

The following article is from Avalon Hill's *General* magazine, volume 10, number 6, 1974. It does not say much about the Blitzkrieg game, but it can give the reader a little insight into what was intended for the game during the design. CGM

Although Larry Pinsky holds a Ph.D. in Physics and an important position in the NASSAU program, he is not generally well known among the wargaming fraternity. Only the comparative "old-timers" will remember him as one of the original Avalon Hill designers, let alone the originator of BATTLE OF THE BULGE - perhaps his best design effort, still selling well after 9 years on the market. Like many wargamers, Larry drifted away from the hobby due to outside pressures and has only recently rekindled his interest in wargames. Among the projects we have in mind for Larry is the handling of the BULGE rules rewrite when the game goes into its next printing sometime in 1975. It will be Larry's job to correct all the ambiguities and rules problems which presently plague the game and provide us with a "perfect" set of rules free of ambiguities and inconsistencies. This is a problem made greater by several faulty rulings in past issues of the GENERAL's question box. If you'd like to help with these problems drop us a list of problems you've encountered with the BULGE rules so we can turn them over to the designer for the final wrap-up of BULGE.

DESIGN CREDITS: BATTLE OF THE BULGE, GUADALCANAL, BLITZKRIEG, D-DAY '65, MIDWAY

"Are you any relation to 'Lake Pinsky'?" That's usually how most AH wargamers respond when I'm introduced. I've been known to reply upon occasion, "Yes, and I am also tributary of the North and South Lawrence Rivers."

I was first introduced to Avalon Hill games in September, 1961. At the time, I was in high school and living in suburban Washington D.C., and one evening while I was toying around with designing variations to chess, my next door neighbor just happened to drop by. He listened quietly while I described my efforts, and when I finally gave him a chance to get a word in edgewise, he said with an air of condescension: "Have you ever heard of Avalon Hill." When I said that I hadn't, I noticed that a gleam appeared in his

eyes. You see, he was a *Tactics II* buff of sorts, and his lifetime record included *no* defeats. He could hardly wait to add one more quick victory to his tally. Before I realized what was happening, the *Tactics* board was spread on the kitchen table before me. After 'a quick 30 minute lesson which included some rule reading, some examples of combat odds calculations, and a lot of seemingly incoherent mumbling, the game was on, and he moved first. He used almost all of his tricks that first move, and it turned out to be a considerably more useful education in how to play *Tactics* than the earlier 30 minute lesson had been. Well, it was a good game, and I made him frown several times during the course of the evening; but eventually I conceded (due to the lateness of the hour, of course). When I said good night at the back door, the gleam had shifted to my eyes, and I invited him to come back very soon. I have never succeeded in getting him to play any Avalon Hill games with me since, and to my knowledge his undefeated record is still "intact".

Well as if anyone really cares, that's how I was first introduced to Avalon Hill games. Since 1961 was a big year for new AH titles, it took me a few months to save up the scratch to buy a copy of each one; and since I was already interested in military history, it took even less time for me to start picturing unit counters and combat factors in everything I read. By late spring of 1962 I had already designed (for my own consumption) a WW II Russian Front game remarkably similar to *Stalingrad*, which was released by AH over a year later. In those days blank hex sheets were not available, so I had to draw my own with my father's T-square and triangle. My "Stalingrad" game used army level unit counters with the actual corps substitutes counters available for breakdown when required.

Over the next two years, I designed a few other games including two naval games based on the battles at Midway and Coral Sea. These games were inspired by the AH game *Bismarck*, and included the land combat portions as well as *Bismarck*-style surface combat. The air to ship combat was very similar to the eventual AH *Midway* system except that rather than rolling everything on an odds table of aircraft factors vs. anti-aircraft factors, the attacker was allowed to roll once for each aircraft factor that had survived an odds table anti-aircraft fire. The aircraft attack

rolls were made using results tables based on the target (i.e., the ships size, speed and maneuverability).

