

1066: The Battle of Hastings

The Lost "Great Battles of History" Series!

In issue 67 of Strategy and Tactics, dated March / April 1978, the following Feedback offering appeared:

The following questions concern a proposed new series of games to be published under the title "Great Battles of History." This series of games would cover some 24 to 30 of history's most important battles and would be published over a period of four to five years; they would be sold on a subscription basis. Each game would cover a specific battle, ranging through time from Ancient Greece to the Modern era, on either a tactical or an operational level, depending on how the subject could best be handled. The battles covered would be ones which have not been the subject of a game previously published by SPI.

All games would include a single map, 400 counters, rules booklet, charts, and a 16-page historical article. The games would be published somewhat randomly rather than in chronological order. Games would be released approximately 8 to 10 weeks apart. They would retail individually for \$10 or be available through subscriptions for \$49.95 per set of six (or more cheaply if demand is sufficient).

In Issue 69, SPI announced that "Among the great battles of history, the most popular were Trafalgar, Verdun, Midway, Suez, Dien Bien Phu, Stalingrad, Hastings, Saratoga, and Normandy."

1066: The Battle of Hastings S&T 70, Sept /Oct 1978

The second game in the **Great Battles** series is in the initial formation stages. That means reading lots of sources, most of which are quite short - a benefit which has its drawbacks informationally. The disagreements between sources for Hastings is almost comical. Forget the numbers - which range from 5000 to 15,000 for a side. One source has the alleged commander of the Norman left (the Bretons) in Brittany at the time of the battle. Then there's all the rubbish in some of the old sources about the Norman "feigned retreat" - a bit of legend that has been successfully debunked in recent descriptions. We will be going with Bourne, Beeler, Fuller (although he disagrees on some points, he does have some good OOB information)

and Col. Lemmon (when we can locate his tract).

The map is done - it looks quite nice - and the scale is about 30 yards a hex. There will be about 200 combat counters, ranging from about 75 men per unit (for the Huscarles) to maybe half that and more for the various Shire-Levies (Fyrd) that Harold had to use.

The system is still in the formative stages, but we are hoping to use a series of Command Cards for each of the Wing Commanders, through which each section of the player's army will be ordered what to do e.g. .. Stand and Defend, Melee In Place, Attack and Pursue, etc. Given that each unit will have two "formations" - attack and shield up - these "orders" could have quite an effect. It will also add a great deal of "game" into the simulation. Projected release date is late Spring, 1979.

Rich Berg

1066: The Battle of Hastings Moves 41, Oct/Nov 1978

For once we are way ahead of schedule with a game - about six weeks ahead of schedule with the second in the **Great Battles of History Series**. What's even better, the game is progressing with amazing rapidity. Perhaps this is due to the basic simplicity of the design; the play testers took less than fifteen minutes to learn the entire game. **Hastings** is being done with ease of play as the keynote; we intend to keep all rules within an 8-page limit. This is not for any monetary reason; it is simply because we felt that the games in this series should be readily accessible to everyone.

As for the system itself, we have taken the basic **PRESTAGS** idea of Fire and Melee (what else is there in the 11th century) and combined it with much more effective Morale rules, added new CRT's

which use the Morale idea to a much greater extent. and added our new Formation Card System. Voila, we have **Hastings**. The terrain is clear and affects the game directly, e.g., William's mounted knights must check morale every time they enter an upslope hex as, in the real battle, the knights were often thrown into disarray when they tried to fight their way up the steep flank slopes of Senlac Hill.

The heart of the game, however, is the Formation Cards. Each Player chooses which formations he wants his given wings or sections (the Saxons have three, the Normans six, to start with) to adopt during an Assault (ten turns of action). These run from "Shield Wall", a stalwart defensive position, to "Attack and Pursue", in which units in melee gain a benefit from their fierce attack, but must pursue any routed units. Having chosen all ten formations for a wing, the player then removes the top Formation Card, shuffles the remaining nine (so he does not know the order in which they will appear, after the first card) and starts his turn. Thus, a player knows approximately what his units will do, but he does not know when they will do it (plus some added kickers too long to go into).

The practical result: last Friday while Harold was trying vainly to beat off a charge against his right flank by the Breton knights, under Alan the Rod, his brother Gyrrh took it in mind to order a charge down the hill against the onrushing Franco-Flemish infantry on the Saxon left. The Saxon left drove the French back only to get cut to ribbons by their cavalry, under Eustace of Boulogne. Anyone familiar with the battle will recognize *that* maneuver.

The major Norman loss was Roger, Count of Mortain, who fell off his horse in the heat of battle and got trampled to death!

The most important item here is fun. We want a game - a game that demonstrates history; most of all, we want the Players to have a good time with this one. So, lots of color, lots of unknown, and lots of surprise!

