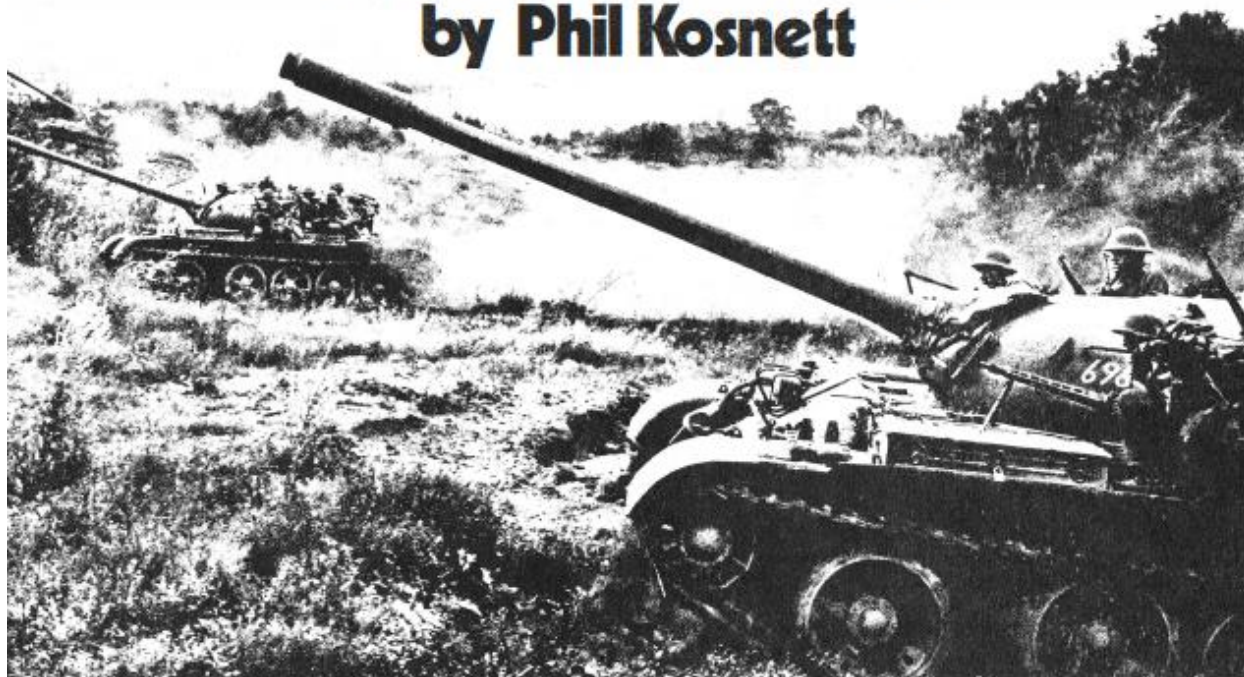


To Laud or Too Flawed? **MODERN BATTLES II** by Phil Kosnett



SPI's Quadrigames are supposed to be easy to play and easy to design. Each Quad includes four separate games, and each game has its own map, 100 counters, and shares a common set of 'standard' rules [i.e., a standard system] for the entire Quad. In theory, all a designer has to do is whip up some Exclusive Rules to make his game unique among the others in the Quad, playtest, and turn the thing over to Redmond A. Simonsen and his Band of Renown in the Art Department. Easy. The only trouble is, it ain't always so easy... Herein, Phil Kosnett — SPI's Boy Wonder — reveals the behind-the-scenes, Byzantine machinations which produced Mod Quad II...

It is SPI policy to use the smaller game projects — like the Quadrigames to train young, new designers to fill the ranks of the SPI Research & Design team. These 'simple' games are usually easy for virgin designers to get a handle on, and the financial loss to SPI is less if one turns out to be a 'turkey'. Back in June/July 1976, Wargame Czar Jim Dunnigan decided to give four would-be designers a shot at the Big Time through **Mod Quad II**. The titles were to include: **DMZ**, a game of the North Korean drive on Seoul, 197(?); **Yugoslavia**, a Soviet invasion of that neutral land followed by U.S. intervention; **Lebanon**, a game with a colorful countermix, telling the convoluted tale of that scurvy little internecine conflict; and **North German Plain**, a companion to the original Modgame **Wurzburg**. Dunnigan and Terry Hardy, then R&D chief, got together with four fledgling designers and matched them with the games they wanted. (This is standard practice. People don't turn out good games unless they like the subject they're

working on.) The entire **Mod Quad II** package was put in the '62' cycle, slated for publication in June, 1977.