This type of combat resolution is sometimes employed with miniatures, although I was not aware of that fact at the time. One day in the late spring of 1964, I was preparing to play a game with one of my close friends, when he suggested that instead, it might be worthwhile to take the 35 mile drive up the Baltimore-Washington Parkway and look in on these AH people and their (assumed to be) magnificent operation. Of course, our real goal was to get a sneak preview of their next release. Well, when we arrived in the rather dingy, dust covered combination warehouse, shipping dock, ad department; and "magnificent operation," I met Tom Shaw and Lindy Schutz for the first time. (*Ed. Note: We have since moved to a larger dingy, dust covered combination warehouse, shipping dock, ad department and "magnificent operation."*) While I was shaking hands (taking care of course at the same time to guard my wallet from these seedy looking characters), I noticed over their shoulders, a game that bore a striking similarity to my Midway game. Well, it only took a few minutes to break the ice, and before long Lindy and I were discussing the similarities and differences of our games. None of my approaches were ever incorporated into the basic game, but I managed to persuade Lindy (after several subsequent discussions) to incorporate some of them into the tournament game and optional rules, (e.g., "anvil attacks" with torpedo planes).

From that time on, I communicated frequently with AH, and in 1965, Tom Shaw offered me a job designing games. I was then in college. The idea had been that together, Lindy and I would design two games. I was to work principally on *Battle of the Bulge*, and Lindy on *Guadalcanal*. Since *Bulge* was to be released first, it moved ahead quickly and *Guadalcanal* took a back seat. As this is an article entitled "Design Analysis", I intend to make some comments about game design in general and "*Bulge*" in particular, but first let me attempt to finish this rambling "historical" narrative. Well, when Lindy left in the late summer to get married, I had virtually completed "*Bulge*", but the design of *Guadalcanal* was still in its infancy. I wound up finishing the design during the fall semester back at school. I had originally wanted to make *Guadalcanal* a campaign

game including the entire Solomons. Clearly that would have meant another predominantly naval game, and Shaw wanted a primarily land battle game that employed marines.

As a land battle game, *Guadalcanal* was relegated to its real life scenario, a struggle for Henderson Field. I realized this, and I had a decision to make about the scale. I could include the entire scope of land operations on the island with a battalion level game - or I could have confined the game to a company-platoon level tactical scale in the immediate vicinity of Henderson Field. Well, I chose the former which probably sealed the fate of *Guadalcanal* from the outset. The reason for this choice was partly playability. Since all of the units in the eventual battalion level games would have participated in a company platoon level game, it would have meant at least tripling the number of pieces, and that unit inflation would have caused a severe curtailment in the playability of the hidden movement rules. I felt that hidden movement was essential to reproduce the situation accurately. I think the game as published did a faithful job of simulating the actual campaign conditions, which may be one of the reasons why the game was eventually doomed.

As a side job during the summer of '65, I was chosen to revise *D-Day*. That's right. I'm also the son-of-a-gun to blame for *D-Day* - '65. I have been given to understand that some people feel that things went a little too far overboard with *D-Day* '65. Since I really don't desire a flood of blustery challenges, let me say that with a really competent German commander, his chances are fairly even with those of a competent Allied commander. Be advised, however, that the German commander must be *very* careful. Mistakes are much more prone to produce *immediate* disaster for him than they are for the Allied commander.

My next effort was *Blitzkrieg*, where I was given a free hand to create a sort of designer's workshop for "the nuts". I was somewhat disappointed in the types of games and strategies that resulted when the game was released. I tried to provide "the nuts" with the tools to design their own games, but I failed to give them explicit scenario ideas along with an obviously dynamic model as an example. Tom had originally envisioned *Blitzkrieg* as a scenario game, but it didn't

get into print that way, and it's my fault. Backing up a bit, let me say that I think the design as published, is generally sound, but the basic scenario given does not entice the *average* player to become dynamic and aggressive. Let me quickly suggest a single rule change that might help push bashful trench diggers out into the open. One should employ a second move and second combat for armor as employed in *France '40*. Actually, I considered putting such a rule in when the game was first published. I was originally introduced to this type of rule in 64 by my friend, the indomitable Frenchman, Alain London, a master game designer in his own right. Returning to *Blitzkrieg*, I believe there are better versions of the "Second move rules" than as employed in *France '40*, but I leave it as an exercise to the reader to discover these for himself.

