

Letter From America

by Jack Scruby

I feel quite honoured at being asked to submit a column on American Wargaming for Miniature Warfare to help make this publication an "international" organ. For, as we shall point out a little later, there is a difference in how war games are played in the USA and in England.

But the main thing is that John Tunstall has had the courage and foresight to put out a very excellent publication, and to have realized that there are enough war game players in the world to support such a journal. I am sure those of you who originally subscribed to my old "War Game Digest" will be more than pleased to see this magazine come out. It was only in 1957 that the WGD was first published, and eleven years the hobby has had such growth that it can afford a lavish publication. What will happen in the next eleven years will be wonderful to see probably! Anyway, congratulations to all those who dreamed up, and who are publishing

The one really interesting thing to have watched over the last years has been the trends wargaming has taken in the USA and in Great Britain. I date this trend as starting at about the same time that Don Featherstone began printing his "Wargamers Newsletter" and his first book on War Games. Up until that time actually only "War Game Digest" was being published, and the road war gamers were taking; no matter where they lived and played; was quite similar. For, if I am not mistaken, it was as late as 1962 when Brigadier Peter Young and I authored an article together on the use of cavalry in Napoleonic war games. Over a period of about six months, Peter and I exchanged letters on this subject, and expressing our viewpoints together we found a similarity at I don't think would exist today.

It seems to me the basic difference as it is today between American and British war gaming is the use of dice to a greater extent by the English, than it is used here in America. In all the publications to date printed in England; in all the stories published that are written by English war gamers; and in personal talks with Alan Rogers, who is the sole English wargamer I've met; this, plus two other issues are the difference; but these minor differences add up to making two complete types of war games.

For example, the English, to we Americans at least, seem to have their dice rolls control the game pretty much. You dice to see if one man hits, or kills, an enemy soldier; and then you dice to see if this soldier can be "saved". The English apparently dice to see if their cavalry can make a charge, if their infantry can fire a volley, etc. In fact, in reading some of the rules one cannot help but think that

a fist full of dice is required to be thrown on each individual's actions throughout the miniature battle.

In the US, dice rolling is usually limited to determining the amount of "kills" an artillery piece will make, or to determine the "morale" of any unit, AFTER it has fired its volleys, or fought in a melee. Copying the old HG Wells idea, the Americans have their cavalry make their charge, no matter how great the actual odds are, and no dice is required to determine if the riders are brave enough to do the job. And, as yet, I know of no single American who uses the "saving" roll, which, if I understand correctly, means you can save the life of an individual by being lucky with the dice. It is the feeling here in America that a war games outcome is determined more by the ability of the table top general to have maneuvered his troops better than his opponent, than to have everything decided upon the luck of the individual in being able to toss dice around. I think the basic rule of American wargaming can be best described in that old saying, "get there fastest with the mostest" and you'll win your war game!

Another great variation between our two country's wargaming lies in the fact that most Americans over the past five years have adopted the Joe Morschauser roster system, whereas the British still play the "individual" game. This means, in America, we glue down a "company" (or battalion, or regiment) of lead soldiers on a moving stand, give it a roster number, give it a qualitative factor, and no longer move each soldier individually. The use of this roster system has changed wargaming considerably over the Individual method. Under the Individual method, each soldier equals just one soldier on the battleground - in the Roster System a moving tray of 10 soldiers can equal 10 men, 100 men, 1000 men or what have you. At the same time, this means more soldiers can be moved quicker (thus speeding up the game) and "representational strength" can be varied. Thus, in a game on the Individual basis, every-one is more or less equal, soldier for soldier. In the Roster game, one stand of soldiers - which look just exactly like another stand - can "represent" more strength, more combat ability, have more morale factors, etc. What has been developed in American wargaming, using the Roster system, is the war game of "unbalanced equality". This means that you need not have equal armies on a man for man basis, but that one can have one force in great numbers of soldiers; the other in smaller numbers, but that the "total combat effectiveness" of both sides is equal - not numbers of model soldiers. As anyone can see, the difference between a game played on this basis, and one based on moving individual soldiers, all of more or less equal combat effectiveness can lead to quite different aspects of play.

The third major deviation between American and British games seems to be to be in the "morale factors". In America, "morale" is becoming more and more important. The use of morale breaks up the fact that in most games two huge lines of opposing soldiers stretch across the table top facing one another in a battle of attrition. In the US game, this no longer happens, since after most combat, one side or the other is going to "break" due to morale; and retire, leaving a "gap" in the line through which the adroit wargamer may pour in to "flank" his opponents force.

