

WARGAMING WORLD WAR ONE

BREAKING THE STALEMATE

By Gerard Miller



Melchett: *Field Marshal Haig has formulated a brilliant new tactical plan to ensure final victory in the field.*

Blackadder: *Ah. Would this brilliant plan involve us climbing out of our trenches and walking very slowly towards the enemy?*

Captain Darling: *How could you possibly know that, Blackadder? It's classified information!*

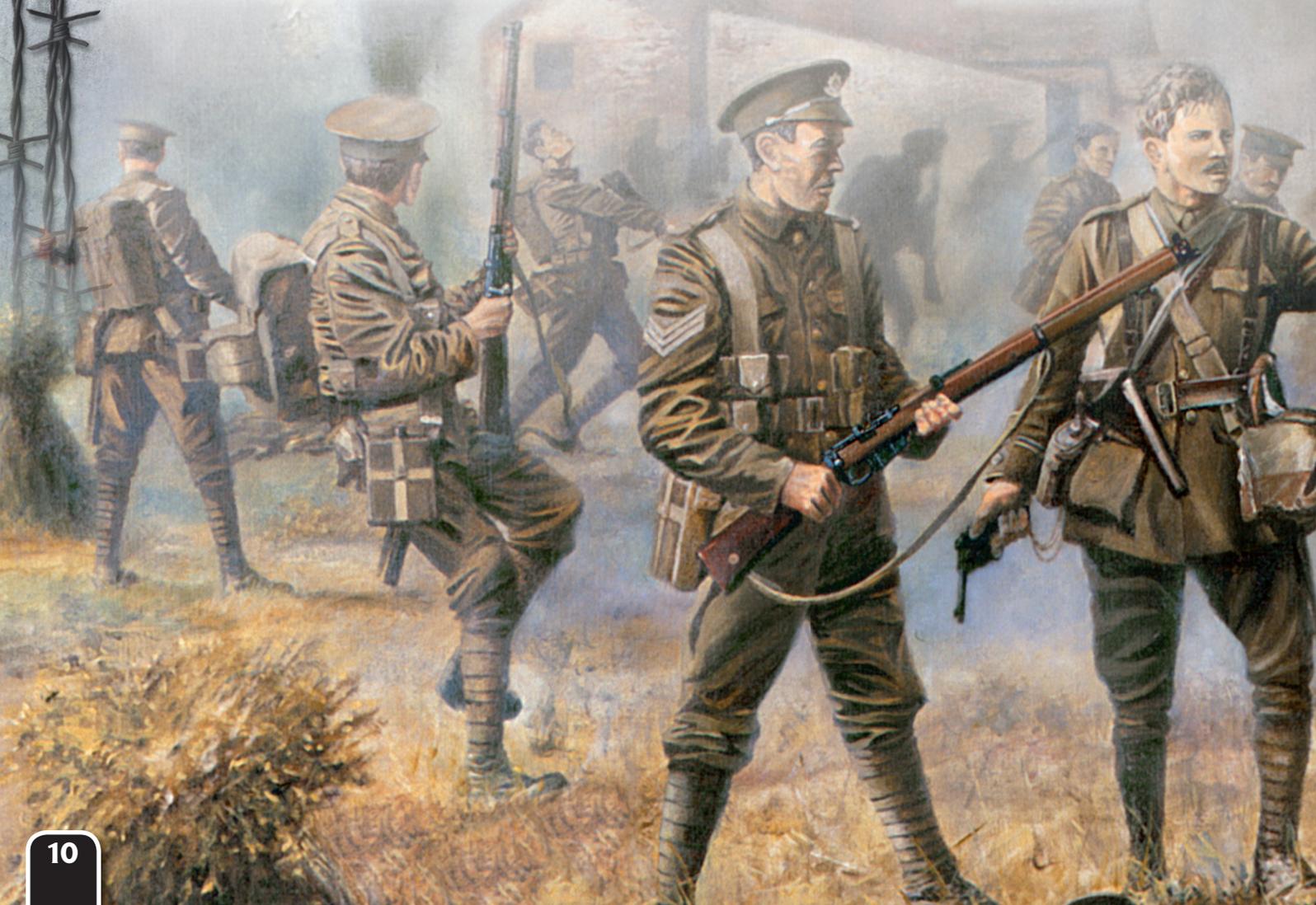
Blackadder: *It's the same plan that we used last time and the seventeen times before that.*

From Captain Cook, Blackadder Goes Forth

Below: This month's cover artwork, 1st Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment at Audregnies by David Rowlands, seen again below in all its glory. The painting shows the heroic stand of Lt. Col. D C Boger and his troops against the advancing German columns near the village of Audregnies, at the close of the Battle of Mons. Read more about this action, and see more artwork, on David's website www.davidrowlands.co.uk.