After I finished *Blitzkrieg*, my studies became more demanding and I spent succeeding years working in my academic field. I remained associated with Avalon Hill for awhile, and I continued to answer some of their mail for them. Eventually, however, it became time for a new release, and it was unfeasible for me to continue for several reasons, so my formal tenure with Avalon Hill came to a close. Since that time, however, I have continued to think about many of the design ideas and philosophies that were kindled during those years, and I shall attempt to relate some of them to you here.

Bulge Revisited

There has been quite a lot written about *Bulge* over the years, and a fair amount of that has been criticism. I shall not attempt to meet these objections head on, but rather describe my intentions at the time that I designed the game.

In *Bulge*, I was primarily trying to obtain an exciting game that would remain so from beginning to end, and I wanted to remove the awesome fear of attacking, that the old "ELIM" CRT had spawned. I felt that first of all, one should consider the CRT and the details of combat resolution as being as fundamental a part of the design as the mapboard and the OB. This is not to say that every game *should* have a different CRT, but rather that one should not start with the age-old dogma and work around it, as had been done for all of the games before *Bulge*. So, what was the

rationale for the CRT as designed? As stated above, it was intended to overcome the bloody annihilation that occurred at moderate odds with the old table. The old CRT was unrealistic for the type of combat and time frame (turn length) depicted in *Bulge*. From a game playing standpoint, it tended for the wrong reasons to deter the attacker from launching anything other than desperate (or soak-off) attacks at less than 3-1. In real life regiment level, 1-1 and 2-1 attacks are undesirable because they have a lower chance of success than 3-1 and higher attacks; but unlike the old CRT, 1-1 and 2-1 attacks almost never (statistically) result in complete annihilation of one side and/or the other. It is interesting to note that tactical objectives (even at regiment levels) are almost always terrain oriented! Translated into a CRT, it means at lower odds the deterrent for attacking should be primarily the lower chance of success (gaining the terrain objective) and the increased vulnerability to counterattack because of your exposed position for your opponent's next turn. This implies D-back 2's, A-back 2's and Contacts. So where did this screwy "engaged" business come from. Well, the Ardennes is a fairly heavily forested region. The so-called "woods" squares on the map represent the really dense "impenetrable" forest. Most of the "clear" squares (especially on the eastern half of the board) still contain substantial forest, and in this type of terrain it is possible for units to become entangled during an attack to the extent that immediate one turn disengagement and break off is not feasible without unwarranted losses. Further, the "engaged" result implies that command and control problems occurred during the attack and these were sufficient to preclude rapid disengagement and movement elsewhere. The greater command and control capability of armor lead, in the later *Bulge* printings, to the rationale and rule that armor can, at its option, withdraw from an engaged situation. I've said enough about the *Bulge* CRT vis-à-vis my intentions. Let me only add some comments about OB. The British units that participated in the late stages of the battle in real life were left out intentionally. They were under strict orders from Montgomery to remain on the defensive (well) behind the Meuse River until the German offensive had completely spent itself. One might argue that some provision should be made for their inclusion after German units have crossed the Meuse, or even that if "you are allowed to *command* the actual forces" etc., you should have the

option to commit them earlier since they were generally available. I can only say that given the scope and the balance of the game as I designed it at the time, I decided to exclude them. Perhaps they should have been included as an optional rule. Aside from some regiment numbering conflicts (which neither add nor subtract any units) the major U.S. oversight is the 83rd infantry division which was committed from the north as early as the 22nd AM turn. The German units are fairly complete. Some of the "discrepancies" that have been noted by various people, occurred because the unit counters represent the subdivided *kampfgruppen* that were used in the actual command organization, rather than the traditional regimental structures of the various divisions. Well, I hope I haven't stirred up a nest of hornets. To those of you who feel that too much designer's license was used, I apologize; and if you really don't *enjoy* the game as it stands I owe you a more fundamental apology.

