

Cold Wars 2020: We Few, We Happy Few

by Russ Lockwood

As I walked around the Lancaster Host, I kept thinking of lines from *Henry V* -- you know: "We few, we happy few," etc. I don't know how many attended, but eye-balling it around, maybe 750 or so?

Lampeter Room, 9:51am Friday sez my notes. Background emptiness, but foreground fun.



I was talking to Frank Chadwick in the Lampeter Room, catching up on his past, present, and future efforts, including Kickstarter for his *Breakthrough WWII* rules and GMT picking up his hex board wargames of the Eastern Front, when talk turned to the coronavirus and Cold Wars attendance. I looked around and guessed 75 people were in the room and he guessed more like 125 to 150.

So I started to count, table by table, gamer by gamer, with my arm extended and pointing a finger to count bodies. Including the folks behind the registration desks, it was 76...plus Frank and me. That's 78.

Oh, I may have been off by a couple or three people behind pillars, but you get the idea that Cold Wars was sparsely attended.

My guess is that if the convention was held a week earlier, it would have been close to usual 1,500-2,000 gamers. If a week later, it would have been canceled.

Of course, now I'm a pariah for the next two weeks...shunned like an Amish transgressor, but it's understandable. That's the way it goes.

Distelfink Room. Thursday 5:15 pm.



Greetings

For those who attended, ingrained habits of shaking hands were altered to include lots of elbow taps, 1980's forearm smashes, fist bumps, foot waggles, silly walks, interpretive dance, and very, very few handshakes. I did see a hand sniff -- by a gamer's service dog. Hand sanitizer was in abundance, including inside my goodie bag. I saw only one person wearing a mask.

Nothing's in perfect isolation, of course, in a convention with shared dice, figures, and charts, but everyone I saw made the effort.

Thursday

Last year, temperatures hit 70 or so during the convention. This year, they peaked in the high 60s.

Scott and I pulled into the parking lot around noon or so on Thursday to find a fairly deserted parking lot, even with the loss of spaces behind the hotel.

The renovations continue apace, but I was surprised to find that the Host's renovations seem to be stressed. The new steps from the back of the Hotel to the Dealer Hall (Tennis Barn) had been patched and I saw more cracks in a step or two.

The renovated tennis barn with new plaza.

The plaza outside the Tennis Barn was now installed with new stairs off to the side from the driveway to the plaza. Here, too, the work seems off, for at least one step was loose -- and these are large slabs of slate. By the end of the convention, multiple steps were loose -- you could hear the grinding as you stepped from one to another.

That said, the heat, lights, and hot water worked in my room, even if the baseboard covering for the electrical wiring by the TV had pulled from the wall. Maybe the Host, er, Wyndham might not want to pick the lowest bidder...

Back of the Host showing the tennis barn.

With no line at the register, check in was smooth, if delayed, because they had to reboot their systems. Maybe the guy working on the wiring pulled from the ceiling by the Starbucks had something to do with it -- dunno. He looked like the same guy working on pulled ceiling wiring wire from last year.

The rest of the place looked good, with lots of lighting in the lobby and main rooms. Yes, Virginia, the dingy atmosphere of the Distelfink is history.

Dealer area in the former tennis barn as early vendors set up on Thursday, 1:15 pm.

Dealer Hall

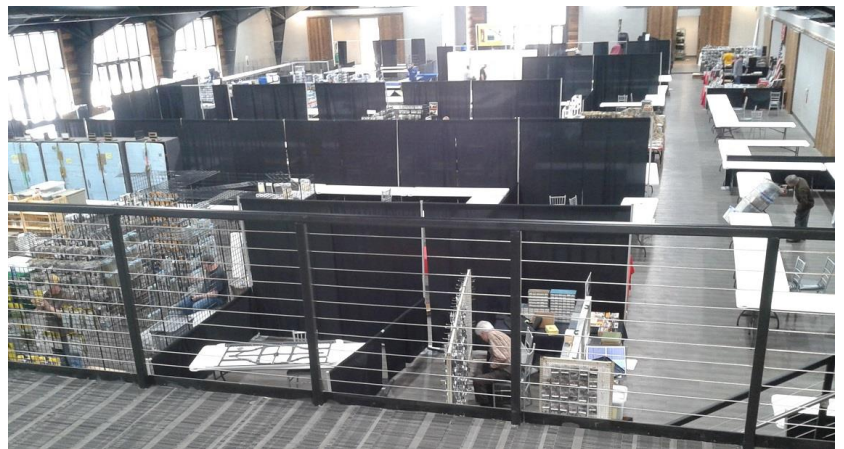
I trekked down to the Dealer Hall about 1:15pm to see what I could see. A few dealers were set up, but it was too early to tell how many would cancel. I chatted with the usual suspects...

One change was that the parking areas around the dealer hall were mostly a construction site. The plaza replaced one area and construction replaced the secondary parking area and all the grassy parking area.

That said, the dance of dealer vehicles seemed well managed given the tight quarters.

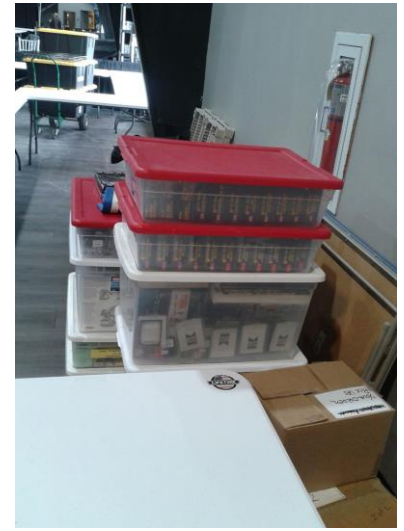
Loading 'dock' at the back of the tennis barn on Thursday, sans parking areas.

The Friday opening would see if the dealer area would be packed or empty.



As I wandered around the convention through the afternoon, more and more gamers arrived, so it wasn't going to be a complete bust, but it seemed less crowded than usual. That just allowed more time to catch up with folks I usually only see at HMGS conventions.

Silver Eagle booth in foreground, looking down the window wall. Now, if I had only remembered to take a photo when Silver Eagle was set up. Doh!



Command and Colors Samurai

I sat down to watch a samurai *Command and Colors* game in the empty Distelfink room. This samurai-specific version of C&C used the left-center-right activation cards to move units and attack. Specialty cards allow for special actions, although they usually carried a cost in honor points, which are picked up for battlefield success and optionally at the end of a player turn.

It all moved quick enough for two experienced gamers, although the main complaint was the sheer number of cards held in a hand and needed to be looked through. Many is the time where I heard one or the other gamer say something like, "Ah! I should have used this last turn!"

Wargamerus Lamentitus -- 'tis a common ailment.

Samurai game in progress. Green chips represent honor. Cards in two decks.



Cthulhu Game: Elder Sign

I met up with John in the Lampeter for some pick-up gaming. He brought a few games, so we tried *Elder Sign*, a Cthulhu-ish boardgame of defeating the cultists and monsters using a variety of dice and cards.

I randomly picked a player character card, Dexter Drake the magician, who started with a couple spells and a common item. He had 5 mental points (against madness) and 5 heart points (against wounds). When you lose the former, Dexter becomes insane and plays with his toes the rest of his life. When you lose the latter, Dexter dies in a pool of his own blood.

