



Dunnigan



Flory



Barasch

An Interview With

JAMES DUNNIGAN

by Patrick A. Flory

An Interview With James Dunnigan

James Dunnigan is the main man at SPI. He made it what it is today. So that means that he is about the best person to talk to if you want to discuss its problems. I was accompanied by Harold Burger and David Boyce, two local wargamers, who were a little pessimistic about the whole thing. (I think they came to watch me get thrown out, more than anything else.)

"You can't go running around SPI looking for an interview."

"Sure I can."

"What makes you so sure?"

"I talked to Dunnigan on the phone."

"What are you going to talk about?"

"The same thing I talk about with the SPI nuts."

"Can I bring a camera?"

"Sure — in fact Don Lowry said pictures would be nice."

"Who's this guy Lowry?"

Dave became my camera man although I wasn't sure if he brought it to take pictures for me or of me.

As it turned out we had a very interesting talk with James and found him very amiable. We also met and had a chat with Mark Herman (who was working on October War at the time) and Dave Isby.

Flory: I noticed in *Perfidious Albion* that your man in England, Malcom Watson, is receiving a bit of criticism.

Dunnigan: Malcom is a pisser, you know. The main reason he's running the show over there is because he's the only one who can get things done. Anyone else trying to run things over there apparently was too much of a gentleman to get the job done. That's not a bad reflection on anyone unless these other people have other jobs or whatnot. He was willing to quit his regular job and put everything into this and succeeded, but he's a fairly decent businessman which means he can get screwed a bit. I only attribute it to what shape England is in. There is a little intramural sniping; most of it, if not all of it, is good natured. I hear a lot of it that doesn't get into print. Malcom is always expected to come to all these shows; they all get roaring drunk and whatnot and make fun at each other. But, in this case, what's his name, Charlie Vasey (editor of *Perfidious Albion*) or something — he puts it in print and it comes across to Americans

as being a bit more than it is. I think nothing of it; in fact when Malcom was over here, we said, "gee Malcom what are you going to do with this Vasey?" We went through this routine, "Oh I'm gonna rip his lungs out. . ." and all. Yet it was all a big joke as far as he was concerned. They're all on speaking terms. The people Malcom really gets mad at are the ones who do him in, in a business sense. You can make all the fun of Malcom you want but when you take away some of his talents, or bucks, or whatever it is that he spends over there and he gets very upset. As far as I can tell things are in good shape; his sales are up 50% this year. He's doing very well; he must be doing something right.

Flory: I notice that English wargamers have a problem getting copies of certain games.

Dunnigan: Yeah, well Malcom brings most of them in and the ironic thing is that most of them don't sell. It surprised the shit out of me and it surprised the hell out of him too. He brings in anything that looks likely; in fact, he has this new magazine, *Phoenix*; have you seen that?

Burger: We've read about it in *P.A.* but haven't seen a copy.

Dunnigan: I have a copy up here. He has his own feedback in the back which he sends to us for keypunching and processing; some of it anyway — he can do some of it himself and apparently does. He asks questions in there such as "these are games currently available in the states from third world publishers (other than S.P.I. or Avalon Hill) and whatnot, rate them as to whether or not you'll buy them." He takes the top 50% or third but he can't bring them all in because he takes a beating on a lot of them. You know, the *Excalibre* mini-games and whatnot.

Flory: What do you think about the complaint that many English wargamers have about *Phoenix* being attached to *S&T* which means that they have to pay for it whether or not they wish to?

Dunnigan: Again it's a matter of economics; there is no other professional wargaming magazine over there. I grant you, in a matter of speaking, he just piggy backs *Phoenix* on top of *S&T*, but I believe he has a deal and it's right there in the editorial. He's getting more of a profit than we are. I mean he has to please his subscribers so I leave that up to him. If his sales start to fall down I'd say, "Malcom you must be doing something wrong," but if they were increasing I'd say, "Malcom you must be doing something right." In other words leave the reins loose; I can't be running a show that's 3,000 miles away — even with the Navy's communications system I doubt that I could run a show that far away. I believe he's on top of it, I mean he feed-backs everything. You can't go wrong when you feed-back. Granted

you're going to know how large a minority you offend but at least you're going to know you're on the right side of the fence when the shit comes down. You're always catering to minority interest; you just try to get as many minorities on your side as you can. You've got to do something.

