

became the poster boy of the unresourced half of the Army. But in the words of the author, at the conclusion of TFH's time in Northern Ireland in 1970, "He gave clear military advice to his political master and expected in return that be a consistency of approach, a statement of strategic objectives and then a reasonably hands-off policy to allow the military the freedom of action to proceed."

But this was not how he was viewed within the military establishment. Field Marshal Carver's view was: "In a campaign so close to home and at such an early stage, his advice was often too blunt and his reaction to fudging the issues caused more than a little irritation by those whose responsibility was to confront issues and take decisions, but who seemed incapable of doing so."

He was an uncomfortable presence, an outsider to the system and not properly house-trained, a man of the frontier, rather than of the drawing room.

He was eventually allowed a stint in Germany, but as an outsider he was unable to reform the entrenched mindset that he found there. He was not allowed onto the Army Board (at a time when the Army Board was noted for selecting clubbable chaps in its own image), despite the fact that his record of service qualified him to speak truth to power in a way that others, some of whom had never heard a shot fired in anger, could not. This is somewhat reminiscent of the position of Kitchener in 1914. The difference was, of course, that there was no national crisis that demanded his presence.

Instead, he was sent to a senior NATO appointment in Norway, where he was forced to watch events unfolding at home that he would have been well able to assist with. But by now, his reputation was that of a thundering Old Testament Prophet who brooked no compromise. That said, he must have taken comfort from the successes of the Paras in the Falklands, which could be seen as full vindication of his legacy. Moreover, the fact that a Parachute Regiment Officer, Rupert Smith, was selected to lead the UK's Armoured Division in the First Gulf War, was testimony to the fact that the 'Heavy Metal' side of the Army was still not able to grow its own talent in-house.

This is a very good portrait of an exceptional British soldier. He experienced more than any of his contemporaries, and while he was no innovator, his vast repertoire of experience, all registered mentally, gave him a comprehensive 'play list' that he was able to draw on.

Jonathon Riley has given us a comprehensive portrait of TFH. Indeed, there is almost too much detail in some areas, which can detract from the thread of the story, and yet it is a bit thin in others. The man who springs from the page was indeed a warrior whose formative years were spent in areas too dangerous for the media, before the hierarchy fully developed its 'long screwdriver', and before the public forgot that armies must be prepared to take losses in order to keep the nation safe. It can confidently be said that TFH was someone who gave the full measure of devotion to his country and his soldiers and who never flinched from his duty. We are indebted to Jonathon Riley for reminding us of what it was like to soldier in the middle of the last century, before aversion to risk and lack of funding emasculated the British Armed Forces.

John Drewienkiewicz

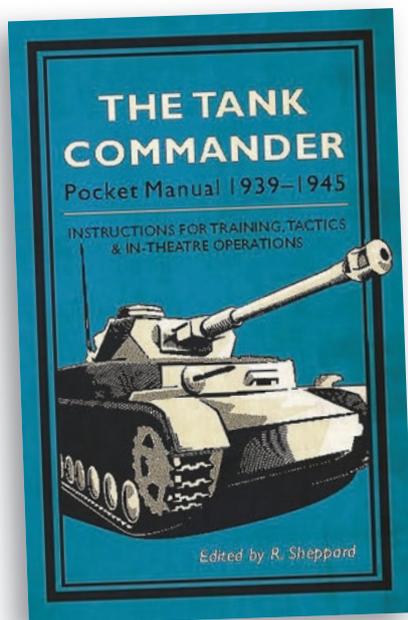
THE TANK COMMANDER: POCKET MANUAL 1939-1945

by R Sheppard, *Pool of London Press*, 2016; 978-1-910860-16-8 £8.99



This is a superb 160-page hardback collation of various articles and reports on tank warfare in WWII, drawing on British, US, Russian and German tactical appraisals and training notes. There are five sections – crew training, tactics, 'in theatre', knowing the enemy, and 'in the turret' (the last three sections being broadly similar in describing actual tactical situations).

