

C3i INTERVIEW

James M. Day

By Sam Sheikh



C3i
MAGAZINE

Game companies and gaming fads come and go, but game designers can be as enduring in our hobby as the six-sided randomizer. Several designers from the 1970's are still going strong today, particularly from the old SPI alumni (Simulations Publications Inc., New York, NY).

One non-SPI designer still intrepidly nurturing his signature design, and yet also looking to widen his output, is James M. Day. Surprisingly, despite his 30 years of involvement in our hobby, I have not read an interview of him. I have sought to rectify this omission now with this **C3i Magazine** Interview. I hope you enjoy it.

C3i/Sam Sheikh:

Tell me about Jim Day, when he's not designing or playing games.

Jim Day: I've been married for over 30 years, and we have a daughter. My undergraduate degree is in accounting, and I've a graduate degree in healthcare administration. I retired about two years ago; it's great to be able to make that happen while I'm still young enough to get around. Prior to that, I worked for 25 years in healthcare (hospitals) in a wide range of management areas from clinical, administrative, and information technology. I also worked for seven years in the entertainment software arena.

C3i: Would you list your game designs up to 2010?

- **Panzer** (1979)
- **88** (1980)
- **Armor** (1980)
- **MBT** (1989)
- **IDF** (1993)
- **Gunship 2000** (computer, 1991)
- **Gunship 2000 Islands and Ice** (computer, 1992)
- **F-15 Strike Eagle III** (computer, 1994)
- **Across the Rhine** (computer, 1995)
- **Panzer Miniatures Rules** (2007)
- **Kaiser's Pirates** (2007)
- **Iron & Oak** (P500)
- **Panzer/MBT/IDF** (P500)

C3i: When did you discover gaming?

Day: I discovered, at a very young age, that I liked to play games. I then discovered "mainstream" wargaming when I was in college. I saw a copy of **Strategy&Tactics** magazine, and it all escalated from there.

C3i: What was your first game? Board game or mini?

Day: Other than **Stratego** or the original American Heritage Games (**Dogfight** and **Broadside**, etc.) and simple games like that, my first true wargame was Avalon Hill's **Panzerblitz**.

C3i: Given that your first design was on tactical armored warfare on the Eastern Front, it's no wonder you started with PanzerBlitz. Was that your early favorite, as it was for so many other gamers?

Day: Actually, my initial love was tactical naval warfare. However, when I first got into gaming there wasn't much out for naval gaming other than for miniatures. At that time, I had neither the financial resources nor the floor space to really get into it. I did purchase a copy of the **Seapower** rules to longingly check out the ship data.

That's how I got into tanks. After all, as I saw it, they were just ships on land. There were many more options for tactical tank warfare, like in **Panzerblitz**, so I moved in that direction. I did purchase a copy of **Tractics** and picked up many of the various tank-oriented games.

Again, all of the games were at the tactical level.

C3i: How did you get your start as a game designer?

Day: Even as a young kid, I was continually designing little games to entertain myself and to play with others. My first published game was the board game **Panzer** published by Yaquinto Publications in 1979.

JAMES M. DAY Interview

C3i: Why did you decide to become a game designer?

Day: I was never quite satisfied with the tactical tank games on the market. My fellow gamers were tired of hearing me complain until one day they said, "If you think you can design a better game, put up or shut up!"

That is how the original version of **Panzer** came about. At the start, it was designed as a set of miniature rules, not a board game. I playtested it a great deal with the local gaming group in Toledo, Ohio, and I hosted events at the conventions that were held in the Detroit, Michigan, area. That is where I first met Craig Taylor, one of the principals at Yaquinto.

MBT and **IDF**, both later published by Avalon Hill, were both logical follow-ups given the subject matter. In fact, I had originally fleshed out the modern games to a greater extent than a World War II version, but Yaquinto wanted a WWII title.

The Kaiser's Pirates came about because I have always liked to play card games. They make for an enjoyable diversion from more complex miniatures or board games. In addition, the subject matter got me back to my naval gaming roots.

