

# For the Kaiser or the King



'To the  
Green Fields  
Beyond'

*The Battle of Cambrai, 1917*

A PROFILE by D.I.A.MACK

## Prologue

The Battle of Cambrai, fought from 20th November to 6th December 1917, is famous for two reasons; it marked the first use of the new Tank Corps as a massed formation to spearhead an infantry assault and it was the only battle of the war for which the bells were rung for victory. The Royal Tank Regiment celebrates Cambrai Day, 20th November, as their Regimental Day, the day they set out to drive "through the mud and the blood to the green fields beyond".

Early on 20th November nine battalions of tanks and six infantry divisions launched an assault on the Hindenburg Line opposite the German-held city of Cambrai: their object was to break through the Line, seize the commanding heights of Bourlon Ridge and its wood, take Cambrai, and thus open a route for the five divisions of cavalry to exploit and then head for the crossings of the Senee River north of the city.

Surprise was complete, all the more so for there having been no prolonged curtain-raiser from the massed British artillery; the thousand guns fired at selected targets on calculations worked out from the map, a new and difficult technique but a successful one. By the evening of the first day the Hindenburg Line had been overwhelmed except for the strongpoint of Flesquiers and on the morning of the 21st the bells of London pealed for the victory.

Then the picture changed. Flesquiers' resistance had prevented the taking of Bourlon Wood, the infantry were tiring and, worst, too many tanks were breaking down — 179 out of 476 were out of action already. The advance on Bourlon Wood on the 21st went well at first but then came up against

determined resistance; for a week inconclusive fighting went on and Haig was forced to commit more divisions to support the exposed salient, rather than use them to create a diversion. Meanwhile the Germans were assembling their forces and on the 29th the counter-attack fell like a thunderbolt. The assault was spearheaded by 'Stosstruppen', divisions thoroughly trained in aggressive tactics and in the techniques of infiltration and supported by a sudden, fierce artillery bombardment. Bourlon was lost, the salient driven in and on the British right there was even a breakthrough of the original front line. On the night of 4/5 December the British withdrew, on Haig's own orders, to a line passing through Flesquiers, a line roughly the same as the extent of the first day's gain two weeks before. Though little had been gained much had been learned and the future of the Tank Corps had been assured for its value in the attack was manifest, despite the unreliability of the early tanks. But the curtain had fallen on the Battle of Cambrai.