DMZ was assigned to Joe Balkoski, 22 and just out of NYU with an MA in History. Joe had the usual start for an R&D troop: he rose through the ranks from the trolls. (The trolls are SPI's Assembly & Shipping workers, and several at any given time are prospective R&D men. This may seem like a waste of History BA's, but it really isn't. Trolls do some playtesting, sometimes write articles for **S&T** or **MOVES**, and Trolldom is a nice place to be observed as hard-working and industrious. From there you can go far at SPI: Joe is already Deputy R&D Chief.)

Mark Herman got **Lebanon** — which was rapidly dumped and replaced by **Battle for Jerusalem '67**. The Lebanese Civil War was just too big and complex for a Quad game, and it would require lots more than the four pages of Exclusive Rules allowed. Mark, 22 and recently graduated from Stony Brook with a History BA, is a little rare in that he was hired outright without previous exposure to SPI (other than some playtesting he'd done for Howie Barasch). Developing **October War** for **S&T** #61 was his first assignment. (If it seems that Mark gets a lot of Middle East games, there's a reason. Recently, we were assigned to do a hybrid of **Chinese Farm** and **Strikeforce** for the **New York Times**. Jim plopped the data on Mark's desk: 'Mark, you're Jewish, you do it...' Being only half-Jewish, I was made developer.)

The unwieldy title of **North German Plain** was dropped for **Bundeswehr**. It was the easiest (or least challenging) of the four

games, so it was given to the designer who knew the least about wargames — Ginny Mulholland, SPI's librarian. Ginny, also 22, graduated from Catholic University with an MA in Library Science. She was the first SPI librarian with formal training, and knew as much about wargames as the producer of *Lost in Space* knew about science fiction. It put her at a disadvantage, and she had to learn very fast.

Yugoslavia went to me. Then 15 and without any degree in anything (I'm a high school senior majoring in absenteeism — and my girlfriend thinks wargames are a waste of time, too.), I came up through the ranks writing articles for *S&T* and *MOVES* and doing a bit of playtesting. (In August of '76, I was the only one of the four of us trainees who had a game already published. Put out by another company, the game is now resting comfortably near the bottom of the SPI Game Rating Chart.)

The developer of the Quad was the most experienced in the industry, JFD himself. A Quad developer's job is to see that everyone follows the standard rules, make sure the four games fit together, make sure no giant foul-ups arise in playtesting, and coordinate everything in the rush to get things into and out of the Art Department. Jim's first production memo hit us in September. It said, in part:

...Don't forget to check with Brad (Hessel) on how you're doing with your budget. Exceeding your budget does little for your promotion prospects...If you have any questions, you'd better ask them. No matter how dumb you might think they are, I'll be all over you (expletive phraseology deleted) if you DON'T ask questions when you're stuck...For all of you folks this is your trial game. How good it is determines what juicy assignment you get next. Just thought I'd mention it...

Meet this date or die? Jim likes to wake people up with these things. I guess he was afraid we might not take our assignments seriously, hence the pep talk. The developer fades out at this point in the Quad's progress as the four designers put together their first prototypes.

The first step in designing a game is research. For many games that's the easiest part. For events from about 1200 AD to 1968 AD it's relatively easy to get maps, orders of battle, and historical narratives to tell what happened and why. Before then you do a lot of guessing. After 1968 you observe an interesting dichotomy. Some wars are subjected to intense scrutiny in the popular press, the subject of books with hard information and timetables, and extensively covered by the tech journals like *International Defense Review* and *Aviation News and Space Technology*. The '73 October War has been wonderfully covered. Other contemporary conflicts are either totally ignored or shrouded in secrecy (e.g., try getting good, hard data on the Angola War).

Joe and I had this 'information' problem. Yugoslavia and North Korea keep very quiet about their orders of battle and military doctrine. By comparison, South Korea, Germany, Britain, Italy, the U.S. and the USSR are known quantities. Another problem of doing hypothetical contemporary games is that you can only estimate what will happen. You have nothing to point to other than the data in books, magazines, and the big mouths of friends in high places to back you. It makes for some very uncomfortable research.