John and I battle the horrors of Cthulhu in Elder Sign.

The clock mechanism is a literal clock. Each turn takes 3 game hours of the 12 available per day. End a turn and turn the clock ahead. At the end of the day, a variety of events occur depending on what cards are showing on the table. Sometimes, it's a no event, while other times, a variety of effects burn heart and mental points, add monsters, and so on.

A separate clock mechanism counts down the time to releasing the big bad monster randomly drawn at the start of the game.

A series of tasks awaits your die rolls. Roll the right number of icons in the right order and your task is complete -- collect rewards, turn the clock forward, and the other player goes.

Random monsters show up to complicate the icons needed, or, remove dice from your toss. The common and unique items add a yellow or red die to your usual toss of green dice.



One Sign

The first game proceeded apace and indeed, it seemed like we sailed through the game, helped by 'clues' (re-rolls) and favorable cards. For example, I had two spell cards from the get go that banished monsters. When a particularly nasty varmint showed up, I played the card.

My man, Dexter Drake. The monster upper left stole our yellow die. The spell at lower right allows me to hold on to one green die for later use.



Two Sign

The second game wasn't quite as easy. Indeed, it seemed like we were going to be buried in monsters, not to mention slowly going insane and leaving a trail of our blood behind us. But with some clutch rolling, including more than our fair share of one out of six rolls, we battled back and gamed our assets for the win.

Monsters up close and personal. The High Priest called a secondary goon, who grabbed our red die. More secondary goons plague the unnatural habitat.



Red Sign, Blue Sign

Elder Sign is a eurogame. It was mildly entertaining to try a couple times, but like most eurogames, the sense of story was second to the spreadsheet aspects of counting, and manipulating, icons.

The use of cards and dice means every game will be different, and you can always use different characters who come with different mental and heart stats. The games didn't take long. Maybe about 45 minutes or so each. All of these aspects tic off the right boxes for a eurogame.

John Spiess is a blur of activity GMing Crecy, with French on left and English on right.

Knight to King's Bishop 3: Crecy

I wandered across the Lampeter Room to get in on John's game based on Crecy. I had played in his Viking Siege of Paris game at Historicon (see my 7/26/2019 AAR) and had a hoot.

In the case of Crecy, I was in the second wave of French knights and



arrived to find the Genoese crossbowmen already trading shots with the English longbowmen and a couple of English cannons. I don't recall cannons, er, bombards, at Crecy, but a pair of them held one square in the English line. Like the archers, they were behind stakes.

My troops: men-at-arms forming the second wave behind the knights in front of me.

Now, apparently what's old is new again, for John gridded his battlefield into squares. Sam Mustafa released *Rommel* as a gridded terrain system and Chris Parker's *D-Day to Berlin* also uses a grid. I recall seeing photos in the old *Wargamer Newsletter* showing gridded miniatures games. Board wargame-wise, most use hexes now, but early some games used squares.

My knights could move two squares and make a rotation. The English foot could either move two squares or move one square and rotate.

When the Chips are Down

Each player received three chips: red for firing, green for movement, and black for meleeing. You picked one for the turn.

The twist was that a player can give his chip to another player to use in addition to his own chip -- in essence, two chips. The C-in-C for each side also had a stack of orange chips to add to a player. Once used, the orange chips were permanently lost while other chips were returned to their owners.

I have no idea why this caused such confusion. Basically, one player is going to do nothing in order for his teammate to do two things. I'm guessing two is the maximum, for I never saw three chips played by a player. You couldn't shoot twice.

Now, I'm unsure of the logic of this twist. I'm also not sure what would allow a player to move and shoot/melee because his adjacent ally didn't do anything, but it worked in its own way and everyone had the option and used it.

It's a Knight Fever, Fight Fever

The crossbowmen tied down the English archers well enough while additional crossbowmen eliminated the English bombards. That left a one-square-wide hole in the English line -- a line fronted by miles of stakes.

My five stands of MAA shoot the gap. Note the foot MAA on the back of my three leadings stands -- unhorsed from the stakes, but still able to fight.



Before the English could fill in the gap, the left-most French knights began their melees to tie up the English, leaving my second line of mounted Men-At-Arms (M-A-A) a clean shot at the gap, providing the French King gave me extra chips.

Sure enough, he pulled back the crossbowmen and gave the chips to the far right knights, who were sweeping behind the English line, and then to me.

Frank (left) and Kevin struggle to contain my troops filling the gap and hitting flanks. Alas, the two closest stands with two and three mounted figures respectively are mine, having taken casualties.

I hit the gap and pushed forward. Now, crossing the stakes required 50% saving roll for EACH of my M-A-As. As each stand had five figures, I was able to beat the odds and save four of five on all five of my stands. The fifth was unhorsed, but still able to fight.

Battered, my troops maneuver behind the English line and put the English foot in peril. Up top, the French threaten the other flank in front (top right corner) and in flank (just off photo up top).

MAA-MAA, Just Killed a Stand

The square shape meant that units did not fight on the diagonal. They had to be flush up against the target square. The square to my left felt the wrath of two of my mounted M-A-A units and vaporized. The stand to my right was hit, but not very hard.

Combat was a very Featherstonian roll 1d6 per figure (2d6 per mounted figure) and 6s scored a hit. Flanking units tossed double dice. So, my stand of four mounted M-A-A figures tossed 8d6, with flanking stands tossing 16d6. One hit kills a foot figure and two hits kill a mounted figure.

English stands contained 12 archer



and 6 M-A-A figures in three ranks -- so I needed 18 hits to wipe it out. The first two ranks toss dice. The English needed 10 hits to wipe out my cavalry stand. Front to front, French cavalry stands toss 10d6s to the English 12d6s. So, all told, advantage English...but I had scooted through the gap and was pounding on the flanks.

Better yet, the French commander on my left was in the process of demolishing the English in front of him, so there was a sweeping of the left flank in progress.

Oh, I took losses. Two of my stands were whittled down to two figures and were forced to make a 2d6 morale test. When they failed, they fled towards the rear.

On the right hand flank, the French chewed through the advance troops and hooked around the flank. The English pushed a line, a thin line, to stop them, but it was looking like Cannae.

The English army hit breakpoint, but the stalwart lads from across the Channel rolled well enough to continue the battle.

My last two stands slam into the English foot in flank and in rear, but there are so many of them, they're still hanging around. Up top, my French compatriots face off against the new English interlopers.



Say Good Knight, Crecy

Losing men, my M-A-

As continued to roll up the line...but just as we French finished crushing the left and started munching on the center, the English king showed up with a trio of units to support the center and stop our freewheeling ways. These English reinforcements blocked the other French commanders more than me, for I was down to only two combat-effective stands of my original five.

In any case, we hit the wall of the English King's reserve and they dished out damage -- too much damage, for the French army soon hit breakpoint and the required 2d6 roll.

Sad to say, our own king had fallen protecting the middle and keeping the English on their side of the stake line, so one of the French commanders rolled...and failed.

We French fled as fast as our little hooves could take us away from the English.

Another gorgeous, down to the last roll, game from John. I can hardly wait to see what he comes up with for Historicon.