[enter Barasch] Howie, these are the guys from *Campaign*. This is Howie Barasch; he's number three and you've got two-thirds of the SPI high command in this office now. The cat isn't here, Redmond, throw him out of the art dept. and he's in the hospital. Were you looking for Richard Berg by any chance?

Flory: I don't know — after being misquoted by *Perfidious Albion* about *Terrible Swift Sword* being historically inaccurate, I figure he may want to throw me out of here.

Dunnigan: What was that, issue 12? I think that was being bounced around here. I forget what was in it, a lot of these things we read and whatnot and on to the next thing. There is such an intensity of material and everything passes through here. I don't remember him getting in a flap over that. I know he's mad at Dave Isby who keeps calling *TSS* "terrible swift bore" and he makes a point of doing that.

Flory: A lot of people get upset about his reviews in *Moves*.

Dunnigan: Richard's reviews?

Flory: Yes, and even more so about his lists of best games.

Dunnigan: Well, he said at the beginning, "this is going to offend half of you and please the rest."

Barasch: I'm sure that if you put your list of best games you're going to find a half dozen people running your list.

Dunnigan: You can't accuse us of false advertising. We blatantly said "Richard Berg's list" and put his picture right there.

Flory: I noticed you kind of stuck him out there by himself.

Dunnigan: Well, Berg himself came up with the list; nobody badgered him about it. Berg is free to write anything he wants about our games or anybody elses.

Flory: How can a guy be a critic and be on the payrole of the biggest wargame producer without having a conflict of interest?

Dunnigan: So what is the alternative? We either fire him or he no longer writes criticisms. That seems to be a rather unenviable choice. We have to be a little flexible. Sure somebody could say he's under the influence but as far as I'm concerned all shit like this gives people something to moan and gossip about and I consider that a public service; that's why it never bothers me. When somebody throws a zinger at me I say "hey that's interesting, I wish I thought of it first."

Burger: In other words you subscribe to the idea that anytime somebody talks about you it's free advertisement?

Dunnigan: Yes, at least people are alive, they're saying something. Anything is better than nothing.

Barasch: They only say things about people who are up there; they do not talk about too many people who are on the bottom.

Dunnigan: It's not so much an ego boost, it's that people are thinking, even if I disagree with what they're thinking. I'm not a letter writer but if someone is willing to debate me in person I'll debate him all he wants. You get two different personalities with people writing in small 'zines and they come across in print a lot differently than they do in person. I have yet to meet one of my critics or whatever you call them who has been able to give a fraction of the vitriol that they were giving me in print (could be because James didn't give them a chance to get a word in). Somehow they're in the dolts when they have to do it face-to-face. I don't know what you can contribute that to.

Flory: Perhaps, when one is writing an article. . . .

Dunnigan: And I'm not there to defend myself.

Flory: No, not so much that, as getting your ideas out in one line of thought without getting on tangents.

Boyce: You're not talking to a person.

Dunnigan: Yes, that's right, and I do the same thing but deliberately to get somebody's goat. If I'm going to zing somebody in print I'm not going to do it by accident, I'm going to do it rudely, on purpose.

Flory: In an article you go along the line of thought of your choosing, whereas a discussion is more or less a compromise as to which line of thought is followed.

Dunnigan: It's hard to debate yourself and there's always the chance you might lose. You figure you zap it to the other guy and let the chips fall where they may. I don't think anybody around here has ever gotten upset over anything that has been said.

Flory: Most SPI criticism is SPI's by origin is it not?

Dunnigan: It's a tempest in a teapot; you see a couple of letters — what you mainly see there is the "S&T-ites."

Burger: Do you think that many are not overly satisfied and just accept the fact that 10% of your games are going to be out-standing, 10% dogs, and the rest in between. He doesn't care; he doesn't write because very little is going to get him excited.

