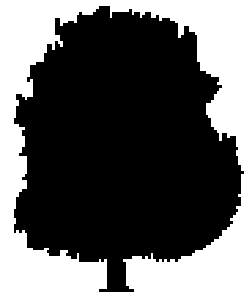




Military Muddling



Volume 16 Issue 9

Chestnut Lodge Wargames Group Newsletter

December 2005

Editorial

The annual CLWG Conference took place in early December, having been postponed from its usual date in October, and - although attendance was not high - was a quite successful mixture of Jim Wallman's *Universe* game, playtests and design sessions. The first report, by Dave Boundy on the playtest of his *Operation Rheinbung* computerised naval wargame, and another, by Andy Grainger, on designing a megagame of the Battle of the Somme, will be found in this issue. I should be very grateful for others when you can tear yourselves away from the Winter Solstice/*Saturnalia*/Christmas festivities!

The Annual Business Meeting, however, could not take place and will now - numbers permitting - be held at the December meeting.

Arthur Harman

Contributions for Military Muddling

To: Arthur Harman, preferably as Word attachments in Times New Roman font, point 12, by e-mail to arthur1815@lineone.net but you can also send paper or disks to me at:
115 Kenley Road, Merton Park, Wimbledon, London SW19 3DP



DEADLINE FOR JANUARY ISSUE: 16th January 2006

Officers

Trevor Duguid Farrant (Events Organiser) 01344 455167; Trevor_Duguid_Farrant@gillette.com

Mukul Patel (Games Organiser/Admin Officer) 02087690538; mukul1965@hotmail.com

Nick Luft (Treasurer) nickluft@impudent.org.uk

Jim Wallman (Webmaster/Competition Secretary) jgw@pastpers.co.uk

Forthcoming Events

8th January 2006: Jim's Office [email Jim for directions if you don't know where that is]

Little Lambent Meteors by Jim: a game of 18th century civil unrest/crowd control/rioting
See Jim's wargames rules webpage for further details.

Annual Business Meeting: postponed from the Conference, as insufficient members were present on the Sunday for the meeting to be quorate. Please attend if you can.

Please remember, when members are kind enough to allow CLWG to use their homes for meetings, to show them the simple courtesy of informing them by telephone or email that you will be attending!

**Fire from the Forest, The SAS Brigade in France, 1944 by Roger Ford: reviewed by
Andy Grainger**

Fire from the Forest, The SAS Brigade in France, 1944 by Roger Ford, Cassell Military Paperbacks £7.99 (or much less on the net) pp307

This book is a comprehensive account of the very many small operations launched by the SAS during the liberation of France. It is very much not a "*Sten guns breathing death*" book chock-full of accounts of jeep attacks on German lorries and railways (although there are some of these). Instead, it seeks to correct the rather dubious and sparse accounts of these operations and set them into the context of the main battle, the airborne forces and SOE. In a fascinating first chapter the author describes the infighting around the definition of a role for the SAS – who just wanted to launch purely military attacks on the German lines of communication, against the concern of the SOE who were worried at their likely impact on the French population and *maquis* and finally the Airborne planners who saw them as a sort of beefed up expendable pathfinder unit.

There is a very revealing chapter on recruiting. Contrary to popular belief the WW2 SAS were not all crack combat troops. Their training had emphasised self-reliance, map reading, explosives and the skills needed to survive behind enemy lines. Tactical training and weapons skills had a lesser priority. When the SAS was expanded for Overlord, many recruits came from the Auxiliary Units of the Home Guard. These men were to have been stay-behind parties in the event of a German invasion of the UK and so had a lot of the necessary survival and demolition training. But they had no combat experience and very little conventional military training.

The role of the SAS was only firmed up a few weeks before D-Day. It seems clear that the planners had more to worry about than the activities of a few lightly armed troops running around hundreds of miles in the German rear. The initial idea of using them as heavily armed but ultimately expendable demolition parties on the routes behind the bridgehead appalled the SAS but seems to me understandable given a) the hype they generated about themselves and b) Eisenhower's sanguine thoughts about sacrificing entire airborne divisions if that was the cost of getting ashore.

Eventually only a few SAS teams were dropped in the Normandy area (between Flers and Domfront) where they reconnoitred supply dumps and occasionally called in airstrikes. But even tens of miles behind the battlefield they found it almost impossible to operate due to the density of combat troops.