Like all caricatures, the above has elements of truth in it. However, WW1 actually has plenty to offer the wargamer on land, sea and air. Let's dig a little deeper.

One point to remember (and there is a clue in the name) is that WW1 was a World War with numerous theaters of conflict; the Western Front, the Eastern Front, as well as fronts in Italy, Palestine, The Dardanelles, Greece, East Africa and the Pacific. All these areas can provide interesting scenarios and unique situations: in Palestine cavalry played a significant role, in East Africa an asymmetrical campaign pitted German-led native troops against a range of British Imperial forces, in the Italian Alps small-scale skirmish warfare flourished, alongside the big offensives.





Air warfare went from a few flimsy reconnaissance planes to Zeppelins, heavy bombers and Flying Circuses with all the attendant activities of aerial conflict: dog-fighting, ground-attack, strategic and tactical bombing, long-range reconnaissance etc.

At sea there were not only great (and generally indecisive) battleship actions, but also decisive squadron-sized actions (Coronel and the Falklands, for example), single ship fights, coastal forces, submarines and Q-ships.

All the examples above provide a lot of wargaming possibilities ranging from large-scale battles of movement, flying circus-style dogfights and massed fleet actions to small-scale trench-raiding with a dozen figures a side, plane verses plane combats and Q-ships trying to lure submarines to their doom.

Given this plethora of choice we have to be selective here, so, in this article we're going to concentrate on the land war aspect. However, let's salute the brilliantly effective air combat system of *Wings of War*, with movement cards reflecting aircraft performance characteristics (the tight right-hand torque turn of the Sopwith Camel, for example) and an ever-growing range of single and two-seater models. Naval gamers are also well-provided for with ship models of all types in various scales. Some of the forgotten campaigns like the river war on the Danube can also make for unusual naval skirmishes.

THE WAR ON THE LAND

The classic image of WWI is that of the trenches on the Western Front with the bloody attritional warfare of artillery, gas and mortar bombardments, in which gaining 100 yards was a great victory. It's true that there were large periods in the War that fit this description - but not all.

The opening months of the War were of maneuver and counter-maneuver in the West. The French found out that *élan* in attack was not enough against modern weapons and the Germans desperately marched to make the great turning movement of the Schlieffen Plan a reality. The battles of this period are like those of the American Civil War (though elements of that war should have warned of the shape of things to come) or the Franco-Prussian War; the generals involved still thought in Napoleonic terms of a decisive victory. It was a victory that they strained to achieve in the face of quick-firing artillery, machine guns and aerial reconnaissance (not to mention the deadly rifle fire of the British Expeditionary Force). All the classic types of cavalry still scouted ahead of armies and occasionally charged home; a soldier's boots were vital equipment in the long marches and counter-marches.

In the East the Germans, Austrians and Russians also spent the first months of fighting in a war of movement with decisive tactical (but not necessarily strategic) victories like Tannenberg and Lemberg. As far as can be made out from

somewhat sketchy information, these battles were fought Napoleonic-style by massed infantry in attack and behind improvised defences, with direct support from field artillery.

