The Boardgamer’s Special PANZERBLITZ Issue

Featuring New Counters, New Situations, Historical Corrections and Rules Clarifications
Introduction To The Special Issue Of PANZERBLITZ
By Alan Arvold

Back in 1968 an up and coming game designer by the name of James Dunnigan designed a game about tactical armored warfare on the Eastern Front in 1944 during World War II. He called the game STATE FARM 69 after a fictional Russian farm collective where all the scenarios in his game occurred. As he was affiliated with the then new organization Simulations Publications Incorporated (SPI) he naturally presented it to them first. SPI saw great potential in the game and after cleaning it up a bit released it as one of their experimental test series games in 1969. Entitled TACTICAL GAME 3 the game proved to be immensely popular with their playtesters and many ideas came in to further improve the game. As the game was being further developed, SPI, which was rather strapped for cash at the time, sold the game along with several others to the Avalon Hill Game Company. By that time most of the developmental work on the game was already done and after some minor touch ups Avalon Hill released the game as PANZERBLITZ in the autumn of 1970. With the release of PANZERBLITZ the wargaming hobby was turned on its ear and was never the same again.

PANZERBLITZ was revolutionary for its time. Here was a game that presented tactical armored warfare in a boardgame format, something that was thought at the time to be restricted to the realm of miniatures. While it took a while to learn the game, as it introduced new concepts not seen before in previous wargames, it was great fun to play once you mastered the rules. And most importantly it SOLD. In the first few months it was out, tens of thousands of copies of the game were bought by eager young gamers like myself. Almost immediately articles to the game appeared, not only in the GENERAL but in other wargaming magazines as well. Variants to the game showed up all over the place with new counters, rules, and boards springing from the minds of amateur gamers. Gamers quickly adapted the game to other theatres of war such as the Western Front, North Africa, and even into the Pacific. Even other game companies were busy further developing the game system or creating new ones using PANZERBLITZ as a basis for comparison.

By 1975 PANZERBLITZ was showing its age. By that time state of the art had left the game far behind. Tactical wargames were already on the market which were more realistic and complex. Yet despite this PANZERBLITZ remained a good seller, its ease of playability virtually insuring a steady supply of gamers who were getting tired of the ever increasing levels of complexity of the new tactical wargames. And the proof of this is evident even today at the turn of the century. Most of the tactical wargames of the period have gone the way of the dinosaur, lying in wargame private collections and showing up only in auctions while PANZERBLITZ can still be seen today in stores (in ever shrinking numbers in fact).

In 1976 Avalon Hill came out with the original Wargamer’s Guide to PANZERBLITZ, a collection of previously published PANZERBLITZ articles from the GENERAL plus some new material. Once plentiful it has now become a rare item to find. In response to this Bruce Monnin and myself decided to produce a new BOARDGAMER’S Special PANZERBLITZ Issue using new material. In this issue are a variety of articles; new scenarios, updated previously published scenarios, a compilation of every rules question that was answered by Avalon Hill, an analysis of the new counters introduced to the game over the years and more. It is our hope that PANZERBLITZ gamers find enjoyment in them.

It would be rude of me if I did not mention the people who contributed to the making of this issue. Leading the list is Michael P. Flaglioli. Besides collaborating with me on several articles and submitting an article on his own, he has provided me with much information on German T.O. & E.’s and unit strengths in many of the battles depicted in the scenarios presented. Coming at a close second is Dave Giordano who is a three-time winner of the PANZERBLITZ tournament at Avaloncon/WBC which he has also run for the past six years. He allowed the tournament to be the testing ground for many of the scenarios presented in this issue. Among the people who playtested at the tournament were Dave himself, Chuck Leonard, Johnny Hasay, Oscar Kenneth Oates, Bill Scott, Jay Zollitsch, Bruno Sinigaglio and Kurt Kurtz. Other playtesters who were not at the tournament were Alvin Muelling and Jeff Swegler. My thanks to all of them.

In closing the future of PANZERBLITZ appears to be uncertain. With the sale of Avalon Hill to Hasbro and their subsequent dumping of all but a few wargames, it would appear that the game is slowly fading into history. However, Multi-Man-Publishing has purchased the rights to publish the game and is now working on a redevelopment of PANZERBLITZ slated to be released sometime in late 2001. PANZERBLITZ has been around for thirty years and let’s hope that it stays around for thirty more.

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The BOARDGAMER’s series of unofficial guides is published by Bruce Monnin, publisher of The BOARDGAMER. The Special Issue of Panzerblitz is intended to be a compilation of quality articles for the game.

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