Mark had no such problems for *Jerusalem '67*. The '67 West Bank campaign has been studied as much as the other innings of that interminable slaughter. Mark knew exactly how many men, weapons, and vehicles of each side were where and did what at every hour of each day. It was nauseating to see him come up with such data as how many tanks were destroyed each day on each road! All from books easily available to the public, back issues of *Armor*, *Marine Corps Gazette*, and other military house organs and documents declassified by the Israelis. He could also just walk into the Vault and yank the *Sinal* file. And maps? The Israelis have an outfit similar to the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Service which provided him with a

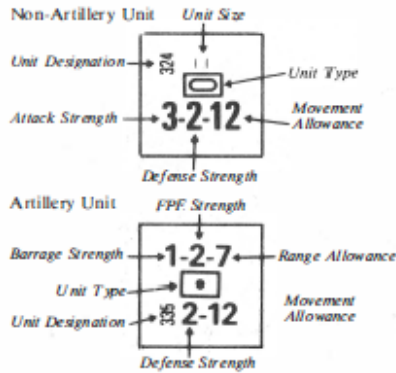
detailed map of the West Bank. The scale was increased from one mile to 1.6 miles per hex to include the entire Bank.

Joe could find maps of the Korean-Korean border area for DMZ, but the most recent was printed in 1958. Secrecy around the DMZ is very tight on both sides. To fit the DMZ and Seoul (the Republic of Korea's capital) on the map, the game had to be scaled up from one mile to 1.25 miles per hex. The South Korean order of battle was comparatively easy to get from Korea vets. These guys also provided the unit placement information and some vague impressions of the North Koreans. Eventually, Joe could place the South Koreans and U.S. 2nd Division on the map with some accuracy. As for placing the NK's in their correct locations — hell, the Commies are attacking; they set up where they want...I still worry about that 1958 map, though. They haven't moved the mountains, but they have built new towns and roads.

Ginny had a pretty easy time for *Bundeswehr*, too. The research for Central Europe had been done for NATO, *Fulda Gap*, the *Red Star/White Star* book, and many other SPI projects. Dave Isby, our intrepid Chief of Research & Resident Limey, gave her all the unit organization and placement she needed. Her map was her big problem. All the other games covered a specific area because of some specific geographical objective (e.g., the West Bank, Seoul, Zagreb). Ginny could use any portion of the North German Plain. I suggested the map include Hamburg or Bremen or at least a portion of the Main River. (The 'Word' is that the Main is the Main Line of Resistance for AFCENT, the NATO army group in Germany and Denmark.) These maps would provide some center of gravity, a territorial objective to fight over. Ginny went through several maps and finally came up with an area of the Luneburg Heath on the border. What strikes you immediately about this area is that nothing strikes you immediately. The Soviet objective is to get off the map and head for the important stuff westward. The terrain is boring, a succession of minor rivers, minor woods, bogs and heather. The only interesting thing about the map is that the West German military attache's office in Washington refused to talk about it. Ginny called to find out what effect those bogs would have on combat and movement; it was hard to tell from the maps just what it was like. Anyone is free to drive around and see, but the guy in the attache's office became somewhat upset: 'The plain is flat; what can I say?' People are really paranoid these days...

Surprisingly, finding a map of the Zagreb region for *Yugoslavia* was no problem. Terry Hardy yanked a 1966 U.S. Army Command and General Staff College map from the map file (i.e., a pile on the floor of the Vault). The thing was overlaid with unit boundaries of fictional U.S. and Yugoslav units fighting off the Red horde (I tried to do a scenario based on the CGSS' but it just didn't work out). The map was old, but good enough to use. All the roads marked 'under construction' I include as being completed. I merely had Larry Catalano (the #3 Art man, who proudly claims he has never played a wargame) blow it up on the stat machine and I had it. U.S. organization and order of battle was a breeze, as was the Soviet's; it had all been done for *Mod Quad I*. But the Yugoslavs — they just don't like to talk about these things. I knew how many divisions they had; the *Revolt in the East* article had that (*S&T* #56), but I needed organizational data. Jim suggested that I call the Yugoslav UN Mission. A bit dubious (Ginny had already failed with a NATO ally, and all she wanted to know was how soft the ground was), I phoned the UN Mission and tried to explain about this magazine article I was doing and could I please speak to whomever handles military affairs? I wasn't about to explain wargames over the phone and the man's English wasn't so great. Apparently convinced I was either a Croat terrorist or an inept CIA man, he cursed me in Serbo-Croatian and hung up. I next tried the Yugoslav Embassy, mailing them several magazines and games, including *Battle for Germany* (which the Yugoslavs never lose.) I never heard from them...So I did what I should have done in the first place. I went to our librarian, and Ginny introduced me to the erratic but excellent *Armies of Europe To-Day* by Otto von Pivka, in which I found the information I needed.

All four of us were now on our way. With maps, orders of battle, combat strengths, and standard rules you can sit down and start playing out the ideas for Exclusive Rules and scenarios that have been floating around. The U.S. and Soviet combat strengths had been done for **Mod Quad I**. The rest we calculated through the standard formula: firepower analysis, manpower analysis, necromancy, human sacrifice, and a touch of bullshit for taste (i.e., if it works it works). Around October we got down to serious playtesting...