It's certainly the case that the middle period of the War on the Western Front turned into an attritional slogging match. However, as revisionist historians have shown, this was perhaps due more to the indirect firepower of artillery (in one estimate 80% of casualties were artillery inflicted) and that of other weapons than purely to the "arrogant bunglers" model of British or French generalship (the Allied forces were generally on the attack in this period). There's certainly an argument to be made that generals like Haig did learn from mistakes and today it's difficult to see who could have done much better in the existing situation. It's also true that the previous vision of the Germans as supremely tactically gifted in the First, as in the Second World War, has come to be modified. In the case of WW2 it's become clear that the Russians were not as backward tactically and strategically as German commanders writing their memoirs liked to pretend. For WW1 it's become apparent that the British Army of 1918 has more than a little claim to be seen as the most effective modern all-arms army of the time. The middle period of the War also allows possibilities of fighting between the Austro-Germans and the Russians on the Eastern Front; the British and Turks in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia; as well as the Germans, Austrians and Bulgarians against the Romanians (make sure you take the Central Powers side).





Above: We love any excuse to show more photos of our 2011 Salute/Historicon Gallipoli table. Figures by Woodbine Designs.

The last period of the War, in 1918, is of real wargaming interest with, firstly, the last great German offensives and then the Allied ripostes, which turned it back to a war of movement again with artillery sometimes firing over open sights and massed armoured attacks accompanying infantry infiltration tactics. You'll be able to add some more varied scenery to your table top and get out of the trenches, cross rivers and canals and capture villages and towns. This is also the period when American troops appear on the Western Front.

While all this was going on, von Lettow-Vorbeck was fighting a brilliantly successful, long, drawn-out struggle against much larger opposing forces in Africa. This campaign offers the opportunity to field an interesting mix of European and African troops, including exotic units like the 25th Battalion, Royal Fusiliers (Frontiersmen). The 25th, raised and commanded by Colonel Driscoll, had an amazing variety of members: the famous hunter F.C. Selous, ex-Foreign Legionnaires, a Buckingham Palace footman, a millionaire and some Texas cowboys. The 1915 Gallipoli landings were a painful failure as the Turks provided much tougher opposition than expected.

The war on the Italian Front (1915 onwards) turned into just as much of a slogging match as that of the West, though it should be noted that it also lends itself to a variety of river crossings,

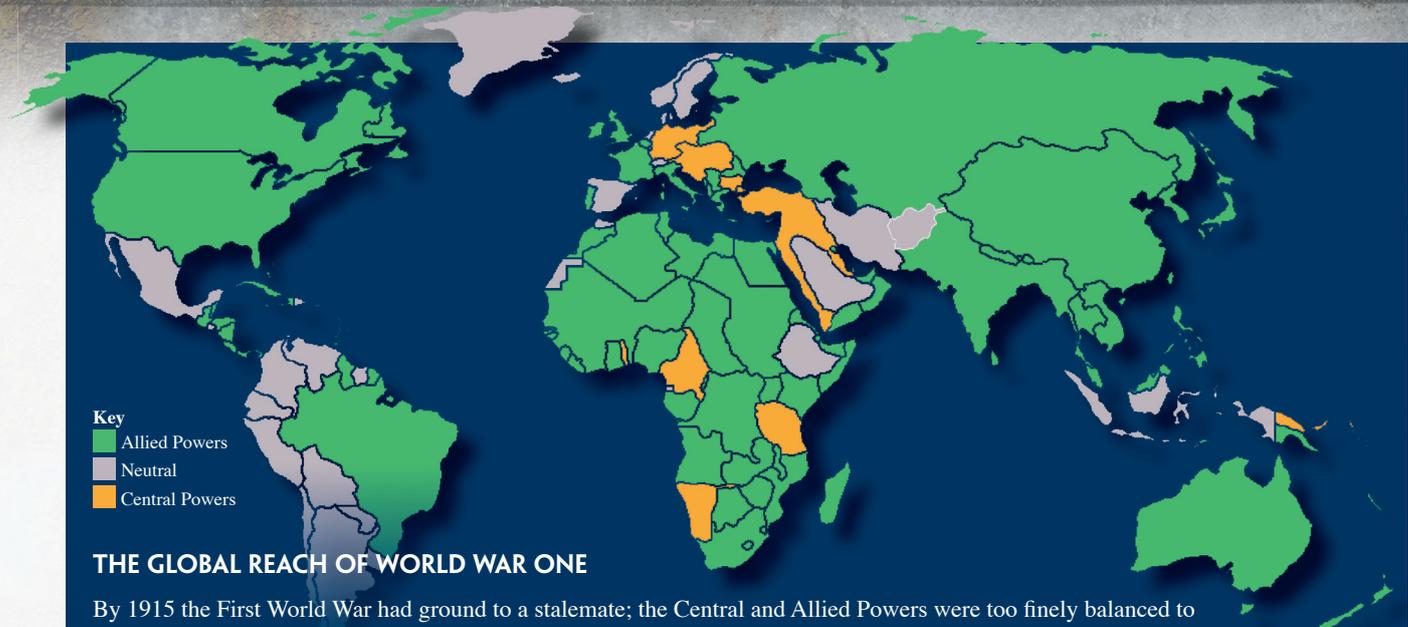
mountain assaults (a famous one led by the young Rommel) and trench raids in addition to the more 'normal' offensives. It also offers the possibility for a brief period towards the end of 1917 to have Austrian, German, British and French troops on the same table - not to mention the Italians! In 1918 the Austrians were on their own again against the Italians, who were aided by nearly 250,000 British and French troops with artillery and air support. This front also offers