## The Game

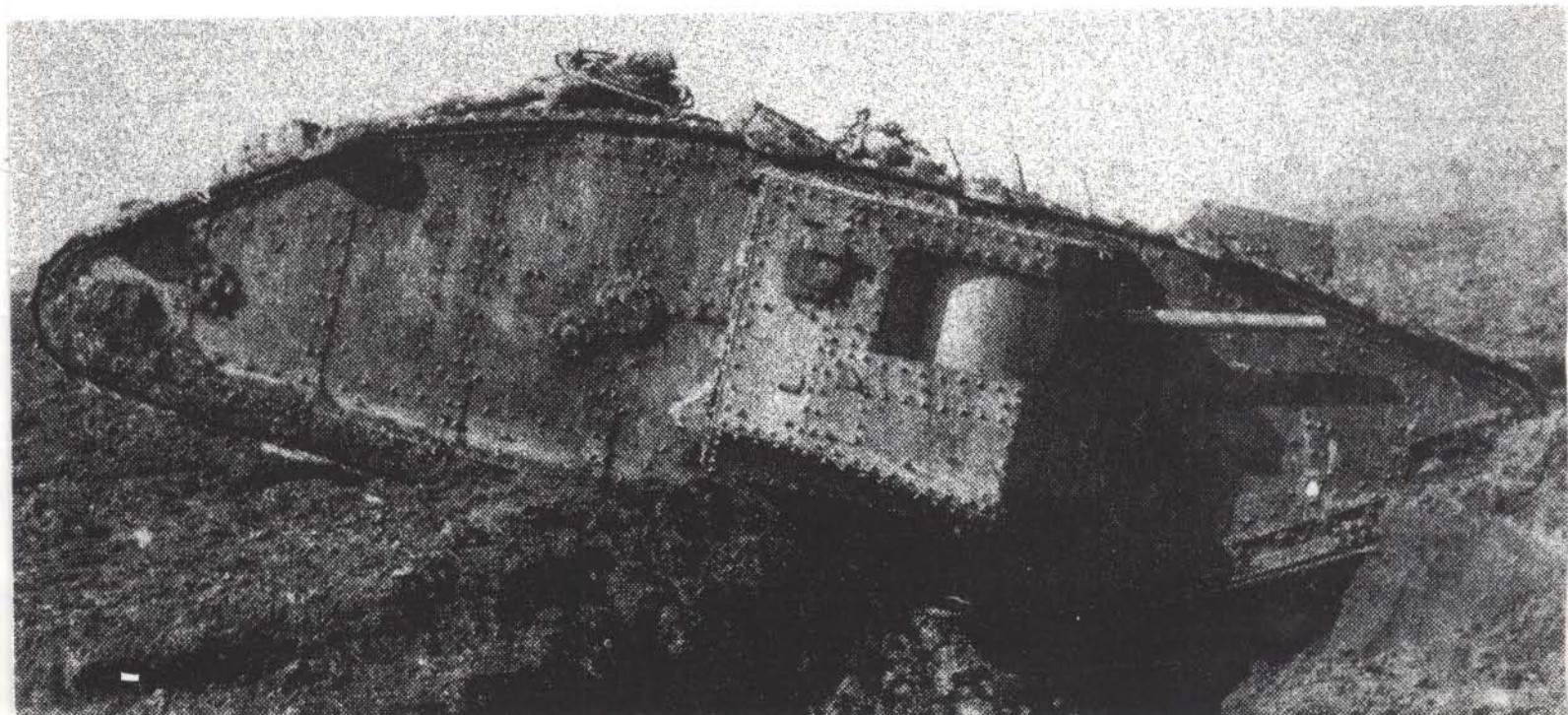
'Green Fields' is an operational game of the entire battle, playable as a 17-move campaign game or as three shorter scenarios covering the three main phases of the contest; scale is 1250 metres to the hex and 24 hours to the game-turn — the hex-grid, by the way, is larger than usual at  $\frac{3}{4}$ " across. The map covers the whole battle area and also the terrain which would have been fought over had the British plan gone as envisaged. The trenches are prominent, the British front line in grey for easy recognition, the whole German system in light brown; the display recalls the contemporary trench-maps and indeed I suspect that the topography has been taken from one for, like a real

trench-map, it shows only the British front line, with nothing behind it in depth. What was good security is not necessarily right for wargame maps especially should the little grey counters re-create the breakthrough.

Contrary to what one used to SPI's normal practice might expect, the trenches run through the hexes rather than along the sides; this is because they are, as well as being obstacles to movement, protection for infantry units in the hex. The other dominant features of the map are the city of Cambrai, the scattered clumps of wood and the obstacles of the Senee River and the St Quentin Canal. Most of the many villages scattered across the battlefield are battered ruins of no use as strongpoints and neither more nor less obstructive to progress than the rest of the nightmare-landscape of the Western Front, their subdued brown shading indicating their lack of importance other than as reference points. The blue shading of Bourlon, Flesquiers and a cluster of villages at the main crossing-point of the canal indicates their strongpoint status.

A section of the map-sheet, about a fifth of its area, is devoted to a display of terrain key, TEC, four CRTs (Standard and Mobile for ground assault, plus two artillery barrage tables), a supply schedule for the calculation of supply points (SP) expenditure and a display for the current level of SP available at the various depots: and a turn record track. In short, all you need to keep the game going.

Combat units are infantry brigades (British) and regiments (German) — both organisations fielded three battalions — British artillery brigades and German artillery regiments and the nine tank battalions, each appearing as three company counters. Supply depots also appear and, optionally, air





squadrons. Finally come the five cavalry divisions at three lightweight but mobile brigades to the division — a reminder that in 1917 cavalry was still the only arm capable of sustained, comparatively rapid cross-country movement whatever its defects on the contemporary battlefield. Germans are field grey, with the Stosstruppen regiments (of which more later) having the unit symbol in red, and the British are an eye-catching if somewhat ahistorical red. I had hoped to see the tank counters with silhouettes to emphasize both their importance and the difference between the tanks of 1917 and their descendants of even twenty years later, both as vehicles and as instruments of war, but the NATO armoured unit symbol is used instead. Combat factors are the familiar attack-defence-movement and the artillery have the five-number display well-known to players of various modern and WW2 quads; however FPF, presumably an American term, is SOS fire in 'Green Fields'. This is the still-current British jargon although, strictly speaking, an SOS task is one allotted only to those batteries in *direct support* of a particular unit, the guns being kept laid on the SOS task when not firing; one does not get the instant support of every battery within range, not in real life one doesn't.