The remit is very varied, ranging from instructions on tank gunnery, maintenance, camouflage, driving, ammunition conservation and so on, to action reports from the Russian, European



and Far Eastern theatres of war. The author has drawn from a good range of sources, all of which are listed, enabling you to delve further (in the case of websites or National Archives) should you so wish.

This is probably a 'must' for the serious armoured warfare enthusiast, especially for those with a taste for skirmish warfare. One thing that really strikes you from the tactical reports is the ease with which even experienced crews could ditch/crash the vehicle – and it wasn't a deliberate attempt to avoid action! I suspect that our rules seriously underestimate the impact of this.

Chris Jarvis

VIII CORPS: THE SOMME 1916

Published by Vexillia Ltd, PDF/Print on Demand \$14.50

Multi-Play

VIII Corps: The Somme 1916 is a card game, the first in a series of games written by Neal Reid, and is currently available in PDF 'print and play' format, and is designed to give the players some appreciation of the difficulties faced by VIII Corps on the first day of the Battle of the Somme as the British 4th, 29th and 31st Divisions attacked the villages of Beaumont Hamel, Serre and the Heidenkopf Redoubt.

The game consists of 77 cards, which are divided into nine Terrain cards, 39 British and 29 German cards.

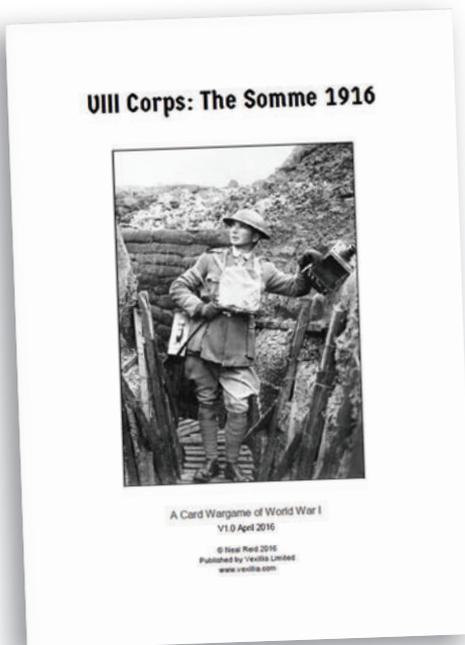
Each terrain card details a certain area of the battlefield. At the start of the game, the terrain cards are set out in 3 x 3 grid.

The objective of the game is for the British player to attack and capture two of the German Support Line terrain cards, which obviously means that they have to advance through the Front and Second line defences first.

Each player has a hand of cards, and these are divided into a mix of Strategic and Tactical cards. Strategic Cards include different types of artillery barrage (or cards that negate them), the ability to draw more cards into your hand or to look at some of your opponent's cards. Tactical Cards provide 'Assault Points' which are used to launch infantry attacks.

The game lasts a number of turns, which are divided into Strategic and Tactical phases. Only Strategic Cards can be played during the Strategic phase, and only Tactical cards can be played during the Tactical phase.

During the first four turns of the game, only the Strategic Phase is played, which represents the pre-battle artillery bombardment. The idea is for the British player to attempt to cause as much



Card Samples - VIII Corps: The Somme 1916

disruption to the German defences as possible using artillery barrages, whilst building up a hand of Tactical cards for later in the game. For the German player, it's very much a case of damage limitation, as they will be seeking to play cards that negate the effects of barrages, whilst at the same time trying to build a hand of Tactical cards to defend against the inevitable British attack.

At the start of Turn 5, the British player has a choice of whether to delay his attack, or attack as planned. If the attack is delayed, only Strategic Phases are played for a further two turns (you might perhaps delay the start of the attack to further build your hand of Tactical cards).

At the point where the British start to attack, the second phase of the turn comes into effect – the Tactical Phase.

