"The Great Games Explosion in 1973" by Martin C. Campion

- submitted by Brian Train, 2023

[This article is excerpted from issue #30 of Simulacrum *magazine, subtitled "The Quarterly Journal of Board Wargame Collecting and Accumulating". Thirty-three issues were published between Spring 1998 and Winter 2014; after issue #25 (end of 2005) the pace of production slowed due to editor John Kula's health difficulties. This issue appeared in the summer of 2012.*

John Kula was a great friend of mine, with an eclectic and vital sense of humour. He delighted in publishing unusual pieces like the following, a previously unpublished manuscript by Martin C. Campion. Copyright variously remains with Steambubble Graphics and the authors, John Kula (referred to in the article as JK) and Martin C. Campion (referred to as MCC).]

[JK begins:]
After becoming a game designer in his youth, Martin Campion, after a conventional education, becomes a conventional professor of history. Dissatisfied, he becomes involved in using and writing about hobby war games, then goes on to design historical computer games for his classes and publication. He also becomes a NASAGA [*JK: North American Simulation and Gaming Association – see below*] "old-timer".

Martin C. Campion is a professor of history at Pittsburgh State University in Pittsburgh KS, where he teaches various military history courses in which he uses hobby wargames which he modifies as needed to make them usable in an educational setting. From 1969 to 1980, he also did quite a bit of writing about military history, wargames and their educational use in *Strategy & Tactics*, *Moves*, and in Robert Horn and Anne Cleaves *The Guide to Simulations and Games for Education and Training* (4th ed., 1980).

Since 1980, he has been designing history games on or moderated by computers. He designed *RAILS WEST!* (Strategic Simulations, Inc.,1984), *MEDIEVAL LORDS* (SSI, 1990), *MASTERS AND SLAVES* (Perspicacity Software, 1991), and, with James B. M Schick, *JAMES TOWNE IN VIRGINIA* (Perspicacity, 1991). Although the first two of these were sold by the publisher as hobby games they were originally designed as classroom games. M&S is purely a classroom game, while JT is a single player game suitable for an outside assignment.

Martin is active in the North American Simulation and Gaming Association (NASAGA), an organization of gamers in education and training whose main activity is to produce a convention every year generally in mid-October.

I culled the above from the Internet *in lieu* of a biography which, I get the impression, is non-existent. However, I remember Martin's articles from *S&T*s of the early 1970s with a great deal of fondness and ran into his name again in relation to an effort he undertook to categorize board wargames *vis-a-vis* my own efforts to produce the board wargame database, SimBase.

I have hounded the poor man unmercifully for almost ten years. He sent me the following unpublished article, which I hope will be the first of many articles. Competent collectors will note a few references to what I suspect may be close to *incunabula*. I am convinced that Martin is full of such references.

[MCC manuscript begins with a comment circa 2010-11:]

I do not remember why I wrote this unfinished and unrevised article, dated approximately mid-1974. At the time I was doing a lot of articles for *S&T* or *Moves*. This is a lot like an article I had done for *Moves* about the year 1972. I submit this without any present-day editing. I do not necessarily hold to any of these opinions anymore. In some cases, I find my opinions then a bit foggy now.

The games explosion has been going on for two years now. According to the count of games in my still incomplete collection, there were 47 complete wargames and five extensive variants published in 1972. (An extensive variant has usually two out of three possible changes: a new mapboard; new units; or new rules. Sometimes it has all three.) In 1973, 44 complete games and eight extensive variants were published. It may look from these figures that the games explosion is subsiding but that would be an erroneous impression, because my count for 1972 is probably more complete than my count for 1973, and because the 1972 count is inflated by a number of very weak amateurish games while almost all of the 1973 games are professionally or semiprofessionally done. So game designers and publishers are continuing to do their thing at a dizzying rate. As in 1972, SPI published nearly half of the games I've counted: 19 in 1972, 20 in 1973 (for 1973, I am not counting *Scrimmage* which is not a wargame.)

SPI produced a varied assortment in 1973, and among their games were some of the worst and some of the best games I've seen. The year opened with *The Destruction of Army Group Center*, the last, so far anyway, of a long line of games going back to *Kursk*. The game contained few surprises, since the form was well set by its predecessors. It played well and appealed to those who liked the others in the series, although it was not as appealing as the others because of its subject matter – 1944 was not as dramatic as previous years on the Russian front.