There were four SAS battalions, two British, two French and a Belgian company. Each battalion was organised fairly conventionally into company and platoon sized units and so could put about a dozen to 20 patrols into the field. Generally they dropped by parachute onto DZ's selected from maps and then sought to attack airfields, railways or supply depots either on foot or, more usefully, by jeep. Liaison with UK was via the Jedburgh teams of the SOE. The role of these small 3-man teams was to liaise with French resistance networks and co-ordinate their activities with each other and, to some extent with the SAS. This produced very varied results. Most of the time the Jedburgh teams worked well with the SAS but some Jed officers resented the SAS presence fearing that it would provoke German attacks and reprisals and feeling that the *Maquis* was much better at sabotage than the gung-ho SAS. The waters were muddied by the fact that some resistance groups had been penetrated by the Germans and others had not. Some resistance groups had a shoot-out over sharing weapons dropped to them, some were highly disciplined, others less so. SOE had a policy that favoured the Gaullist *Armée Secrète* at the expense of the Communist FTP whilst the SAS would fight with anyone.

All this could make for a fascinating wargame at many levels. The infighting in UK which resolved the SAS role only shortly before the invasion would be an excellent committee game. The same would be true at the SAS bases in the forests with lots of characters having their own particular agenda.

One issue of which I was not fully aware was the impact of Hitler's infamous *Kommandobefehl* by which any troops operating behind the lines, even if wearing uniform, were to be shot. The allies seem to have been unaware, or at best uncertain, about the existence of this order and the *Wehrmacht* was unhappy about implementing it. Generally, however, captured SAS and Jedburgh personnel were handed over to the SD (who were in charge of the *Einsatzgruppen*) and virtually all shot. Some of the perpetrators were charged with war crimes after the war.

The book is well researched from primary sources in the PRO and from sources in the SAS Regiment although that from the German / Vichy side is little more than anecdotal. The maps are good and the coverage is comprehensive. It is, however, not a very exciting read and assumes some knowledge of the origins of the SAS which most of us will, however, probably possess from our schoolboy reading.

Generally the author is careful to cite his sources but unfortunately does not state the origin of this quote from a sceptical British officer: "*All [the private armies] did was to offer a too-easy, because romanticised, form of gallantry to a few anti-social, irresponsible individualists who sought a more personal satisfaction from the war than of standing their chance, like proper soldiers, of being bayoneted in a slit trench or burnt alive in a tank*".

Read this book (£2.50 plus postage on the net) and form your own view. I am even inspired to design a game!

There is another review from an illuminating US perspective in the US Marine Corps Gazette at <http://www.mca-marines.org/Gazette/2004/04bateman2BR.html>

Operation Rheinubung Onside Report from Dave Boundy

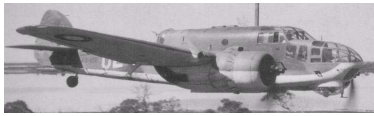


The Bismarck breakout into the North Atlantic in May 1941 was part of a wider operation – *Operation Rheinubung*. I enjoy such things, so I wanted to run the game again, but I also wanted to use it as a test bed for ideas on computer-adjudicated games. On this occasion, therefore, I kept most of the same props and player actions, but replaced the central umpire team with a computer program and with me performing the role of oracle to the computer (quite appropriate as the program was written in a language called Delphi). At the same time, I had been very unhappy with the combat system devised for the previous two games, so I changed that somewhat and I decided to ring the changes by starting with the *Bismarck* group in Norwegian fjord, rather than just after the sinking of the *Hood* (as I had done before).



The game as it developed. Admiral Lutjens, flying his flag on *Bismarck* and with the cruisers *Prinz Eugen* and *Admiral Hipper* in company, decided to take advantage of a period of fog to slip out of Norway and head north. His judgment was that an early start would guarantee the fog and would be worth the risk of leaving his two cruisers without topping up on fuel. Only a slight twist on history so far. Meanwhile, in the convoy lanes, the Royal Navy was using a cruiser hunting group to search for the *Lutzow* (another cruiser) and was using search planes from Iceland and Scotland to assist. Weather

conditions prevented air searches of the Iceland-Faeroes gap but they seemed very confident and kept *King George V*, *Prince of Wales* and *Hood* with a number of cruisers in Scapa Flow ready to depart as soon as the patrols in the Iceland-Faeroes area found what they assumed was *Bismarck*.



Meanwhile, the battlecruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau* left Brest and, separately, a right royal battle was being



fought out between an outbound convoy and a wolf-pack of U-boats. With the first definite sightings of the battlecruisers out of Brest, 18 Group Bristol Beaufort torpedo-bombers were sent from Scotland to intercept them south of Ireland [*designer's note: this gave me a shock and I don't know why, but that felt wrong but was within the operating range! - whether some oddity of the projection I was using or whatever, I'm not sure – maybe it was even realistic!*]. Although pressing the attack home with great determination, little damage was done (although the aircraft thought that a resounding success had been achieved) and several aircraft were lost.