On the subject of artillery I suspect from the stacking rules (one brigade or three battalion-equivalents per hex) that even the Britannophil David Isby has not really understood what a British artillery brigade was; despite its nomenclature it was the unit which finally became a regiment in 1937 and which remains a regiment (with some alteration in numbers of guns per battery) today, i.e. a lieutenant colonel's command consisting of three eight-gun batteries — except for heavy artillery in which the number of guns was less. In 'Green Fields' it is reckoned to be equivalent to 1½ battalions and is therefore unable to stack with an infantry brigade, making it impossible for infantry to provide immediate protection for beleaguered artillery.

The game-system is unique and emphasizes the importance of artillery in trench warfare, the 'set-piece' nature of operations necessitated by lack of a portable communications system, the 'knuckleduster' effect of tanks and Stosstruppen and the drain on a supply-net better suited for static war in difficult terrain. Furthermore the system gives a marked advantage to the defence and requires the attacker to have second-wave formations close behind his initial assault if he is ever to see those green fields. Finally, the trench-seamed terrain quickly gobbles up the MF of units and supply-lines alike and makes the cavalry long for the breakout.

Particular features are: a preliminary artillery barrage phase to soften-up the enemy prior to the assault; the provision of a Mobile CRT for attacks spearheaded by tanks or Stosstruppen; the consumption of supply points by barrages and by assaults, the rate of consumption increasing with the distance to the depot being drawn upon; the liability of the wretched tanks to break down just when one doesn't want them to; and a *double* phase per player-turn of barrage-assault-then-move, units being able to barrage/assault or move (but NOT both) in each phase. Last but not least, a Surprise bonus for the British on Turn 1 and for the Germans on the turn in which Counter-attack is declared; best to be on leave or in hospital when that happens. Let us look at some of these in more detail.



**Artillery.** The advertisement for 'Green Fields' on page 19 of S&T 68 makes much of the variety of artillery units ("light, medium, heavy and super-heavy") and the need to co-ordinate them to best effect. This is, I regret to say, flannel. There are a great many artillery units, especially on the British side; these have varying barrage strengths and ranges, as in other games, and that is all. All are equally accurate, all have the same effect; it remains only to apply the requisite number of barrage-points to the target-hex. Here things become more interesting. The best use of artillery

is, in my opinion, to fire Rolling Barrage; this represents fire immediately preceding the assault and moving in front of it, and has the effect of shifting the combat odds in the attacker's favour in the succeeding assault phase. For example 13 — 18 barrage points on a die-roll of 1, descending to one column on a roll of 4 (5 and 6 have no effect). This shift holds no matter how much the defender is able to change the combat odds with his SOS fire. Thus a 2-1 attack altered to 1-2 by SOS will be resolved at 3-1, given a shift of 3; very very useful, indeed essential to the attacker as defending infantry in trenches is doubled in CF and most infantry units are strong in the defence, whatever their attack CF may be. The other form of preliminary barrage, Drumfire, disrupts units (in 'Green Fields' disruption means in fact that one step is lost, not affecting morale or MF) or, in the case of artillery, suppresses them for that turn. Drumfire barrage requires more points than Rolling to have the same chance of a successful outcome, which is why the latter has my money; and to expend, say, 12 of one's own barrage points to suppress 2 enemy SOS points seems to me to be a poor exchange. Artillery which does not fire in the Barrage Phase may fire in direct support of assaulting ground units (i.e. boost their CF) but may do so only at a range of up to two hexes, limiting its value in this role. Contrariwise SOS may be fired, instantly, by every gun within range, which seems most unhistorical — indeed one wouldn't get this sort of instant bail-out even today — but 'Westwall' is the only game which I have seen which limits the amount of SOS/FPF which can be called down.

**Tanks and Stosstruppen.** Any attack in which 50% or more of the units taking part are British tanks or German Stosstruppen — note, units not CF — is resolved on the Mobile CRT, yielding a much higher possibility of disruption of the enemy and also of retreating him, without cost to the attacker and allowing the attacking force to advance after combat. Disruption upon disruption reduces the unit to cadre strength, a state which leaves it a ghost with no ZOC, no attack factor and a defensive strength of 1; it will be eliminated if anyone shouts "Boo!" at it and in any case there is no rebuild from cadre strength in the time-frame of the game. Tanks can stack up to one battalion (three counters) with an infantry brigade, thus boosting it by CF, but are liable to suffer breakdown; this is thrown for at the end of the British player-turn, a roll of 1 or 2 on Turn 1 and of 1 on subsequent turns signifying breakdown. Each company is rolled for separately, regardless of stacking. As tank repair facilities are well to the rear, breakdown means that the company concerned is a write-off in any of the shorter scenarios; in 'Battle for Bournon' I rolled five 1s out of nine throws, effectively wrapping up the game for me — annoying in the extreme! Stosstruppen are otherwise normal infantry regiments, their special characteristics being good CF and the ability to move from one enemy ZOC to another even when those ZOC belong to the same unit; they may also trace supply through one enemy-controlled hex, all these advantages simulating their high standard of training and their self-sufficiency. What is more, they don't break down and in my opinion they are worth more to the German player than are his tanks to the British.