Dunnigan: You know what I do,

speaking about the 10% — which is true, we have a feed-back rating and we have one big master print out which comes out every two months and it has all of them on there. We do them by publisher so that if I ever want to feel good I take the top 10 put out by SPI and match them with the top 10 by anybody else and we beat them into the ground and I take the bottom 10 by SPI and match it with the bottom 10 by any else and ours is usually better.

Flory: You're using your own feed-back. Isn't that a little biased?

Dunnigan: I don't care about anybody else. Those are our customers, if they're happy I'm happy. I don't give a shit about the guy who owns nothing but Avalon Hill games or something like that, if he doesn't like our games, too bad. I don't even want to hear him. But, if it's someone who is a regular customer of our's, I'm all ears.

Burger: Don't you want to know what it is about Avalon Hill that he likes?

Dunnigan: Well that's market research and we don't really do that sort of thing in S&T feed-back, that's strictly to monitor, primarily to monitor our own stuff. We do a lot of fancy mumbo-jumbo with the regression analysis trying to find out, and we do find out things. Just looking at the results all you're going to see is basically our own audience. We have to do a lot of mumbo-jumbo to separate the bias. There is a bias and we have done it. What it basically does is it brings — I used to have it boiled down to a rule of thumb — we did it a couple of years ago with a validation survey. The newer games stayed the same, they worked over the bias. The bias came with the older games, especially the older Avalon Hill games. Games like *Stalingrad* and shit like that; they did much better when we adjusted for the bias. In the newer games there apparently isn't much bias. The only way I can really validate this is to do a true across-the-board sample. Nobody can do that because even *Panzerfaust* and *Campaign* has an audience which is biased. You noticed we asked the question a couple of times, "do you read this magazine?" Well once we got those results we milked them and ground them around and sure enough each magazine has it's own bias. *Campaign* is slanted towards Avalon Hill. *Conflict* was slanted toward GDW, the others, third world.

Flory: SPI has another mechanism to establish a deeper market penetration?

Dunnigan: Yes, we got what we call our "foreign army south" department which is basically a couple of files in which we keep stuff on Avalon Hill and whatnot, and Howie is doing that now because he's handling the retail distribution. We're selling about 140,000 games a year now and that's about one-third of the games Avalon Hill sells. About one-quarter of the games bought in stores are SPI's. Like last year

they were so proud of themselves; they increased their sales 35% percent but we increased our retail sales over 50%.

Flory: To change the subject. Simonsen is too busy. . .

Dunnigan: Well he lost at cards last night, but he is busy.

Flory: There were a couple of statements made that I wanted to ask him about; one is that SPI takes a loss on *Moves* and *S&T*.

Dunnigan: No longer *S&T* just *Moves*.

Flory: Do you account for your own advertising?

Dunnigan: Yes, we do as internal transactions. The SPI game division pays full page rates that anybody else would pay.

Flory: Did you lose subscribers due to the smaller games you were coming out with in *S&T*?

Dunnigan: No, we checked that every which way. There were a couple of questions we asked consistently and we went through a validation survey which is where we take out a 2% random sample and ask them in a letter. We got about an 80% response and we found just the opposite with our true audience, not just our feed-back audience, which is biased in more ways than one, we found that people actually like the smaller games better. Circulation didn't decline but didn't grow much either. . . a couple hundred or something like that but that was because of other reasons; we were not advertising and things like that.

Flory: When the quad games first came out there was quite an applause, so to speak, but in your most recent ratings they had a significant drop with respect to other games. Is this normal?

Dunnigan: They always drop. We only rate a game once a year now because there's so many of them. When you put out a game with a new concept such as the quads — a simple system and a fast game — people say this is great and give it a high rating but when they evaluate it a second time in light of all the other quadri-games it doesn't do as well.

Flory: You are saying that a lot of that drop is not due to the fact that quadri-games are not as popular as they were first perceived to be.

Dunnigan: We're dealing with an audience accustomed to a lot of new beginnings.

Flory: Like *Terrible Swift Sword* which got an 8.1 on it's first rating?

