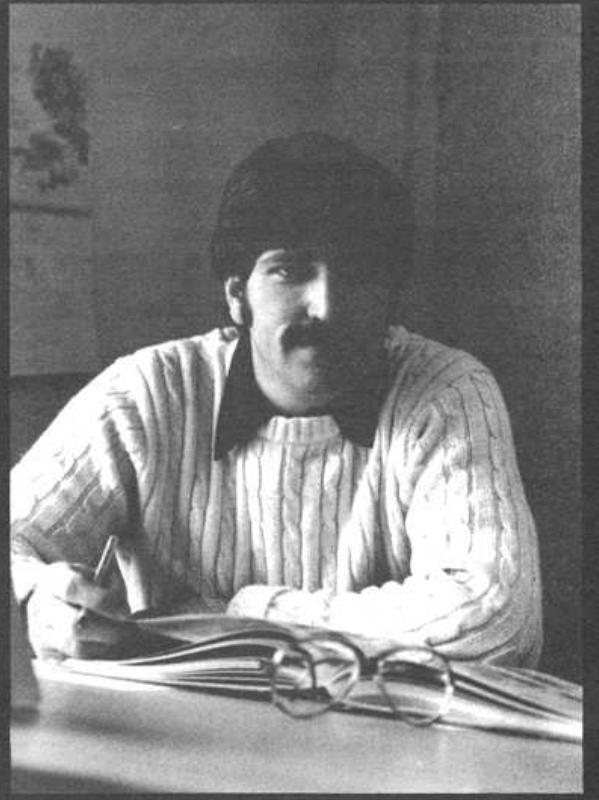


# F & M INTERVIEW DANA LOMBARDY

by Bill Sanders



**F&M:** Dana, where do you come from? As such an exponent of the Southern California wargaming scene, are you by any chance one of that rare species, the California "native son"?

**Dana Lombardy:** Not quite. Our family moved to California in 1951, when I was a year old. My father decided to close his illegal gambling casino in Ohio and pursue a less risky business here out west.

**F&M:** Some might say you seem to have inherited his penchant for the risky. But what brought you into wargaming?

**Lombardy:** I bought my first wargame, **Chancellorsville**, when I was twelve, but I had no one to play it with, so it sat in a closet after a few solo plays. It was at that time that I began to design my own games. Then, in high school, a friend who shared my interest in military history reintroduced me to Avalon Hill and their new titles: **Afrika Korps**, **Bulge**, etc. And I began designing again, even doing my own graphics without benefit of instruction.

**F&M:** Was that how SDC got started?

**Lombardy:** Simulations Design Corporation was started by three of my friends and me in 1971, when I was attending San Diego State University. By then, I had had an opportunity to travel to Europe and do research in several country's archives. We bought a small printing press, which I had learned to operate, but we didn't know anything about running a business and made just about every mistake possible. My friends moved on to other pursuits in 1973, but I hung on out of sheer stubbornness. Our last publication was in 1977, and SDC was finally dissolved last year.

**F&M:** Our younger readers may have heard little of SDC's games. Will you name some of them?

**Lombardy:** My first published design was **Guerre a Oustrance**. (I had a penchant for picking names difficult to say or remember, and that might have contributed to SDC's demise.) **Guerre** was a **PanzerBlitzstyle** mini-game with scenarios from 1940. The next was **Dunkerque 1940**, based on three years of research and published in book-case format with mounted map. Then came **NORAD**, born literally overnight for *Conflict* magazine, a little

game about as far from simulation as you can get. People loved it or hated it — but even the latter could be caught playing it between moves of **Drang Nach Osten**. We sold more of it than of any other title: over 5000 copies. Other games I designed or contributed to include **Khalkhin-Gol**, **Battle for Hue**, **Dien Bien Phu**, **Rifle-Musket**, **Cromwell**, and **Jerusalem**.

