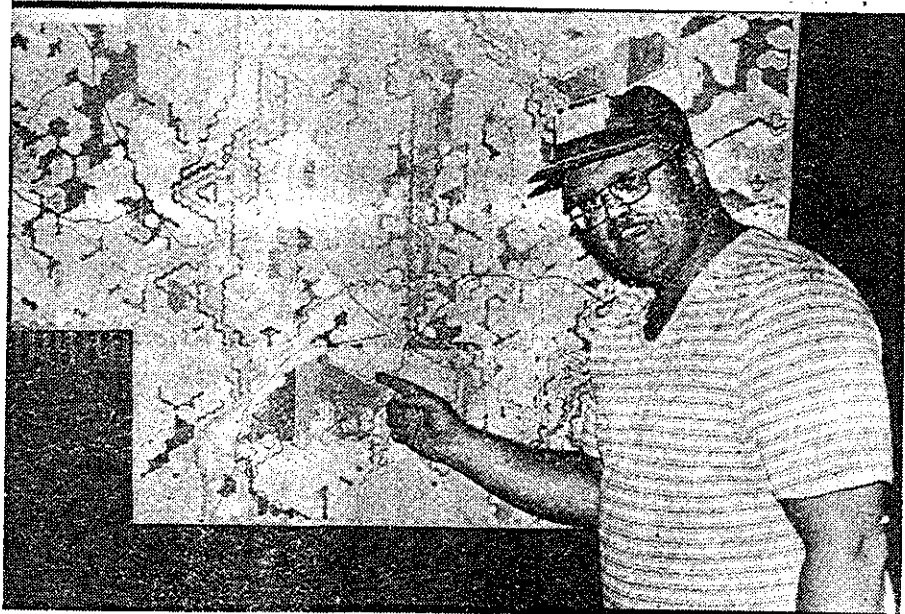


# War on Staten Island!

## 2000 Clash on College Campus!

By David Tipmore



HARVEY WANG

The Imperialism Tournament

Saturday afternoon's session of Origin '77, the third national wargaming exposition, offered the disarming picture of 2000 men pursuing war as an objet d'art. All over the campus of Staten Island's Wagner College, these men, from breeding grounds of military instinct everywhere, engaged in three days of civil wars and naval campaigns and aerial combats and tactical shoot-outs, all waged on nearly 200 board-games with names like *Oil War* and *After The Holocaust* and *Invasion: America*.

Usually played on grid-patterned maps, wargames enable their players to alter the course of history in a matter of hours. Some of Saturday afternoon's wargamers had already altered the course of history in actual combat. Many of them wished they had, an impression strengthened by statistics from Simulations Publications, Inc., the world's largest publisher of historical simulations, or wargames. The statistics revealed that wargamers are usually men, usually college-educated, usually between 18 and 35, usually married, usually white, usually in the \$15,000-per-year income bracket, and usually terribly devoted to their hobby, to the degree of owning between 20 and 30 wargames at around \$10 apiece.

On my way into the Communications Center, the battlefield for several tournaments, I marveled at the number of very, very fat wargamers, signed a petition to save the whales, and overheard that West Point had recently purchased 1000 *Panzerblitz* wargames. At the point when I was recalling a particularly ugly fight I once had with my father about his years in naval intelligence, I met Bill Scott and Frank Preissle, who were 16 hours into their second round of the *Stalingrad* tournament. *Stalingrad* is a wargame that restages the bloody World War II battle of Stalingrad, a battle described by British historian B. H. Liddell Hart, the god of wargamers, as the beginning of the end for Hitler.

Stalingrad was Bill's favorite battle of all time. "My Commies are, of course, represented by the red squares," he said, "and

*"You can get perfect weather, or mud, or snow, by a roll of the dice,"*  
Frank said.

Frank's Fascists are blue—blue in the face from all that aggression." Bill, a big-bellied, pleasant card in his early thirties, plans to move to the mountains of Virginia from his home in New Jersey, where he works in his father's welding shop. "Virginia's about the safest place I can figure to start digging in for the holocaust." Frank, who teaches advertising at Michigan State University, looked up in the middle of taking a crucial bridge near Smolensk. "You've got your Napoleonic fans," he said, "but World War II is the most popular war."

*Stalingrad* was, just then, at a stalemate. The Allied and Axis troops were aligned in a long front stretching from Lake Lagoda near Leningrad south to the Caspian Sea. It seemed a rule of etiquette to finesse each move with a conversational aside. "I started playing wargames in 1960, when I was in ROTC," Bill said casually, moving three Russian armies closer to the Dvina River, "when this kid showed me this wargame—and whopped me. He's now a CIA agent."

There are two major manufacturers of wargames: SPI and Avalon Hill, Inc., located in Baltimore. SPI games, such as *Highway to the Third Reich*, emphasize historical reality, with specific rules for troop deployment and weather conditions, while Avalon Hill games, such as *Stalingrad*, or *Diplomacy*, or *Imperialism*, emphasize "playability."