Dunnigan: Yes, there again it's a new concept. When we do *Highway to the Reich* and *Wellington's Victory*, *TSS* will drop a bit.

Flory: So *TSS* has an 8.1 because it's

your first in a series?

Dunnigan: Right. It's also a big game; bigger is better as far as most gamers are concerned.

Boyce: You also picked a very popular topic.

Barasch: And curiously enough, we cannot repeat it. We ask questions on Antietam and Shiloh and they didn't make it.

Dunnigan: I think Shiloh would have been a good game.

Boyce: It might be a better game, but it's not the battle everyone remembers.

Dunnigan: You're right, it is the battle everyone remembers.

Barasch: The same thing is true of *Wellington's Victory*, it is the battle of the Napoleonic wars that everyone remembers.

Flory: The other statement I wanted to ask you about pertains to the reason you put out so many different games. You say this is done to satisfy all the gamers.

Dunnigan: Right.

Flory: It would seem to me that a corporation's highest priority, and rightly so, is to make a profit and that the more wargames you put out the larger the profit will be. . .

Dunnigan: Not necessarily so. We had tacked up here somewhere a list of priorities. Number one was to stay in business since without that all others are rather nebulous. The number two one is the games, that's the main reason. It's a little different from your normal corporation. This is not as odd as it seems, most publishing corporations, even today, are run by self-proclaimed gentlemen who are not all that crazy about profit. I do not want the business end to dominate the R&D end.

We can produce a game on anything. The only problem is marketing it. If you can't sell it, it's just going to sit there and. . .

Boyce: Like *Scrimmage*.

Dunnigan: Well a lot of people like *Scrimmage*. We tried to come out with it as an SSG. . . It was released later as an SSG and it didn't do nearly as well as other magazine games.

Boyce: I sold my copy of that game for the entire price of the magazine.

Dunnigan: We still get letters from people with optional rules for it, extra scenarios and all sorts of shit. . . like simultaneous movement. There are a couple of hundred people out there who are into *Scrimmage*. We got one not so long ago. I always pass them on to *Moves*, but somehow they never get published.

Flory: I saw the captions in *Moves* #29

with you and Tom Shaw asking each other about *Kriegspiel* and *Scrimmage*.

Dunnigan: I said after they printed that, that only a minority of people are going to know who Tom and I are.

Flory: Dave, do you know who Tom Shaw is?

Boyce: No. [And he's an Avalon Hill fan.]

Flory: Thanks, Dave.

Dunnigan: Ha Ha! Think about it.

Flory: In the last issue of *Moves* in 1975 there was an article where all your game designers criticized games. The one thing that stood out was that they often ran out of time. They said, "we didn't play-test it enough," or "we play-tested the beginning so much we missed a few flaws in the end." Are you giving your designers more time now to develop games?

Dunnigan: The way it works is that when a guy is given a project he has to list the percentage of his time spent on it on his payroll time analysis card. He may be working on 4 or 5 projects in any given week. The computer then chops them up and punches them out and spits out a report. You get a crew together: the designer, part-time help, the developer, and whatnot working on each game; they form an ad hoc team and they have 8 months and \$2,100. I'm working, on *The First Battle of the Next War* with 3 other people and I'm the one responsible for it. I have to bring it out on time and within the budget. We have to do it that way because the people around here expect to get paid every week or every month as the case may be, and the customer expects to get the game by a certain time. He doesn't want to wait indefinitely like he does on some games. It is possible to run out of time and any competent group working on a game will run out of time to one extent or another and the game will suffer. However, that is grounds for dismissal from SPI and we've lost a number of people for that reason. They may have brought it in on time and under budget but it was fouled up so a couple of those mistakes and they're not around anymore. When you produce 150 games in 5 or 6 years anything is liable to happen and that has happened more frequently than we like. We give our crews all the freedom in the world and that includes the freedom to foul it up. We try to catch them before they get foisted on the public but, because you give that amount of freedom, you do get a lot of turkeys. We admit our turkeys right in our feed-back. Sometimes they're well made turkeys; technically they're excellent games; they just sucked and the subscribers come back and tell us so. I just accept it; you are not going to go through life without a couple of cuts and bruises.