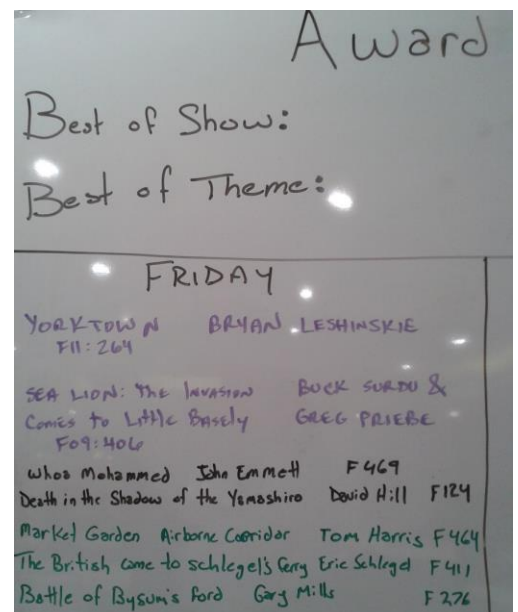
Friday

First things first -- I headed over to the Lampeter Room to pick up my badge and swag bag. I had preregistered and printed out the e-mail with the square barcode. A quick scan and it printed out my badge and gaming tickets. The badge had both a spring-loaded clip (preferred) and a safety pin to attach to your clothes.

Friday award winners.

I picked up my psuedo-backpack and peered inside: a tiny jar of hand sanitizer (someone at HMGS was on the ball), a magnet with Cold Wars April 8-11, 2021 date at the Ocean City, MD convention center (more on this later), and a...a...an oversized wrist keychain?

I have no idea why anyone would need a keychain. Frank had the best explanation: a scrunchie for a man bun. The psuedo-backpack was a great idea for all those dealer area and flea market purchases.



Pondering the imponderables of swag, my top three useful items: a pseudo-backpack or tote bag is best, followed by a tape-measure or ruler in inches and mm, and then a set of dice.

Command and Colors Medieval game.

Walkabout

The dealer hall didn't open until noon, so I had some time to do some walking, do some gawking, do some talking, and just wander about catching up.

I found Allen involved in a Command and Colors Medieval game. It seemed to play the same as the samurai version. I did wonder about how a cavalry unit could attack through its rear hex, but he noted you should treat it like a board game.

A nice-looking ACW game using Fire & Fury rules was in the Lampeter room. I'm not sure if it was the new regimental or new brigade rules, but the Rebs looked to be advancing smartly across the fields.

ACW action on Friday morning.

On the next table over, WAMP put on a Star Wars ground game. While I watched, Luke battled Darth Vader and the wookiee took a shot as storm troopers and Rebel riff-raff fell from blaster bolts.

Foreground (clockwise): Pat measures movement, Lou checks stats, Seamus ponders a counter attack, and Ryan watches the Storm Trooper waltz. Far background: Frank Chadwick and Tom Harris practice social distancing with an unknown gamer.

In the lobby area, a samurai Test of Honor game featured a large table and some sort of fortified house atop a hill. I should've snapped a photo later in the day of the game in progress, for the figures were nicely painted as well, but alas, I merely gawked.

In the Hawks room, a Viking raid was in progress featuring the largest playing cards I've ever seen outside of a game show. I also saw sheep, but I guess gold was of more importance to the raiders.



Dealer Donut

No, HMGS wasn't handing out donuts in the dealer area. The 'donut' I'm referring to is a large hole in the hall when Windsword, and perhaps another dealer or two or three or more decided not to attend.

On the plus side, that allowed at least a couple of vendors, notably Clash of Arms/Against the Odds, to receive a premium booth upgrade to inside the hall instead of tucked next to the side door.

I arrived at about 1pm. To put a brave face on it, it wasn't too bad, but you could tell this wasn't the normal Cold Wars traffic. I bought items on my list and went looking for items on my buddies' lists -- although if they weren't coming to the show that meant they weren't going to get their goodies until two weeks after the convention.

Samurai Test of Honor table.

Dealer Diving

I took photos of various lines of booths and dealers amid my shopping, although in retrospect, I really needed to do the photoshoot after shopping, for I found my coverage woefully inadequate -- even when I stopped to chat with dealers. So, with apologies to those I did not photograph directly, I'll have to do better next time. Photos at the end of Cold Wars report.

Talk: Tips for Writing an AAR

I arrived for my talk at 4pm on Friday at the Hopewell Room to find it almost empty. Two guys were towards the front and one fellow was eating an early dinner in the back row.

Mind you, I expected a talk about writing to be a lower priority than game design, historical events, or just plain gaming. Add in about half attendance and three was better than zero.

Except...the two guys thought my talk was about game design. It took me a second and I said, "Ah, you want the Heritage Room. This is the Hopewell Room. Up the stairs to the lobby, up the stairs to the kids' playroom, and before you get to the playroom, hang a left."

They thanked me, apologized, and headed off. Well, one fellow waiting and two leaving...hmmmm...I guess that meant I had an audience of negative one. I figured I should take a photo to prove someone was there. When he finished his meal, he left.



Crickets, save for the MC of the War College. Just as I was about to give up, a couple of gamers wandered in for the talk. I should have taken a photo. Honest, they were there.

Nobody Expects the Wargaming Inquisition

The two main traits needed for a successful After Action Report (AAR) are Surprise, Speed...and nice looking figures. I mean, the three main traits needed for a successful After Action Report (AAR) are Surprise, Speed, Nice Looking Figures....and great looking terrain. Doh!

Among the many traits needed for a successful After Action Report (AAR) are Surprise, Speed, Nice Looking Figures, Great Looking Terrain, and Fanatical Devotion to Die Rolling...

The Viking raid in the Hawks room on Friday. Apparently, size matters for playing cards.

Now that I've ripped off Monty Python, I tried to emphasize the intangibles of writing an AAR -- that sense of story I keep talking about. To me, it's more than laying out a scenario and recapping who pushed troops where and which units rolled well or poorly...It's about embedding those five aspects of gaming into a story with a beginning, middle, and end.

I likened this to a good book. Fiction or non-fiction, good authors bring you into not only the action, but the motivation for the actions. An AAR is no different. You're going to tell a story and most stories start at the beginning. Although not mandatory, for flashbacks are quite the staple in literature, history often relies on chronology, so, the beginning is a good place to begin an AAR.

Surprise

I stressed that you should write the way you want to read. If you like a 'just the facts, ma'am' style, that's great. The surprise will be in the game, maybe a lucky roll, maybe a strange move, or maybe the outcome, but the sequence of events will provide the surprise.

Me? I like to get a little more creative, so my definition of surprise extends to absurdities, embellishments, observations, and all sorts of humor -- well, I hope it rates a chuckle or two.

For example, I could have set up an American Revolution scenario the way the GM did -- Loyalists gather a force to crack down on Patriot (or Traitor, depending on your point of view) looting. Instead, I put it to rhyme:

Now this here's a story
about a man named Russ,
Loyal to the Crown and
never ever made a fuss.
Then one day
he was
tendin' to his farms,
When up through
the fields
came traitors bearin' arms.

"Turncoats," he sez.
"Patriots, my foot."