Rifle and Saber and *Musket and Pike* appeared together – two very similar games on the tactical scale, but *Rifle and Saber* was the biggest disappointment of the year. It plays fairly well as an abstract game but it is a disaster as a historical representation. *Musket and Pike* is awkward and suffers from the difficulties of the whole tactical series, but it also is easy to play and it has a recognizable relationship to history. *Austerlitz*, which appeared at the same time, is a fine simple enjoyable game with one fault – the Allies can't win except as the result of French incompetence. It is probably a historically accurate game in that respect, but it is not a good game for most play. It is good as an introduction to gaming, and if the old player takes the Allies and the new player takes the French, the Allies will probably win for a change. Neither *Austerlitz* nor *Musket and Pike* have been very popular around here. Most players here as everywhere are mostly interested in the 20th Century, or later.

Spitfire was another disappointment. Its predecessor, *Flying Circus*, has problems with realism because of the woodenness of its movement system. In *Spitfire*, virtually the same movement system was applied to faster flying airplanes. *Spitfire* does include three special maneuvers which are exceptions to the rest of the movement rules, but they are so hedged about with conditions that they prove useless in loosening up the game. *Foxbat and Phantom* was SPI's other air tactical game. It was also disappointing but a lot more interesting than *Spitfire*. Now the movement system has become so rigid that the player has a difficult puzzle to solve just to fly the airplane, but when he also wants to hit a moving target it is nearly impossible unless he has some radar-homing missiles, which are very flexible in their movements. The other difficulty with the game is that a large number of the scenarios are susceptible to trick wins. Although I found these games disappointing, I think that they are both worth saving. In each, a few of the rules have to be tinkered with in order to produce a better game.

In contrast to SPI's air games, Avalon Hill's single game of the year, *Richthofen's War*, is a delight. Its appearance here was preceded by a brief flurry of controversy that was quite puzzling. Jim Dunnigan wrote that *Richthofen's War* was a warmed-over Flying Circus and Randy Reed, the game's designer, replied that the only thing similar about the two was that they were on the same subject. So which was it? *Richthofen's War* certainly uses a movement system which is virtually identical to that of *Flying Circus*, but the designer has tinkered with the details and the result is that the planes are more realistically maneuverable without any addition of complexity. So the two games are very similar and it would be difficult to believe that the designer of *Richthofen's War* had never seen *Flying Circus* before doing his own game. But the later game, in addition to having a better version of the same movement system, also has a more comprehensive system of scenarios and a particularly fascinating although lengthy campaign game.

Back to SPI. *Lee at Gettysburg*, now called *Lee Moves North* which is a more accurate title although not as saleable, came out at the same time as *Spitfire*. It was the first of three Civil War games for the year, the others being *Atlanta* (Guidon Games) and *The Battles of Bull Run*. *Lee* appealed to the same Civil War fanatics who liked *The Wilderness Campaign* in 1972. The basic game system, first used in *The Franco-Prussian War*, is a little smoother in *Lee*. The strategy of the game is more complex than that of either of its predecessors. With equal players, *Lee* has usually lost here, but perhaps because a good strategy hasn't been found for him.

Atlanta, designed by Don Lowry, a long-time gamer and editor-publisher of *Panzerfaust*, is a fast moving straightforward game, with the possibility of adding several optional rules, some of which are more work than they are worth. Its main claim to distinction is a combat resolution system which superimposes a matrix system on a normal CRT. The decisions made on the matrix affect the results on the CRT. It is a good idea and certainly an improvement on the straight matrix system, but I'm not convinced that it makes any great difference in the play of the game.

The Battles of Bull Run is on a very different scale than the other two Civil War games. It deals with a single battle field, fought over twice during the war. The features that characterize the game are simultaneous movement, semi-hidden movement, and a command control rule that has numerous units marching around erratically. In the first battle, your big battle in this game is the one against your own army – just trying to get it to the right place. In the second battle, the Confederate army is under control while the larger Union army still is hard to move anywhere. This makes a more interesting situation than in the first battle game.

SPI's *Ardennes Offensive* was one of three games on the 1943 to 1945 period in Western Europe. They are a varied trio. *Ardennes Offensive* is the last, so far, of a long line of Battles of the Bulge, including another published by SPI a few years ago. *Ardennes Offensive* is a reasonable adaptation of its impossible predecessor, *Bastogne*. The earlier game has a movement system that is brilliant in its reflection of reality – it is so accurate that each game general needs a staff of two in order to keep track of movement and supply. *Ardennes Offensive* simplifies that down to the point where one man on a side can handle the game. It is then a fairly accurate and playable representation of the battle. Around here, however, there has been very little interest in it. Maybe the world didn't really need another Bulge.

