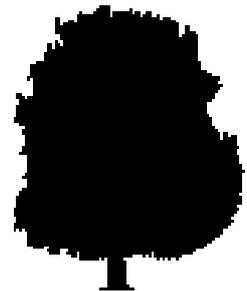




# *Military Muddling*



Volume 16 Issue 10

Chestnut Lodge Wargames Group Newsletter

February 2006

## **Editorial**

I've recently removed my old wargame and military history magazines from a loft cupboard, where they have languished in cardboard boxes since we moved in nearly seven years ago, and have spent some time skimming through them. In my opinion, many of these older issues had far more original ideas and interesting articles than the same magazines do today, although the computerised graphics have improved enormously – a victory of style over substance?

**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](mailto:arthur1815@lineone.net) but you can also send paper or disks to me at:  
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**DEADLINE FOR MARCH ISSUE: 16<sup>th</sup> February 2006**

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## **Forthcoming Events**

**Sunday, 5<sup>th</sup> February 2006, at John Rutherford's home from c. 10:30**

**Normandy 1944: A Design Session by Dave Boundy – see article below**

**Annual Business Meeting:** postponed from the Conference and the January meeting, as insufficient members were present for the meeting to be quorate. This time, the ABM will be held at lunchtime, 13:00-14:00, so that anyone who cannot stay all afternoon will be able to attend. Please make a special effort to attend if you can.

**Barbarossa: The invasion of Russia, using the TLW system, by Jim Wallman**

**Studs and Slags: John and Adam Rutherford**

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!

## Normandy 1944: A Design Session by Dave Boundy

Almost two years ago, we developed a game about the D-Day invasion of Normandy and the period for several months after. The game was designed by a number of Chestnut and MM people, with Jim Wallman pulling together and writing the mechanisms and I produced the game parts and adapted the rules. The intention of the game was to prepare 120 youngsters (age 14 or so) to visit the Normandy beaches as part of their History course.

It was run for the kids in May 2004 (I was there, ably assisted by Jim, Mukul and Andy) and then I helped Jim run it for the public at the National Army Museum, as part of their D-Day celebrations, in the June and finally we ran a game at the Chestnut meeting in the September at my place (see the CLWG web-site gallery for some pictures).

As a game, it works. It produces reasonable results from a simple structure and simple rule-set. However, as an exercise for 120 youngsters, it had problems. We played it by placing all youngsters on the allied side (because of the variability of the German side during the period) and we had sixth-formers taking the role of Germans. With 120 to play with, we had a 4-tier command structure – AG, Army, Corps and Division. We found that the kids did not have enough to do. Megagamers would have been involved with planning, co-ordinating with other formations and the various other things that distinguish good play from bad. The kids did not have a feel or understanding for this at all and therefore went through the mechanics and had spare time after. The only way we could force the day through and ensure that they got something out of it was to orchestrate every action – I stood at the front and issued instructions such as “Right... Corps logistics players... take supplies to your divisions... now”. This was less than satisfactory.

The aim of the design session is to adapt the game in order to make it enjoyable for 120 14-year old players, while retaining the educational benefits. My initial thoughts are that it probably needs to be even simpler than it is and that it needs fewer levels – we might well consider putting the kids on both sides.

The handbook containing the rules and the background is on the download section of the club web-site <http://www.jimwallman.org.uk/clwg>. I intend to run the design session by using the maps, props and handbook to play through a game for about an hour. I then want to have a discussion about the changes we could adopt, then split into groups (if there are enough of us) and do some serious rule-writing.

I look forward to it – thanks in advance for participating. Dave Boundy

## *Little Lambent Meteors* by Jim Wallman Offside report by Mukul Patel

This is a rather raucous map game about riots in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The map was a simplified version of central London of the time. Players took various roles: one was a battalion commander, a peacekeeper with a magistrate and Member of Parliament, and various rabble-rousers, such as William Cheapside (me). Mobs of people (all counters were edited to the correct ground scale) have spilled out onto the streets in a state of slight agitation looking for entertainment. The issue of the moment is whether Roman Catholics should be allowed into the army to help fight the Rebellion in America.

The players all sat round the table with a single map and counters. We all took turns in sequence for our personal characters to take one action: rabble rouse, arrest people, talk, issue orders, lead men or whatever. The map had marked a number of key riot and potential locations for anti-Catholic activity, such as the brewery, a prison, wealthy Catholic households, Catholic sympathisers and so on.

The initial rowdiness of the crowds was low, and the game started with William Cheapside and others trying to stir the crowds up. Unfortunately the forces of law and order, John Law, head of the peacekeepers, and Sir Tufton Bufton, the pro-Catholic MP, stomped on and defused the initial agitation arresting the

rabble-rouser in St James Square. Sir Tufton Bufton MP had a unique talent to waffle and bore the crowds into dispersing. No riot there!