It continues and it's nice rhyming, so what's the big surprise? Well, that opening rhyme is set to the theme song of the 1960s TV show, *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Surprise!

Go ahead, go back and sing it. If you don't know the tune, it's on You Tube. I know, I doublechecked the rhyming patterns.

Now, that doesn't have anything to do with the game, but from the e-mails I got in response, folks appreciated an opening twist. I see these AARs as a way of not only recording the game and the participating gamers, but also as a way to try and capture the enjoyment, and occasional madness, of gaming.

I've done other lyric substitutions, altered and adapted pop culture references, dropped puns, inserted sight gags, and tortured the logic of rules and situations in ways silly and serious to inject fun and information into the AAR. I once wrote an entire AAR about a WWII *Command Decision* game in the style of a *Flashman* novel. And yes, I know I'm not in the league with George McDonald Fraser, but since I was playing the Brits, I sure felt like ol' Flashy at times during the game, so that's how I wrote it.

Say What You Mean, But Don't Be Mean in What You Say

Humor, of course, can backfire, especially since writing must convey body language and tone or else it can be misinterpreted. Although I'm not a social scientist, or play one on TV, my guess is that emojis started as a way to replicate such non-verbal clues.

If your gaming group is like ours, us gamers have known each other for quite some time. Sarcasm is a part of our sessions, but translating the basis for that sarcasm requires a light touch. Without emotional background, otherwise clever bon mots can often be read as demeaning. An emoji won't help as much as passage that dances with the basis of the sarcasm.

I suppose humor is a little like art: you'll know it when you see it. So I try and emphasize the positive in the AARs. If you have to touch on the negative, touch on the situation, not the player. And remember that a negative for one side is a positive for the other side -- and that's often easier to joke about.

Speed Rules

So, assuming you write an AAR that generally starts at the beginning, has a middle, and then an end, how do you get through the middle? With speed.

The key here: gloss over the more typical movements and combats and concentrate on the highlights. To readers not at the game, a move-by-move and combat result-by-combat result recounting will slow down the story.

These highlights can inject additional surprise. For example, in a Napoleonic *Shako* game, three French Imperial Guard columns bore down on one regular Austrian unit in line. Everybody at the table knew what would happen: the IG would roll over my quaking Austrians. Even if you weren't at the table, you know the outcome. Or do you?

In the description, I glossed over previous IG successes and concentrated on this particular combat ... a highlight, so to speak.

I quickly explained the rule that allowed me to roll volley fire -- only a 6 on a d6 would save me. I rolled a 6 and the IG columns fell back disordered. OK, a clutch lucky roll, but what happened next combined the situation, the reader's new understanding of the rules, and the good-natured jesting between gamers. Here's what I wrote:

“ Jay hemmed and hawed about what to do with his three columns.

I offered my opinion. "Oh, what is the matter, Imperial donkey bottom biters? Has your la audace been passed? I wave my Viennese sausage at you, you Shrimpi Gardeners! Now, surrender the Corsican Ogre, or I shall taunt you a second time."

Jay charged. It was the same three columns, only they were a tad more shot up than last time. Once again, Dave charged a cavalry unit.

I rolled against Jay's infantry. My die bounced and tumbled across the tabletop. Lo and behold! A 6!

The Allies cheered anew, with Phil pummeling my arm in glee and Sam roaring with laughter. Jay turned away, disgusted and disgraced by my clutch roll. Dave slapped the edge of the table and threw up his hands. Mike groaned and moaned as the French plans unraveled before their very eyes. ”



This happened during the game, although in the write up, as you probably guessed, I embellished the Monty Python adaptation. A little embellishment is OK in an AAR if it conveys the camaraderie of the players.

Although 99% of you were not at the game, I suspect such a wacky die-rolling coup has happened in some game you've played. Without getting too clinical, a combination of situation, humor, surprise, and emotional response made for a better recap of this one combat highlight than a straightforward "I rolled another six and sent them packing" or "They came in the same way and I chased them away the same way" or some such encapsulated recap.

I snapped a photo (*at right*) of the big attack and repulse, which provided the visual cues to supplement the written explanations.

And I also suspect you might want to know what Jay did next...

It's the middle of a story, and hopefully a compelling highlight that makes the reader want to read on.



Rules On Rules

Like the recap, a rules explanation should be enough to grasp a situation and not copy the rulebook. Most gamers are familiar with the 4Ms: movement, missile (firing), melee, and morale and most rules use them. Preferably, your explanation will blend the situation with the rules and the tension of possible results.

In the case of the Imperial Guard recoil, readers had to know the volley and stagger components of the melee sequence. It was only one short paragraph:

“ Then came the melee against the Imperial Guard. I had one chance, or should I say, one chance in six, of surviving. If I rolled a 6, I'd put two hits total on his troops, disorganize them (stagger in Shako parlance), and halt the mass an inch away -- no melee. Only a 6 would stop the charge. ”

My first time roll was a 6, which made the second charge of the IG all the more tension filled.

Rules Analysis

Now, if you disagree with a rule, or your logic finds something absurd, it is perfectly OK to say so as long as you provide some rational for your disagreement and an example.

Personally, I find rolling for movement the worst mechanic you can ever stick in a game. A bad roll takes the player out of a game -- and I come to game, not sit around. The longer the time frame that a turn represents, the more reprehensible I find such a mechanic. Yet, as I always point out, the logic conundrum is mine and mine alone -- although you will often find me embellishing such interludes as troops setting up an impromptu picnic, sightseeing, or debating post-modernistic architecture.

Oftentimes, rules will be a mix of the good, bad, and ugly. I like *Chain of Command's* die-rolling command and control mechanic, but find the grenade prep-and-toss rules ridiculous -- not that I minded altering the Monty Python Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch sketch in the AAR.

My point is to summarize only rules that impact the game while providing an example of a rule in the course of a game highlight.

Nice-Looking Figures and Great-Looking Terrain

Most phones take photos and most can be e-mailed to yourself, allowing you to include them in the AAR.

Don't be intimidated if your photos aren't going to be included in the National Geographic Wargaming Edition. Taking multiple photos helps -- one of 'em's bound to be useable, right? A little cropping goes a long way, too. In my case, it's a lot of cropping.

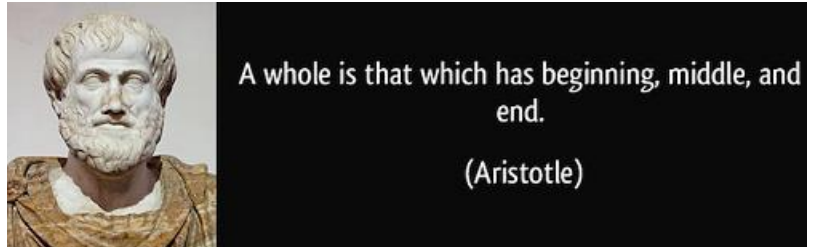
Also, don't be intimidated that the figures and terrain aren't museum quality. I'm happy to game, so I'm fine with a tabletop of carpet and felt. As the years go by, the goodies get a little fancier and the tabletop gets a little better looking.

Don't get me wrong, I like to game with nice-looking figures and great-looking terrain. We're a visual and tactile hobby, but most important of all to me, we are a social hobby. I take photos of the tabletop and also the people around the tabletop. I may not know everyone's name if it's a convention photo, but that's OK, you probably don't know them either. Gamers gaming is good enough for me.