unusual spectacles like a battalion of Gordon Highlanders being rowed into action in the 1918 River Piave fighting by conscripted Venetian gondoliers.

In the East it was still more a war of movement than in the West. In Palestine the ultimately successful campaign against the Turks involved aircraft and sweeping cavalry movements as well as infantry, armoured cars, tanks and artillery (and Lawrence of Arabia).

Below: An Austro-Hungarian anti-aircraft machine gun team, somewhere in Northern Italy. Figures by Scarab Miniatures.





Key
 ■ Allied Powers
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Central Powers

THE GLOBAL REACH OF WORLD WAR ONE

By 1915 the First World War had ground to a stalemate; the Central and Allied Powers were too finely balanced to force a decisive or conclusive victory. One proposed method of breaking the deadlock, which was tremendously alluring to policy makers and military rulers on both sides, was to expand the conflict, to gain more allies and increase collectively the strength of their own side. As well as recruiting new allies, drawing on one's own colonial resources was also an option.

The scramble for empire that had taken place in the late 19th Century had added a new global dimension to any war which began in Europe; inevitably the colonial possessions of the Allied and Central Powers would be drawn into the conflict, providing both manpower and resources.

The map above shows which countries and territories were aligned with the Allies (green) and the Central Powers (yellow) - graphically illustrating how the war affected about 90% of the globe, with countries like Canada and New Zealand providing manpower (20% of the male population in the latter case) and resources, to countries like Japan who sought to use the war to advance their own geo-political aims within a military alliance.

UNIFORMS

While it's true that WW1 on the tabletop is never going to look as pretty as the Renaissance or Napoleonic periods, it's not as drab as all that. French uniforms in 1914 were almost as colourful as in 1870 and the Belgian army of the same year had an extraordinary range of uniforms: lance-armed red-trousered mounted guides wearing fur busbies, lancers, *chasseurs à cheval* and infantrymen with an interesting collection of headgear. Russian forces included Cossacks as well as more conventional troops, Polish lancers wore the Napoleonic-style *czapka* until 1915 and the Italian *Bersaglieri*

wore their famous hats with cocks' feathers in action (keeping the cocks' feathers even when a steel helmet was substituted). Austria-Hungary also started the war with cavalymen in blue and red and infantrymen in pike-grey. In Africa von Lettow's native *askaris* were a fairly colourful lot and he was also reinforced by sailors of the sunken cruiser *Konigsberg*. The ANZACs sported slouch and 'lemon-squeezer' hats, as well as sun-protective headgear at Gallipoli and in the Middle East and their ranks included Maoris.

The German army of the early part of the War still wore the *pickelhäube* and riflemen the shako. In the final stage of the war a three-colour splinter-style camouflage was even introduced for helmets and equipment like artillery pieces. Uniforms may have been field grey, with grey-green for riflemen, but there were many detailed collar and cuff distinctions for different units and the different states making up the army of the German Empire. Also the various grenade bags and knee patches that festooned stormtroopers make for a bit

Below: Musketeer Miniatures Highlanders (displaying their distinctive uniforms) take up a position in a derelict building in Northern France.



of extra colour difference. Even boring British khaki was enlivened by Scottish regiments keeping their kilts and a variety of regulation and non-regulation leather and sheepskin over-jackets in the trenches as well as a mass of divisional and other unit recognition signs.

