

Guide to Panzerblitz

by T.F. McGrath

"Fools profit by their experience; I prefer to profit by other people's experience." — Bismarck

INTRODUCTION

The rules of PanzerBlitz have a beautifully logical basis; while they are complex and varied, they follow an explicit pattern and can be interpreted very simply, once that pattern has been established in your mind. The major problems with the interpretations of these rules comes when the pattern has been violated. The various "answer men" of Avalon Hill apparently do not have the game and the rule experience to follow this pattern, hence they have constructed some interpretations which defy the game and rule logic. Insofar as possible however, this section will give the various rules interpretations that are given by Avalon Hill, together with interpretations based on the original game logic. Where necessary, certain potential optional rules which may be used to bring the game back to the original tenor will be given. Other optional rules which may be used to equalize certain situations will also be given. This section is only a supplement to the rules; it will not replace a careful and diligent study of the rules as given in the pamphlet on the Rules of Play.

MOVEMENT

The movement rate is predicted, as described in the Campaign Analysis booklet, on a move turn time of about six minutes. This factor is important, since any interpreta-

tion of the rules must take this six minutes of time into account. It would be illogical to make any interpretation of the rules that would permit a unit maneuver or unit operation that would exceed this allowed six minutes in any one turn. The movement rules are generally quite clear; however, one question continually arises. The rules state that units with a MF of 1 may move one hex per turn regardless of terrain. Avalon Hill has, logically, extended that statement to allow any unit which has a MF to move one hex, at least, regardless of terrain, unless the terrain into which the unit is moving is forbidden to it (armor into swamp hexes, for example) or it is not allowed to move across the hexside separating the two hexes (a truck unit across a green hexside, for example). Therefore, a cavalry unit, which has a MF of 3, may move out of a gully and up on a slope hex, all in one turn. Certainly, with horses, this activity should not materially exceed the allowed six-minute time period. There are no provisions in the game for accumulating movement points from turn to turn.

TRANSPORTING UNITS

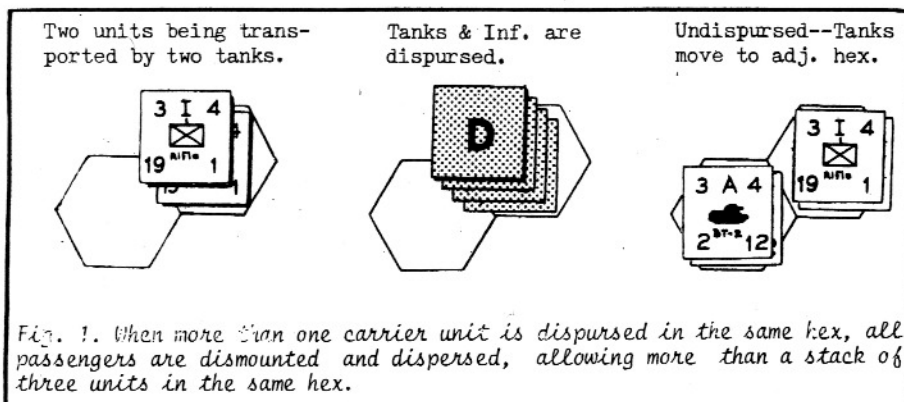
The rules for Load and the rules for Transport are reasonably clear; it is usually only Transport and Unload that causes some difficulty in interpretation. AH has furnished the following interpretation of this rule. A C unit may drop its passenger anywhere along the route it is traversing and continue on to the limit of its MF. The passenger unit may not move further in the same turn. There should probably be some movement penalty for the C-type unit for

this activity, but the total concept fits well into the framework of the original PanzerBlitz rules.

One of the undefined areas is the disposition of passengers on carriers after dispersal. The dispersal could happen in one of two possible ways: The passengers are fired upon and dispersed, or the carrier upon which the passengers have been riding is dispersed. There is no problem in the case of halftracks (HT), since the passengers ride inside under the cover of such armor plating that exists, or possibly in the case of trucks, which follow the same category. These units would just move as fast as possible to covered areas. Here a dispersal means that the units would take some time to get reorganized and set out to their ultimate destination. The real problem comes in the case of armored units, where the passengers are clutching to any point they can find on the exterior of the steel hull. The obvious and normal reaction of these passengers to that first ping of a bullet against a steel hull is to seek safety huddled against mother earth. The tankers, on the other hand, head for cover in their tracked monsters.