"The thing about Avalon Hill," said a man in a jumpsuit and toupee, "is that you can write your own rules. Take the *Waterloo* game. SPI's rules in *Waterloo* for

Continued on next page

"World War II is the most popular war."



Bill Scott and Frank Preissle with "Stalingrad."

## Wargames

Continued from preceding page

handling your artillery are not at all practical. Take *Stalingrad* here. If you would introduce the Turkish replacements—"

"You'd ruin the game," Frank inserted.

"—it would force the Russian commander to break his line," Jumpsuit continued imperturbably.

"It's tougher to play defense, which is what I'm doing," Bill said. He looked down at the board to see where he stood. "Boy, am I sweating now," he said, watching Frank move four blue squares on the board, squares which symbolized 250,000 Hungarian advance troops and the 4th and 5th Panzer divisions.

Bill sighed. "I've always hated Hungarians," he said.

"And here they come!" Frank announced, watching Bill's face fall. "They're—will they—yes! The Hungarians have finally tasted blood! They've been hiding so long behind the Dvina that I thought they'd never come out and fight."

Bill wiped his forehead. "After playing one of these games you wouldn't ever catch me on the front lines."

Frank leaned over the table. "Don't ever let any of these young kids hear you say that. Some of them are pretty warlike."

"Do I look scared?" Bill said. "Let us not hear of generals who conquer without bloodshed!"

"Who said that?" Frank asked with suspicion.

"Clausewitz."

General Karl von Clausewitz, whose philosophy of military strategy inspired the German Republic to initiate several of Europe's more horrible wars, is admired by wargamers as the man most responsible for the practical application of wargames. Clausewitz, however, did not anticipate a rather embarrassing tactical problem: Wargames quickly exhaust the number of aesthetically appealing past battles, so that future wars and future wargames must constantly be invented, games with names like *Objective Moscow: The Death of Soviet Communism*, or *Dixie: American Civil War in the Twentieth Century*.

And the weather, I wondered? "You can get perfect weather, or mud, or snow, by a roll of the dice," Frank explained, showing me a complicated point system that helped distinguish one day from the next on the Russian front.

"So where is my infamous Russian winter?" Bill asked the dice.

Suddenly one of the warlike young men playing *Afrika Korps* at a table next to us walked up and sat down. He was Keith Schoose from Schiller Park, Illinois. Keith, a junior at Northern Illinois University, had never been in a war, but he knew a good battle when he read one. Of those he had read about, he liked the Fall of France

best. "The Fall of France was *amazing*," he said from under long bangs. "That beautiful little outflanking action through Holland and Belgium in only three weeks! Of course it wasn't as good as Denmark—which just folded up in eight days—but it showed how far behind the times the Allies really were, which is what the United States has to watch now. The Russians have got—*right now*—they've got four times as many tanks as we do."

A man in a "Nuc 'Em Till They Glow" T-shirt walked up, dropped a Coke off for Bill Scott, and left. Bill looked at me. "Of course that T-shirt is meant ironically," he said.

"It is?" Keith asked.

"See what I mean?" Bill said to me.

Frank took a long swig of coffee from his thermos, and then surveyed the board. "The Russians are beginning to wind down," Frank said with the hauteur of conqueror.

"Never," Bill said.

"The Russians couldn't sell shit to a plumber," Frank needed.

I asked about *women* wargamers.

"A *woman* won the Nuclear Destruction Tournament last year," Frank answered. "I started playing with one once, but she kept disappearing every two minutes."

"Typical female," Bill said. He pulled a box of Good 'n' Plentys out of a paper sack, finished the box quickly, and fished around inside the sack for more food. Across the table Keith stared at me behind glasses so thick his eyes resembled bubbles. I mentioned that I had met someone named Terry Hardy from Melbourne, Australia. "They come from all over," Keith said. "There's a challenge to try and better history. Given two forces and no historical outcome you can *really* realize a result. For example, had the Germans handled the army right they could have held out until 1946, when they would have had the atomic bomb. There's even a game where the Germans win! It's called—"

"Frank just made a big mistake!" Bill Scott interrupted. "Frank, *you left Moscow open!* When you capture a city you *always* have to leave a unit of men in it for protection."

"It doesn't matter," Frank said. He shook Bill's hand and pointed to his temple. "Strategy," he said. "*Moscow doesn't matter.* I left it open on purpose to divert your attention from the sweep here—" Frank paused to move more than 1,000,000 Nazi infantrymen and 1000 Nazi tanks—"which will effectively strangle Leningrad and prevent your little boogers in Moscow from getting and food supplies."

Bill threw up his hands. "Shoot," he said. "I was hoping for my standard tooth-and-nail Stalingrad victory, but now the Germans win."

"So you surrender?"

Bill laughed, but he would not say the word.