A slice of the Bulge is cut off and served up as part of a trio of games called by the unlikely name, *The Major Battles and Campaigns of General George S. Patton* (Research Games Inc.) Let's just call it *Patton*. It is designed by Sid Sackson, *S&T*'s general games columnist. It includes three maps for three games: the Sicily Campaign, the Normandy Breakout, and the southern flank of the Bulge. The game system is quite different from that of any other recent wargame. It is much simpler than most, reminiscent of the system used in Milton Bradley's *Battle Cry* but with a lesser luck factor. The games are fascinating and fast and not as far removed from reality as I had at first suspected.

The third game in this area is *Campaign: Overlord*, a fantastic amateur effort published in several parts in the ADA's *Grundsteit*. I haven't played it or seen it played because my copy still needs to have counters made for it and because the rules are somewhat disorganized. It is a simultaneous movement game using a combination of areas and individual hexes for movement and combat. It looks like a promising new system. The game itself is only part of a projected long series of compatible games dealing with World War II.

CA turned out to be one of the simplest and fastest moving games of the year. It attracts a lot of players with its playability but it also attracts a lot of players' criticisms for its oversimplifications. Most experienced players will say, "It could be a realistic game if only a few little changes were made." Unfortunately, each person you talk to has a different set of little changes he wants to make. As it is, it is successful as a game and fairly successful in reproducing the results of some of the Pacific battles.

Several other games last year dealt with the Pacific. SPI's *Solomon's Campaign* is the most ambitious. It is based on the infamous game *USN*. They blew up a part of the map for *USN*, then stretched the time scale so that a movement is executed a half day at a time instead of a half

week at a time. They added a new simultaneous movement system and a full set of scenario information. It was surprising to see the great resemblance to *USN*, but it looks like it makes a good manageable game, not as complex as *USN* because it covers a smaller territory and does not require the player to make basic grand strategy decisions.

CA is pure sea warfare, while *Solomons Campaign* combines all three arms, although land warfare is quite abstract. *Leyte Gulf* is an extensive variant which combines air and sea warfare. It appeared by surprise in the September-October issue of *the Avalon Hill General* and is a variant of AH's *Midway*. It has, of course, a new board section showing the Philippines and it uses most of the original rules plus a few for new developments like Kamikazes. Some of the new units necessary are included with the magazine while the rest have to be hand made. The game is stacked against the Japanese and suffers from the problems of the *Midway* system but also benefits from an old but workable hidden, simultaneous movement system.

The year 1973 may be remembered as the year the desert bloomed. Seven games and three variants were published on the North African campaign last year. Up to 1973, I only had one game on the subject: AH's old classic, *Afrika Korps*. Four of the games are full campaign games like *Afrika Korps*. *Desert Fox* (Cavalier Games) is the most ambitious of these. In it the amount of Axis supplies is kept track of in some detail and losses are taken and replacements returned by the single points. There are three moves [per month] of six impulses each (like *Anzio Beachhead*). You can play a very long campaign game or one of three short games.

Loren Sperry's *Rommel* is also very long in the campaign version with four shorter games. It is easier to play with fewer things to keep track of, and it gives less of an illusion of realism. Both *Desert Fox* and *Rommel* start the game with the first British offensive against the Italians, who thus have the opportunity to preserve something from the rout or to lose even worse than the original Italians. Unlike these two games, SPI's *Panzerarmee Afrika* starts, like *Afrika Korps*, with Rommel's appearance. It turned out to be a surprisingly innovative game. The first look at the movement factors of the units produced a shock. And immediately after that, we saw a strange new kind of combat results table. And the supply rules governing the supply units were quite tricky. All these little things produced a large number of aborted games (aborted games are games you play until one or the other player suddenly discovers that you've been playing with a distorted interpretation of a key rule). After the bad starts, however, *Panzerarmee* emerged as a fascinating game with refreshingly different problems to solve. The long time span in a move and the consequent large movement factors still strain the historical accuracy of the game.

The last game in the new group of whole campaign games is *The African Campaign* (Jedko). The only really interesting thing about this game is that it comes from Australia. It is a playable game, although unbalanced, and, compared to the other three games, without enough different ideas to make the player turn away from *Afrika Korps*, which still comes off well in the face of this sudden, quadruple challenge to it in its previously uncontested domain.

