

## G.I.: ANVIL OF VICTORY Designers Notes By Don Greenwood

Mr.Selover's [GIA Review by Jay Selover; Fire&Movement #33, p12] review leaves me little with which to quibble. He paints a pleasant picture with broad strokes of approval. Far be it from me to argue with him; although, were I the critic, I would have given myself a harder time. Close as I am to this the flaws perhaps seem more obvious to me.

The lack of actual bocage on the new mapboards seems to have been Dr. Selover's lone major disappointment. Our solution of using existing walls/hedges to represent Normandy hedgerows was indeed disappointing to many a purist. However, we did present the rules for this type of terrain and, lacking sufficient room in the box to stuff in yet another mapboard, our solution seemed a reasonable compromise. It would have been difficult to get the correct feel of a Normandy campaign with just one new mapboard anyway. I have heard similar complaints about the lack of a beach board with which to portray the actual D-Day landings. My personal opinion is that there is not a plethora of choices to be made by the participants in portraying an amphibious invasion at this scale. Nonetheless, our eventual plans for the series include Campaign gamettes using actual terrain mapboards (as opposed to typical isomorphic samples) and portraying specific actions that *took* place in that locale. The Normandy Campaign gamette should more than please those missing the actual hedgerows in G.I.

More surprising, perhaps, is that Dr. Selover passes over the concept of "green" American units without really letting us know whether he approves or not. This conceptualization of the G.I. was the cornerstone on which the entire design was based, and proved very controversial. Many of my playtesters, among the game's strongest adherents, were quite bitterly opposed to the concept. Indeed, some of them even accused me of being unpatriotic. They

did not care for a game system which represented the American fighting man in a comparatively unfavorable light. Why, they protested, if the G.I. were so inferior to his German counterpart, did we push the Huns all over Europe?

That cannot be answered simply. Like most complex pictures, it must be painted in tones of gray rather than the more starkly contrasted black and white answer that X is greater than Y. For starters, one must recognize that Squad Leader, more than most wargames, is a combination of abstractions and compromises. Not every German soldier (or squad) was superior to every American soldier; or every Polish or Italian one, either, for that matter. The game system makes generalizations and then compounds and exaggerates those findings to generate values that give a feel for nationality differences. While admittedly unfair to judge men by their nationality in this way, it is nonetheless a major factor in why the game has so much flavor. Ask yourself if the basic Squad Leader would have been as much fun if all the units had been rated 4-6-7.

Having already accepted this premise in the original Squad Leader game, which gave American units a base morale of 6 (as opposed to the European's 7) so as to allow them an increased firepower capability, I had to find the single most commonplace trait which would accentuate their differences from those of the Europeans. There were two obvious differences: experience and individuality. The Germans had been tested by nearly three years of combat before G.I.s met them on the battlefield. Every unit had cadre which had seen action, whereas the G.I., who was far less responsive to discipline anyway, was often led by an NCO with no more combat experience than himself. Naturally, as the war progressed, the Americans gained experience and their counterparts continued to be bled white by years of protracted battle. This is reflected in the game by introducing a German Experience Level Rating as *ersatz* units and *Volksgranadiere* began to provide more and more of the opposition.

Thus we come to my big confession, the one that will doubtless brand me by

some as one who blindly attributes glorious abilities to the Nazis: In my opinion, the average soldier fielded by the *Wehrmacht* in the first five years of the war was, indeed, the best man on the field. There, I said it. By the time American divisions took the field, the cream of the German *Wehrmacht* had been scattered all over (and under) Europe. American land victories, by and large, were won in the steel plants of Pittsburgh. Their German adversaries were usually outnumbered, short on supplies, lacking adequate air cover, and facing a virtual horde of Sherman tanks. After the Normandy breakout, American troops, backed by immense firepower advantages of all kinds, merely steam-rolled already battered or second-line troops. It was a relatively rare situation when a temporary local superiority could be used to wrest the initiative away from the G.I. and fuel Hollywood depictions of American victories against overwhelming odds.