The obvious interpretation would be that if a passenger unit is dispersed by fire, it should be dismounted and dispersed on the same hex. Then it would require an additional turn to mount it and to move it on. However, Avalon Hill has made a ruling in this case: The unit remains mounted and may not be

Editor's note: This article is actually a two part article; part II will appear in Outposts #9.



dismounted in the turn of dispersal, but may be carried on to a new position by the carrier unit. It is certain that I will disagree with this interpretation and an optional rule will be introduced later to solve this problem.

In the event that a carrier is dispersed by fire, it would seem that the passenger unit would be dismounted and both the carrier and the passenger unit would be dispersed on the same hex. In the event that more than one carrier unit would be dispersed in the same hex, then all passengers would be dismounted and dispersed, allowing more than a stack of three units on the same hex (see Fig. 1). At the first available opportunity, the excess units must be moved off the overstacked hex.

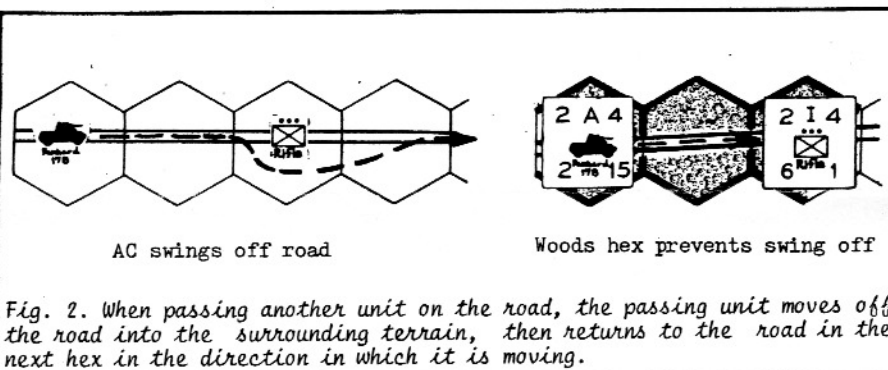
It is unknown to me whether Avalon Hill has made a ruling on this situation, but this would seem to be the logical consequence of the dispersal of a carrier unit, when it is transporting passengers. (When the carrier unit is a tank or tank-destroyer type. As pointed out earlier, this interpretation would not be followed if the carrier were a halftrack, a truck, or a wagon, as passengers can not be attacked exclusive of these units.)

ROAD MOVEMENT

To completely understand the road movement rules, it is necessary to understand the state and character of the majority of the Russian roads during this time. They were normally not more than cart tracks, seldom metalled or gravelled, just wide enough for one vehicle, with steep ditches on either side to carry off runoff water. Passing another unit on the road would entail swinging completely off the road, down into the ditches on either side, moving across country, then swinging up through the ditch and onto the road again. It would

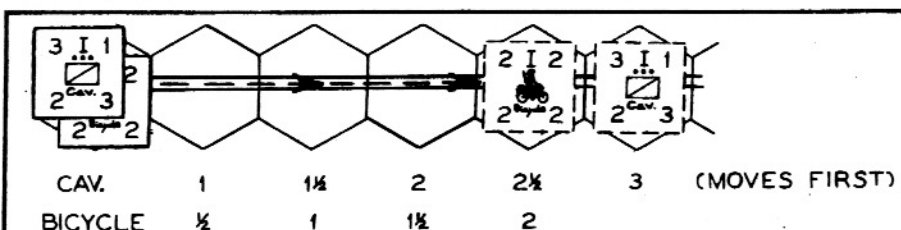
certainly increase the transit time along the road hex. If a unit halted, it would take advantage of the cover provided by these ditches and the surrounding terrain.

To come up on a unit halted on the road, it would be necessary to slow down, hence the movement penalty for entering a road hex on which another unit is halted.



The passing rule implies that you leave the road on the same hex in which another unit is located, swing off this road into the surrounding terrain, then swing back on the road in the next hex in the

direction in which you are moving, re-entering the road on the next hex ahead of the location of the friendly unit. Hence, if there is a green hexside between the hex on which the friendly unit is located and the next hex in the direction in which the unit is moving, it is



impossible to execute the passing maneuver, since vehicular units may not pass through hexsides marked with a green bar. So you must stop on the hex coincident with the other friendly unit and move forward in the next turn.

