

# Designer's Notes

## Julius Caesar: The Gallic Wars

Does anyone remember the game *Cassino*? Dig through your collection of old *S&T*'s for a moment and pull out number 71. Then turn to page 18 and you'll find the first progress report on *Julius Caesar*. Richard Berg, the game's designer, wrote that report in November of 1978 and I'm writing this one in November of 1981. What happened to this game? Did it enter some kind of time warp — well, yes and no.

*Julius Caesar* was originally intended as an issue game to appear in *S&T* 75. Things went wrong. Richard originally designed the game to use 56 playing cards, 200 counters and a full size map. As he worked on the game, it grew too large for its intended purpose. The game *Napoleon's Art of War: Dresden and Eylau* was quickly put into shape and replaced *Julie* in issue 75. It was decided that *Julius Caesar* should be released as a full sized boxed game and work continued on it.

My first exposure to *Julie* came during the winter of 1978/79. I was then a regular Friday night playtester at SPI and the game I had worked on for so long, *Bloody April*, was finished. I decided to stick with Berg and went directly into testing *Julius Caesar*. Richard organized an exceptionally good set of testers which included two of the game's future developers, Fred Schachter and myself. I played the game every Friday night for two months and amassed a perfect record of 8 losses in 8 games against Fred. Even though humiliated by Fred in game after game, I really thought *Julius Caesar* was an extraordinary game. After two months Fred became the developer of the game and I began emergency testing on *China War* (at the request of Brad Hessel, R&D manager). I went on to other games after *China War* since Fred had *Julie* well in hand.

Fred began to really remake *Julius Caesar* as he developed it. The testers loved the game, but Richard was becoming uneasy as to its increasing complexity. I quote Richard from his October 1979 Progress Report in *S&T* 76: "Actually, Fred Schachter, *deveporus majoris extremis*, is handling most of the work on this one now. I've received more notes from Fred on the rules from this game than we had errata for *Armada* (which is saying something...)."

After a year or more of work Fred handed in what has to be the most completely tested and developed game in the history of SPI. The game was continuously tested every Friday night for almost two years and was blind-tested by four groups too!

The game was really something to see. However, it had grown into a game with a 335-page manuscript. This put the game into a category of complexity which made it impossible to produce as an *S&T* game or as a regular release. It was a game without a mar-

ket. To make things worse, it was during this time that the bottom fell out of the market for pre-twentieth century games (except American Civil War games). *Julius Caesar* entered the R&D filing cabinet with other misbegotten games.

*Julius Caesar* was gone but not forgotten. I remembered how much fun I had had with it and I kept reminding the powers that be that this game should not be allowed to die. Recently I received the good news that I had been chosen to revive the game for publication in *S&T*. I am quite excited about the game. I know it's finely balanced, extremely exciting and wild to play. The only problems are editing the rules down to 16 typeset pages and making sure the game's components will fit an *S&T* format. The game will use tiles as per *Spies* and *Dragonslayer*, rather than the cards it was originally to have had. Tiles contain the same information as cards and are actually easier to use and last longer. I am happy to be assigned this game and look forward to seeing it finally presented to the *S&T* audience, who I'm sure will appreciate its uniqueness.

Eric Lee Smith

## RDF (Rapid Deployment Force)

I recently had the pleasure of demolishing an Iraqi armored battalion with an Iranian force of Chieftains (2 companys) and associated infantry. The Iraqis had the larger tank force, but not only was their equipment inferior (T55's against Chieftains is suicide), so were their tactics. The Iraqi commander found out why it doesn't pay to attack with tanks in a piecemeal fashion; against superior firepower, you get defeated in detail.

*RDF* is now entering the final stages of development. The addition of high-technology equipment like thermal-imaging sights (to allow sighting into and out of smoke) did not require lengthy new rules, but it did require a change in tactics. The side that had such equipment had a real advantage, even when outnumbered and with relatively poor command ratings. It became possible to balance the scenarios with ease; one side had it, the other didn't. The MPWS (Mobile Protected Weapons System) finally could stand up to even a T72, although still not on quite even terms. Before, it didn't stand a chance.

The scenarios have now been balanced to the point where playtester skill has become paramount, which is exactly where they should be. I detest games where one side always wins; you feel as if you're not playing against your opponent, as much as against the game. None of that in *RDF*, oh no.

Scenarios are being prepared now to deal with helicopter-to-helicopter combat, reconnaissance units contacting each other, ambushes by guerrilla units (Afghanistan guerrillas vs. the Soviets), and the like. The system seems to handle almost any battle situation thrown at it with a modicum of tweaking, so coming up with new scenarios shouldn't be a real problem.

Scenarios tend to be unmercifully bloody, sharp engagements, with units breaking well before the end. It is something to watch when a Soviet tank battalion breaks after its headquarters has been destroyed by an artillery barrage (he let a platoon of APC's get close enough to spot the HQ for

the 155mm howitzers) while F4's chew up soft vehicles in the battalion. It is not easy to achieve such a debacle (for the opposing player), but the results are well worth the effort. Nothing like a scenario with a serious catastrophe for your opponent! This game has the potential for many such happenings; of course, such things can happen to you too. I got clobbered by the Soviets in a meeting engagement when my RDF battalion refused to change formation before running head-on into 3 companies of T72's. RDF casualties ran up to 75% before it was all over, and the Russian was only down a tank company. Oh, well, the war continues... Tony Merriidy

## NATO (2nd Ed.)

Research and design work on *NATO* Second Edition has just been completed. The game has been played a dozen times and is now ready to go to the blindtesters for debugging. *NATO* represents a giant step backward in terms of most current treatments of the subject. Although incorporating a great deal of updated research from our *Next War* experience, *NATO*'s key design parameter is simplicity. The end product, we trust, will be a clean, fast, easily playable game that can be hammered to a conclusion in a single sitting.

There are four major elements which contribute to the relative simplicity or complexity of a simulation: 1.) the number of counters, 2.) the length of the rules, 3.) the sequence of play, and 4.) the layering of game mechanics. The following aspects of *NATO* have been developed from these elements. At no time will either player be handling more than 100 pieces on the board. The rules booklet, exclusive of scenario information, will not exceed 8 pages. The sequence of play starts with a simple Air Phase and then continues with the following 4 phases for each player: 1.) Air Strike/Interdiction, 2.) Movement, 3.) Combat, and 4.) Rebuilding/Resupply. Finally, only the air game involves mechanics with more than one table or sequence of steps.

*NATO* handles the air war as follows. During the Air Phase, a single die is rolled on an Air Superiority Table to determine the outcome of the air superiority battle for that Game-Turn. The result determines the column on an Air Defense Table used to see how many of each player's Ground Attack Points (GAP's) penetrate into enemy airspace. Once through, surviving GAP's may be plugged back into the air game by performing airfield attacks, which can modify the column used for the next turn's air superiority roll, or they may be "leaked" into the ground game where they can be used to interdict enemy reinforcements, strike at enemy units and supply trains, or support ground combat.

The simple movement/combat sequence of play in the ground war makes for quick Game-Turns. The chief drawback is that the lack of a mechanized movement phase commonly creates very rigid front lines and encourages a boring war of attrition most unlike the kind of warfare expected nowadays. The solution to this problem involved developing a very bloody and mobile CRT, and making ZOC's fairly fluid. Breakthroughs and counterattacks are now the order of the day, and a static front line occurs only

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