That's when I decided to design **Iron & Oak**, currently on GMT Games' P500 List. I liked the naval subject matter and the period. I didn't think the American Civil War naval campaign was well represented so I went in that direction. It's a card-assist game with an area map, a little different from what's been published on the subject in the past.

C3i: Avalon Hill's Tobruk was released in 1976, three years before Panzer. Did it have any influence on either your design or the reason you decided to design Panzer for Yaquinto?

Day: Yes to both points. I liked the strong tactical nature of the vehicle modeling in AH's **Tobruk**, but I found the game me-

chanics to be somewhat cumbersome and the combat resolution process a never-ending dice-fest.

C3i: Which of your game designs are you most proud of?

Day: That is really a tough question. If I had to say, it would be **MBT/IDF**. While they are two distinct games, they are really attached at the hip given the similar game design mechanics. The main reason for my choice is what I feel is the realistic nature of the simulation. For example, when **MBT** was first published, there were a number of naysayers who pooh-poohed the armor values for the **M1 Abrams**, stating the values were just too high compared to its then Soviet counterparts. Then the first Gulf War hit, and as they say, the rest is history. The **M1 Abrams** proved to be all that and much more.

On the computer front, it would be **Gunship 2000**, given its ground-breaking features and advanced visualizations for that time, and that the fact that it is still considered by many to be the best helicopter simulation published.

Because **The Kaiser's Pirates** is my only card game to date, it wins by default.

C3i: You seem to have strong knowledge about modern weapons systems. What are your predictions on the future of modern warfare, especially on the direction of hardware and technology?

Day: Thanks for the compliment. As you well know, there is a never-ending infatuation with technology and its impact on the modern battlefield. Don't get me wrong; I feel it does have a significant impact on the outcome of regular conflicts, but is mitigated to a certain extent in irregular conflicts.

In my opinion, where it really makes the difference is in the area of real-time battlefield communication and intelligence. However, technology is never a replacement for training, planning and leadership. You can put cutting-edge equipment in the hands of poorly trained or poorly led troops and it won't make a difference against a quality force, even one with inferior equipment.

One area where I believe great strides have been made is in battlefield medical care. If you look at the numbers, the casualty rates are significantly lower today than they were even in recent historical times. Knowing you're going to be taken care of has a tremendous impact on morale and therefore a force's *élan*.

In the not-too-distant future, I believe you will see the advent of the fully electronic soldier with on-body computers and other supporting tools. There will be greater use of UAVs (much to the consternation of real-life pilots everywhere) even to the point of fully autonomous systems.

I believe the era of the heavy tank is not over. It's still required even if it's not facing other heavy tanks, but it'll probably evolve to an external gun system with the crew completely located in a protective hull. Since the traditional gun systems have pretty much exhausted the development options, I believe we'll see sooner rather than later chemical propellant or rail guns as the armament. In addition, there's a very strong requirement for a lighter, more easily transported combat vehicle. This has been identified as part of the US Army's Future Combat

The Kaiser's PIRATES

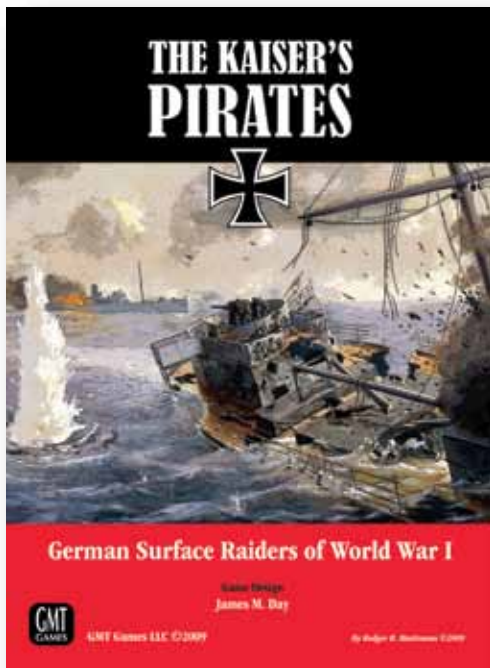
Design by
James M. Day

Published 2009
GMT Games LLC

AGE
12+

PLAYERS
1-4

PLAYING TIME
1.5 to 2 hours



Systems program.