In the opening statement in the rules on road movement there appears the following: "Roads do not alter the defense effects of surrounding terrain." So, in general, whenever a unit is posted and halted on a road hex, it enjoys the defensive effects of the surrounding terrain. There is one type of terrain for which the previously mentioned statement is not true. When a vehicular unit is posted on a road on a swamp hex, the vehicular unit must stay on the road and can not move any elements into the swamp, hence it can not benefit from the defensive effect of this terrain. However, any units in a swamp hex on the road can not be overrun, since the overrunning ar-

more units can not penetrate the swamp terrain either. The attacking tanks would have to attack as a column on the road. Without a bulldozer leading the way, the overrun is impossible.

ahead by itself at the road movement rate. So, in order to avoid delays, the obvious move method is to move each unit in the stack separately, taking advantage of the road movement rate, and then using remaining movement points to restack the units. Alternately, the units may be stacked off the road in some maximum MF position (see Fig. 3). There is no movement penalty for splitting off from a stack on a road.

STACKING

The stacking rule was set up to maintain a low density of units and to keep the character of the game as a highly mobile, light force spread-out situation, particularly for the Germans. Certainly it would pose no problem to place more than three German infantry platoons under cover in an area of over 40,000 square meters. It would have absorbed many more infantry platoons than three, with no crowding, but the Germans were habitually using infantry to cover a lot more area than that during the period in question. There is no question of overcrowding the terrain. The Russians would jam far more than two

imum stacking capacity of the hex. However, they may not enter this hex and reload these units, since in that case the number of units in the hex would exceed the stacking capacity of the hex. So, in order to move units out, at least one of the units in the hex must have a nonzero movement factor so that it can leave the hex to make room for a carrier unit to enter and remain. If all of the units in a given hex have a MF of 0, it is impossible to enter the hex and reload units. So it is possible for units to become trapped in a hex for the duration of a game.

COMBAT

Combat takes place before the movement portion of each player's turn. The results of combat in face-to-face play are known before the moves are made. In play-by-mail, the results of combat (other than automatic victories) are not known until after the player has made his moves. FTF play then becomes an entirely different game compared with PBM games. To fully equate FTF with PBM play, combat results should not be determined until after all the phasing play-

ing stack be attacked, no more. The weakest unit is defined as that unit on which the attacking unit can get the highest odds. The 4:1 odds limit does not apply in this case; the largest numerical odds possible must be used. The unit in the stack that may be attacked may not necessarily be the unit with the lowest DF. For example, if the stack should contain a German 81-mm mortar unit and a German halftrack, and it was attacked by a Russian T-34 at greater than half range, the T-34 can get odds of 3:1 on the halftrack, but odds of only 2:1 on the mortar unit. Therefore, in the use of this specific rule, the half-track is the weakest unit (see Fig. 4). This rule also permits attacking only one passenger unit when there is a stack of carriers, each carrying a passenger unit. (If the passenger units are attacked separately, then a single unit may attack only one of the transported units, regardless of the strength of the attacking unit.)

Multiple Attack

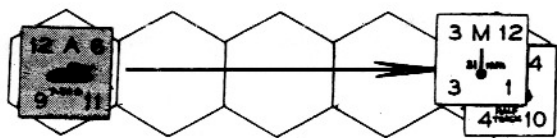
In the multiple attack, the weakest unit must be attacked first by at least a 1:1 odds attack. The weakest unit has been defined above, so that the attack may be defined, in part, by the type of the attacking unit. However, in this same rule the strongest unit is defined by its defense factor. The attack on each unit in a multiple attack must be conducted at 1:1 odds or better. It is not necessary to attack all of the units in a stack to conduct a multiple attack; two must be attacked.

So, if two 81-mm mortar units and a German halftrack are stacked together, the halftrack must be attacked last as the strongest unit in the stack. Not very consistent, but as specified by this section of the rules.

Combination Attack

In the combination attack, all of the units in the defending stack must be attacked simultaneously. The only problem with the rules in this type of attack is the determination of the type of target that the stack consists of. The DF of the units are used to determine the type of target. If the DF of infantry-type units exceeds the DF of armored-type units, then the stack is a nonarmored target. If the DF is equally divided between the two types of targets, then the stack is viewed as that type which is least favorable to the units which are attacking.