Beginning, Middle, and End

As I've stated, a story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. And in general, following that chronology may help you to recap your game. It's not a hard and fast rule, but we history buffs appreciate an order of events that leads from start to finish.

Hey, don't just take it from me...Image from web.



Yet, don't fear putting anecdotes and images out of order, but understand you'll need a deft touch to lead off an AAR with the end result and work backwards to the initial deployment.

I have on occasion boosted the middle part of a game up top and then eased into deployments -- call it a flashback -- but not that often. I might foreshadow a situation, much like a peak into the future, but generally I stick to the beginning, middle, and end.

Speaking of Endings: Fanatical Devotion to Die Rolling

I like AARs with analysis mixed with the recap and fun. I balance, or at least try to balance, rules explanations while hitting the highlights of a game.

Like the best histories, the conclusion leaves the readers with the moral of the story, or at least some wrap up remarks on the positive aspects of the game. And if all else fails, blame the dice.

AARs get easier and better with practice. You don't have to create the great Wargaming AAR each time. Sometimes it's just enough to put down an overview and impression. Above all, be comfortable with what you want to do and how you do it. This hobby's about fun, not work...or so I like to believe.

I hope some of the above offers some encouragement for you to write AARs of your games. I only wish I had started my own much earlier.

HMGS Membership Meeting

I was 20 minutes late for the HMGS Membership Meeting on Friday night. I never used to go, but now it's a staple of my convention experience. Alas, I also had to duck out during the meeting. So, my usual caveat: my recap comes from notes I scribbled down, so any errors are mine and mine alone. The official HMGS meeting minutes will have the full details of the meeting.

Moving Cold Wars

Space rental at the Wyndham Host went from \$10,500 to \$19,500, and would increase \$2,000 per year thereafter. HMGS learned about this in April 2019.

Ocean City, Md. Convention Center. Image from web.

Under such a contract, hotel room rates for the block of reserved rooms would be \$134



in 2021, \$144 in 2022 and \$154 in 2023. Worse, the hotel (now under Wyndham) would not, unlike other hotel chains, honor commissions to HMGS for rooms booked. For Historicon 2019 and the Marriot, that was \$9,000, which HMGS used to pay down the space costs. The 'old Host' as privately owned, didn't give such commissions.

The Host has about 85,000 square feet in total, although HMGS uses more because games get put on in hallways, lobby, etc. The remodeled tennis barn (dealer area) lost about 30% of its space, now down to 18,000 square feet -- which means less revenue from booths/tables rentals. The vendor hall accounts for about 40% of the revenue that pays for the convention. The smaller space means turning away vendors and not allowing any vendors to expand.

HMGS previously examined sites for Historicon (downtown Lancaster) and Fall-In (Valley Forge), so they had a base of information about venue costs. HMGS went back to relook at 10 and narrowed the list to 5 or 6 serious proposals, with Ocean City, MD, coming up with the best offer, although details were not mentioned.

Ocean City has 214,000 square feet and free parking. Your badge gets you on some sort of free shuttle service.

The downside is no attached hotel, but some hotels and motels are within walking distance, with a wide range of pricing, presumably off-season pricing, too.

Treasurer's Report

The trend seems to be increasing venue costs of about 10% in 2019. Revenues are generally solid, with 2019 showing a profit of \$13,500. In general, HMGS has \$394,000 in cash assets and no liabilities.

In my opinion, and only my opinion, like the previous convention moves, and here I'm thinking of the Historicon and Fall-In, HMGS will have to deal with the fear component -- gamers won't come, vendors won't come, too far to walk, too far to drive, too far to get a coffee, and so on and so on. If you go, as I did, to both the cons, you'll find the same great gaming, comraderie, and products as before. For me, Ocean City is about two additional hours of driving, more of a concern for me on the Sunday drive back than the drive down, but doable. back to the Meeting.

Historicon 2020?

Cold Wars slid in under the coronavirus bans. So far, HMGS is planning to hold the Historicon convention in July. Obviously, much depends on how the virus' hold on the country goes. Stay tuned.



Outreach

HMGS has sponsored a number of school events that teaches history via miniatures. Small grants are available to teachers.

Allies and Conventions

HMGS continues to negotiate with some sort of co-sponsored event, like an Adepticon East, to generate some cross-over appeal among boardgamers, eurogamers, etc. If, and the board emphasizes if, such a deal is agreed to, paperwork will take some time, so nothing soon.

Considering that in a normal HMGS convention, Saturday nights are half filled and Sundays are virtually completely empty, the board feels providing space for 'Adepticon East' tournaments, however, far from historicals events might be, can help boost the profile of HMGS.

Likewise, HMGS is looking into a HMGS-Midwest alliance, possibly making the Little Wars convention HMGS' 'fourth' convention. HMGS-Midwest has a new board and good will between the chapters increased.

For both of these, stay tuned.



Friday Night Walkabout

The meeting over, I meandered around the convention taking photos and gawking a bit.

Friday 9:26pm, Lampeter Room.

Over in the Lampeter, I stumbled upon a *Black Cross Blue Sky* board wargame with stands holding aircraft counters. Dials on the stands recorded stats like height. The game seemed to have just started and already the dogfighting had begun.

Top: *Black Cross Blue Sky*. Middle: *Arnhem*. Bottom: *Saga*.

On the other side of the room, a *Chain of Command* game was in progress, with a great version of Arnhem and bridge (or half a bridge). The Germans were just starting to cross the bridge with their trucks, half tracks, and an armored car. The British were waiting, although the armored car struck first by hosing the top of a building with 20mm fire, knocking of a couple paratroopers.

Way in the back, the folks from Harmony Hut gamed a *Saga* skirmish revolving around a small village. I can't say I understood all the icons on the special dice, but the game includes a chart to aid players in what each icon allows them to do.

Downstairs, in an area usually reserved for *Carnage and Glory*, a half dozen gamers pushed troops across the table.

HMGS Awards

Per usual, HMGS hands out awards for interesting games. I snapped a photo of the Friday winners. Alas, I failed to snap a photo of the Saturday winners.

Saturday

Saturday dawned too early for me, mostly because I planned on having the \$15 breakfast buffet before my 9am game. It was typical of the Host -- eggs were fine, bacon was excellent, coffee needs help but seems better than last year's swill, and the orange juice, although now with pulp, still seems watered down. They had an omelet chef, which was new, but slow.

For some reason, they no longer set down a carafe of coffee on a table -- so we're constantly



chasing down the waitress for refills. Eventually, they actually seemed to get the idea that gamers need coffee and lots of it. Not that we'll be back there anytime soon, but my suggestion: if a table of four wants coffee, put a carafe on the table...just like they used to.

Lampeter Room. Saturday 9:02am.

World at War: Bulge

WAMP: The Wargaming Association of Metropolitan Philadelphia put on its usual over the top extravaganza, this time the central sector of the Battle of the Bulge using its homegrown *World at War* rules. Each stand is about a battalion or so, maybe armor is a company. I've played this a couple times before and it's a die-rolling slugfest meant for a fast and furious game. The game started with a briefing at about 9am and lasted to 1:30pm to 2pm or thereabouts.