**Supply.** Every bombardment and every ground attack consumes supply points for every brigade/regiment involved, the rate of consumption varying with the distance in MP to the depot supplying that attack. Depot units are included in the set-up and begin the scenarios with a certain level of SP in each. At the start of each player-turn the appropriate side receives more SP which are allocated to depots at discretion, a special display recording each depot's current level. A vigorous offensive can quite easily consume more SP in one turn than resupply provides and players will have to keep a careful eye on their supply state, both general and at each depot, when planning attacks; the good planner finishes the scenario victorious and with his supplies consumed just down to the last point and no more! Defense consumes no supplies, not even SOS bombardments, another factor in the scales for the defensive in this game.

**Surprise.** This is handled simply but effectively. On Turn 1 in both the first scenario and in the full game the British player has the odds of all ground

attacks automatically shifted up one in his favour, in addition to any shifts obtained by rolling barrage. And ... wait for it ... the German player, in the turn in which he declares his counter-attack, enjoys a *two-columns* shift! This is quite devastating and, fortunately, may be used only on the first turn of the Counter-attack scenario or, in the full game, not before Turn 6.

As I said earlier there are three short scenarios (short, that is, compared with the full game; more of this later). The first is 'The British Breakthrough' (three turns, 20-22 Nov) featuring the tank force at full strength, the British poised and ready to go and the German line thinly held. It starts as a British walkover but the 'diminishing power of the attack' factor soon manifests itself; as the British start well away from most of their objectives victory is not as close as it seems at first.

'Battle for Bournon' (five turns, 24-27 Nov) features the British 'high water mark' at Bournon Wood and is the most balanced of the short scenarios, the British player still quite well provided with tanks and the German with his Stosstruppen ready to hand. The only trouble is that the Stosstruppen don't break down ...

'German Counter-Attack' (five turns, 30 Nov-4 Dec) is like Scenario One but with the boot on the German foot. The British salient is at its maximum extent, most of the tanks are withdrawn or hors-de-combat and the German calls the shots. But they too will find the attack bogging down though with any luck they will inflict enough casualties to gain a handsome victory.

The full game lasts seventeen turns, from 20 Nov to 6 Dec. The rule-book is well laid out and a good grasp of the rules will be gained with a little study. Fifteen of the thirty-two pages are rules, the balance being scenarios (including long set-up lists for 2 and 3), a solid chunk of historical notes and 3rd Army's plan for "Operation GY" as issued to the corps commanders on 13th November; this is in full, is admirably concise and will repay study. There are some silly misprints in the set-up lists, some unit numbers being garbled; however this soon becomes obvious and does not hurt the set-up. More serious, in all scenarios the British player receives VPs for having cavalry "west of the 18 hex-row and north of the 16 hex-row", an object which he can achieve without ever moving the cavalry over his own front line! If for "west one reads "east" this requires them to be well on the way to the Sensee crossings and well through the German lines and is obviously what should have been printed.

'Green Fields' is a game of methodical battering-ram attacks to crack the enemy's front and allow infiltration of his defensive structure. A steady momentum must be maintained, interspersed with halts, preferably in captured trench-lines, to consolidate, allow reserves to catch up, to exchange disrupted units for fresh and to let supply points build up. The attacker must utilise bombardment and his tank or Stosstruppen spearheads and must keep reserve units moving up close behind the leading wave if he is to exploit any advantage gained. The MP-greedy terrain makes sudden sweeps and pounces difficult to achieve until at last one can indeed break through to 'the green fields beyond'. The British player will do well to assume that he will suffer 25-33% breakdown of his remaining tanks on each turn (remember that I achieved 55% in *one* turn!) and therefore not spread them too thinly: infantry-to-infantry attacks on the Standard CRT tend to leave both sides on their backs. The defender will find defence in depth an essential tactic, especially if he is the German, whose trench system is designed with this in mind. As the arrester-wires on a carrier's flight-deck slow down then stop a landing-on aircraft so will successive lines of defence trap and halt the assault, provided that they take the strain. Fierce local counter-attacks to nullify breakthrough must be made where necessary, especially if the attacker is in the open and thus at his most vulnerable. Generally things will never be so bad as they seemed at the end of the previous turn!