---Rich Berg

**1066: The Battle of
Hastings
S&T 71, Nov/Dec 1978**

Progress has been quite steady with **Hastings**. The original design has remained remarkably intact during testing, and play has gone so well that we are considering moving this game up in the schedule for a late Winter release. The Battle Formation Cards have proven quite successful, and the playtesters enjoy the uncertainty they bring to play. They also provide quite a bit of historicity as we have already had several instances of the Saxon wings chasing Norman troops down the hill, only to be cut up by Norman cavalry. Yet the balance which we are working on now seems fairly good.

Initially, William was winning quite handily. We are now in the midst of a game in which it seems that Harold might just hold the day! It will be close - down to the very end, with many losses. And this is what we are aiming for: a real nail biter.

Hastings is remarkably simple to play (the rules will be less than seven pages!), and it can be learned in less than 15 minutes. So far there is a great deal of action and a great deal of movement. Together with the uncertainty that the Cards provide (an uncertainty that

well suits the period), it looks like **Hastings** will be a good opener for the **Great Battles of History** series

Rich Berg

**Hastings:1066
Moves 42, Dec/Jan 1979**

Moving along smartly here, and way ahead of schedule. We are now entering the final stages of development, and the release date for this game is wholly dependent on when the Art Department wants to do it. Map and counters are set, as are the Formation Cards, and the balance seems to be working out just fine.

There has been one problem, however, and that is that different pairs of testers have been achieving moderately different results. One pair puts William out ahead, by about 60-40, which is a bit higher than I would wish. The other pair has the two sides quite evenly matched. (As a matter of fact, in the last run through, William took the game two turns out of 40 + from the end! And it was a close-run thing at that!

The main problem for the players is their general inability to closely control their troops, which is a built-in play factor. Whole sections of an army seem to charge when you want them to stand, stand when you need movement, etc. Good, old-fashioned medieval confusion.

The last design decision now rests on whether to upgrade the defensive value of the Housecards while in Shield Wall Formation or devalue the melee value of the Norman knights, or both.

Rich Berg

**1066
Battle of Hastings
Moves 43, Feb/Mar 1979**

Now that the game is completely finished, we've decided to do it all over again! Two things prompted this incredible decision: the game will not be released for some time, due to scheduling problems involving *The Great Battles of History* series, and the general ineptitude in planning exhibited at higher levels, and the game as designed is just too long (in playing time) for the audience contemplated.

My feeling as to the latter is that only the historians and true game buffs will be attracted by this anyway, but I don't make the marketing decisions here. There was absolutely nothing wrong with the game itself; it just took 10+ hours to play. It was (and still is) remarkably simple (only 6 pages of rules); but since the actual battle took an entire day, the system just couldn't handle that time period in an "acceptable" playtime limit. Thus, in order to accommodate the management here and produce an item that can be played in "reasonable" time, several changes being wrought.

First, the initial system remains. What we will be changing is the map: we will be converting the original 21 mm hexes to the giant 25 mm hexes. The effect of this will be to reduce the number of units needed by about 20%. Since most of the time consumed is attributable to physically moving counters, this decision will cut play time by about 10-15%. (There is a loss of efficiency percentage involved).

In addition, we will be revising the Melee CRT and general two-leveled combat

system to eliminate 50% of the die rolls, cutting the playing time by another 20-25%.

We hope to thus decrease average playing time from 10 hours to 6 hours while retaining the basic system as well as the solid level of historicity we had already achieved.

Rich Berg

**Hastings
S&T 73, Mar / Apr 1979**

This **Great Battle of History** trundles on. Playtesting revealed that this game took somewhere over 10 hours to play and that was an optimistic estimate; I playtested it for a while. So Rich went somewhere into a corner and worked some magic alchemy over it. Voita!

New Improved **Hastings** has now appeared on our doorstep and comes complete with guarantee that it is zippier and shorter than the earlier game. I must admit it looks like troops die a lot faster than they ever did before. A little more playtesting is in order, and then we shall be sure we have what we want. It looks good though, and don't forget that now you too can try for that fateful arrow in the eye that changed England forever.

Robert Jervis

**Hastings
Moves 44, Apr/May 1979**

Last Friday I slugged my way to the closest fought victory I have yet seen in **Hastings'** history. In the game a hauntingly historical series of results started the game off. The Norman line charged forward and lo and behold, the left fell back in disarray. The Saxons charged off the hill and were ridden down by cavalry charging out of the center of the Norman army. After

regrouping, the Saxon army in the second phase of the battle fell back on both flanks (and eventually formed into a circle). It came down to the end of the final phase of the battle (Assault Period in game terms) with an extension due to the Normans smelling victory and therefore fighting on despite exhaustion.