In general, WW1 uniforms provide a good opportunity for detail painters in 28mm, for example, to show their skills. How about an Austrian rifleman from 1915 with a cocks' feather plume on the cap and a marksman's lanyard on the breast of his pike-grey uniform, black collar patches, woollen stockings and mountaineering equipment?

EQUIPMENT

Weapons and equipment changed considerably during the War. The most obvious of these changes was the introduction of tanks from 1916 onwards. If the first ones were slow, clumsy and difficult to operate, by 1918 faster, lighter and more effective models had appeared. However, these were not wonder-weapons, the Germans (who never got much of a tank force going) rapidly got to know the weaknesses to exploit and tank (and crew) casualties were high in most battles.

It was a technological war and good sets of rules will reflect the British superiority in artillery use by 1918. Conveniently, a lot, or all, of your artillery can be off-table! Gas warfare was also a product of

fevered research and was commonly used by 1918. The main tabletop effect, as in reality, will be to force the opposition to use gas masks and thus hamper movement and firing efficiency.

Infantry weapons evolved considerably. By the end of the War the first submachine guns were in use and hand grenades were frequently the weapon of choice in trench attacks. Flamethrowers made their appearance among the French, Germans, Austrians and Italians. Mortars of all sizes were also widely used. However, apart from the artillery, the king of the battlefield was the machine gun. During the period their numbers increased exponentially (in 1914 a British infantry battalion had two!); trench warfare meant, after the first few months, that the machine gun's influence was all-pervasive. The number of machine guns fielded steadily increased and by 1918, with light machine guns now available as section weapons, a British battalion was looking like the prototype of a WW2 one.

The biggest problem on the battlefield was frequently that of communications equipment. Unless telephone lines were buried at least six feet down they were liable to be cut by shelling; communications were frequently reduced to runners, pigeons, signal lamps and message-carrying dogs. On several occasions potential cavalry breakthroughs (only the British kept a substantial force in the West) were aborted by

slow communications; other attacks that had reached their first objectives then stuck due to lack of fresh orders or information about what was happening in the adjacent area. By 1918 more reliable wireless sets were in use to supplement the other means of communication.

A good set of rules will build in an element of the confusion due to the usual 'communication gap'.

There were also the more unusual weapons as well: an early British form of mortar in 1915 was the trench catapult, which - as its name implies - was just that. A later form of mortar fired the so-called 'toffee apple', which again looked just like its name! The Belgian Army of 1914 had machine guns mounted in dog-drawn carts.

SCENARIOS

As already mentioned, the War offers a variety of potential wargaming scenarios. Below we'll take a look at some typical types and how they could be adapted on the table.

SKIRMISHES

If you've got some British cavalry you want to use you could try the fight on 22 August 1914 between a troop of A Squadron, 16th Lancers and two companies of German Jägers (light infantry riflemen), which took place in a cornfield with corn-stalks the Germans used as protection. The lancers charged with the lance - twice - and though



Above: Austro-Hungarian troops move forward behind the cover of a German tank. Figures by Scarab Miniatures and Great War Miniatures.



Above: A Scarab Miniatures machine gun team.

suffering casualties, seem to have caused more to the Jägers. This action was part of the fighting between the German advance on Mons and the BEF covering screen. As supports you could give the Germans an all-arms force and the British the Scots Greys. Your table would be farmland, country roads, tracks and villages.

ENCOUNTER BATTLES

However, if you want something on a larger scale, how about the fighting at Le Cateau? On 26 August General Smith-Dorrien fought a delaying action with brigades against German divisions in the undulating countryside west of the town, dotted with villages (but few hedges). In one part of the battle the Germans, from a ridge, attacked the British right flank with nine infantry battalions and five machine gun companies. They were supported by more artillery than the British, who themselves had two infantry battalions (later reinforced by one more and elements of another), 42 field guns and a heavy artillery battery. The ground was open, about 2,000 metres square, with some dead ground, used by machine-gunners as cover, on the German side of the crossroads in the centre of the British position. British accounts suggest that the German shrapnel was relatively ineffective as far as the infantry was concerned and that their machine guns caused more casualties. Later in the fighting another German division started working its way up the valley of the River la Selle south of Le Cateau to outflank the British position. The British were now facing the fire of the artillery of three German divisions and at least 12 battalions of infantry. They held on until ordered to retire; most of the guns and infantry got away, apart from the 2/ King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. The