While *Bismarck* was making her way north (with a slightly odd course which clipped land as a result of my misinterpretation of orders from the players and with an obliging program which was not designed to tell the difference!), the final chapter of the game was being played out by the interception and subsequent sinking of *HMS Edinburgh* after a four hour stern-chase. We left it at a point where a number of interesting areas were opening up – the U-boat war, the air attacks to be sent against the Brest squadron as soon as light allowed, the timing of the Home Fleet sally and the brave decision that was just being implemented to strip heavy units from convoys, where they had been deployed to protect against cruisers and commerce raiders (e.g. *HMS Rodney* had just left the *SS Britannia* to make the crossing to the USA on her own).

As for the mechanics of the game – I had written a program that kept a track of each ship. The four-hour turns were broken into one-hour movement phases so that any potential sighting could be identified. The philosophy I adopted was that the program should be an umpire aid, rather than adjudicating the game. The program worked reasonably well – I had forgotten to implement some orders so I stopped the program and went back to the beginning of the turn – that worked well, but I had forgotten to allow for the change in time that would imply when I wrote the program, so I had to stop again, change and recompile the program and carry on – a useful test. I think I need to sharpen up the programming and test it even more and I need to build more automation into the program – I was forgetting to do things that I could easily have built into the program to check for, so it should have been even more useful. Still, it did mean that I could do the umpiring on my own and I was still less pushed than I was when there were two map umpires to help.

I was pleased that the battle system seemed to work with the right sort of flavour, but again it needed to be more automated and built into the computer program (but without losing the flavour or the player involvement) – it was, however, a big improvement on what had gone before. Apart from a problem with the fact that the battle between *Scharnhorst*, *Gneisenau* and *Edinburgh* took longer than I had allowed for (in game time) and that other things around would have to be allowed for, I was pleased with all the game mechanics.

I think that the decision to start at a point before the break-out could have been interesting but in reality left the German operational team with too little to do – so apologies to Rob and to Arthur for that and thanks to all who took part (the RN – First Sea Lord Mukul, Admiral Rutherford and Captain Ward of the Admiralty, along with Trevor from Group West and Nick *Fuhrer des U-Boot Luft*) for indulging me. I learnt a lot and intend to develop this much further into a couple of different directions – one of which will be a full day play of this game but with computers collecting orders and sending reports back as well as adjudicating the results.

Designing *Price of Victory* – the price of compromise! Report by Andy Grainger

Back in May 2005 Dave Boundy presented a megagame – *Muck & Bullets* - to 120 pupils at his school to illustrate certain features of the battle of the Somme in 1916. He described this game in the July 2005 *MilMud*. Although I was unable to attend the game I understood that it was so successful with the children that it was thought that an adult audience would also appreciate it. During a meal at the traditional venue in Streatham – the Turkish restaurant – I agreed to run it in October 2006.

Thanks to Dave, again, we will be able to stage it at his school and so re-use the dramatic props that he designed for the original performance. In recent months, therefore, I started to read some of the literature on the Somme to get an idea of what had happened during the real battle. There is something of a virtuous circle here; the great interest in the First World War has sparked an outpouring of military literature of all kinds – and this is then reflected in tours of the nature that Dave’s pupils will attend.

I was now armed with a fair amount of historical knowledge but although I had been involved in the correspondence was designed, I had never seen the game being played. There were aspects that I wanted to add to the system. Some of these could just be added on, such as more debate at the higher command levels but others would require tinkering with the system mechanics. For example, the battle was about the capture of high ground in order to get better observation for the artillery and I wanted to include this as it seemed so important. I therefore wanted to use the CLWG Conference to have a go at playing the *Muck & Bullets* system and then to try out my ideas for adjusting the system. One of the constraints very early had been that, in order to re-use Dave’s maps and counters I did not want to change the system. I hoped, therefore, that I would be satisfied with it as a broad model of combat on the Somme in 1916.

How Big is the Game?

But first, I wanted to size the game. *Muck & Bullets* used turns of roughly 7 to 10 days and is at brigade resolution. It used three-man Corps teams, each running several subordinate teams of three who played one or more divisions. Thus a Corps had about fifteen players although the adults who ran it reckoned that a team of five or six adults could handle the roles that had been taken by fifteen children. This suited me as I wanted to reflect the debate at High Command much more and so the British element of *Price of Victory* will have two Army HQs (Rawlinson’s 4th and Gough’s Reserve) instead of one, and six Corps teams of five or six. The Corps teams will operate their own HQ plus, typically three or four infantry divisions – a total of about 40 - 45 British players. The Germans deployed one Army and four Corps HQs, a further 25 - 30 players and then one team of French and some umpires will bring the total to 70 - 80. I have not yet decided how to reflect Haig and GHQ. Haig was crucial, of course, but I am not sure that there is a full-time role and so I will need to think more about this.