The Tactical Phase is played after the Strategic phase of a turn, and represents the infantry attack. The British player must attempt to capture at least one terrain card in each Tactical phase – if he fails to capture a terrain card on two consecutive turns, the attack has faltered and the British player loses the game. Most Tactical Cards have an Assault Point value on them. The British player selects a Terrain card to attack, and then both players select a number of Tactical cards to play in the attack, the idea being to score more Assault Points than your opponent. Once players have selected the cards that they want to

play, some cards can be randomly removed by the effects of barrages, or by certain special Tactical Cards. Finally, the number of Assault Points on each side is calculated – if the British win, they capture the terrain area, if the Germans win, they stop the attack – remember, two consecutive failed attacks by the British player and the German player wins the game.

So that's the game in a nutshell; what are my thoughts on it?

In general terms, I enjoyed the game, although misreading the rules during our first play meant that the British had an easy victory – one of those times when you have to ask “Are you sure we are playing this correctly?”. We weren't. The subsequent play was much more satisfactory.

The game is fairly abstract, and is very much a game of hand management; as the British player tries to cycle his card deck in order to ensure that his attacks can keep being pressed home. On the German side, it's very much a case of damage limitation and then throwing as much at an attack as possible in order to try to stop it.

The German ‘Wire’ card is fairly key, as it can be used to immediately stop a British attack. Whilst the British have barrage cards that can remove these from the German hand, the German player always has a chance of drawing a new one just before a Tactical Phase, so there is a certain amount of luck involved in the game which the British player cannot legislate or plan for.

The aim of the game, according to the author is “to give you an appreciation of the problems faced on the day, and the ferocity of the battle itself”, which I think it achieves. The fact that the game has a short playing time (45–60 minutes, with the first 4–6 turns running really quickly once you know what you are doing) is a bonus, as you can play the game ‘both ways around’ in an evening – something which I think is needed as each player has a very different playing experience.

The rule book could also be a little more explicit, or perhaps give more emphasis in certain places to ensure clarity. It's only by carefully reading both the rule book and the detailed example of play (which are in separate documents) that you get a full appreciation of how the game works. It's a minor quibble, but it caused a fundamental error in our first game which almost made us discard the game out of hand.

That aside, VIII Corps is a pretty decent game which scratches an itch and gives some appreciation of the history behind the game play, whilst combining strategic thinking with fast play – a difficult

combination to achieve.

You can purchase *VIII Corps: The Somme 1916* from the Vexillia via *Wargames Vault*. The second and third games in the series; *X Corps* and *III Corps*, are also available.

Neil Shuck

PLASTIC SOLDIER COMPANY GERMAN MEDIUM TRUCKS

1/72 version £16.95 for three vehicles; 15mm version £19.50 for five vehicles. See <http://theplasticsoldiercompany.co.uk>



The 1/72 set contains three classic Opel Blitz trucks. Each sprue provides options to build an L3000 Mercedes cab option, a Maultier option, two cargo beds and a canvas tilt. The cab has open windows, two driver figures and cab detail. The 15mm set has five Opel Blitz trucks, with options to build an L3000 Mercedes cab, a Maultier, two cargo beds and a canvas tilt.

I decided to chance my arm and assemble one of the ‘plain vanilla’ 1/72 Opel Blitz trucks and it took me about an hour, not bad considering the fact that I don't do much modelling these days and, as ever, struggled just a little to comprehend the PSC instructions sheet which is, shall we say, ‘minimalist’!

As you see, however, the end result is a very nice model indeed, which went together easily and all the parts had a pleasingly snug fit. The casting is almost entirely flash-free; and though a few parts are delicate on the curves (cab roof window frames and the mudguard assembly proved vulnerable to my fat fingers), the result is a sturdy and ‘playable’ model. Incidentally, the driver and passenger come separate – don't lose the steering wheel, and remember it's left-hand drive!

A super kit of this ubiquitous workhorse. Highly recommended.

Henry Hyde