Fig. 4. If a stack contains a German 81-mm mortar and Halftrack, a T-34 attacking at greater than half range can get odds of 3:1 against the Halftrack and odds of 2:1 against the mortar. Thus, the Halftrack is considered the weakest unit in the stack.



infantry companies into this area, particularly when attacking.

This stacking rule keeps the character of the game in perspective, and makes PanzerBlitz a highly playable game, so it should be maintained. Playability should supersede realism, whenever the two come into conflict in a board game situation.

The stacking rules are very clear; unfortunately, some of these rules and standards have been altered by the various Avalon Hill answer men, in making interpretations on the treatment of wrecks and fortifications. These problems will be dealt with in the sections of this article discussing those aspects of the rules.

One stacking rule affects loading of units. Stacking limits do not apply during movement, hence carriers can move through any given hex and unload units up to the max-

er's units have been moved. I highly recommend this change in the rules to players who wish to become skilled in PanzerBlitz, since many tournaments will be played by mail. It is a rather realistic change to the rules, since six minutes was certainly a short time to determine what had happened as the result of your attack on any position.

NORMAL ATTACKING

The set of rules promulgated in this section are reasonably clear, but some further discussion is probably desirable, especially of the three mutually exclusive ways to conduct a normal attack. The rules section on Weapon-to-Target Relationships must be fully understood to correctly interpret this section on combat rules.

Selective Attack

This attack requires that only one unit, the weakest, in a defend-

(See the Weapons-to-Target Relationship section of the rules pamphlet.)

OVERRUN ATTACK

The overrun attack is one of the strongest attack methods available to either combatant; as such it is carefully circumscribed with rules concerning its usage. These rules should not be tampered with, even by Avalon Hill. Overrun attacks are executed as part of the movement phase, therefore they come after the fire phase has been executed. They may be executed at any point in the movement phase. If one armored unit in the stack which is to be overrun is destroyed by fire during the fire phase, the overrun may not be executed, since units in hexes containing wrecks may not be overrun. Hence, if the game is being played by mail, or if the optional rule requiring the results of fire to be determined after combat is used, any hex on which sufficient fire has been placed to possibly cause an armored unit to be destroyed, an overrun attack may not be made. Of course, nonarmored units may be fired on and eliminated in the same hex prior to the execution of an overrun against that hex.

Units that may be blocking the planned exit hexes for an overrun attack may be destroyed by fire, so that the overrunning units will have an exit hex. Of course, if those units are armored, then the resulting wrecks may prevent or limit the overrun, since the exit hex can not be occupied beyond the stacking limits and wrecks count toward the stacking limit.

Perhaps the most abused rule in the conduct of the overrun attack is the rule that forbids movement at the road movement fate for those units that are making an overrun attack. We will have to examine the game logic behind that section of the rules. Armor attacks are made in line or echelon formations of individual tank units, moving away from the normal road column formation in order to attack an enemy position. In the six minutes of time allocated for each move, the armored units can not stay in column, moving down the road, then swing into formation to execute the attack, especially since radios were not found in every vehicle. Hence the unit must move into the attack formation first, then proceed across country to the attack. Only one vehicle could possibly get up on the road, and it certainly did not want to get ahead

of the others. There is no feeling like that sitting duck feeling when you are all alone.

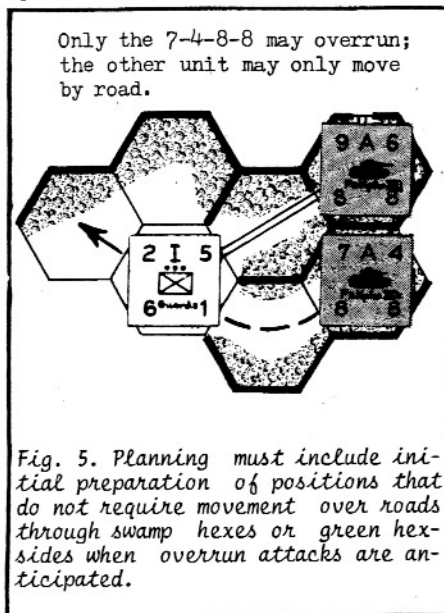


Fig. 5. Planning must include initial preparation of positions that do not require movement over roads through swamp hexes or green hexsides when overrun attacks are anticipated.