Flory: I've read, in *The General*, about S. Craig Taylor's development of *Wooden Ships & Iron Men* and in *Fire & Movement*

about his development of *Airforce*. He massages his games, so to speak; if something doesn't work quite right he'll change the scale or the mechanics until he's satisfied. He takes a lot of time and the results are excellent. When he runs into a problem he apparently sets it aside until he comes up with a solution.

Dunnigan: The same thing happens here. Most people have 2 or 3 things going on at once over an extended period and when they run into a problem they stop and go on to another. Now remember the big difference is that people around here are doing it mostly for fun so that they can come in, in the morning, and work on *Schmidlock* and run into a problem in the middle of the day throw it aside and work on something else. A lot of people here, like myself, I only spend about 45% of my time working on games. I spend a lot of time on marketing and public relations or general business, things like that, and when I can squeeze some time in between I work on games. We do the same thing here, we just do it more intensely.

Flory: Do you consider designing game mechanics to be an art?

Dunnigan: Yes, I guess so. . . an art or a science. I don't quibble about the titles or labels. It can be hard, it can be fun. Slippery aren't I?

Flory: Yes. You must get a lot of practice.

Dunnigan: I got my ax straight you see. I know what I'm doing and I don't lie to anybody so I can do no wrong and if somebody says that's a lot of bull I say all right, different strokes.

Flory: I would say that SPI often, quite often, has many flaws in their games.

Dunnigan: Sure do, very expensive flaws.

Flory: *Fast Carriers*?

Dunnigan: That's one of them. We'll never make money on that game, it cost so much money to do.

Note: The remainder of the Fast Carriers part of the interview was not taped. I thought I had Dunnigan cornered and didn't see the tape run out. As it turned out I didn't have him cornered anyway.

Burger: How do you feel about other companies doing take-offs on your games? *Jagdpanther* did one on the invasion of Jacksonville based on your *Invasion America*, for an example.

Dunnigan: It makes no difference to me.

Burger: Is that why you no longer bother with copyrights?

Dunnigan: I don't know why we ever did it in the first place. Our lawyer said, "are you going to unleash me on these people or are we going to let it go?"

Flory: Your locking zone of control rules are supposedly based on the fact that it is not that easy to disengage from enemy units. I grant you that disengaging poses some problems, but historically it is easier to disengage than it is to prevent a unit from disengaging. From the Second World War onward, actual combat was short and violent. The enemy was seen only during an attack if at all. It was not uncommon for units to pack up and leave without opposing forces being aware of it. Your locking zone of control says this is impossible.

Dunnigan: In *Fulda Gap* we have more elaborate rules. It depends on what complexity level you want in a game. If it's going to be a fairly simple game you cannot cover all these points. You can only cover so many points in a game. That's what makes a game complex or simple, and in *Fulda Gap* you'll see where we handle the same situation as *Wurzburg* but we allow them, for example, to retreat by rolling on a disengagement table although in many other respects it's the same rule; *Fulda Gap* is a much more complicated game. I don't disagree with your analysis of modern warfare but if you want a simple game something has got to be given up.

Flory: In *Panzergruppe Guderian* you have combined a non-mandatory attack rule with the locking zone of control rule so that. . .

Dunnigan: Yes, but that assumes a less violent form of warfare. In *Wurzburg* we assume more violence. . . more firepower so that you do have a mandatory attack which in effect gives you more violence, although a lot depends on how bloody the C.R.T. is.

Flory: You have problems with bloodless C.R.T.s also. Your attacker effectiveness rules in the *Blue & Grey* quads, on the other hand, do a nice job in preventing too many low odds attacks. Without this there are too many "game tactics," a "game tactic" is one that exist in games only. I use them even though I consider it a flaw of the game.

Dunnigan: There it is; you've got gamesmanship and you've got historiansmanship or whatever you want to call it. That's what game design is all about. In other words you have to describe something in a hundred words so that you have to choose your words very carefully to say as much as you can in those few words; if you have a thousand words obviously you can say a lot more and be as sloppy as hell. That's the difference between *Cemetery Hill* and *TSS*.

