were 'uniquely American' and yet, apparently without realising it, is clearly describing the methods of the German Blitzkrieg which had conquered Poland and France at the beginning of the war. This, however, does not really detract from a very interesting read. (George Gush)

Conversion kit of 1939 Russian Zis-42m half track with 37mm AA gun, by AER Model Studio, Moldova.

There are now an increasing number of 1/76th scale kits coming onto the British market from Eastern Europe and Russia. They cover a lot of interesting and unusual models, especially of WWII Red Army equipment, as here. Generally they are of a pretty good standard, though instructions and packing are not very good, and parts fit can be variable. They used to be cheap, too, but I suspect importers have realised they can add on a lot of profit and still be competitive with Western kit prices, so they aren't such bargains as they were.

This kit cost about £10 at the recent Beltring 'War and Peace' show. Quite pricey, but it is a very rare subject, and is in fact a combination of an injection-moulded truck kit with resin parts for conversion, firstly to a half track and secondly to carry a 37mm AA gun, so I thought the price justified. It has, eventually, made up into a nice model, though I haven't painted it yet. However, that word 'eventually' conceals what at the time felt like an eternity of irritations and frustrations. I am definitely not the world's greatest kit assembler, but I am quite experienced and have spares boxes full of plastic bits and pieces, and I would definitely not recommend this kit to anyone lacking either qualification!

The first problem came from the fragility of resin castings. With rather typical Russian careless optimism, the makers reproduce the very thin barrelled Bofors like gun in this medium. The barrel broke twice during assembly, and I doubt if it is strong enough for wargaming. I shall have either to replace it with an Airfix Bofors barrel, or at least coat it with PVA glue to strengthen it. This, however, is just the start. Fine detailed gun parts were mostly broken, and the sights appeared to have disintegrated altogether in transit. This probably doesn't matter, as they would certainly not have survived the model being handled. I made up a rather rough substitute from the spares box.

The half-tracks were a lot better. They are typically Russian in being massive castings with a track width fit for a Tiger! This rather antiquated-looking vehicle would have been ploughing happily over the snow or mud when all those fancy high-tech German Sd Kfz 251 would have been stuck fast. However, another problem showed up here. The bogies go together all right, but then the makers expect you to wrap them with wide, thick, rigid resin tracks! They claim hot water allows these to bend, and this is true – to bend about half as much as you need. What is more, they instantly lose even this flexibility when taken out of the water. Burnt fingers, curses, and the snap of breaking resin were the order of the day, until I gave up and went back to the spares box for suitable bits of soft plastic track.

You also have to do a good bit for yourself even when things go right; there are templates for making card mudguards, and even in the injected plastic lorry part of the kit you have to make wire axles etc. It was worth it, but I wouldn't want to make another one. (George Gush)