Now I know that the English use the morale factor also, but not as consistently as we do here, nor to the extent we do. Most American players war games are decided by "morale", not by casualties. For normally our rules here make it extremely difficult to "rally" troops that have retired in "panic" (due to bad morale), and often with minor casualties, one side or the other is defeated simply because once broken, his troops will not rally long enough to form up a line somewhere else to fight off the victorious opponent.

Thus, from a more or less common start years ago when most of us played by the Wells rules, the two lines of wargaming have come along two different roads. It is doubtful if an American wargamer visiting in England would enjoy too much the British game, while I feel certain the British wargamer might not like the "technicalities" imbued in the American war game as we play it today. Possibly, the best thing in a case like this, i.e. that the Wells rules should become more or less the standardized "international" war game rules, simply because they are simple and everyone can play them - and it makes a good game.

Of course, a set of "standardized" rules for everyone would seem to me to be the poorest thing that could happen to our hobby. I believe the one thing that appeals to everyone interested in war games is that there is no standardized set of rules and thus this is one of the few remaining hobbies that is entirely "free". Even in the collecting of single figures of military miniatures, one does not have this freedom, for every figure in such a

collection must be an exact duplicate of the real thing, down to the last button.

In war gaming each individual, whether he goes for realism in his rules or his table top arrangements, still plays the game his own way. If he doesn't like a Featherstone, Scruby or Morschauser rule he can toss it away and make up his own. If he doesn't like the British way of playing, he can adopt the American way, or make the game in his own way, or take any part of either game and put it together just for himself. And no one is hurt, or mad, or upset. You can imagine in a game of chess if the players decided to give a pawn all the movements of the Queen - the chess people would throw them out of the club!

Thus, the real basic rule of wargaming still is - whether played in England, or the USA - when you're at my house you play my rules and when I'm at your house, I play your rules. And that is what makes our hobby the greatest!

I'm afraid that I cannot agree with some of the things Jack says in his article and have sent him a copy of the rules used at the London Wargames Convention in 1967. I think, or at least I hope, that when he has read through them he will realise that on both sides of the Atlantic we are attempting to "recreate the tactics and weapon capabilities of the period played".

Editor

BELLONA

BELLONA BATTLEFIELDS

There are 15 different BELLONA BATTLEFIELD Sets, size $10\frac{1}{2} \times 5\frac{1}{2}$, suitable for 20mm figures, the various emplacements can be cut out and used as required, formed in earth brown pvc. The range includes British, German and Japanese Pillboxes, all types of artillery positions. A wide range of sandbagged and revetted emplacements for troops, machine guns, etc. Send for illustrated list.

BELLONA DIORAMA

The BELLONA DIORAMA range are large set pieces size $16\frac{1}{2} \times 10\frac{1}{2}$, formed in earth brown pvc. They form the ideal background for set pieces or the Centre piece in a Battle. The range includes:- D1. 1914-18 Trench System. D2. Menin Road, a large ruined house with cellar. D3. The Redan. D4 Twin 88mm Gun position. D5. Fighter Dispensal bay..... Send for illustrated list.

BELLONA TANK PRINTS

BELLONA TANK PRINTS will provide in series form the worlds most comprehensive and highly detailed Military Vehicle reference library ever produced. Each series contains an average four sets of highly detailed scale drawings (4mm to one foot) drawn by experts, each set of drawings will show a minimum of four views, plus photographic illustration, history and technical details. Fourteen different series available. Price 4/- per series. Send for Publication List.

BELLONA PUBLICATIONS

ARMoured VEHICLES a handy reference book covering the development of the tank from Little Willie onwards, over 500 illustrations, scale 1/16 in. to one foot. Size 11 x 5. Price 7/6 post 6d
SUMMARY OF SELF-PROPELLED WEAPONS OF THE GERMAN ARMY 1939-46
Part 1. Weapons on German-built fully tracked Chassis. Size 11 x 5 Price 9/- post 6d
MILITARY FIELD WORKS OF THE 18th and 19th CENTURY
a highly detailed sketchbook of Military field works. by William Holmes FRSA
Size 10 x 5 Price: 5/- post 6d

VUES DE WATERLOO a reprint of a booklet of contemporary engravings showing prominent places and features on the famous battlefield
Size $10\frac{1}{2} \times 8\frac{1}{2}$ Price 4/6 post 11d

BELLONA WARPICS

BELLONA WARPICS post card size real photographs of tanks and guns of World War II, our first list contains over 270 fully referenced photographs, with further list to follow. Send for list.

ILLUSTRATED MODEL CATALOGUE 6d. PUBLICATION LIST 3d. BELLONA WARPICS LIST 6d.

BELLONA - HAWTHORN HILL, BRACKNELL, BERKSHIRE, ENGLAND.