The peacekeepers moved on and dispersed another mob threatening a Catholic's house. Eventually, though, the undeniable veracity and self-evident truths of William Cheapside caused one part of the crowd in Leicester Fields to turn riotous, storm the prison there and start a fire outside the building. Cheapside then led the crowd down to the Haymarket and a wealthy Catholic household located there. Here John Law and the peacekeepers confronted Cheapside and the crowd. Fortunately the rioters were able to cow and overpower John Law. They set free the previously arrested rabble-rouser, looted the house, started a fire outside the building and were urged to move on to Sir Tufton Bufton's household before the Army, reacting to the prison break-in, arrived. The crowd once given a target will act outside of the rabble-rousers control, so I decided to go down to the brewery and start another riot there. I didn't try co-ordinate my actions with the other rabble-rousers though our paths did cross at times; we weren't organised so didn't play it as if we were organised.

The crowd moved on to Sir Tufton Bufton's house, entered it and caused merry hell...until the army turned up outside. The crowd had by now entered such raptures of riotous exultation that they attacked the army and nine civilians were killed. The crowd fled....

Lots of other stuff happened, it was game with lots of incidents going on.

This game was good. It had a huge element of banter between the players, trading insults and so on. This was the raucous element of the game. The pace of the game was slow to start with, but built up a head of steam as the peacekeepers lost control. At first I thought this was too slow but I am not so sure now. It would be quite easy to rig the game to speed up or slow down the initial wind up of the crowds. As players got to take actions quite quickly there was little waiting around for the players really.

The back-story of London provided a great backdrop for the game - familiar but different, it provided yet another good hook into the game. The game's subject riots was good fun, I love a bit of wanton fictional destruction, and it appealed not to my higher intellectual leanings but my basest crudest passions: GREAT!

There was an idea that it could have been made into back-to-back game. The upside of this proposal would be creating more confusion and oddities. The down side would be that it would slow the game down, reduce the raucous banter, and also, perhaps, reduce the passion making it more a game than a feeling, and also creates more difficulty in appreciating the crazy course of events and individual incidents within the game.

This game worked well for the players. Play it!

**Editor adds:** Readers can download the rules for *Little Lambent Meteors*, together with the briefings, map and counters for the troops, magistrates and rioters, from Jim Wallman's free wargames website at <http://www.jimwallman.org.uk/wargame/index.htm>

### ***The German Army on the Somme 1914-1916* by Jack Sheldon review by Andy Grainger**

I must confess that I struggled with this book. Having dipped into it a few times at the bookshop it appeared simply to be a collection of long extracts from German Regimental histories from the interwar years with little effort to set them into context. It did not seem to be the book that we have been waiting for to tell us about the Battle of the Somme from the German perspective.

The author acknowledges that such a book is long overdue. His own interest in the battle dates back many years and revealed the paucity of German sources. He explains that he seized an opportunity to exploit this gap during a course at the German Command and Staff College in Hamburg in the 1990's. He also discovered that although many records of the Prussian Army had been destroyed in WW2 (a view that I understand is being revised as people trawl through dusty basements in Moscow) those of the Bavarian and Württemberg regiments lie largely intact in Munich and Stuttgart respectively. But the book is largely based upon the hundreds of regimental histories published in Germany during the 1920's and 1930's.

Jack Sheldon is certainly to be admired for this as many were published in Gothic script and I recall my own attempts to decipher extracts from one or two of them as being very painful. The books are themselves the subject of interesting historiographical debate<sup>1</sup>. Their intention was not simply to record the historical events but also the heroism of the *Sommekämpfer* and the ethos of soldierly comradeship – the *Frontgeist* – who says that German is a long-winded language. This, of course, for a nation that was gearing up to do it all again. Certainly, a great deal of effort must have gone into them because officers and soldiers who were taken prisoner provide many of the accounts. These men must have been contacted after the war and given an extensive debrief, frequently, I suspect backed by notes and researches they made in captivity.

The author keys the personal accounts to sketch maps of the ground. This is very useful, particularly when the text is annotated with the British trench names. In his foreword Richard Holmes draws together four themes:

- The French attacks around Serre in 1915 which encourage the Germans to dig and keep digging,
- The importance of skilled junior leadership,
- The state of allied training and
- The impact of attrition on the defenders.

Certainly, the author does not discuss in any detail the wider aspects of German operations within a strategic context or analyse the army's methods of operation, command or tactics. And yet... as I read this book I realised that he was building an entirely different picture of the battle to the one to which I had become accustomed. He has achieved this by the very number of accounts and also the universality of the experience which they relate. This being a book about the German Army's battle, the author devotes as much space to operations south of the Somme as he does to the north. Clearly, many readers will move immediately to the chapters relating to 1916 but they will miss the vivid accounts of fighting in 1914. There they will find descriptions of infantry and artillery actions west of Péronne that could almost be from 1814 or 1870 (p14) whilst the scene in the dining room of Thiepval Chateau (p30) could be captured in one of those 19<sup>th</sup> century paintings of officers singing around a piano.

