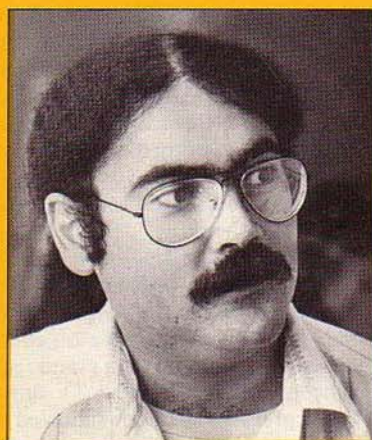
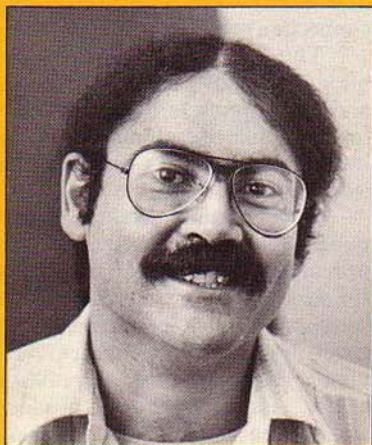


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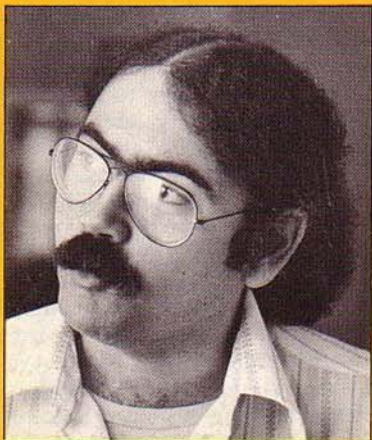
Conflict
Simulation
Theory and
Technique



Prados: “I dashed off these great ideas about how to do it, wrote them all down, and sent them all off to Avalon Hill. All that I got back was this little blue postcard with four sentences and little boxes next to them to check off, and they had checked off the box that said, ‘We do not accept ideas for games from people.’ ”



Prados: “I’m not putting most of my time into the games at this point, I’m putting most of my time into academic work. I’m thinking of a couple of articles to write, and I’m doing some work on an October War game, an operational-level Egyptian Front game — which should be very interesting when it gets itself together.”



Prados: “...if the following that’s developing for the fantasy and science fiction side of gaming doesn’t have a larger amount of cross-over to the historical side...then the hobby as a whole could be in bad shape.”

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GAME PROFILE

THE CHROME PLATED MACHINE-PISTOL

A Look at the Squad Leader System, Part I

by Jeff Geisler

Folks that know better than I have said of *Squad Leader*: 'It doesn't have anything to do with the realities of tactical combat, but it's a hell of a game.' Others have said that it *feels* so much like a realistic simulation that it's immaterial that it really isn't (and doesn't pretend to be). Perhaps it could be said that *Squad Leader* benefits from a kind of Kodachrome 'realism' that doesn't let history stand in the way of having fun and exciting your imagination. —RAS

The *Squad Leader* game system is Avalon Hill's most recent contribution to World War II tactical combat. One may well wonder why another such game is needed, but *Squad Leader* has qualities that make it exceptional and truly a contribution to the genre. It is the first game in an intended series; four expansion kits will follow that will include additional counters, mapboards, weapons, and nationalities along with the rules applicable to the new features introduced. *Cross of Iron*, the only one published so far, has as many counters as *Squad Leader*, another mapboard, and extensively adds to and revises the *Squad Leader* rules.

The scale and emphasis of *Squad Leader* are both given in the title. Units are squads of four to ten men, with counters for individual leaders. Vehicles are depicted singly. Each hex is 40 meters across, and the time scale is two minutes per Game-Turn. The graphics are up to Avalon Hill's normal standard of professional excellence, with, for once, a fairly decent box cover illustration. The Germans are represented by light blue counters, the Russians by light brown, and the Americans by a pleasant green. Beneath a picture of two advancing infantrymen, there are three numbers on the counters' front; they are respectively firepower, range, and morale rating. The reverse side has a picture of men shot up and the irritating pidgin "Broke" (for "Broken") plus the rally number, which is usually the same as the morale number. The leader units have a named figure of an officer, a morale rating, and a (usually) negative roll modifier (DRM). The vehicle counters are to-scale, top views of tanks, self-propelled guns, halftracks, trucks, and jeeps, with the main gun size, machinegun firepower, and movement factors printed on the counter. The reverse side is a wreck.