Bits and Pieces

What is the real attraction of this "hobby" anyway? Why do the games have such wide appeal? I do not pretend to be, nor presume that you have any great interests in the opinion of a professional psychologist on these matters, but as one individual, who has given it some thought, let me attempt to sketch my views. Essentially, the games represent and exemplify conflict and competition between individuals. This form of competition is symbolic, ritualistic, and intellectual *not physical*. The last point is the most important. These games present an arena where a participant can organize and evolve impersonal intellectual strategies in a known predictable environment, against an opponent who is a single "intelligent" entity, and where the stakes are generally and basically intellectual. Ironically, the feeling that these games are a simulation of "real life", break down at the most fundamental point. They mimic overt real life scenarios in facade and style, but they fundamentally do *not* present the player with the same psychological influences and uncertainties. This is part of the so called "fog of war"; for the fog of war is not only an environment typified by less certain military intelligence, but by personal psychological involvement and the basic unpredictable uncertainties rampant in almost every aspect of war in real life. Thus, abilities displayed as a master designer or player of these games; do not *necessarily* por-

tend any real life potentials as a great military leader. (I apologize for stepping on the Walter Mitty in all of us). I refer the reader to Scott Duncan's fine article in the May-June 1973 Design Analysis column (General, Vol. 10, No. 1, p. 18), where he comments a true 'simulation', is highly unlikely and perhaps equally undesirable." I agree! I feel that if the games really simulated war and combat, at least in their psychological effect on the players, they would rapidly become as unpopular and unenjoyable as war is to the majority of those who actually participate (even as commanders).

The foregoing dissertation does not mean to imply that as a game designer historical accuracy is unimportant. One of the primary attractions of these games as contrasted with Chess or "Go" for example is their charismatic and intellectual appeal as "*representing*" a significant historical situation where the rules and procedures are based on practical analyses and logical considerations rather than completely whimsical and arbitrary choices. A strict adherence to history and realism in the design actually makes the game more playable because one can then base strategic planning on realistic considerations rather than on arbitrary rules. Thus, to me the ultimate AH type game is one that combines playability and diversity sufficient to allow the players to evolve a spectrum of reasonable strategies. One can argue that in some historical situations (including *hypothetical* scenarios) there is only one reasonable strategy. I feel that if this is truly the case, then that battle may not be the most suitable for design into a game that will remain rewarding over the long run. This is one reason why many games fall from favor after only a few playings. I think if you consider the past games that you have enjoyed the most, they are the ones that were a contest of new strategies, and not the games that seemed to settle into the same old routines that differ only in the results of the die rolls. In summation - as a game designer you should strive for a product that allows (and elicits) a variety of strategies.

My Last Two Cents

Hang on, it's almost over. I just couldn't resist throwing out a few final "where do we go from here" suggestions. First of all, I like to see attention paid to real differences in the capabilities of

different types of troops (armor, infantry, etc.) in all facets of the rules. Further, rules should not lead to arbitrary ridiculous strategies. In some cases, the biggest offenders here, are the victory point systems, where in the final moves, players are led to make unrealistic moves for "points". As an aside to this comment, I think in the design process it is instructive to simulate a game that faithfully duplicates the actual campaign and strictly adheres to the rules. If this simulation requires an extraordinary amount of (die roll) luck on the part of one side that was not present in the actual battle, then there may be a design problem. I would also like to see combat odds calculated in such a way that the entire attacking force is relevant. Under the conventional system, for example, if the defender has 10 combat factors and the attacker 35, then the presence of the last 5 attacking factors has no effect upon the probability of success. An alternate system that

also has problems is the so called attack superiority system where rather than odds, one computes the number of excess factors the attacker has and consults the appropriate table. One problem with this system is that attacks of 12-10 are resolved under the same column as 3-1. Perhaps there is a solution on middle ground somewhere! Finally, the ultimate observation that is clearly obvious to everyone is the need for a *playable* limited intelligence, simultaneous movement system. I confess that the only system I have come up with, involves the use of a computer and 2 remote terminals! Well, let me conclude with the advice that if you have found a game or game variation (either of your own design or otherwise) that you thoroughly enjoy playing, and have no trouble obtaining opponents who will regularly oblige you; then enjoy - by all means enjoy - and ignore all of those frustrated sayers of malcontent. ●