

TSG review



We were going to start off this column by wading right in and revising (cleaning up might be a better word) one of the clumsier Test Series Games. However, there's always that nagging feeling that we might miss something. So rather than have to do it over again (just to catch all those things we might have missed) we will outline the major problems with each of the published TSG games and inveigh upon concerned readers to send us their list of favorite gripes with each of the TSG they might be familiar with. That approach, we feel, should insure that the subsequent articles on the TSG will be as complete as possible in clearing up the rules and other snafus which crept into the games.

First of all, we ought to remark a bit upon the conditions under which the TSG were designed and produced. Eleven of the TSG (numbers 2 thru 12) were designed and produced in a 12 month period between the Spring of 1969 and the Spring of 1970. Jim Dunnigan designed all of these, plus ITALY. Dunnigan also did the "artwork" (such as it was) for most and wrote the final rules for about half (Ed Birsan wrote the rest). Birsan and Bob Champer also did the playtesting on most of these games. Nine of these games were actually initiated in a seven month period starting in March 1969 and ending in September 1969. The point of all this is to explain why some of the TSG have a somewhat "thrown together" look. After the first "wave" of TSG (numbers 1-9) were published the same crew found themselves also stuck with the publication of S&T. By the end of the year Birsan and Champer had to drop out because the enormous work load conflicted with schoolwork and it took over six months to collect a new playtest and "production" crew (which now includes John Young and Steve Patrick). Basically, the choice was between publishing new games

or revising the old ones. Mortals that we were, we opted for new games and let the old ones fend for themselves. It was a heady experience, as previously Avalon Hill took from three months to a year to "produce" a game. The Poultron Press Gang turned out an average of one a month (at one point one a week, for three weeks). Performance improved with experience, as is shown with the production of PANZERBLITZ (which took three months from the time the ink dried on the contracts and the delivery of the finished artwork to Baltimore). PANZERBLITZ was, basically,

a new game, a thorough revision of Tac 3. In the meantime, we also turn out a new game every two months for S&T. Add these games to the TSG line, plus the ones done for Avalon Hill, and you have 27 games produced in 21 months. End of explanation.

ITALY was designed out of spite, in order to show Avalon Hill how the Italian campaign should be handled. Among the TSG it has sold the least number of copies thus feedback has also been minimal. Actually, we felt there were few problems with this one and a revision of it would basically do little more than re-organize the rules for greater clarity.

FLYING FORTRESS came in two flavors, with a step down attrition system (FLYING FORTRESS 2) and without (FLYING FORTRESS). Otherwise, both games were quite similar although the game with out the step system was simpler and easier to play. There were a few kinks in the rules, particularly in the Campaign Game with regard to the Germans converting their production to advanced types of aircraft (tracing changeovers from the FW 190A to the Ta 152C wasn't as difficult as it appeared). But beyond all that we have since completely redesigned the game, which will be the topic of one of these columns.

TACTICAL GAME 3 probably won't be covered as it was completely revamped PANZERBLITZ. That transformation is a good example of what we mean when we say we will "redesign" a game. PANZERBLITZ isn't sacred either. Tactical Game 1 (France, 1944) will be published in S&T this year and will include a complete redesign of the PANZERBLITZ game mechanics. For the moment we will just leave Tac 3 alone, although we may answer questions if we get enough of them.

BARABROSSA is without a doubt our best seller. It is also, in the designer's opinion, the best game he ever did. A real labor of love (of course, that applies to all the TSG, but BARBAROSSA did so much better and you-know-how-it-goes). The game does have flaws, however. The most glaring one is the kink in the rules whereby the Russians may hole up in a city with a supply unit and never be dislodged. This, and other flaws, will be put right. This game also served as the basis for a game called WORLD WAR II (using smaller hexes we were able to put all of Europe on the map and fight out the entire war). AH wanted this game for the Spring of 1971 but we simply didn't have sufficient time to finish it. We're only human after all.

DEPLOYMENT was done in great haste, almost as an afterthought. The designer had, over the years, acquired an enormous store of data on that period. Unfortunately the opportunity to design this game came at a time when "the clean game" was in vogue. DEPLOYMENT is indeed clean, but a dirtier version is in the works. Also in the works are revisions to clear up some of the flaws in the movement rules. Keep in mind that many of the apparent "inaccuracies" result from the desire to have simple mechanics.

NORMANDY is another game that didn't quite click mechanically. This was one of the games that was designed in a week (although the playtesting and "finishing" took many more weeks). The rules were written by Ed Birsan, at a time when it wasn't realized how difficult it is to have one person design the game and have someone else write the rules. We have since learned our lesson. But in the meantime the game is a casualty. The rules need to be re-organized considerably. Numerous points need clarification.

LEIPZIG, ah LEIPZIG! The poor relation, the neglected child. This game was also designed in a week. Unfortunately, it wasn't finished. A project is actually underway to produce a second version. The original game was a great idea. A pity we didn't finish it the first time around. Lots of new ideas which were never really worked out to a conclusion.

TANNENBERG is another game with rules by Birsan, actually, there was as much work done on writing the rules for this one by Dunnigan. It still comes out like shit. This game had been in the works (in one form or another) since '68. The final version was a last minute brainstorm which did not have sufficient time allotted to it for proper development. In other words, the rules have to be re-written.

1914 REVISION is basically the same rules system as TANNENBERG although the REVISION was better tested and developed. To be quite honest about it, the 1914 REVISION rules were simply grafted onto TANNENBERG in order to make the two games compatible. Still needs some work.

1918 is actually a part of the "second wave" of TSG (along with FLYING FORTRESS 2 and KOREA). These second wave games were done almost single handedly by Dunnigan after Champer and Birsan had split. At the same time the designer was also editing issues 19 and 20 of S&T. 1918 was the better effort. There are a few snags in the rules, but nothing serious.

KOREA was finished under the worst possible conditions. The game required some highly innovative rules and in a case like this rushing the operation can be disastrous. It was. The rules are a mess, particularly the critical supply rules. We expect a considerable number of questions on this one. KOREA will probably be covered in the next issue.

FLYING TIGERS was designed by Lou Zocchi. It contained a few minor omissions. When we cover this one it will probably include a few revisions.

BATTLE OF BRITAIN REVISION has been a very good seller, which perhaps leads one to believe that a revision was needed. Little negative feedback has been received on this one up till now.

STALINGRAD III is more of a game than a historical game. The designer's (Fred Schachter) avowed purpose was to produce the most enjoyable game possible. A revision sheet for the rules was included before the games were even ready for shipment. As it was the game underwent testing and refinement for over a year and this probably accounts for the lack of problems with the rules.

TWELVE O'CLOCK HIGH was being altered right down to the time it was published. Designed by Lou Zocchi, it is being re-published by Avalon Hill as LUFTWAFFE in the Spring of '71 and will then no longer be sold by us. So far the game's sales have been very disappointing. The per-centage of feedback questionnaires returned has also been very bad (the rate at which these questionnaires are returned is a good indicator of the success of the game). Whatever problems there are with the game are now Avalon Hill's.