Flory: It's also nice to note that *Cemetery Ridge* connects with *Cemetery Hill* in the latter. It doesn't in the first.

Dunnigan: Exactly, that's the difference in the scale. . . hundred words versus ten thousand. I mean it really comes

down to that.

Flory: It is difficult to have "game tactics" reflect real tactics.

Dunnigan: No, it can be done; it depends on how complex you want the game to be.

Flory: No, it can be done in a fairly simple game.

Dunnigan: Yes, it can be done; that is what I call elegance in game design but you can't always have everything.

Flory: This elegance would take a certain amount of effort, would it not?

Dunnigan: It sure would.

Flory: I consider that to be the art of the industry.

Dunnigan: Right. A certain amount of effort...I've designed about half the games published in the last ten years or something like that. I'm just saying where my experience is coming from. You can be lazy and just pull something off the shelf and throw it together, you can get a good idea at the right time, or you can bulldoze your way through. None of these are time-related; I've never run out of time on a game design. We never really run out of time; it's only something on the computer; somebody fucks up. There is no such thing as running out of time. I have done games which are fantastic. *CA* for an example, or let me name a complex one; *Panzerblitz* didn't take much time. Time is not the problem; talent, application, and dedication are. Believe me. That's my opinion based on my experience. That's what will foul a game up. You don't run out of time. I mean someone could come along like me and say that it took me a year to do *Jutland* so therefore *Jutland* is a better game than *CA* or even *Fast Carriers*, which took 6 months to design. I don't agree with that; I think *Fast Carriers* is a far better game than *Jutland*. I put a little more effort into *Jutland* and a little more time.

Flory: How can you compare *Fast Carriers* with *Jutland*? They are completely different.

Dunnigan: A game versus a game. What do you use money for? You use money to compare the value of one thing against another.

Flory: We're dealing with preference.

Dunnigan: I'm not talking about preference. I'm talking about all the World War One naval nuts taking *Jutland* and all the World War Two carrier nuts taking *Fast Carriers*. I think the carrier nuts are better served than the battleship nuts. I mean *Dreadnought* is better than *Jutland*. I think that everyone who is moaning and groaning about time does not have to face the problems we've had to face.

Flory: You are talking about your staff now?

Dunnigan: I'm talking about game designers in general: staff or non-staff. There are people here at SPI who think they can do a game better if they had more time but that's just a psychological thing. I've been in all places. I have said, to myself, "gee, in another 6 months I'll find the problem and I can see other problems coming along," and my mind was distracted. Not that I didn't have the time; you can make the time. It doesn't take that many hours. At one time, years ago, we had a time card where we had to keep track of every hour and I was trying to figure how long it took me to figure out this design problem and found that it took me about 15 seconds. It dawned on me that I spend a lot of my time doing something else and I said, "oh yeah, let's see if I can take care of this," and blop, blop, blop that'll take care of it.

Burger: I have some people who work for me in my office and I know that I can take care of a problem ten times faster than they can.

Dunnigan: Because you're more dedicated.

Burger: No, it's because I'm more experienced and it takes a person of less experience more time.

Boyce: He has done it 20 times while it's their first.

Dunnigan: Let me give you another example. There is this guy who has a direct mail business and he had two people he hired that worked about 24 hours a week opening mail and stuff like that for him. He decides that he'd rather run the business at home. He figured that he and his wife could do it. They found that instead of using 48 hours of other peoples' time in a week they could do it themselves in 4 hours because they've eliminated all the bull shit. People create a lot of bull shit. When I see that here, not your office or mine, I see people creating obstacles for themselves. We have people here who can do much better game design because they have their wits about them. You have somebody who walks into walls, and there are people like that, they could be good game designers but they spend half their time walking into doors and walls. They just don't think straight.

Flory: S. Craig Taylor's new game *Air Force* — what do you think about it?

Dunnigan: Steve Peek is going to work for us. I don't know what Taylor is going to do. I have not played *Air Force* but its feed-back is decent.

Flory: What do you think about S. Craig Taylor?