tabletop battlefield, looking south/north, would have Le Cateau with the River la Selle valley below it in the middle of its right hand (eastern) side with a road leading west out of Le Cateau, bisected in the middle of the table by a road running north-east/south-west. Make the ground undulating with dips and gullies to give some cover and you're set up for a game which gives both sides knotty problems.

If you have some French you want to use, the fighting during what came to be known as the First Battle of the Marne (September 1914) could fit the bill. Both sides were often sparring for control of villages and other strategic points. You could replay the struggle for the Chateau de Mondemont, which German guardsmen struggled to hold as a vital lookout point. This was a small-scale

Below: Foundry British make their way across no-mans-land.



fight with at most three French Moroccan battalions with 75mm artillery support against a smaller number of Germans with some machine guns. Another typical battle in the Marne fighting was for control of the village of Penchard (5 September 1914) between two French infantry divisions and a Moroccan brigade and two German infantry divisions and a further infantry brigade. This was an encounter affair with both sides moving forward. The Germans were nearer the village and got there first and were then attacked by the French across a battlefield dotted with other smaller villages and woods, with easily fordable rivulets running across a terrain covered with corn fields.

RAIDS

In the middle period of the War the massive artillery preparations, with literally millions of shells being fired, and then the following frontal attacks, do not lend themselves to much tabletop fun. Trench raids, however, do. These night-time raids came in all shapes and sizes, from very small patrols of a few men to company-sized forces with artillery preparation.

In the West, the British and Germans were particularly active in this sphere with raids designed to disrupt the other side's work on their defences, capture prisoners for intelligence purposes or to check on any evidence of new installations and equipment on the other side. All sorts of improvised weapons, like spiked clubs or sharpened entrenching tools, were used, but hand grenades and pistols were frequently the arms of choice. Trench raiding scenarios will be enhanced by the maximum of scenery you can gather and by making

your No Man's Land not too easy to traverse - plenty of barbed wire and craters! For the raiders, there's the problem of arriving at the opposing trenches without being spotted and, of course, getting away again with their prisoner or information. For the defenders the reverse applies: spotting the raiders while they're still in No Man's Land and foiling their nefarious designs. These sorts of scenarios can be played with as few as a dozen or so figures on each side. If you want something a little more exotic, how about some of von Lettow-Vorbeck's raids on the British Uganda Railway in 1915? These raids were carried out by small groups of about ten Europeans and askaris with the objective of sabotaging the railway line, which was a vital supply route from the coast. A raid scenario like this offers plenty of opportunity for some interesting bush scenery with British posts guarding the line. But where will the German forces strike and will they have enough time to sabotage the tracks or plant explosives before the British intervene?

ASSAULTS

As noted above, the Western Front reverted, during the course of 1918, to much more open warfare. Firstly, there were the series of offensives by Ludendorff, starting in March, which aimed to damage irreparably the British Army's capacity to continue the War. They undoubtedly inflicted some heavy

defeats, but were strategically incoherent and eventually ran out of steam. They offer all sorts of scenarios: stormtroop infiltration tactics, fighting retreats, holding actions etc. A possible scenario could be roughly based on the attack on Givenchy on 9 April.

The fighting was on the extreme left of the German 6th Army's attack. The village stood on a slight knoll which offered considerable advantages in terms of observing this flat region. Givenchy had been in the front line for a long time and to the east and north-east of the village (north is the top of your table and the village should be in the middle) was a kilometer-long crater field (in places impassable); to the south of the village ran the canal (east-west). To avoid the crater field the Germans planned an attack with four battalions north of the village and two more attacking from the south, along the canal bank (which is at the bottom of your table). The idea was to roll up the British line from the rear. The defending British should have four battalions to oppose them. You can add plenty of trenches (in use and abandoned) and an outpost south of the village and two to the west of it.