**F&M:** Some of these were included in *Conflict* magazine, were they not?

**Lombardy:** Yes. That was another of our ventures in connection with SDC. I tried to be editor, art director, and just about everything else for it. We got seven issues out between 1972 and 1975, and some people may remember them for our lavish use of color and illustrations. I like to think *Conflict* was ahead of its time, influencing a lot of other publishers to use more color and pictures in their games and magazines. Unfortunately, we set too low a subscription price: \$8.50 for six issues (with games), when *Strategy & Tactics* sold for \$4.00 a copy at hobby shops. We thought we'd give gamers a bargain at \$2.50 per issue. *S&T* is still around, *Conflict* isn't.

**F&M:** You think that underpricing killed SDC?

**Lombardy:** No kidding. If the smaller game publishers were to ask two or three dollars more for their products than the going rate, they'd worry that the gamers will scream and moan and not buy. To some degree that may be true. I know many who always get very nervous about raising their prices, even if it may mean the difference between survival or going the way of SDC. But I'd like to ask the readers of *F&M* if they'd part with an extra buck for the sake of keeping smaller businesses alive. The big companies may set the standards in wargaming, but the new and smaller ones often are the innovators. I know this was true of SPI when they came up back in the early seventies to compete with giant Avalon Hill.

**F&M:** Most gamers probably don't think in terms of keeping a business going, and I guess it's natural to complain about any price increase. But with SDC dissolved, what is your formal

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occupation today?

**Lombardy:** I work for Boynton & Associates, for their *Model Retailer* magazine, a trade publication for hobby shops. I write the column on hobby games and am in the fortunate position of being in close contact with almost every aspect of the games industry.

**F&M:** We all know of your "magnificent obsession" with **Streets of Stalingrad**, on which you worked ever since it got started as an SDC project. Has that — and your job! — left any time for other hobbies and pursuits?

**Lombardy:** Little enough. I played some baseball and ice hockey in an amateur league. Right now, my most enjoyable hobby is helping my daughter Erin Marie grow and learn. Also, I do freelance work in game design, graphics, and cartography, for game companies and "think tanks."

**F&M:** No other game has been as often announced and then delayed as has **Kesselschlacht Streets of Stalingrad** (although **The Longest Day** or **Rising Sun** may yet break that record). Why?

**Lombardy:** At SDC, we were shooting for something truly spectacular, to get us attention — but we bit off more than we realized. We couldn't make it, and only stubbornness and the desire not to waste all the research kept the project alive at all. Then, when Phoenix had taken the game on, there were all the chronic problems a small publisher faces with his first big effort and my inability to judge accurately how long a project will take to complete. I am responsible for half of this delay, despite my working every night for six months.

**F&M:** Did the experience sour you?

**Lombardy:** I'll never work on any game again in so many capacities: designer, developer, artist. I'll never do another "monster" game by myself, only as a member of a team — after my scars from this one have had time to heal. Other game companies have told me they have "monster" designs in limbo simply because it's not worth it to publish them. To be adequately compensated for the effort, GDW should charge \$100 for a game like **Drang Nach Osten**. Gamers might gasp at such a figure, but that's a hard fact of business.

**F&M:** Some people had to wait for a long time after sending their money for **Streets of Stalingrad**.

**Lombardy:** Everyone who asked for his money back received it. Only one person had trouble getting it (until *F&M* stepped in). That order seemed to have been lost in the shuffle, at a time when Phoenix was refunding money on orders held for six months or less. As a solution, it might be best in the future either not to print any ads of games not physically delivered to *F&M*, or not to print a price until the game is delivered. The latter method would have the advantage to allow a company to get exposure while the finishing touches to a game are still being applied.

**F&M:** I hate to ask you this, but I shall anyway. SPI released **Battle for Stalingrad** right after your **Streets of Stalingrad**. How do you compare them?