The mounted map is the best tactical gamemap I have ever seen; the multiplicity of

colors and the drafting style give it the appearance of an aerial photograph and contribute greatly to the verisimilitude by making a player feel as if he were playing on real terrain rather than a mere gameboard. There are also more terrain types than I have ever seen on a tactical gamemap, including not only woods, stone or wooden buildings, hedges, and walls, but also wheatfields, cliffs, shellholes, and three levels of hills. It is one of the first gamemaps that does not look like a gamemap, and furthermore, it plays less like a gamemap than is usual. The twenty millimeter hexes offer two benefits—first, the extra room in the hex allows comfortable fiddling with the stacks of 1/2 inch infantry and weapons counters, and secondly, the 5/8 inch vehicle counters just fit with their opposite corners across the hex. This placement makes an unambiguous definition of the covered arc, flanks, and rear and also defines the vehicle within the hex, which is important with respect to line-of-sight. A unit traces a line-of-sight from the center of its hex to the center of the target hex, a drudgery that the presence of a white dot in the middle of each hex alleviates somewhat. The line-of-sight is clear unless it actually crosses blocking terrain. Since the counter's position defines the vehicle's position within the hex, the presence of a vehicle may block the line-of-sight.

The game provides two quick reference data cards, printed on heavy stock paper, which contain a variety of tables and charts. Twelve scenario cards also are included with the game.

The 36-page rule book includes extensive designer's notes, answers to questions about play, and an index. The format is set for programmed learning; that is, a Section presents new rules, and then a scenario is given, using those rules, before players move on to more complex additions. Thus the first, third, and fourth sections develop the basic game, while the remaining nine sections are largely chrome. Programmed learning allows a player to start with a minimum of rules reading, but it does have the drawback of presenting things in a haphazard fashion rather than as a unified whole. This tends to make a difficult game even harder to assimilate, but the detailed index helps considerably in cross-referencing rules. Avalon Hill does give veteran wargamers one well-appreciated service—a warning on the box describes the game as Tournament Level IV, *not* for neophytes. This caveat allows them to leave out the patronizing and redundant remarks in some wargame rules, such as how to make the map lie flat.

Game Mechanics

The heart of a game is its Combat Results Table, and a look at *Squad Leader's* CRT shows its emphasis on leadership and morale. It involves a two dice resolution, with dice-roll modifiers applied for the presence of a leader directing the firing units and for the terrain occupied by the target units. The results are Killed-In-Action or morale checks, usually accompanied by a number. Lower dice rolls give more effective results. To perform a morale check, the owning player rolls the dice; if the number rolled is greater than the morale number of the unit, the unit "breaks," is inverted to show this state, and, in a later phase, routs toward a building or woods hex. Number results on the CRT, or the dice-roll modifier of a friendly leader in the hex, add to the morale-check dice-roll. A unit remains broken until rallied by a leader. If fired upon, demanding another morale check that it fails, the unit is eliminated. In order to rally, a unit must be stacked with a leader; the player then rolls two dice and applies to the roll any dice-roll modifier that the leader has. If the number rolled is equal to or less than the rally number on the back of the counter, the unit rallies and it can function normally.

If a unit is stacked with a leader and it breaks because of a combat result, it must undergo an additional morale check. This has the effect of making it sometimes unwise to stack units with leaders, especially weak ones. In the Designer's Notes, John Hill justifies this situation with a quotation from *Enemy at the Gate* in which Craig describes the death of a battalion commander and the consequent collapse of the morale of his troops. In game terms, the benefit of having a leader present to direct fire with his DRM must always be weighed against the risk of more severe casualties. But if the leader passes his morale check, he can add his DRM to the units in the stack when they undergo their morale check. In effect, the leader can either kill the whole stack or help it to avoid any casualties whatever.

The Sequence of Play is a symmetrical, interactive fire-move-defensive fire with three dual-player participation phases. The Game-Turn begins with the *Rally Phase*, in which both players attempt to rally broken units and leaders, and to repair weapons. Next, the phasing player fires any unit he wishes in the *Prep Fire Phase*, but if a unit fires, it cannot move in the following *Movement Phase*. After his opponent's Movement Phase, the non-phasing player may fire in

the *Defensive Fire Phase* any of his units with a line-of-sight to an enemy unit. The phasing player then has the *Advancing Fire Phase*, in which he can shoot at full strength with any unit that did not fire in the Prep Fire Phase or at half strength with any unit that did move. Both players then rout any broken units toward cover during the *Rout Phase*. The phasing player now has the option to move each unit one hex during the *Advance Phase*; they can enter any enemy occupied hex, which initiates Close Combat. In the *Close Combat Phase*, players mutually attack each other's units occupying the same hex, using an odds Combat Results Table. For a given ratio of attacker's to defender's strength, a number occurs on the Table; if a player rolls with two dice and the result is less than or equal to the number on the Table, the unit he is attacking is dead. A leader may apply his DRM to one combat. If all opposing units are not eliminated, the units are locked in melee and must repeat their combat in the next Close Combat Phase. After the results of Close Combat are applied simultaneously, play repeats starting with the Rally Phase.