OPEN WARFARE

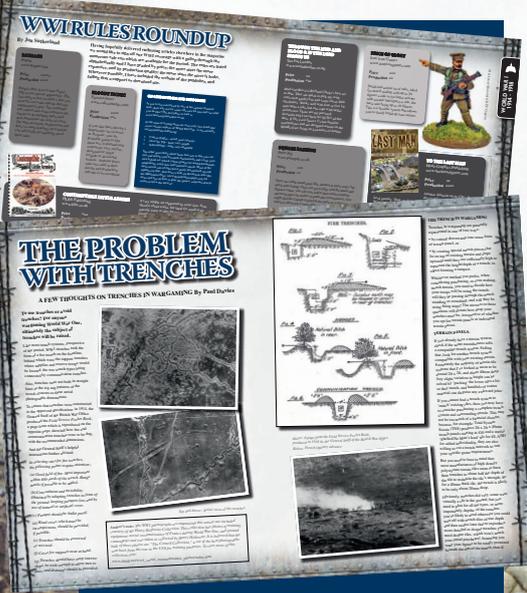
Later in 1918, of course, came the Allied riposte; in the last few months of the War the Germans on the Western Front were steadily pushed back. At times this was much more open warfare than before, giving table top possibilities like capturing fortified villages and farms and crossing rivers and canals as well as encounter battles as the Germans desperately tried to plug defensive holes. As the retreat went on, the Germans had to fight from hastily prepared positions, so you can replace complex trench systems

by rough scrapes and shell-holes and put hedges and orchards back on the table. How effective tanks were in this fighting is open to debate; certainly the breakdown and casualty rates were high: at the Battle of Amiens (8 August) only 145 out of 415 tanks were still operational the next day. Tanks don't occupy the same place in this war as they did in World War Two.

An interesting scenario could be one loosely based on action during the Allied assault on the Amiens Defence Line. There should be scattered woods and villages over your table with the River Somme running along the top (north) of one of its longer sides and the Amiens Defence Line running across the middle north/south. About a third of the distance from the western side of the table place a ridge occupying the top half, protected by the Somme looping down to flow off the table in the middle of its western side (the side where the Allies come on). The German artillery is situated on the ridge and the Allied objective is to out-flank and then destroy it as well as pushing on to the German main defences. The force ratios should be around 2:1 in favour of the Allies before the Defence Line, with the other half of the German force on or behind the Defence Line. The Germans have more on-table artillery than the Allies, who have air and armoured car and /or tank support and some cavalry as well. The Allied infantry could also be Australian, arguably (along with the Canadians and New Zealanders) the most effective assault troops the British had in the last phase of the War.

Australian troops were also a significant factor in Allenby's army in the attack on the Turks in Palestine. The very varied landscape there - from desert to lush, wooded valleys and scrub-covered hills

Below: More action from Gallipoli as Woodbine Designs ANZAC troops surge forward from their trenches.



You won't be surprised to hear this isn't the first time we have covered WWI in *Wargames Illustrated*, and back in July 2009 as part of our "WWI - The Early War On the Western Front" theme, we featured an article which dealt with the problems of replicating trench warfare on the tabletop. If you don't have a copy of *WI264* (which featured the article) you can now download it from our website.

- provides plenty of scenery possibilities on the tabletop. A scenario based roughly on the attack on Beersheba (31 October 1917) would place the town in the middle of the table in very open ground, surrounded by hills to the north, south and east. To the west the ground was flatter and from this direction a railway entered the town. The northern and southern defences were trenches, but with no wire. The southern and south-western defences were on the hills with mainly a single line of trenches and some redoubts. You can also include some wadis in your terrain to give the attackers some cover. The British units included cavalry and the Camel Corps and outnumbered the Turkish defenders. There was also a very successful cavalry attack from the south which overwhelmed the defence and penetrated the town.