Other side of the Lampeter Room. Saturday 10:50am. Battle of the Bulge game in progress in foreground.

Most units tossed three or four dice, subtracting a die here and there for extended range, enemy cover, and so on. Most of the time, you're looking for 5s and 6s for average units and 4s, 5s, and 6s for veteran units. Each unit takes a number of hits before being eliminated.

When you lose more than half of a regiment, the regiment takes a morale check. Fail and the entire regiment flees off the table. When half or more of your regiments flee, the division takes a morale test.

It's enough nuance to keep the game moving -- and there are a lot of stands in a division. Anything else would bog the game down.

The back table with US reinforcements. Pat (left, hat) sees to last second adjustments at Bastogne (top of table) while Henry looks over troops. I would command the two infantry divisions where Henry is standing. Powerful armored divisions are on the other half of the table. Pipe cleaners delineate divisions.

The German Surge

I was in the back with the reinforcements: two US infantry divisions under my direct command, and I moved the adjacent armored division because the front-line commander was in the thick of the battle with the advancing panzers. Two more US armored divisions were on this second table, controlled by other US front-line



commanders. I moved all three up towards the Germans, occasionally pumping in a few long-range artillery shots to whack a German unit.

Lou (lower left) briefs both sides at start at the main table. The other table (reinforcement) abuts.

The Germans ground forward, concentrating on the one US division stationed in front of Bastogne and eventually sending it packing. Panzer Lehr led the way in the center and engaged me, wracking up my losses with impunity. It didn't help that I was just inside off-board long-range German artillery range.

Note that the first three turns turned out to be heavy snowfall, so tanks and other vehicles could not use the double move (and nothing else but move) option. On turn 4 such a prohibition lifted, presumably so that the US armored reserves don't immediately engage the Germans. It did take time for units to concentrate in the area of the offensive.

US forces dug in on the main table.

It also didn't help that I seemed utterly unable to roll to entrench (50% chance) with the leading units. The guys in the back dug in just fine, thanks, but the infantry moving up? As we say in Joisey, fudgetaboutit. OK, nobody I know in New Jersey says that.

In any case, my regiments took losses, dealt out some death, and my lead division headed for the hills. The initial line of German units, or at least the more vulnerable PzIVs and STuGs, were but wrecks on the battlefield. The Tigers, well, I left those for the armored divisions to tackle.

The Germans at the main table start up the attack. Notice the 'Loshiem Gap' at the tops of the table. FYI: The ground cloth is by Cigar Mats.

My second division advanced a regiment onto the main table, failed to dig in, and took a pounding. About the



only thing I can say is that I at least paused the German advance -- likely they had to stop and clear away the remains of my troops.

US Airborne hunker down in Bastogne.

Bastogne

The airborne division held the town all game, although shells rained down on the units. Still, they were in cover and at long range, so initially, they could take it. As the panzers cleared the intervening US infantry division, and took out my infantry division, losses started to accumulate.

Still, in all the turns of the game, Bastogne held out.

The US moves up on the reinforcement table on Turn 1.

The US Left Flank

If the Germans concentrated panzer power in the middle, the 18th Volksturm headed for our left flank -- right into the teeth of a couple divisions and two reinforcing armored divisions.

As you might imagine, our defense didn't budge. Indeed, the Field commanders, and that's a bit of a pun here, counterattacked and dented the German flank, sending the Volksturm division back to Berlin.

The US armored division to my left angled in to try and save my exposed infantry divisions, but there's only so much it could do in the face of Tigers. Still, it took out its pound of German steel.

End Game

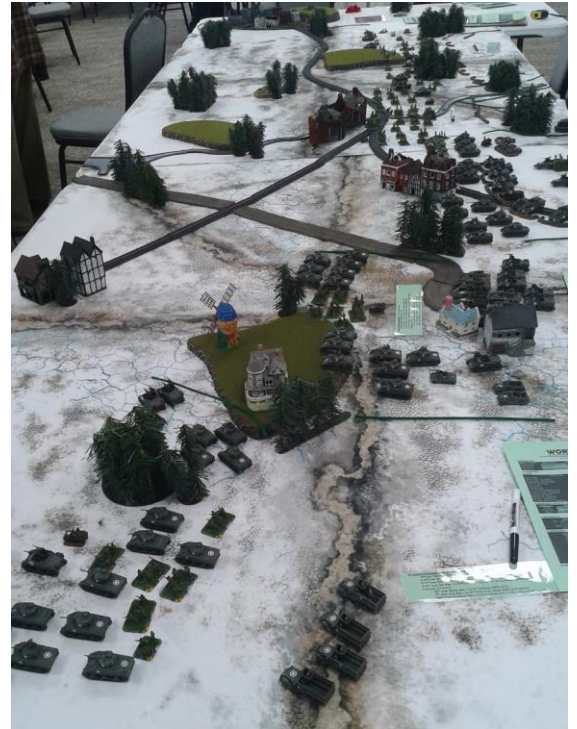
The goal, or so I was led to believe, was to keep the Germans as far away from my home table edge as possible. They never got to

the second table, although two US infantry divisions were toast and my second infantry division was getting close to that magical 50% morale roll. Man, if you ever bring infantry units to a tank fight, bring a lot more because one-on-one is not a good odds ratio.

Although my efforts as the reinforcing wave were modest, the front line players were into carnage from the outset.

Tyler advances with a horde of panzers as Lou (upper right corner) offers some advice.

Once again, I found *World at War* entertaining and kudos to Lou and Pat for running the game. In fact, they ran multiple games of *WaW* representing different areas of the Bulge offensive. The troops do double and triple duty, of



course, but then again, most divisions have 20 to 30 stands or so, with the square US armored division at about 40 stands. That's a lot of metal on the tables -- and it looked mighty impressive.

Sam (left) and Henry not only defend the US left flank, they counterattack and sent the Volkssturm packing. Lou (right) watches the carnage unfold.

Beer Run

I meandered down to the flea market, picked up a couple of things, and then walked about a little more.

I forgot about the Saturday afternoon beer and munchie spread in the dealer hall. I ambled down there to talk, gawk, and take care of a little business. But I certainly partook of the beer and grabbed one of the big cookies -- perfect mid-afternoon snack.

Dinner with the *Against the Odds* crowd at an Amish restaurant, Good and Plenty -- with plenty of space and few patrons -- to discuss upcoming releases.

Notable: I had cherry pie. Why is that notable? It was March 14, or otherwise known as 3/14. Yes, I did my part to uphold Pi day.

And in case you're wondering, Tau day is June 28, or twice pi. I guess you have to eat a double-sized piece of pie, or maybe something starting with the letter T.

German artillery seek US targets on the reinforcement table. Alas, although my artillery is dug in, my infantry's die rolls make them believe this is parade ground time. German commander (right) picks a spot with the help of the US 2nd armored division commander (left). Michael (back to camera) brings forward the Panzer Lehr on the main table.

Goin' Ape: *Planet of the Apes*

"It's a madhouse! It's a madhouse!" I screamed at the top of my lungs in the Cornwall room.