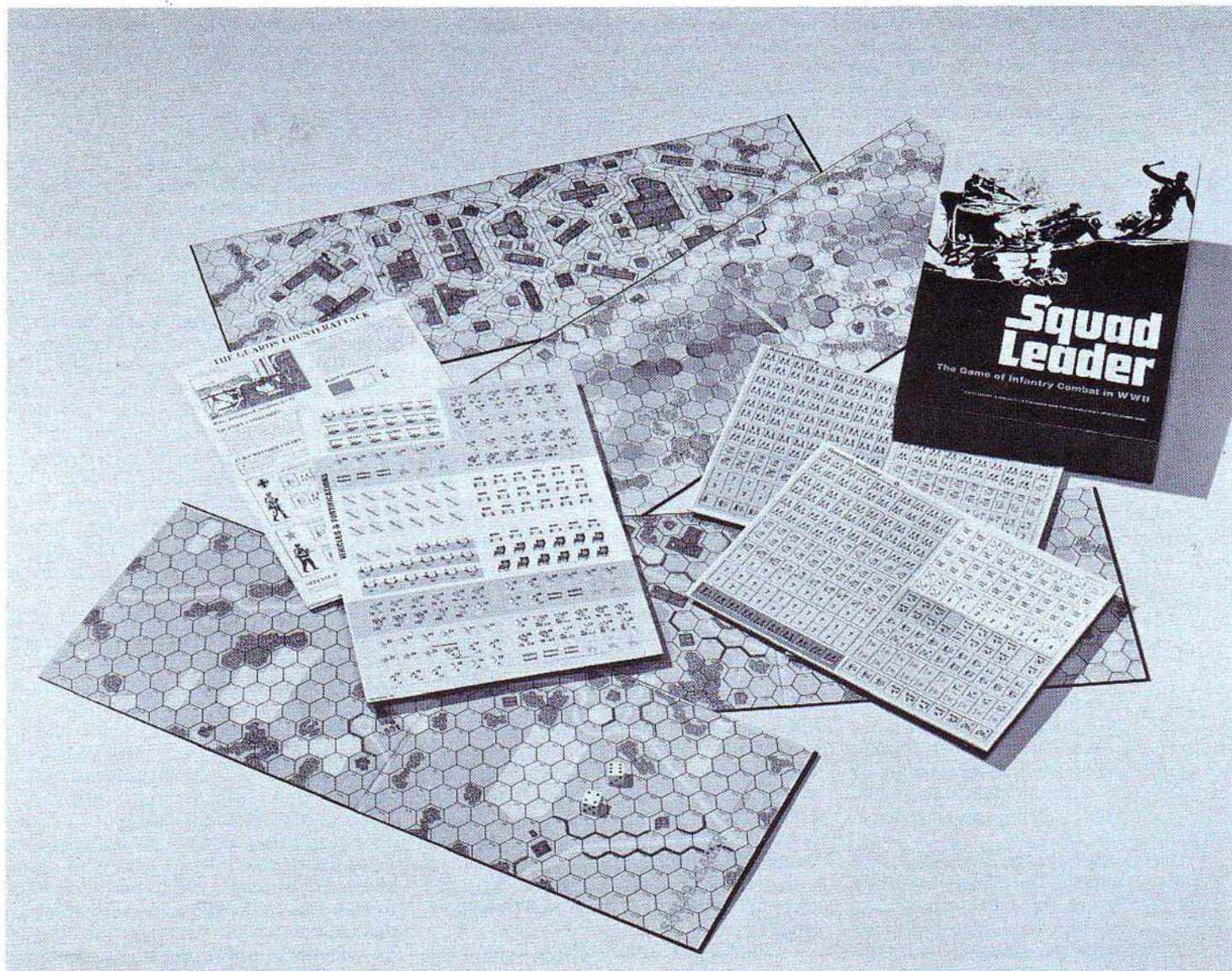
Infantry Game

Innovative in *Squad Leader* is the idea of representing heavy weapons separately from the squads. There are, for instance, counters for light, medium, and heavy machineguns as well as flamethrowers, satchel charges, and bazookas. As a provision for moving these weapons, the game uses the concept of Portage Points. Each squad has a portage capacity of three; each leader has a capacity of one. The various weapons have a cost listed in a chart. If the portage point cost exceeds the portage capacity of a unit, the unit loses from it Movement Allowance however much the portage capacity is exceeded. A squad has four movement points, unless it has spent the entire phase stacked with a leader. In that case its movement is increased to six, the normal movement allowance for a leader.