So, essentially, any armored attack is launched across country, over the existing terrain. Thus, the road help in conquering the movement penalty over specific terrain can not be used. Gullies and slopes will cost their full movement penalties, regardless of whether a road traverses them on the hexes utilized for the attack. On the other hand, fords eliminate the leaving penalty for the gully, even when the units conducting an overrun attack use the ford.

that do not require this movement when overrun attacks are anticipated (see Fig. 5).

CLOSE ASSAULT TACTICS

There are several problems in interpretation of the rules which govern the execution of close assault tactics (CAT). Before we get into these problems, let us examine what a CAT attack really entails in its execution for the units involved.

First let us examine the equipment supplied to the various units (infantry, cavalry, and engineers) which can conduct this type of attack. In every case the units are also equipped with machine guns (MG) and, in the Russian forces, most units are also equipped with small mortars. These weapons are essential to the conduct of a CAT attack. They provide the fire base which is used to keep the enemy heads down and to neutralize the enemy strong points in the defensive line. So they must be deployed to positions where they can fire on the enemy position, without hitting their own men before the attack proper can be initiated. These support MGs are so essential that if they are lacking the attack is suicidal against any strong enemy position. The MGs also are laid out to protect the flanks of the assaulting infantry groups, so that effilade fire can not be laid down against the infantry units which are attacking.

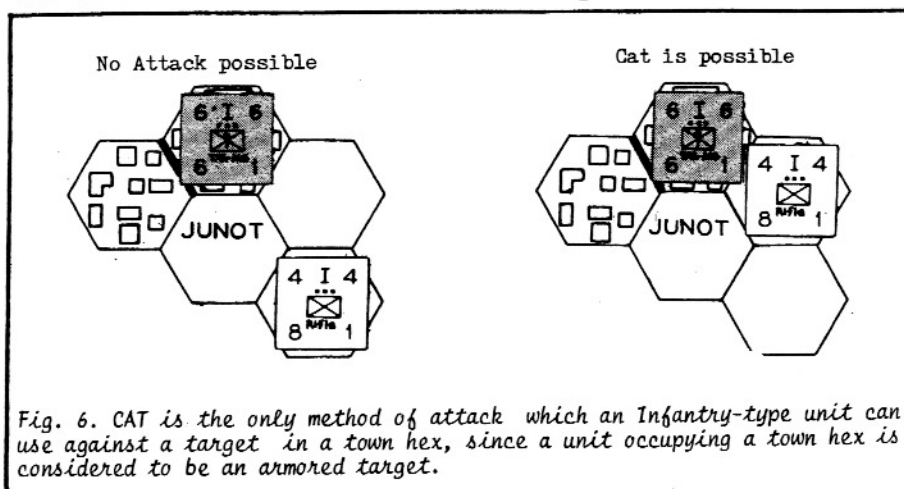


Fig. 6. CAT is the only method of attack which an Infantry-type unit can use against a target in a town hex, since a unit occupying a town hex is considered to be an armored target.

A special problem arises when the only path for armor to use on an overrun attack entails the use of road hexes through a swamp or through green hexsides. Since the attack entails armor movement across country, such attacks are not possible. Planning must include the initial preparation of positions

Then the individual squads or attack groups have to be moved into position so that they can simultaneously attack the enemy position over the desired front. Now the bone-tired dogfaces, loaded down with all their gear, extra ammunition and grenades, have to move up to the enemy position. This is no

Civil War charge, with flags flying, men yelling, driving all in a line for the enemy line. A small group will get up, run for maybe ten meters in the typical infantry crouch, then drop to the cover of the ground. If they can see anything to shoot at and if they are equipped with rifles, they will try to lay covering fire down on the enemy line while the next group advances. If they are equipped with SMGs, they do not have the range to give covering fire, so they must wait until another group gets up and advances. The various groups will do this alternately until they are within grenade range of the enemy positions. Then, after hurling their grenades, they will close to the hand-to-hand distance with the remaining enemy troops. Here the issue will be settled by a few final shots, with flight or surrender of the survivors taking place. All this has to take place in the six-minute time period allocated by the turn length in PanzerBlitz, with the normally already exhausted troops. With this time limit, I assume much of their previous turn was used preparing for this assault.