The Game System

Sizing the game was fairly straightforward. But playing through the *Muck & Bullets (M&B)* system in a three Division attack led to a good deal of debate! It had been designed, of course, to handle the tactical aspects of the Somme in a very broad-brush way. It reflected the attritional nature of the battle with moderate casualty rates and slow rates of advance¹. Trenchlines were difficult to take – but once the defenders were in the open they suffered badly and in the big game the Germans had to fight desperately to hold their ground. It all sounded very exciting.

¹ At the session Dave Boundy indicated that over a period of five game months the British advanced up to the German second line but at a lower casualty rate than the historical one. In other words, they were more cautious. After the session I think this may not be quite right as Dave calculates his strength points at 500 men per point – there are five points to a British Infantry Brigade. Whilst a German Regiment might have had about 2,500 men, however, a British brigade had four battalions and a total strength of about 4,000 or, say, 3,500 in combat. So British game losses would have been much higher as each point would have been about 700 men. The other difficulty is that in reality the British did not take five months to reach the German second line but, in some sectors, only a matter of days!

The trouble was that the historical battle was not like that at all! Contrary to a grinding week by week advance the real Battle of the Somme actually progressed in four or five “lurches” or sub-offensives of about a week in which most of the ground was gained (and the losses suffered) in the first day. For the rest of the time everyone was resting, planning, preparing and bombarding. Well, actually, they were also launching completely pointless uncoordinated small-scale attacks that suffered enormous losses and gained almost no ground at all. But even on the dreadful 1st July two British Corps in the south broke through almost to the German second line in a single day – something that would take nearly the whole game in *M&B*! Indeed the main gripe of the test players was that the “weekly” turns felt like daily turns – it just felt wrong.

This presents an interesting design challenge. Both the historical battle and the *M&B* game produced their share of dramatic advances and near breakthrough but in different ways. Does it matter that the drama in *M&B* comes after turn after turn of gruelling but unspectacular combat whilst in the real battle it usually came after a single day of climactic bombardment and assault which was followed by long periods of inaction – or combat operations at a level below that of the game resolution?

I can stick to the original *M&B* system and know the players will get a good game albeit one that may not have the right historical feel? Or should I design a new combat system that is more “realistic” but may produce a less exciting game?

I will try to keep readers informed in *MilMud*.

In the meantime my thanks to all those who participated in the Conference session with particular thanks to Dave Boundy for providing the maps, counters and other props.

Further Comments by Arthur Harman

I played in the test of the *M&B* system and found the turns felt like periods of some hours or a day at most. Perhaps this impression was created because we players were controlling brigades or divisions, whose commanders would have been responding to events in that sort of timescale; had we been playing officers at GHQ, and been receiving similar information from umpires, updating us on the previous week’s gains and losses, we might have felt differently. But that does not address the more fundamental problem with the existing system raised by Andy: that combats did not continue for days on end.

Andy’s analysis of *Muck & Bullets* raises an issue lurking not far beneath the surface in many historical games: that although a reasonably realistic overall outcome is achieved, the means by which this has been done risk imparting false impressions of the subject at a lower level.

For example, a Spanish Armada game presented with an educational magazine ensured that the English ships would be able to prevent the Duke of Medina Sidonia from controlling the Channel long enough to transport Parma’s army from the Netherlands by allowing them to sink Spanish warships by gunfire. At the conclusion of most games, the Spanish Armada had failed, and had lost a similar number of ships to those it did historically, but those ships had been sunk in the Channel, not wrecked on the Irish coast. The game was great fun, but conveyed the very wrong idea that English gunnery had destroyed the Armada.

At least one set of army level Napoleonic wargame rules uses a greatly extended range for line infantry musketry to represent the casualties inflicted by skirmishers, who are not represented, operating several hundred paces in front of their parent units, whilst encounters between close order infantry have often been resolved by ‘Melee’ rules, although primary sources suggest that typically, either the defender would break before a resolute advance with the bayonet, or the attacker would refuse to close and begin a musketry duel, so that no actual hand-to-hand fighting would occur.

In the case of a game played solely for the players' personal entertainment, such compromises may not matter very much, especially if all the players are aware of them and have agreed to ignore them temporarily to enjoy the game for itself as a social event, which is a major part of the traditional, face to face, open toy soldier battlegame. If, however, a game is claiming to inform or educate its participants, then surely much more care should be taken to avoid giving false lessons? Where does a megagame such as *Price of Victory* stand on a scale ranging from pure entertainment to education?