The other North African games are a mixed bag. *El Alamein* seems to be faithful to history, which makes it one of the dullest games around. The Germans rightly have little chance to do

anything on the offensive while the successful British offensive can occur only after spending half the game clearing minefields. *Kasserine Pass* (Conflict Games) has a lot more action with a Bulge-type situation – a German offensive smashes easily through the unprepared Americans who then try to stop or turn back the Germans by using units that come on the board in front and on the flanks of the German penetration. It seems to be a well-balanced game.

Desert War, which appeared accompanied by *Kampfpanzer*, its twin, is a lively new tactical game descended from *Tactical Game 3* and *PanzerBlitz*. Since most of the framework of the game is simpler than that of *PanzerBlitz*, the main interest lies in the introduction of simultaneous movement and delayed firing of artillery. These do add a great deal to the illusion of the game. The panic rule adds a great deal too, but it is not well-liked and I expect that after the game has lost its newness and players begin to experiment with its rules, many of them are going to drop the panic rule experimentally and never use it again. It does have valuable results for simulation purposes although it is misnamed.

According to Jim Dunnigan, the development of his armored warfare tactical system from *PanzerBlitz* to *Combat Command* to *Red Star/White Star* and now *Desert War* and *Kampfpanzer* has been a story of progress. Many die-hard PanzerBlitzers disagree with that interpretation and play variants of *PanzerBlitz* instead of the newer games. In 1973, Norman Beveridge, designer of several other *PanzerBlitz* variants, published *Desert Rats* in *The Spartan*. It has unmounted counters for the British and Italian armies and for a few German units to supplement the *PanzerBlitz* units. There are only a few new rules but there are 33 new scenarios to cover desert warfare.

Finally, there is one other North African variant that needs to be mentioned. *Foxes of the Desert*, by Tyrone Bomba, appeared in the final issue of *International Wargamer*, which died in 1973 after a lengthy illness. However, this variant of AH's *Afrika Korps* appears from a quick glance to be a lively enough variant. It supplies extra counters to be used in taking point losses, a map extension to carry the war to the Nile delta, and a set of rules changes designed to make the game more realistic. It may be possible to get it from *[MCC: blank spot in the ms. {but could possibly have been George Phillies or Strategy Gaming Society -JK}]*, who inherited *IW*'s remains.

In 1972, SPI moved into trying to foretell possible futures with *Red Star/White Star*. In 1973, they published *Foxbat and Phantom*, *NATO*, and *Sinai*, a game where the future they were trying to foretell happened before they finished.

[MCC concludes:]
While reading through this document, I became painfully aware that this is a first draft. Again, I am now aware that the document is unfinished. Several games seem to be missing and the last paragraph is obviously unfinished itself. I will not try to guess how it might have ended. As I do not remember why I started the article, I do not remember why I never picked it up again. I have resisted all temptations to change what I wrote then, except for a few obvious grammatical and spelling errors. I have also tried to avoid introducing new errors.

[JK concluded the piece with a table of 77 games published during 1973, drawn from his game publication database SimBase. I have gone back to the database and reformatted it, with titles regrouped from alphabetically by title to alphabetically by publisher then by title. I have also added any notes he made, and his personal Reliability Index… a "9" or "10" meant he had held a physical copy in his hands, while anything lower than a "5" was dodgy in his eyes and might never have existed in more than a dozen copies, if at all.]

Publisher	Title	Notes	Reliability
[self] Garbisch	OstFront 41		4
[self] Lang	Stellar Warfare		4
[self] Sperry	Rommel: the Campaign for North Africa	Sperry's only official publication	8
[self] Watson	Phantom Star Raiders		4
Abwehr Publications	Syria 1941		10
American Designers Association	Campaign: Overlord	published in several parts in Grundsteit magazine	6
American Designers Association	Sadowa		4
Balboa Game Co.	Bataan: the Battle for the Philippines		9
Battleline Publications, Inc.	Seven Days Battles	1st Battleline game	8
Cavalier Wargames	Desert Fox: Afrika Korps 2		8
Combat Designs	Zulu		5
Conflict Game Co.	Kasserine Pass		9
Conflict Game Co.	Overlord: the Normandy Campaign		9
Flying Buffalo Inc.	Gazala		6
Gamma II Games	War of 1812		9
Gamut of Games ~A	Realm		6
GDW (Game Designers' Workshop)	Chaco		9
GDW (Game Designers' Workshop)	Drang Nach Osten!		9
GDW (Game Designers' Workshop)	Triplanetary		7