OK, I really didn't do that. I sat quietly by the table watching Pete Panzeri and his son Peter set up a *Planet of the Apes* game using well-crafted figures by a company that had to discontinue them due to copyright objections. The great ape army, including cannon, was set to take back the bomb before the mutant cultists blew up the planet.

My platoon of apes.

I was left-flank Ape commander Bananas McBananasFace, Tom was center commander, and Peter was right flank commander. We each ran a platoon of



infantry, a unit of cavalry, and a cannon. Pete GM'd and ran the cultists.

GM Pete (left) answers questions as Peter (middle) and Tom (right) advance. My apes on the right pass through the jungle.

Run Through the Jungle

My troops filtered through the jungle, although the cultists attempted a mind control trick to make my soldiers stop and sniff for bananas. Yet my apes were up to the task and ignored such a blatant attempt to delay me -- we only stop for smoothies.

Still, the steep-sided ravine ahead forced me to cede control of my cannon to Peter, who formed a grand battery, if three muzzle loaders make up something grand, over on our right flank.

Sheena, Queen of the Jungle

A random event brought the barbarian queen Sheena and her all-star caveman band off the right flank and they charged Peter's ape squad. Although a volley failed to deter them, the melee was less bloody and more posturing. Cavalry saved the infantry and chased Sheena away, except the cavalry failed the roll to halt and followed the cave people off table -- later to reappear behind the advancing infantry skirmish line.

Wicked Witch Rules

Pete used his *Wicked Witch* rules, which uses activation akin to *Frontiers in Flames* if I recall right (well, that's a dubious proposition). Each player rolls a d6 for each commander and that's the number of action points available to that unit.

Mutant cultists get ready for the ape invasion.

The rolls can be modified: for example, the ape squad leaders get a -2 to the roll (minimum of 1 action). The platoon commander can use his points to add to his subordinates, and the player's commander can add his points to individual units within command radius. Likewise, the overall C-in-C can add his points to any under his command.

Like Shako, units showing 6s go first, then 5s, 4s, etc. However, as a unit spends action points, thus turning the die side, eventually the die face will be less than the opposing side's die faces, and then the opposing units get their chance to perform an action. Thus, you get a nice interaction among all the players at tableside.

Somewhere in there, and I apologize for not knowing exactly when triggered, the GM flips over a card, sort of like a random event. In our case, Peter's first card was the appearance of Sheena and squad. Later, he drew a flaming



wagons card and they thundered against the center of our line. Other cards were reinforcements for both sides. I'm guessing there was a chart he consulted.

Over Hill, Over Dale

Once past the jungle, my troops advanced up and over the rocky hill, only to be surprised to find a mutant cultist flamethrower squad appear behind my lines. I ignored them and kept advancing, using the pips for movement actions. As it turned out, they were another Jedi mind trick and nothing but illusion.

My apes advance up and over the rocky hill.



The closer we came to the cultist fortress, the more the cultists tried to disrupt our advance. A machine gun at the entrance to the complex holding the bomb was a good start, not to mention numerous 'spells' and mind tricks -- we apes are a doltish lot, after all.

I hunkered down in a small ravine and traded shots with the cultists while my cavalry swung wide and flanked them. In the ensuing melee, the mutants broke, but fled closer to the bomb. I nevertheless swarmed the hill and meleed again, chasing them even further back.

Hey Diddle Diddle, Right Up the Middle

As Peter set up the grand battery and pounded the right flank, Tom charged the middle right into the teeth of the MG. He was repulsed. He tried again and was repulsed again. But the third time was the charm and he slaughtered all except the MG, which he bypassed. I don't think we ever killed the MG crew.

I believe that's when the ticking started on the bomb as Peter started the countdown clock. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Peter charged the hill, only to be ambushed by real flamethrower troops. Charge and countercharge, volleys and stabbings, and Peter found himself king of the right flank hill.

My cavalry and infantry clears the mutant cultists off the hill as Tom charges the middle.



Battle for the Bomb

A special suicide squad surrounded the bomb, then peeled off to attack Tom. Alas, it was more a one-to-one loss ratio, so when I showed up, the overwhelming number of apes stripped the bomb of its guard in short order. Tom and I would call out, "One down!" or "Two down!"

Nevertheless, the bomb's timer counted down. Tick-tock. Tick-tock.

Uh-oh. A last, desperate ape cavalry charge slaughtered the last of the mutant cultist defenders, leaving big chief mutant open. He was lanced into oblivion.

His death severed the mental link to the timer and the bomb no longer ticked. Apedom was saved.

Peter reacts to attack by Peter, who is so confident he flicks through the latest in ape technology. Meanwhile, Tom's cavalry confronts the mutant suicide squad right around the bomb (missile) in the center.

Quick Skirmish Game

Wicked Witch rules proved quick enough to learn, although I was not entirely clear what happens if your commander transfers all but one action point to subordinates. If my entire platoon moved, I moved him and the platoon commander automatically. In retrospect, that may not be the case. He may be left behind. On the other hand, he may be able to give a force command to move everybody on his pip, which may or may not force squad commanders to use pips. As I

generally kept in line with Peter and Tom, I must have been calculating right.

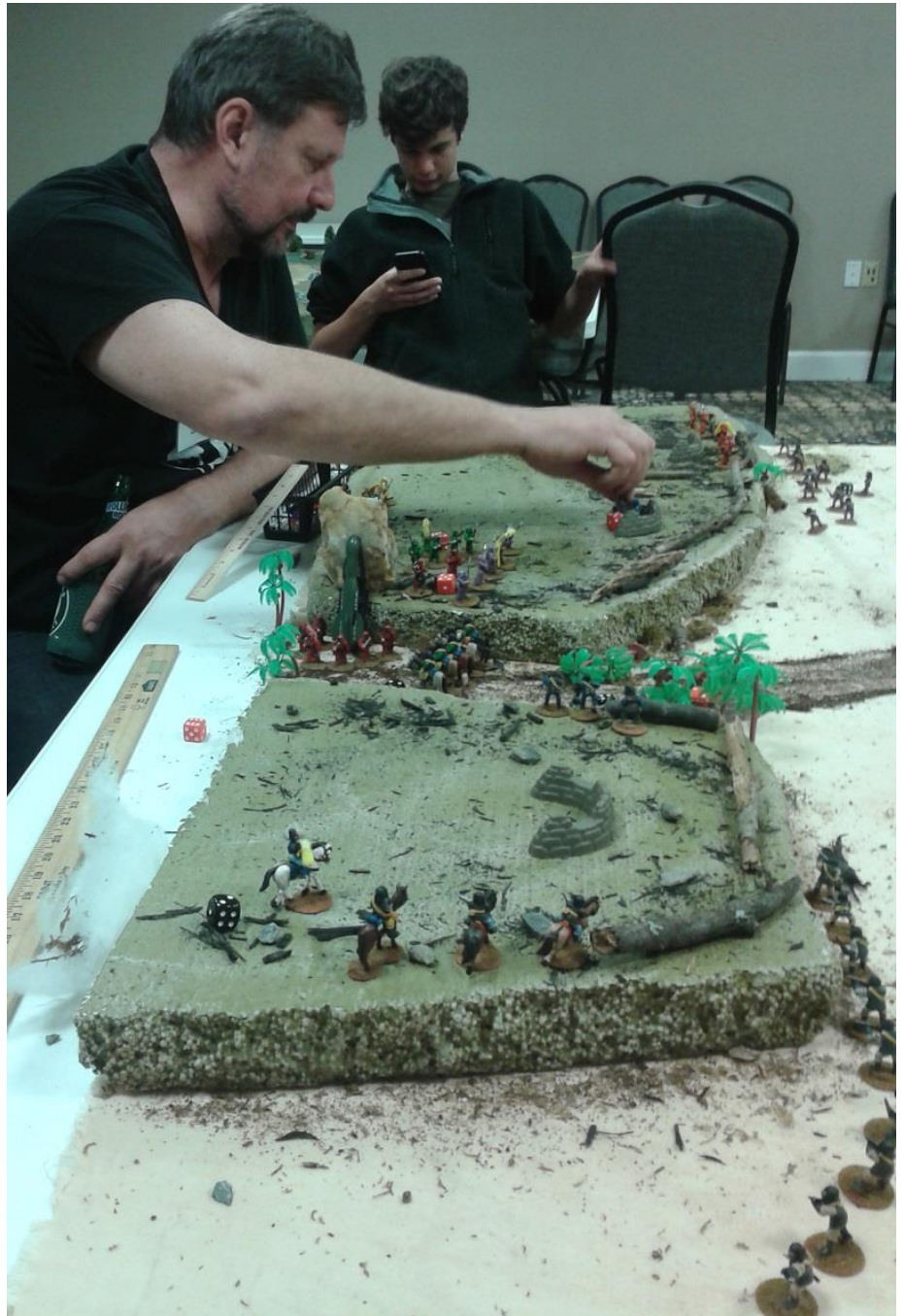
Even I wasn't, I still enjoyed the game. The initiative/action point scheme had nice back and forth, the random events were inventive, and the last mad rush to stop the bomb was a clever GM trick to get us to move instead of snipe.