The American characteristic in World War II, which most clearly stands out is his overwhelming advantage in terms of sheer numbers, armor, air support, and logistics. Because of this, the American player often thinks he is at a disadvantage when faced with a comparable German force. This is as it should be. It is only because we tend to use the relatively rare situations wherein the combatants are evenly matched, no matter how briefly, for our scenarios, that we get the feeling that maybe the Americans have been slighted by the game system. One of my playtesters believes so strongly that this is the case that he goes to great lengths to discredit the game system and berate the game in an upcoming special issue of the *General* featuring G.I.

In actuality, however, a recreation of the day-by-day actions of most American units in 1944-45 would be uncommonly boring from a gamer's point of view, as the situations would tend to be extremely one-sided. The game system reflects this, I think, rather well. In 1942, when the American divisions are still largely untested and the *Wehrmacht* is still relatively intact, squad for squad the Germans seem to get the better of it. By

late 1944, however, the increasing Experience Level Ratings of the G.I.s and the increasing appearance of low quality opposition has turned the tide. Both nationalities have very distinctive strengths and weaknesses, and therein lies the fun of G.I. *Vive la difference.*

The other point of controversy which Dr. Selover only mentions in passing is the new To Hit system. After years of using terrain effect modifiers to alter the effects of a hit, it was quite a shock to the *grogards* to turn that axiom around and use it solely to determine the hits themselves. However, the theory behind the change is quite simple and easy to accept if you have not become accustomed to doing it the other way. Keep in mind that a "hit" never meant that someone had actually been struck by a shell. Rather, it means that the shell had detonated within a radius of the target where its fragments could conceivably come into contact with elements of the target. That could range anywhere from the "critical hit" that lands in a bunker and scores a KIA on everyone inside, to the mortar shell which simply makes a lot of noise but harms nobody. Therefore, if we simply use the protective terrain of a target to reduce the area within which a shell must land to affect the target, rather than keeping that hit area constant and then reducing its effect, we have simply traded even up, and gotten a more easily remembered rule in the bargain. I am pleased with the result, with the sole exception of the "hulldown" example cited by Dr. Selover. In the second edition, a hulldown target will never have a choice of a wall TEM or HD status, it will have to take the HD status and forfeit any wall TEM.

The single biggest gripe I have heard about the game comes from the Design Your Own enthusiasts re the absence of point values for the new units. One such disappointed player accused me at ORIGINS of deliberately leaving out the values so he would be forced to buy them later. Dr. Selover seemed to think the omission was for lack of space. The truth is that they simply were not available. The game system has evolved so much over the course of the last three gamettes

that the original formulas for devising point values are hopelessly outdated. Rather than prepare a haphazard list, which would just have to be revised when the game system is finished, I decided to wait until I could do a thorough and final job.

My next Squad Leader project is actually only related to that game in an abstract way. Currently, I am working on a Squad Leader card game, which we are currently calling **Up Front**. The designer, Courtney Allen, is a Squad Leader playtester and the designer of Storm Over Arnhem. We are packing all the basic principles of Squad Leader into a much simpler, man-to-man level card game. Each man will be represented by a single card. Typical scenarios will pit one squad against another, with the possibility of armor support in the form of a single AFV. It is a welcome change of pace from Squad Leader; yet, strangely, it has much the same appeal. It is scheduled for an ORIGINS release and I expect big things from it. It should appeal to everyone who likes Squad Leader, including the many adherents of the basic game who no longer play it because it has grown too complicated.

After that will come a compilation of the entire revised game system into one hardcover or loose-leaf rulebook. The entire game system will be rewritten and revised where necessary to bring it into focus at one combined, advanced level. There will be no basic, advanced, or super-advanced version of the same rule to confuse and contradict. Everything will be streamlined into one easily read and accessed source. The questions of past editions will be answered in the revised rules themselves. The superior rules updates found in G.I. are just a sample of the type of facelift the entire game system will receive.

When? Surely not this year, or next, for that matter. As this will be the end of the game system, it will require more testing than any of the projects to date. However, it will be followed rapidly (as rapidly, that is, as any Squad Leader project follows) by a Campaign gamette on Africa, which will revise the German vehicular order of battle and introduce the

Italians; another on the Russian Front, which will revise the Russian order of battle up to G.I. standards; and yet another on the Far East, which will cover the Japanese and Chinese. And then we have a Campaign Game format that will really knock your socks off! I just hope I live that long.