WAILING IN JERUSALEM

Opting for simplicity, Mark's first decision was to dispense with Untried Unit Strength — after all, his units were tried. The Israelis are all of uniformly high quality with the best equipped outfits being given an extra strength point. The Arabs are a pretty motley crew, and although they would be little competition in the open, the West Bank is rugged terrain. To force Players to advance down the roads, Mark modified the rules so ZOC's only extend through road and clear hexsides. Only leg infantry may enter rough and mountain hexes except along those roads, which allows the Arabs to block the Israeli columns a little more easily than if the Israelis used a broadfront advance. Luckily, the necessary up-scaling to 1.6 miles meant Mark could get away with stacking! So the Israelis can mass along those roads and push the Jordanian infantry back — slowly. A rule that forces retreating Jordanians to head for the valleys and roads also helps clear the hills.

The actual doctrine and performance of the participants is accounted for in several ways. The Israeli commits airstrikes en masse rather than in sizes of his choosing. The Israelis also get a special First Turn advance after combat bonus to recreate the reckless dash to relieve Hadassah Hospital and the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus behind Arab lines. The Jordanian can release his reserves only slowly — like their British teachers, the Jordanians were forever sitting around 'awaiting developments' until developments started throwing cannister rounds into the command post. Naturally, neither player can commit artillery, airpower, or armor in the Old City (you should have heard the playtesters complain when told they could not throw HE at the Western Wall and the Dome of the Rock).

The last Exclusive Rule to be added happened as an afterthought. Mark and I were sitting around Friday night discussing Middle Eastern politics when one of the playtesters tapped Mark on the shoulder and asked, 'What happens if the Arabs take Tel Aviv?' Mark laughed derisively, thinking he'd been listening to us. 'Impossible! No way!' Then Mark looked at the board, where a lone Jordanian battalion sat in Tel Aviv, washing its feet in the Mediterranean! Tel Aviv hexes now have intrinsic defense strengths that are hard to crack. Single units can't take Tel Aviv, and if an Israeli Player lets a whole brigade slip through, he isn't much of an Israeli. To make sure the Israeli Player protects the homeland, the rules now say that any Arab unit sitting two Turns (one day) on the coast gives the

Arabs an automatic decisive victory. I've seen it happen more than once... Playtesting **Jerusalem '67** was fun, but the Israelis never lost. The Arab strengths were slightly adjusted, and now it is very difficult for the Israelis to clear the city and the entire West Bank in four days as they did historically.

BLUNDERSWEHR

Ginny wanted a clean game and she got it. The Exclusive Rules cover bridge demolition, untried units, nukes, and NATO doctrine. In addition, there is a somewhat drab and predictable air system that allows very little variability in Air Superiority. Jim suggested giving the Soviets a parachute division which would have livened things up considerably, but it was never playtested because the Soviets wouldn't waste a para-division so near to the border. The nuke rules lifted from **Wurzburg** are sketchy and do not take terrain into effect for range attenuation or casualties or devastation of the terrain itself. **Jagdpanther #13** had an excellent, realistic variant nuclear system that put's **Bundeswehr's** to shame. North Germany is boring, so the map is boring. The three scenarios are boring, too. There is a sameness about them I find disappointing. Of course, **Wurzburg** is rated more highly than **Mukden**, so I guess most people like simple, clean games. Ginny certainly pleased this audience.

YOU MEAN THE 38th PARALLEL ISN'T THE BORDER ANYMORE?

Joe isn't an expert on Korea, but aside from this little error on his first map, he did an excellent job. I've always had a special interest in the Korean War. My father spent several long months around hex 1204 commanding a rifle platoon, fighting off the Asiatic Horde, and picking up a Bronze Star. Joe's Exclusive Rules include North Korean commandos, untried units, a variable air superiority chart, restrictions on tanks in the mountains, B-52's and B-1's (oops), NK replacements, and ROK reserve activation. There are three scenarios, all widely different. 'Battle for Seoul' has the NK pushing south down the Uijongbu Corridor, 'U.S. Withdrawal' has President Carter withdrawing the boys in 1978 (oops), but only to southern Korea instead of out of the country (oops again), and 'The Counterstroke' is a somewhat unbalanced romp for the good guys — though by no means a sure win if the NK Player knows when to counterattack. I regret that divisional integrity was taken out, and NK artillery was supposed to be able to support only units of their division or corps. Also dropped were rules for helicopter transport (maximum lift = one battalion) and amphibious assaults across the Imji. Lack of space was the villain; those four pages of Exclusive Rules do get crowded. All in all, it's fast, it's fun, and it's an effective simulation (even if the map is twenty years out of date).