Alas, there is a fly in the ointment and a blue-bottle at that. The introductory paragraph says, "Players should note that each game-turn ... requires many decisions and will probably take 30



to 75 minutes to play." SPI usually fall short when giving probable game-lengths and in 'Green Fields' this is the case with a vengeance. My opponent and I found that one PLAYER-TURN will take not less than one hour and may well take twice that! And that was without the optional air phase! The game-system is ingenious but is laborious to operate: planning of barrages requires very careful thought and will also require a record of fire-tasks to be noted on paper as an aide-memoire, and keeping track of supply expenditure and planning ahead accordingly is not done in two minutes. All this probably has to be done twice in the player-turn and remember that at the end of the British player-turns resolution of tank breakdown means a die-roll for each company on the map — and on Turn 1 there are twentyseven companies. Furthermore unit density becomes very high, making physical manipulation of the counters finicking and frustrating despite the extra-large hexes. To make matters worse the non-phasing player has nothing to do while his opponent flounders in the mud except to fire SOS barrages twice.

In consequence the game consists of bouts of hard work, especially if one is on the offensive, alternating with upwards of an hour of either gazing at the ceiling or roaming round the room looking for something to read. And at the end of each turn little startling will have been achieved due to the terrain's appetite for MF and to that "diminishing power of the offensive" to which I have already alluded. To put it bluntly, we found playing the game a chore and found also that two full turns took us until after midnight and left us with no desire to start a third that session; indeed our attitude became, "That's our stint, Lord be thanked: now for some coffee." As you may have surmised, I rather like wargames, especially the slightly off-beat ones, and I can assure you that such is not usually my attitude. I simply cannot imagine a full game being played out except, perhaps, by two players so dedicated as to be near sub-normal; it would extend over 50-plus hours, long hours, and I fear that it would end in one participant doing in the other or else running off to join the Foreign Legion. As for solitaire play, for which 'Green Fields' is described as being eminently suited ... I can tell you from experience that while set-up for Scenario 1 is quite quick due to hex-numbers being printed on the counters, solo set-up for the other two can take a mind-bending three hours if one wishes to achieve the historical lay-out.

David Isby has worked very hard to produce this game, he has devised a clever play-system to suggest the 'feel' of trench warfare in 1917 and he must have held a seance to have produced those detailed set-ups. The result is a handsome game, a labour of love, with clear and easily-mastered rules and I only wish that I could give it as enthusiastic a recommendation as I gave 'Fulda Gap'; I much regret that I cannot. 'To the Green Fields Beyond' is as ponderous as one of the Mark IV tanks which inspired it, and as productive of crew-fatigue (although also as ingenious and innovative, be it said) and can be recommended only to the enthusiast who really, sincerely, wants to see how Cambrai works out in game terms. One day, truly, I will have another go because I think that David Isby's labours deserve another look, but for the present I have shell-shock. The medical board have advised me to try some other war to mend my health.

**Footnote:** since typing this I have found out that FPF has indeed ousted SOS in the present-day British Army vocabulary; trust a gunner to do something else while you weren't looking!



### AVALON HILL'S FOOTBALL STRATEGY MEETS THE G.P.O. CHARLES VASEY

How many of you remember **Scrimmage**? Alright, alright less of the violent abuse! It would be pretty fair to say that **Scrimmage** ruined American Football for most gamers. Not only were the rules full of holes (which was something new in those days) but the game was not explained and some of its best features were removed. The standard excuse was that the game-design art was not up to simulating the kicking game — well allow me to disagree because as **Scrimmage** was busy annoying the xenophobic populace of these Isles over in the States **Football Strategy** was already well established and it works.