Sunday

Scott and I bundled into the car and headed back on Sunday morning for an uneventful drive home.

I don't know what the actual attendance numbers were -- I've seen varying numbers. My guess of actual people in the door and on the floor was about 750, but that's only a guess. I'm sure HMGS will release actual numbers, although it may have to differentiate between people who registered and people who showed up.

Once again, I enjoyed Cold Wars. Thanks to all the staff, volunteers, and GMs for helping create a great convention. I look forward to the next HMGS convention, Historicon.



Postscript: Attendance

Bill Gray on HMGS.org reported about 800 pre-registered and walk-in gamers came through the door out of about 1350 pre-registered. As he noted, 1350 doesn't count walk-ins and is about 60% of actual attendees that usually attend Cold Wars. I guess I wasn't too far off with 750. Then again, Daniel did joke that I failed to count the gamers hiding behind the pillars. So, call it about a third of usual attendance, but it was still quite the enjoyable convention. Here's hoping Historicon is allowed to open.

More Photos

Jeff Kimmel (red shirt right) running a Chain of Command game.



I have no idea what the HAWKS were up to, but it had animated pumpkins and gamers were having a great time.



A Yorktown game on Saturday. Notice the lack of a line at the registration in the background.

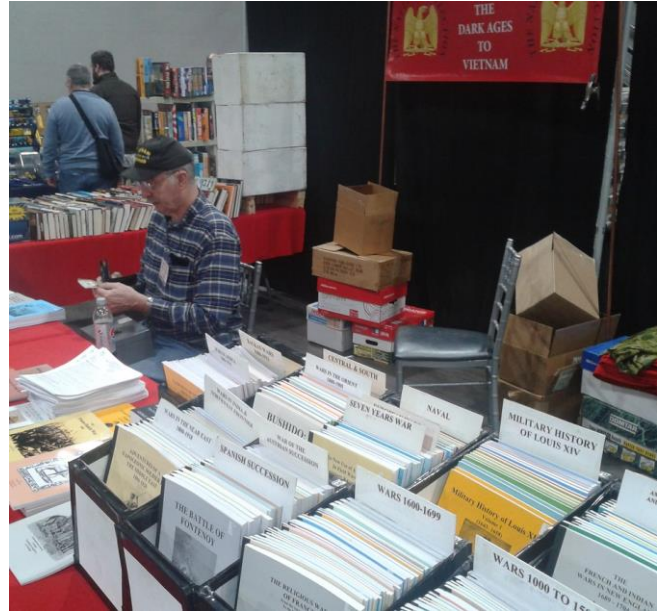


Saturday in the Distelfink room at 3:55 pm



The Dealer Area

Right: George Nafziger and his bevy of booklets.
Below: Casemate booth -- Will (left) and Larry set up on Thursday.



The Battlefront booth.

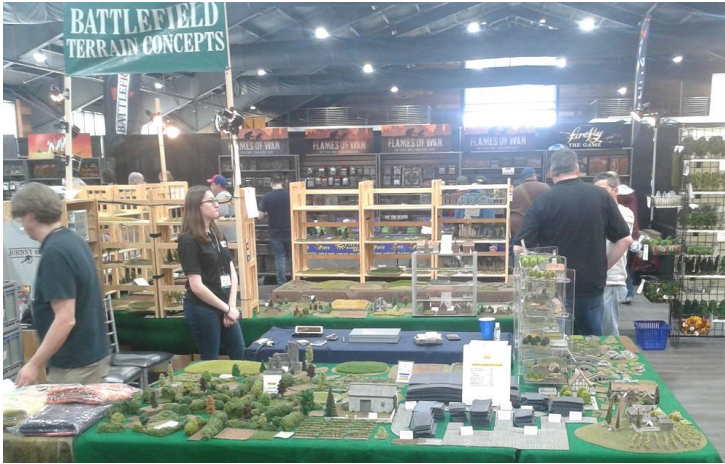


Phil and Outland Games along the window wall.



Foreground: Steve from Age of Glory
Background: Clash of Arms and the Against the Odds Booth.

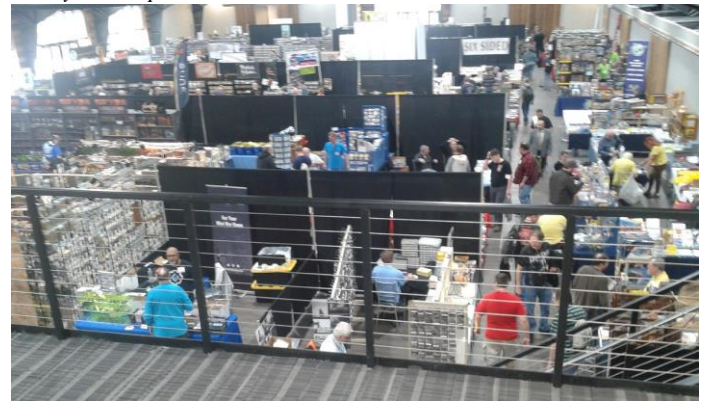
Right: Dad's Army, Dayton Painting, and Badger Games.
The north end of a south-facing Doug at Battlefield Terrain Concepts.



Brigade Games. Behind BG, the 'donut' of emptiness.



Friday at 1:08pm.



Phalanx Consortium.



Like the sign says: Paper Terrain. Scott off photo to right.



The Wargaming Company



See you next convention...