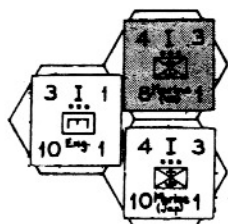
With this construction of the actual events of a CAT we can more prudently go to the interpretations of various facets of the rules dealing with CAT. Movement at the

units could attack units located in a town hex (see Fig. 7).

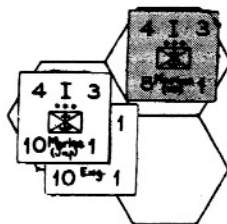
Stacking an engineer unit with cavalry or infantry increases the effectiveness of a CAT attack. As noted in the rules pamphlet, the engineer unit is equipped with flamethrowers. These are excellent weapons against enemy MG emplacements and strong points under cover. This is probably the prime reason for the increase in effectiveness of the CAT attack. The engineer unit must be stacked with infantry or cavalry, not on a separate hex, to gain this additional effectiveness.

WEAPON-TO-TARGET RELATIONSHIPS

There is no specific definition in this rule as to the type of target each unit represents, other than towns and fortifications. The type of target does not depend on the type of weapons with which the unit is armed, but whether the unit is equipped with armored vehicles or not. So, for the purpose of definition, all units with a functional category number below 440 are nonarmored targets. The weapons effectiveness chart may then be used to determine the effectiveness of any unit's particular type of weapon against the target being fired upon.



Normal effectiveness



Additional effectiveness

Fig. 7. Engineer units must be stacked with an Infantry or Cavalry unit, not on a separate hex, in order to gain the additional effectiveness when using CAT.

road movement rate is forbidden to a unit in the turn in which it is to use CAT, but there is no direct mention in the rules as to whether a unit may move through two hexes of a town and execute a CAT attack, except that cavalry units are specifically allowed to move only one hex. With the time limit of the turn in mind, it should be obvious that no unit could have moved more than one hex and still execute a CAT attack. It just would be impossible to have to travel five-hundred meters and still have the energy left to execute the attack, much less the time. Since a town is an armored target, the CAT is the only way in which infantry-type

As previously mentioned, the DF of the defending units are used to determine what type of target predominates in a defensive stack for the purpose of determining weapons effectiveness in the case of a normal combination attack against a mixed stack of units.

Note again that the WEC is not used in determining the effectiveness of the weapons in an overrun attack; the actual AF of the overrunning units is used against the actual DF of the defending units in the hex that is being overrun. Armor thus increases its effectiveness against infantry (nonarmored) when the overrun attack is used.

GAMING NEWS

GARY GARCIA

Flying Buffalo, Inc., P.O. Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252 — Starweb is a new multi-player computer PBM game. Six races of space travelers explore 225 star systems. Moves processed every two weeks. The rules are available for \$1.00.

Attack Wargaming Assoc., 314 Edgley Ave., Glenside, PA 19038 — New releases include War of the Star Slavers, a battle-diplomacy game for 2-18 players, four maps, \$12.95; Victory at Sea, air and naval miniatures rules in three scales for WWI to modern, with scenarios and 1:1200 ships, \$5.49; Rheinburg Pursuit of the Bismarck, naval board and miniatures game covering Operation Rheinburg, including 1:1200 ships, \$6.99.

Metagaming Concepts, Box 15346, Austin, TX 78761 — Godfire is a multi-player society space game, the play of which is based on economics, two maps, 600+ counters, playing aids, \$15.00; Hymenoptera is a science fiction game for six players, based on a society of insects.

The following people should be contacted for more information about the conventions mentioned:

Glen Cooley, 806 Bancroft Ct., Lansing, MI 48915 — Convention scheduled for April 2 and 3.

Sam Kanai, 2055 Gaylann Dr., Brunswick, OH 44212 — Convention scheduled for April 17 in Cleveland.

Andy Webber, 20 Graydon Hall Dr., Don Mills, Ontario, Canada M3A 2Z9 — Torontocon scheduled for May 14 and 15 in Toronto.

Bill Somers, 1654 Chandler, Lincoln Park, MI 48146 — Michicon VI is scheduled for June 3-5 in Detroit.

Jim Blancer, 19536 Minnehaha, Northridge, CA 91326 — GLACS II is scheduled for June 17-19.

Rick Loomis, P.O. Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252 — The Flying Buffalo Fifth Annual Wargame Convention is scheduled for June 24-26.

Send news items to: Gary Garcia, 87-77 117 St., Richmond Hill, NY 11418