**Lombardy:** I don't think they should be compared. Even though they are on the same battle, they differ greatly in scale. **Streets** is company level, with daily turns; **Battle** is battalion level, with weekly turns. Each is trying to say something different about the battle. **Streets** is much more detailed, thanks to three extra years of research. But the lack of so much detail should not count against a game with a different design approach. The bottom line is this: John Hill had less data and records to work from, yet he drew the same conclusions about the battle as we did: the German infantry and tanks get ground up, leaving mostly artillery at the end. The Russians have very little left and only a small slice of the city, but they won strategically. Both designs show this. I'd love to play John's game to find out whether the tactics which can change the historical outcome in **Streets** can do so in the same way in **Battle**.

**F&M:** Didn't you say in your designer's notes that you haven't played your own game?

**Lombardy:** I haven't played it *with playtesters*, and I am so sick of seeing it that I may never touch it again. But I constantly "played" it when I was writing the rules and drawing the examples. You have to work on a game solitaire very intensely when designing it. That's why you should stand back and let the playtesters dig into it without a designer's "help." The designer is too intimate with his creation to be a good playtester. He knows what the rules *mean*, he understands what is implied. Playtesters may not know about the battle at all, but can find more loopholes than a designer, who has read everything and "knows" how the units should behave.

**F&M:** You worked with John Hill on **Battle for Hue** and **Jerusalem**, and you used his combat system of **Battle for Hue** in **Streets of Stalingrad**. Is that correct?

**Lombardy:** Yes. His combat system is good for street fighting, and I don't feel ashamed to "borrow" a good idea — with his permission, of course, and with proper credit. John designs fun games, and I am definitely one of his fans. He is one of the best game designers in the country. He admits he fudges on history, but nobody else gives you games with such historical flavor and "feel." By comparison, my main strength is not in design, but in developing designs and translating them into an effective graphic format.

**F&M:** It sounds as though John and you would make an excellent pair. Do you have any common plans for the future?

**Lombardy:** The first team effort is in progress right now. Dave Parham, who did the historical research for **Streets of Stalingrad**, will do the same for a new game, and in an equally impeccable fashion; I shall do a scientific analysis of combat strengths of units, as for **Streets**, and prepare an exact map; John will design the game system; I'll then polish his rules and take care of the graphics; Dave will write the historical commentary. This will be the first wargame even done in such a manner, each person being an expert in his own area of responsibility.

**F&M:** What is it?

**Lombardy:** That would be telling.

**F&M:** That's the idea.

**Lombardy:** All I can say is that it will not come out before 1981, and I don't know as yet who will publish it. As to the subject: John never saw his real father, who was killed in 1944 before John was born, in a battle between one of the top U.S. divisions and one of the better SS divisions. The game has a lot of personal meaning for John, and may be his best ever.

**F&M:** As a designer, do you feel reviewers are fair in general, or have some reviews been too critical?

**Lombardy:** There are two arguments you can never win, even if you are right; with your boss, and with a reviewer. I don't believe there is any bad publicity. Any publicity is beneficial — just don't misspell my name! If I design a game, don't include a bibliography, do only a superficial job of playtesting, and later have to publish pages of errata, how can I say I don't deserve to get nailed. No game is perfect. And even a real hatchet job of a review may only have a marginal impact on sales. I don't rely on a critic's opinion to decide whether or not to see a particular movie. If a game is a subject I really love, I'll probably buy it regardless of what the reviewers say. And a game on a subject of only marginal interest to me I'll probably pass up unless the reviewers convince me that I can't live without it. Most reviewers today, with the state of the market, primarily deflate some egos that deserve to have the air let out of them.

**F&M:** Any last thoughts?

**Lombardy:** Yes, on a quite different subject. The *Hall of Fame* award usually goes to one of the better known, current designers. There is a man who helped to make this hobby way back when, and who now helps everyone to get started selling their games. Lou Zocchi is a name not known to many gamers today, because Lou is not as active in design as he once was. I should like to recommend that we recognize his contributions to wargaming by electing him to the *Hall of Fame*.