

SITTANGBAD

The War Gamers

It's now nearly 40 years since Brigadier Peter Young, a celebrated WWII war hero, and Lt. Colonel J. P. Lawford, published a book which was to become a touchstone for an entire generation of wargamers. The book was *Charge!*; the year, 1967.

Though by no means the first wargaming book (Don Featherstone had already published *War Games* and *Naval Wargames*), *Charge!* nevertheless captured the imagination in a way that those earlier works did not. Our guess would be that the Brigadier's larger-than-life personality somehow osmosed into the very pages of the book, just waiting to burst out at the unsuspecting reader as they pored over the details of "The Action at Blasthof Bridge" or "The Battle of Sittangbad".

Even if one did not know Peter Young's remarkable biography, one would instantly suspect that the authors were men who had seen the inside of a drill square. It is interesting to note that in many ways, the rules in the book are pretty *laissez-faire*, but in the matter of how one's units should be displayed and arranged on the table-top, this liberalism disappears instantly, and several pages are dedicated to parade-ground didactic: your sergeants must go *here*, your officers *here*, your drummers *there* and, of course, your *vivandère* (if you have one) must be stationed exactly *here!*

In issue 1 of *Battlegames* there was a piece by Don Featherstone, who has vivid memories of the late Brigadier. Not a man to be trifled with, he was wont to, shall we say, 'adjust' rules to suit himself during a game, and evidently had lost none of his commando cunning in later life. One must assume, then, that what is enshrined on the pages of this book was merely a 'snapshot' of the Brigadier's thinking in the late '60s, but be that as it may, it is an insight into a brilliant, sparkling and delightful mind of a man with whom it must have been a pleasure indeed to spend a day gaming followed by a leisurely dinner.

And who are The War Gamers, and what are we doing? What's all this retro stuff?

Well, we're just a few guys who met online via the Old School Wargaming *Yahoo!* group (http://games.groups.yahoo.com/group/old_school_wargaming/) and decided that the depth of our interest in the early authors

went beyond merely chatting online – we actually wanted to play the games, use the rules, have some fun, and perhaps even learn something by so doing. We've certainly come to realise what we love about the hobby, and perhaps what we don't.

The build-up to this show didn't always feel like fun: simply obtaining some of the figures on display here today proved to be a test in itself, since sculpts by Holger Eriksson, Suren, Stadden and others are as old as the book (indeed, are featured in it) and as hard to come by as hen's teeth, requiring time-consuming importation from Scandinavia, though recent news is that new sculpts may be available from France soon. We are more fortunate with the Spencer Smiths: they are available in the UK, now cast in metal rather than their original plastic (though all Henry's *are* old plastics), from proprietor Peter Johnstone. But our determination to put this game on carried us through and we hope you enjoy the result.

Logistical and other decisions meant that we either couldn't, or didn't want to, reproduce the original Order of Battle precisely, but we think the Brigadier would have approved. So here on display you will find units that not only never existed historically, but even come from fictitious worlds that exist only in the minds of some of the participants. Somehow, it just seemed appropriate.

Finally, don't be left thinking that this is all old fogey stuff. Sure, the terrain is simple, but in our opinion it has a classic design aesthetic which is refreshing. For the last 20-odd years the hobby has been moving seemingly inexorably towards the 'moving diorama', and whilst acknowledging the achievements of its exponents, we feel it's important to re-state the case for cleaner, more symbolic, perhaps even abstract vistas. Here, the terrain plays the role of stage-setting to the players in our drama, these elegantly marching and firing and charging little men, beautifully proportioned and lovingly brought to life. And having the figures singly-based, rather than on the normal multiple figure bases one sees today, brings about an interesting relationship between the player and every single one of his miniature warriors.

Here, the game is paramount, and a little more is left to the imagination. Which is, we submit, no bad thing.