Dunnigan: I don't know, I don't think I have ever met him.

Flory: I don't know him either; I was referring to his games.

Dunnigan: *Wooden Ships & Iron Men*? It seems to be pretty good. It has a rating of about 7 which is respectable.

Flory: Do you think he could work for SPI with the time restraints?

Dunnigan: I really don't know. I'll have to ask Steve. I didn't discuss that with Steve when he was up here a couple of weeks ago. When he starts working here that is one of the questions we'll undoubtedly kick around here some night. He may not be able to. You see that's the difference between an amateur game designer and a professional and the differentiation there is whether one does it for a living or not. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, in this country who can design games as well as I can if they are given enough time to walk into their walls, but if they wanted to do it for a living, if they want to get paid regularly for doing this they need a different set. It's like this guy who built himself a F-104 in his spare time. It took him about 5 years. He built a 104; he finally got an engine and he's flying the damn thing.

Flory: He built a F-104, he didn't design it. A lot of people use the book industry as an analogy of the game and there are many parallels. One of these is that they have in-house writers, but most of the best books are not written by in-house people. Some of these games from amateur designers are top-notch with respect to quality.

Dunnigan: I don't agree. I think that, over all, the professional game is better than the amateur.

Boyce: On the amateur, by the time it goes through a professional publishing house anything that isn't good will be gone.

Flory: We have *Wooden Ships & Iron Men*, *Air Force*, *Russian Campaign*...

Dunnigan: You're just pulling a few games out of the hat. Take all the amateur games and compare them to all of our games then you get a valid comparison. I said there are thousands of game designers that can do as well as we can if they can find some way of getting them published but they can't. All things being equal we will turn out more and better games than anyone else. That's what we're equipped to do.

Flory: Compare *Frigate* to *Wooden Ships & Iron Men* in your ratings.

Dunnigan: A lot of people like *Frigate*. We sold more *Frigate* than *WS&IM*; well, not since Avalon Hill came out with it. That's just one game. You're being picky, like I said compare our top 10 with anybody else's.

Burger: Let me give you an example of a game that I don't think would have come out of SPI. In *Jacksonville* I have a F-15 providing CAP in a 1.2 kilometer hex.

Dunnigan: What makes you think it wouldn't be done here?

Burger: It can't be done, a F-15 can't turn around in 1.2 KM.

Dunnigan: I see what you mean. Yes, it's silly. You're wrong however, because we have done silly rules here. I don't approve every game rule that comes out of here. I do about a third of the games and the only reason I do so many is that somebody else can't handle it or nobody is available. We find that if we do so many games we keep X number of people happy and it takes a long time to train somebody to do a game. You can take people off the streets to design games but they can't afford to do it professionally. They can't produce enough games to live on.

Flory: How do you get your designers?

Dunnigan: People walk in; they hang around on Friday nights. They have to let us know they are there. We talk to them. Steve Peek said, "I'm interested in coming up; I need this much money; you know what I do," and he now works for us. That's how it happens. We are always looking for people. We have found by experience that many are called but few make it.

Flory: Do you have any prerequisites with respect to knowledge?

Dunnigan: No, nobody learns anywhere how to design games. We just try to pick people who seem to be able to do it, and we just let them loose, and they do what they do, so that they could do a rule like that.

Flory: So knowledge is not a prerequisite?

Dunnigan: No, they have to be knowledgeable. First we try them on a folio game as an initiation. That can be tightly controlled and watched. If they do a good job on that I throw them on a \$9 game and they get it all to themselves and they rise or fall on that game. I tell them, "hey baby, you do well in that game you're in fat city; you don't do well—you'll be selling books, or something like that." We don't keep any schmucks around here turning out garbage. The reason we've had a lot of turkey games in the past couple of years is because people are training. How else are we going to train them? It's like training troops; you can't use blanks all the time; you need live fire exercise. We created this out of nothing. I borrowed a hundred dollars from Al Loppi and I had to pay it back in two months. That's what got SPI started.

Flory: Are you still obligated to Avalon Hill for one game a year?

Dunnigan: I told them I'd give them one as long as they want, but they stopped bothering me after a while.