The use of separate counters for heavy weapons allows for some interesting rules. Weapons can be captured and used by the enemy, for example. Each machinegun counter has a fire-power and penetration factor, and

a range printed on the front. The penetration factor is the number of additional hexes along a line-of-sight that a machinegun can project its fire. This nicely simulates the cross fire effect of machineguns, especially the heavies, and makes a difference in the tactics of the attacking units. The counters also have a breakdown number on them; if an attack results in an unmodified dice-roll equal to or greater than the breakdown number, the weapon has jammed or run out of ammunition. In subsequent Rally Phases the owning player rolls one die with a 1/6 chance of either repairing the weapon or eliminating it.

Squad Leader's treatment of artillery is conventional with the exception of the radio counter. In order to use artillery, a leader must have a radio and must have established and maintained radio contact with the off-board artillery. Contact uses a dice-roll and depends on the nationality of the unit. After the leader gets radio contact in the Rally Phase, the player can place a spotting round in a hex in the leader's line-of-sight during the following Close Combat Phase. He rolls for scatter, which also depends on the nation-



ality of the player's forces. In the Rally Phase immediately after placing the spotting round, the player can correct the round up to three hexes. He can then fire for effect in the Prep Fire Phase if he is the phasing player or in the Defensive Fire Phase if he is not, or he can correct the round again in another Rally Phase. Fire is resolved on the Infantry Fire CRT, using for the artillery those columns equivalent to infantry fire, according to the calibre of the rounds.

Armor Game

Since a game cannot really simulate World War II without also simulating combined arms operations, *Squad Leader* of course includes armored fighting vehicles, trucks, and jeeps. AFV operations will then be divided into three types—AFV versus AFV, infantry versus AFV, and AFV versus infantry.

In tank against tank combat, fire is resolved using two tables—the To Hit Table and the AFV Kill Table. The To Hit Table takes into account the terrain the target is in, the range, and the nationality of the gun crew. It is a two dice Table, with numbers that must be rolled equal to or lower than in order to hit. Such things as the movement of the target, the movement of the firing unit, firing outside the covered arc, etc., will modify the dice-roll. Once a hit has been obtained, the player refers to the AFV Kill Table. Again, this is a two dice Table, with numbers that must be rolled less than or equal to in order to kill. The Table takes care of variables such as whether the target presents the front, side, or rear, and the gun-type of the firing units; dice-roll modifiers take care of differences in armor and silhouette of the target type. The infantry anti-tank weapons also have columns on this table.

Tanks and self-propelled guns can also fire high-explosive ordnance against soft targets. Resolution is on the Infantry Fire CRT in a manner analogous to artillery fire, but with the requirement that the To Hit Table must be consulted first. Additionally, tanks, SP guns, and halftracks may use their mounted machineguns. There are two numbers separated by a slash on the counter; the first represents the covered arc machinegun factor (i.e., turret and hull mounted machineguns), and the second is the 360° anti-aircraft machinegun factor. Fire from machineguns is resolved on the Infantry Fire CRT as normal machinegun fire, although separately from the HE fire. Thus it is possible for a tank to fire its main gun and break an infantry unit, then finish it off with the machinegun by causing it to break again. Use of the 360° machinegun, however, exposes the tank crew to enemy fire; there is a chance that they could suffer an adverse result and abandon the tank. AFVs are also capable of overrunning infantry.

Infantry may be vulnerable to tanks, but they are not helpless. They have the use of a variety of infantry anti-tank weapons, including *panzerfausts*, bazookas, demolition charges, flamethrowers, and anti-tank guns. The projectile weapons use a fire procedure

similar to that of the tank weapons, referring first to a hit table (which, for the *panzerfaust* and bazooka, is distinct from the anti-tank hit table) and their own column on the AFV Kill Table. An infantry unit adjacent to an AFV has two modes of attack, once it has passed a pre-AFV attack morale check. One mode is close assault against the tank in the Close Combat Phase. In order to destroy a tank, the squad must roll less than or equal to its firepower rating; hence a stack of German assault engineers with a rating of 8 is pretty fearsome as an anti-tank weapon. Or it could attempt to immobilize the tank in the Defensive Fire Phase by rolling less than or equal to a number which is given in the AFV Immobilization Numbers Table and which is dependent on the terrain the firing units occupy. The potency of infantry units in anti-tank roles encourages a player to integrate his tanks and infantry well, since close combat must first eliminate any infantry units riding on the tank or using it for cover.