FIGURES

A wide selection of scales are available: 6, 10, 15, 20 and 25-28 mm. Obviously, for large-scale actions, 6 and 10 mm mean that you could get big battles like Cambrai onto the table. However, rather like WW2, the big battles seem better suited to board games. Strangely enough for a war involving millions, WW1 games can be very satisfying with up to 60 or 70 figures a side - for example, a three-company battalion of some 60 figures plus support. You can substitute tabletop companies or platoons for actual battalions, which works well to re-fight battles, as long as you keep the relative force proportions. Trench raids are exciting with very few figures attacking and defending. A couple of tanks supporting a company-sized attack against a defence equipped with a field gun in the anti-tank role, either in a trench assault or 1918-style open field fight, can give you the sort of game that can be fought to a finish in an afternoon or evening. In early 1914 there's scope for small scale cavalry vs cavalry or cavalry vs infantry actions with a troop of cavalry and a company of infantry - say 30 figures for the two...

There are a wide range of figures available in 20mm plastic. However, in 25/28mm metal, feasible if we're talking relatively modest numbers on the table, there are some beautifully sculpted and detailed figures. Manufacturers like Great War Miniatures, Brigade Games, Old Glory and Renegade Miniatures have a wide coverage of the British, Germans (including von Lettow's forces from Brigade), French and Austrians. Ebor Miniatures specialize in the French and Belgians of 1914. Scarab Miniatures have some nice Austrians and Italians. Musketeer Miniatures have some Early War British and Russians. Woodbine Design and Eureka Miniatures have the figures you might need for the Middle



East and Gallipoli, and Artizan Designs those for the Arab Revolt and Lawrence of Arabia. Vehicles are also available from some manufacturers.

RULES

Research for this article turned up 13 sets of WW1 rules - and there are certainly more out there! *The Great War* (Warhammer Historical), superbly

Above: Woodbine Designs ANZAC characters.

illustrated and with a lot of information, has been influential in raising interest in the period. *Contemptible Little Armies* (Rattrap Productions/Brigade Games) 3rd Edition is a very playable set. *To the Last Man* is a good set of rules by Chris Peers, not easy to pick-up but very pleasurable once you have.

WARGAMES

illustrated.net

For a more in-depth look at the WW1 rules head to our website and download our *WWI Rules Roundup* which appeared in *WI264*

FURTHER READING

The literature on all aspects of WW1 is vast. Below are some basic resources to get you going:

The First World War. John Keegan. Pimlico 1999. (A good one volume introduction.)

August 1914. Barbara Tuchman. Papermac 1980. (The opening phases of the War, 1914, both East and West.)

Osprey: a wide range of books on national armies, units, equipment, battles and campaigns. They also cover air warfare in a lot of detail, as well as naval.

Battleground Europe. Leo Cooper, Pen & Sword Books. (Useful series covering many individual battlefields in the West, Italy and Gallipoli.)

Battle Tactics of the Western Front. The British Army's art of attack 1916-18. Paddy Griffith. YUP 1994. (Essential reading.)

1918. A Very British Victory. Peter Hart. Phoenix 2009.

The Eastern Front 1914-17. Norman Stone. Penguin 1998.

The German Army at Ypres 1914 and The Battle for Flanders, The German Army on the Somme 1914-1916, The German Army at Passchendaele, (among others). Jack Sheldon. Pen & Sword. (Sheldon has done superb research in regimental archives and accounts published after WW1; occasionally the contemporary narratives are a little "our gallant lads" style for modern tastes, but they give a lot of interesting detail.)

Verdun. Alistair Horne. Penguin 1993.

The White War. Mark Thompson. Faber & Faber 2009. (The Italian Front, 1915-1918.)

The Last Crusade. Anthony Bruce. John Murray 2003. (The campaign in Palestine.)

Battle for the Bundu. Charles Miller. MacMillan 1974. (A very entertaining account of the fighting in East Africa.)

Tanganikyan Guerrilla. J R Sibley. Pan/Ballantine 1971.

Gallipoli. Peter Hart. Profile Books 2011. (There are a lot of books on Gallipoli; this is probably the most objective, but see LA Carlyon too.)

Novels and memoirs: *Under Fire* (Henri Barbusse, the 'anti-war' classic); *Her Privates We* (Frederic Manning); *War* (Ludwig Renn); *Storm of Steel* (Ernst Jünger, certainly more 'pro-war' than Barbusse.)

Internet sites: Among many, www.landships.freesevers.com has a lot of useful information.