Flory: *D-Day* is interesting in that a lot of new games were introduced as being

better than it and today it's still around while many of them aren't.

Dunnigan: Very few people say that anymore because most gamers don't know about *D-Day*. The percentage of people who have played the old Avalon Hill games is decreasing.

Flory: *D-Day* is one of those games which has stood the test of time.

Dunnigan: Between you and me, it has, but a lot of people coming on board never get to see *D-Day*.

Flory: I find a lot of people that criticize *D-Day* have never played it.

Dunnigan: That's right. A lot of people criticize a lot of games without playing them. That's why I don't criticize games that much because I'm always working on a magazine game plus some of the SSGs.

Flory: Most criticism is good for the industry.

Dunnigan: Yes, people often criticize. I listen.

Flory: Most critics do a good job for the industry, but I recently read an article in *Fire & Movement* #3 where I was disappointed. It's the one where Michael McGuire criticized. . .

Dunnigan: He's full of shit. I saw him out in California when I was out there to give a talk at UCLA and I said, "all right ask me to my face," and I gave him the answers. There was one thing we made a mistake on; we got some ships transposed but on everything else I said, "come on man; they've got some sonar on one of the carriers; you said flat out they don't." McGuire is full of shit.

Burger: How can you print that in a magazine?

Dunnigan: You can print it in *S&T*. I must add that I agree that most critics are good. I think Berg is good. I don't think he should be suppressed because he works for us part time.

Flory: The question with Berg is a conflict of interest.

Dunnigan: I don't even see a conflict of interest.

Flory: There is a natural bias, isn't there? You work for SPI, Richard works for SPI.

Dunnigan: I don't know; if he works for SPI, he certainly said some unkind things about SPI games. In fact he says more unkind things about SPI games than a lot of people who don't work for SPI. You can imply conflict of interest, you can infer conflict of interest but I don't think there is. We give pretty near complete freedom around here. Say whatever the hell you want; all you got to do is get your games done and get them done well. That's all I care about.

Flory: I did an article dealing with how

Moves compared *Panzer Leader* with *Panzer 44*.

Dunnigan: Right. You did that thing in *Campaign*?

Flory: Yes.

Dunnigan: Yes, I think *Panzer 44* is a better game.

Flory: Well I think *Panzer Leader* is better, and I said that right up front.

Dunnigan: Well, we disagree but I designed both of them.

Flory: Don't you think it's hard for SPI to compare an SPI game with somebody else's?

Dunnigan: SPI wasn't doing it; Phil Kosnett doesn't work for SPI.

Flory: Phil Kosnett's article is a part of *Moves* magazine which is a part of SPI.

Dunnigan: Well what about his articles in *Battlefield*?

Flory: The point is that it is hard to write an article impartially when you have a certain amount of bias.

Dunnigan: Maybe you have a certain amount of bias; I don't and we let *Moves* say whatever outrageous thing they want, as long as they can back it up with something and that's where McGuire went wrong; he's walking on water, or trying to anyway. He contradicted his own sources.

Flory: Getting back to Phil Kosnett, I learned earlier today that he's only 16 years old. It made me feel kind of guilty. I must say he does well for a high school student; very well.

Dunnigan: Yes, and he's the world's biggest kid. He stands about 6'2". He's enormous. He is a pretty sharp kid.

Burger: I'll have to read that article by McGuire I haven't seen Pat's copy of *Fire & Movement*.

Flory: There are a lot of penny pinchers in our part of New England. We have 10 *Moves* readers for every subscriber.

Boyce: Yeah, Pat still has my copy.

Dunnigan: I don't know. Speaking to the guy [McGuire] — he seems reasonable enough. He didn't really come on too heavy.

Flory: I can understand that somewhat. He may have some valid points. It's hard to interview you, for an example, because most of the points I wanted to cover get by-passed as we shift topics. I suppose we could talk forever and maybe cover them all.

Dunnigan: That's what they usually do. I did a radio interview this morning and they talked for about 15 minutes on wargames in general and they chop the tape up and use what they want. You take your chances.