To most folks Football is played by teams with names like the Mississippi Maulers and features immense roughs ploughing into each other wrapped up in padding and helmet. As usual this is almost true but disguises some vital features. First US Football seems part of the American Dream, and unlike the yob-festooned Soccer game over here it attracts whole families. Indeed one team's cheerleaders were disbanded for flashing too much thigh recently (I think it was the San Diego Chargers' Chargettes). The names are only rarely alliterative and usually bear the marks of US taste. The teams may be full of big men but their skill is great and more specialised than an equivalent Rugby player. One must remember that the USA produces only 28 pro-teams — that is a powerful inducement to excellence. Play is remarkably like Rugby League with the continual downing of the ball to halt play. Football does allow one forward pass, but it imposes the restriction that the attacking team must make 10 yards with four downs or surrender the ball at its last position. Play can therefore vary from crunching advances with one player tucking the ball under his arm and moving forward with his own team trying to clear a passage (a bit like an All Blacks rush), gains can be as small as a yard or even inches; at the other extreme we have the long pass thrown with amazing accuracy to one of the many able sprinters who train purely to receive and run. Often the pass will miss (which means you wasted the down) or even worse the opposition safeties may catch it themselves!

Because Football is just a series of separate plays made to gain yardage it fits neatly into a series of game-decisions, as compared to the flowing nature of Soccer. Tom Shaw's game consists of the defender playing (up-side down) a defence card, and the offense player calling out his attack plan. These are compared on a matrix and the result

applied. By now you are doubtless thinking (a) "This man is mad", or (b) "Bit random what?"; well you are right on the first one but not on the second — although that is exactly what I thought when I first played it. Let's examine some typical decisions. Assume you are the attacker and its your third down and you need another 2 yards to make your requisite 10. You look at the twenty possible plays you can make. The first four are mostly short running plays — nothing too disastrous will occur on them, but you are of sterner stuff and you decide to go for a long pass. These come in four varieties; the Down and In is very effective against frontline defenses but it is risky if the defense is deep. You eventually plump for a Stop & Go Pass, which is a pity because your opponent (rather boringly) went for a standard spread defense and the pass was incomplete, its your fourth down and still with two yards to make. Dare you risk a long pass? You consider that its likely your opponent will stay middle of the road so you put in a Power off Tackle (a head-numbing charge); tough luck, he had you marked for a chicken and he played a B defense (everyone forward) — even worse in the resulting crunch you lost the ball due to a fumble. At this point your opponent gleefully pointed out that if you had risked another Stop and Go you would have completed a pass 30 yards further on. You claim it was purely luck that he had you trapped (and make a mental note not to muck about when you are two yards from the target). The ability to second guess opponents or, at worst, optimise plays is what makes for a good player. Of course you can have rotten luck, but then in real football you (as coach) can only give the orders — your team may still fail you. Random play very rarely does well — it never does well in the long term, although I am a great believer in unsettling opponents by going for 'second-best' plays (but then I risk more).

Lest you think this is just some jolly little game hardly worthy of the consideration of the cerebral gamer let me quote Steve Doubleday to whom I taught the game recently: "It is very easy to pick up and play. Guildford Saints managed to defeat Cleveland Steelers at the third attempt .... The sheer concentration involved is hard to describe. I know that when Charles and I were playing, I couldn't have sustained the concentration for longer than twenty minutes at a time! At the end of the period I was so knackered, I felt as though I had actually been out running. The game is simple and because of this, it does concentrate the mind on outwitting and outguessing your opponent. This is a very enjoyable game, one which I can unreservedly recommend to any games player ... you'll be as tired as if you had played, but not so bruised!" I think Steve has the essence of the game there — too often in board wargames the clash of intellects is deflected by the historical factors or even by battles with the rules. This game is you against the other chap with equal chances.

Of course one of the problems of playing the game is finding other pro-American lunatics. We finally stumbled on the idea of playing the game by phone, and after some wangling I arrived at a system whereby one can play games equivalent to a full half for about a quid. "Aargh — a quid," some of you cry! To a hardened PBM man this is about 12 letters — a very small proportion of the number he will send in a game (especially an umpired game). Six of us have tested the system and have found it to run smoothly and effectively. As I write the first season draws towards its close in March where the top divisional teams will meet for a Super Bowl. Next season starts in September and we are therefore asking if anyone else wants to join the League. To facilitate this process and to give players a chance to see if the game is for them (not to mention learning the basics) we are running a series of Little Leagues, these take three novices and let them play a six game schedule amongst themselves. If they are still keen at the end of the schedule they go forward to join the main league next year. If you are a **Football Strategy** fan, or have an interest in American football, and you are over twenty and have a home telephone number drop me a SSAE and ask for our League sheets on how to play by phone. Hope to see you on the gridiron (and I hope you lose!). Contact me at 5 Albion Terrace, Guisborough, Cleveland TS14 6HJ.