An AFV may also be immobilized simply through movement. Any time an AFV goes through woods or into a wooden building hex, there is a 1/6 chance that it will be immobilized if it is Russian or American and a 1/3 chance it will be if it is German. The main gun and the machineguns are subject to malfunction and ammunition shortage in a manner analogous to infantry machineguns. Although a tank may be killed, its crew does not have to be, and *Squad Leader* provides for this possibility by the survival numbers on the wreck side of tank and SP gun counters. If a die-roll is less than or equal to this number, the crew survives and the player places a crew counter on top of the wreck. This crew can then fight or die like any normal unit.

Chrome

The programmed learning approach lends itself well to a layering of chrome. Some is in the form of additional weapons, such as the anti-tank weapons already mentioned, HEAT for anti-tank guns, and mines. Assault engineers can use flamethrowers and demolition charges, and make smoke. Some AFVs can fire smoke as well. Smoke does not absolutely block the line-of-sight, but once the counter is placed, the player rolls one die and the resulting number is added as a DRM to any fire that is traced through the smoke hex.

There is chrome in the form of special rules, such as the provisions for sewer movement in the Stalingrad house-to-house fighting scenarios. There are night rules, rules for snow, and rules for cross-river assaults. Later scenarios introduce roadblocks, bunkers with three levels of hardness, wire, and emplacements. One useful special rule involves building level differentiation. All buildings covering three hexes or more are considered to have an upper story. A unit can occupy either the upper or lower story, and in order to change levels, it must use the staircases in the buildings, designated by a small white square.

The fire and rubble rules are some of the gaudier chrome. In a building hex, an HE at-

tack may cause rubble or start a fire, and flamethrower attacks may start a fire. The fire spreads according to a dice-roll and a table on the back of the counter. A player may find his units hit by fire of two kinds: trapped in a burning building but cut off from retreat by enemy machineguns. There is also a rule for berserk Russian units; if a Russian squad rolls a two on a morale check, the unit goes berserk and immediately attacks the closest enemy unit. It is immune to any further morale checks and continues to close assault the nearest enemy unit until it has been killed.

But really the most interesting aspect of the game is the Design Your Own Scenario Section and the Campaign Game. To make their own scenarios, players first abut the geomorphic mapboards in any way they desire. Then they randomly select the victory conditions, nationality, and composition of the defending force with a draw of cards from a 52-card deck. They secretly determine what force they think will be necessary to accomplish the mission, according to the point value schedule given for the units. The player who comes up with the lower total point value of force gets the force he chose; the other player becomes the defender and gets the force that was previously selected. The number of options provides an immense array of possibilities, insuring that even the die-hard will not run out of scenarios. Yet, scenarios are easy to devise for those lacking either broad imaginations or the inclination to research company level engagements.

The Design Your Own Scenario Section becomes most useful, however, in the Campaign Game. The counter-mix includes some leaders with no names who are used in the Campaign Game. Each player starts out as a corporal in his respective army. During the game, Elan Points are awarded for courageous acts, like single handedly destroying an AFV; Cowardice Points accrue from breaking under fire and causing units stacked with the leader to break under fire. At the end of the scenario the Cowardice Points are subtracted from the Elan Points; a plus ten performance point total results in the leader being advanced one rank. Elan and Cowardice Points are carried over from scenario to scenario. The object is to achieve a higher rank than your opponent after a number of games. The difficult part is surviving.

The game takes on the flavor of role-playing, without the romantic sentimentality of fantasy games, and appeals to those disenchanted with the silliness of science-fiction, and to those who require some history in their games. *Squad Leader* is not perfect; there are glaring errors such as the possession of a crest yielding no advantage to armor, but some of these have been corrected in the *Cross of Iron* revisions. Altogether, I consider *Squad Leader* one of the better games in my collection. Although I am not fanatical about tactical games, it is fascinating enough to make me ignore the annoyance of minutiae. Add to this the subtle attractiveness of its role-playing, and you have a deserving winner. ■■