YUGOSLAVIA AND P'LLGOSLAVIA AND I'LL BE IN ZAGREB BEFORE YE...

I like this game, too, which of course doesn't mean anyone else will... Dave Isby claims I '...set out just to see if you could get more Exclusive Rules than my **Mukden** design. You couldn't have gunboats, so you put in Goat-Propelled Artillery!' Yep, that's what I did. I like Exclusive Rules. Without them, playing a quad would only be playing the same game four times with different maps and countermeasures. I have: untried units; reinforcements which may come on late or be committed off-map (this has been done before but not often enough. Higher Command often fouled up commanders' plans by depriving them of support); movement rules which give leg infantry an advantage in the mountains; rules depriving the Soviets of the road net due to partisans; attack choppers; variable ground support; paratroopers for the U.S. and U.S.S.R.; limits on artillery support between friendly nations; goat-propelled artillery; and the Italian Army for comedy relief.

My four scenarios include a three-player game (a first for an

SPI Quad), a Serbo-Croat civil war in which each side's order of battle is determined randomly by rolling for each unit and for NATO and the USSR to see who intervenes for whom. I tried to make the four scenarios very different games. If it's any sort of a simulation, the Soviets (or NATO) just might have rough going against those mountain troops and partisan militia. There are things I didn't do with *Yugo* that I regret. The Soviet paratroops are mechanized and should have a higher movement allowance — at least if they link-up with friendlies and become supplied. Supply rules would have been nice, but are really unnecessary. Divisional integrity for Soviet artillery should be added to all Mod Quad games. Air interdiction of roads, and airlifting infantry into friendly airports was tried and abandoned. The points used for interdiction were more useful in ground support and the enemy would pound the airports to swamp anyway. Hungarians and Soviet artillery divisions would have been great if I had over 100 counters. I listed their strengths instead. Italian Marines, transport helicopters maybe if I only had 200 counters to work with. Maybe if we do a **Mod Quad III**...

(Interestingly, one of the Yugoslav UN Mission deputies recently came to SPI to get the game. Besides registering surprise that his people had been so uncooperative, he thought the game interesting. What was that he said about the political rationale and science fiction? Ah, well, go try and please the world...) I can't review the game with any sort of objectivity. I hope somebody out there will — but be gentle. It's my first time.

In addition to the usual Friday night playtesting (for a disjointed playtest session, see *MOVES #26*), SPI used blindtesters who were mailed the Quad games to play cold, without the designers looking over their shoulders. This is often the only way to find glitches that people playing with a designer at hand find minor or simply miss. Finally, I used a process dubbed 'Idiot Blindtesting'. I gave a copy to two of the newest,

least experienced, uh... **dumbest** guys I could find. If they could play it cold, anybody could. Alas, the Zone of Control Rules did them in...

In January, we turned the games over to the developer for final editing before the Art Department got the game. Jim was too busy, so Mark became *de facto* developer instead, handling editing (very little) and proofreading. He also dealt with some final *Bundeswehr* playtesting along with Dave Isby, since Ginny got smart and left SPI for a better job.

The Art Department got the games in March. In June, the Quad came back from the printers for final proofreading. This was also when the designers came up with their suggestions for coversheet photos, culled from books and magazines in the Vault (RAS had the final say, of course). I was a little disappointed with the counters. The **Mod Quad I** counters had silhouettes of the vehicles, infantry, and artillery weapons on them. **Mod Quad II** has the traditional symbol boxes. They aren't anywhere near as attractive to my eye. Redmond has his reasons for going back to symbols. He has a Feedback result that told him the symbols were more popular. He pointed out that silhouettes are more expensive and more work — (but in this case all the silhouettes had already been reduced for **Mod Quad I** and other games; not a single new silhouette would have had to been cut out and reduced). At least he used a new and striking typeface for the counters.

The final version of **Mod Quad II** came back from the printer on 21 July 1977, one day before Origins '77. The trolls worked doubletime packing the games and the others that arrived that day, and **Mod Quad II** was one game among dozens to hit the streets the next day. It did OK. Feedback isn't in yet, but I'm optimistic. They're all different types of games, and there is something for everybody. In fact, the Quadrigames program is part of SPI's plan to provide a wide enough variety of games to satisfy every Player's appetite. Try one. Maybe *Yugoslavia*?