In a British account of the Somme the Germans are almost invisible other than as corpses or POWs. But as the Germans are in defence their image of the battle is very different. Mostly, they do not have the initiative. They await the attack in deep dugouts – or increasingly in muddy holes under concentrated artillery fire. Many of them refer to allied aircraft and the need to hide from them. But then the sentries will sound the alarm... *"From [our] position we could observe the advancing British in detail. Dense columns rose out of their trenches. Behind them came harnessed hospital wagons. The attack withered away in German artillery fire.... [Two hours later] no sooner had the men spread out in the shell craters than it was "Here they come!" The British advanced in immense masses. After a few moments the entire broad battlefield was covered with a great depth of advancing waves."* (p274). The description continues with British troops using a covered approach to overrun some blockhouses in a sunken road whilst low-flying aircraft strafe the German troops nearby.

<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang G. Natter. *Literature at War, 1914–1940: Representing the "Time of Greatness" in Germany*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 1999. pp. 280. \$35.00. A useful review is at [http://www.wlajournal.com/12\\_1/Reviews.pdf](http://www.wlajournal.com/12_1/Reviews.pdf)

Elsewhere “... beyond the hollow, was the steep rise to the village of Maurepas, down which streamed dense enemy columns. There were countless aircraft in the air buzzing around just above the ground. To our front and advancing in short bounds, were the British. I could see how, on the hand signal of an officer, the whole line rose and rushed towards us. They were about two hundred metres away.” (p276).

These tactics are very similar to those we have already read about in the 1914 battles between the French and Germans. Now, in 1916, the British are using mass tactics, the wide-spaced skirmishing lines of the old BEF being long gone. Even so, there are plenty of accounts of the New Army units pushing machine guns (presumably Lewis) well forward, searching for flanks and, surprisingly to me, the aircraft are always there; if anything even more ubiquitous than in WW2.

“How much easier it is to attack, than to stand and await an enemy’s attack!”. So reads Haig’s diary entry for 8 August 1918 and this book does illustrate something of the mental pressure facing the German Army on the Somme, indeed on the whole Western Front. Whatever the scale of their losses, German units tended to be in the trenches for longer than their British counterparts and the impact of artillery fire and the winter weather is illustrated vividly by a series of reports from commanders and Medical Officers.

This is not an operational history of how Rupprecht, von Below, von Gallwitz and their Corps and Divisional commanders fought the battle. Its great strength lies in the vivid picture of action at company level downwards. It really does offer a different view of the battle. Whatever the various motives of those who recorded the deeds of the *Sommekämpfer* it is surely right they be remembered as it is so difficult for many of us to imagine how they could endure it.

The German Army on the Somme by Jack Sheldon is published by Pen & Sword 2005, pp432 ISBN 1 84415 269 3 £25

### **Operation *Rheinübung* by Dave Boundy; offside report by Mukul Patel**

This was a terrific tryout, brilliantly presented, with complete briefings that improved upon the last version of the game. It’s a hunt the battleship game plus a load of other stuff. It’s the spring of 1941 and the U-boat war is getting hot; the Commonwealth [Ed. shouldn’t that be the Empire?] is on its own; the Germans haven’t lurched into the Soviet Union [that’s the theme for Jim’s game at the February meeting], and Nazi Admiral Raeder is sending out his big ships to cause even more mayhem in the Atlantic. *Bismarck* and other big ships are sailing, disguised raiders are waiting to pounce and U-boats are attacking the convoys. The British Navy have got intelligence, are going to get intelligence and a lot of combat and merchant ships to look after.

The game in its ideal form requires two Royal Navy and two German teams. The game board is a large map of the North Atlantic. We all had pencils, rulers, erasers and so on for map marking. The only extra tool required is a compass, for plotting future possible positions [Ed. actually, a protractor, for measuring three-figure bearings – or does Mukul mean a pair of compasses?] Game turn length is four hours, which worked fine.

I am not sure how the German teams worked, but luckily the Royal Navy teams got lumped into one team. This meant that I as commander had a subordinate to look after map marking and orders. I had another fine chap to look after stuff and with whom to talk ideas and plans. I therefore believe a Royal Navy team of one player would be overworked, two players would be very pushed, but three is ideal. I suspect with two teams this might still be the case as the extra liaison work would outweigh the reduction in assets.

The team sat in front of a map plots its current positions, future positions, enemy positions, probable and possible enemy positions; it sends orders to the Royal Navy, to the merchant convoys, to Fleet Air Arm, it

orders extra forces from Gibraltar, considers fuel requirements and takes account of weather. There's a lot to do, but it is gripping and challenging.

Eventually we got a minor surface to surface ship contact between two German big ships and a Royal Navy light cruiser. Dave stopped the hide and seek game, and brought out the battleboard to resolve the surface fight and to show us how it worked. I thought it took a fair while to resolve. I didn't get into it too much and much more liked the hide and seek map game. I think I would have been happy with an umpire telling m that there was contact with the enemy at a certain location and bearing; then after one or two hours of combat, that the enemy had escaped or was still in contact, whether the cruiser has been damaged/sunk and the last known position of my ship, the enemy contact and its bearing. I think this would have allowed the tempo of the game to keep flowing, and given more chance for the game to be played to a finale.

Dave has a number of improvements to add to the game. He is going to use computers help the players with plotting and orders. I suspect players will still need the map as well. This all sounds great! Dave can tell us more about this computer jiggery-pokery. I think Dave needs to think carefully about the role of the battleboard sub-game. I enjoyed it, thanks!