At the end there were only shattered remnants of the Norman forces making the last desperate charges into the wavering Saxon lines. William, wounded and bleeding but still able to ride, led the final attacks at the head of his bodyguard. Harold stood to the last, "The bastard can just keep coming. We can hold them forever." It was a forlorn hope, though, for the Saxons had been pushed off the road to London. England was already Norman.

Robert Jervis

**Hastings:1066
Moves 45, Jun/Jul 1979**

Willie and Harry have been languishing around the back rooms here at Inaction Central, awaiting the right moment for the final push to production.

As stated several reports ago, the system has been sliced and diced so that the whole tenor of the game is changed. Instead of a slow-moving, if accurate representation we now have a rock-em, sock-em, let-the-blood-flow-freely special, with only minimal sacrifices to historicity.

The complexity of the game, never too heavy to begin with, has been lightened even more - and, what's best, the game now plays in four hours or so (instead of the 12-15 we had before).

Our final problem is with balance. We are now at the point where Harold is finally

starling to win more than William (whereas it previously took seven weeks just to get Harold to stick around for the last few turns). We now want to adjust slightly backward so that the balance is as even as possible. Since most of the games have been going down to the final 2-3 turns, we feel we have the makings of a real solid beer-and-pretzels item, in terms of playability.

As soon as we solve that problem and arrive at a Missile Combat system with which we are comfortable, the game will start production. Schedule is now for late Fall release.

Rich Berg

**1066: The Battle of
Hastings
S&T 75, Jul / Aug 1979**

This game has had a spotty life in this column, mostly because I never seem to be able to meet the progress report deadlines. Oh well, those of you who have followed the checkered career of this spear-and-cheer thriller know that has undergone more metamorphoses than a cicada (with just about the same gestation period it seems). It is now finished-and in its final form. Blindtest copies are being sent out even as I sit here (mid-June) and it is scheduled to head into the art department late summer/early fall for an end-of-the-year release.

Hastings is a real slam-bang affair; lots of killing and maiming and plenty of swift action (i.e., it is not **Agincourt**.) A complete game plays in five hours and there is even a variable-entry scenario so that you can re-arrange the historical deployments, which are used for the standard game.

In order to achieve this level of playability and speed of

play-we have, to a certain extent, sacrificed some historicity. I do not like to sacrifice historicity; then again, neither do I want to spend 16 hours recreating **Hastings**. Life is full of compromises, and I feel that this is a fair one. Accuracy has not been sacrificed, though, and the game has a really good feel for the times and the tactics.

Rich Berg

**1066: The Battle of
Hastings
Moves 46, Aug / Sept 1979**

Hastings is out to the blind testers, and we are awaiting their verdict. The exact publishing schedule for this medieval epic is a bit hazy at this point, because The Secret Project (q.v.) has been moved into the mid-fall lineup, and something has to give-and it maybe **Hastings**. Very little has changed since our last report, so we'll just have to wait till we hear from Our Man in Goleta.

Rich Berg

**Hastings:1066
Moves 47, Oct / Nov 1979**

The blind tester reports have come in and, for the most part, they seem to find the game quite playable. However, some of their suggestions to further enhance the game have been assimilated and will be included. We have changed the definition of the Saxon Army Wings to one that is a little easier to discern, as well as placing more control in the hands of the player.

A further addition to player control will be the alternate, player-oriented battle-card distribution method. The more historically minded system placed a premium on prior planning which then became a blind draw as the game

progressed. This was based on the fact that medieval battles often went far afield of the original plans, much to the dismay and surprise of the commanders.

This system works fine solitaire (as a matter of fact, it makes **Hastings** an excellent solitaire game); however, several players felt too restricted by it. So we have added a system wherein the battle cards are shuffled and dealt blind, but once in the players' hands they may be played as desired. (Of course, the player may not get exactly what he wants for his strong wing, etc., but that's what makes it fun.)

We have also loosened up the restrictions on Attack and Pursue, so that the Saxons aren't as rigidly channeled into certain maneuvers.

Rich Berg

**And the final note in S&T 78:
Hastings Berg / ? Develop**

Trafalgar is the other game that was selected for development into the **Great Battles of History** series. The only sign of it is a couple of development notes by designer Joe Balkoski. Apparently, it would later morph into **Fighting Sail** published in S&T 85, March of 1981. (How a small action ship to ship battle game is considered the "Battle of Trafalgar" I don't know, but hey.)

I believe **Hastings 1066** is eventually published in the TSR reign in S&T 110, 1987. (The map layout looks very much like a traditional SPI game, with all the charts on the map, etc. But the formation cards appear to be replaced by a chit placement matrix on the map. Changes... RIP, **Great Battles of History**.)

*Russ Gifford, 2021
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