GDW (Game Designers' Workshop)	Unentschieden		9
Gibsons Games	Escape from Colditz		9
Guidon Games	Atlanta: Civil War Campaign Game		8
Guidon Games	Ironclad	miniatures rules	5
Histo Games	Eagle Day		8
International Federation of Wargamers	Foxes of the Desert	International Wargamer magazine, last issue	7
JagdPanther Publications / Eagle Games Ltd.	ACAV: PanzerBlitz in Viet Nam	Jagdpanther #2, with *Capture of Fort Eben Emael.* Sometimes called ACAV DRV.	5
JagdPanther Publications / Eagle Games Ltd.	Battle of Cowpens	Jagdpanther #1, with *MP-44*	7
JagdPanther Publications / Eagle Games Ltd.	Campaign in Poland 1939		8
JagdPanther Publications / Eagle Games Ltd.	Capture of Fort Eben Emael	Jagdpanther #2, with *ACAV*	6
JagdPanther Publications / Eagle Games Ltd.	MGB	*Jagdpanther #3, PanzerBlitz* in the Pacific; the game of amphibious warfare; with *Swordfish*	5
JagdPanther Publications / Eagle Games Ltd.	MP44	Jagdpanther #1, squad level; with *Battle of Cowpens*	7
JagdPanther Publications / Eagle Games Ltd.	Swordfish	Jagdpanther #3, with *MGB*	5
KriegKit Games	Thermopylae		8
Lifer	Mexican War		4
Panzerfaust Publications / Guidon Games	Siege of Gondor	Panzerfaust #66	7
Philmar Ltd. / Ariel	Kingmaker: War of The Roses, 1450-1485		9

Philmar Ltd. / Ariel	Strategy: the Navy Game for All the Family		5
Research Games Inc. / Athol	Major Campaigns of General Douglas MacArthur	Bataan Retreat; New Guinea; Inchon	7
Rostherne Games	Peninsular War		7
Simulations Design Corp. (SDC)	Battle for Hue	Conflict #6, with *Dien Bien Phu*. 2ed 1977	9
Simulations Design Corp. (SDC)	Dien Bien Phu: Strategic Game of Indochina, 1950-1955	Conflict #6, with *Battle for Hue*	9
Simulations Design Corp. (SDC)	Khalkhin-Gol	Conflict #5, 2ed 1977	10
Simulations Design Corp. (SDC)	NORAD	Conflict #4	10
Spartan International, Inc.	Desert Rats	Spartan International #6	8
SPI	Ardennes Offensive		8
SPI	Austerlitz		8
SPI	Battles of Bull Run		7
SPI	CA	Strategy & Tactics #38	9
SPI	Desert War		9
SPI	Destruction of Army Group Center	Strategy & Tactics #36	9
SPI	El Alamein	1st & 2nd Alamein	9
SPI	Fall of Rome: the Barbarian Invasions, 100 - 500 AD	Strategy & Tactics #39	9
SPI	Foxbat & Phantom		8
SPI	Kampfpanzer	Strategy & Tactics #41	9
SPI	Lee at Gettysburg		9
SPI	Lee Moves North: Lee at Gettysburg [2nd Edition]	renamed as Avalon Hill claimed ownership of *Gettysburg*	8
SPI	Musket & Pike		9
SPI	NATO		7
SPI	PanzerArmee Afrika	Strategy & Tactics #40	9
SPI	Rifle & Saber		9
SPI	Sinai		7
SPI	Sniper		8
SPI	Solomons Campaign		7
SPI	Spitfire		9

SPI	Turning Point Stalingrad	originally *Battle of Stalingrad*	8
SPI	World War II: European Theatre of Operations		7
Third Millenia Inc.	Breakout		7
Third Millenia Inc.	Empire I	versions with & w/o colour cover	8
Third Millenia Inc.	Flying Tigers II		6
Third Millenia Inc.	Operation Market Garden		8
Third Millenia Inc.	Search for the Graf Spee	very rare	10
Third Millenia Inc.	Second Galactic War	considered a *dud*	7
Third Millenia Inc.	Shiloh		5
Trumpeter Magazine	Forcing of the Schellenberg, 1702		9
Trumpeter Magazine	Salamanca 1812		9
Waddington's House of Games	Battleships		4
Waddington's House of Games	Major Battles & Campaigns of General George S Patton	Sicily; Normandy Breakout; Battle of the Bulge	9
Waddington's House of Games	Major Campaigns of General Douglas MacArthur	Bataan Retreat; New Guinea; Inchon	7