With everything, it still comes down to the boots on the ground. Airpower is great and sea control is important, but it's still the soldiers and marines that take, hold, and maintain the key objectives.

C3i: How will these developments help us in the future? In regards to the low-to-medium-intensity type conflicts that have re-shaped modern warfare over the last 50 years?

Day: I believe technology has a significant impact on situations defined as low-to-medium-intensity conflicts, not just those classified as traditional "kinetic operations." Observation and communication are critical aspects of those less traditional situations, but are still no substitute for intelligence and planning.

C3i: How will heavy tanks, as you envision them, help? Heavy tanks have long guns that will be difficult to traverse in the urban and rough terrain in which enemies are expected to fight. The M1 has huge logistical needs, and the soft-skinned supply vehicles it relies on are vulnerable even to low-tech roadside bombs.

Day: I feel strongly that despite the logistical challenges of an M1-type vehicle, it still has a place in the US military. Just its intimidation factor alone is enough to tip the balance.

Are the current urban operations *in spite of or because of* what we can put in field? Our opponents clearly understand that they can't stand with us in open actions, so they must resort to non-traditional options. If we're going to continue to dictate the direction of warfare, we must be able to field all critical air, land, and sea elements.

C3i: Switching gears to design again, what other game designs are you working on today?

Day: In addition to **Iron & Oak**, the new **Panzer**, **MBT**, and **IDF** board games are currently on GMT Games' **P500 List**.

C3i: Through the years, which designers have impressed you the most?

Day: I have never really thought of games in that context, that is, if it's designed by so-and-so, I must have it. I look at the context (is it a topic I am interested in), the publisher (I believe that is more important), and the general information about the game. I have certainly purchased my share of less-than-great games, but more often than not, they have been good to great titles.

C3i: Let me put it differently. Given your many years in the hobby, whose works have you found particularly innovative or interesting? Who has a body of work you admire?

Day: No one comes immediately to mind.

C3i: Back to your point about the publisher being more important than the designer when you choose a game, why and how so?

Day: Please don't misunderstand. I'm not saying that designers don't matter, they do a great deal. It's just that it isn't the first factor I consider when evaluating or buying a game.

When I was at MicroProse, I coined a saying, "Anyone can be a game designer..." Now, I made that statement somewhat tongue-in-cheek, but my point was that the ego, the glory of the individual, or perceived self-worth, needs to take a backseat to the team and to the creation of a good product.

The entertainment software business, at least when I was a direct part of that business, was rife with over-blown egos and those individuals who thought they were bigger than the project or anyone else for that matter. Having had the benefit of working in the real world before joining MicroProse, I believe I saw how to act professionally. Most there were not afforded that benefit.

Therefore, my bias, and I'm not saying it's correct or otherwise, is to look at the bigger picture first, rather than individuals.

C3i: So which publishers are on your short-list?

Day: At this time, it is a fairly short list. GMT Games is probably at the top of the list. I held this opinion even before they decided to publish **The Kaiser's Pirates**, so I consider it an objective opinion. Columbia Games is also a current favorite. In their day, I had a great deal of respect for GDW and The Gamers.

C3i: Speaking of game publishers and designers, you've been associated with Craig Taylor many times, first with Yaquinto, then with Avalon Hill, and finally with Lost Battalion Games. Can you describe your partnership with him?

Day: I first met Craig at a convention in Detroit, Michigan, where I was hosting a demo of **Panzer** in miniatures. He played in one of the games and stated that he really liked the design and would be interested in publishing it. That is how the game got to Yaquinto. He provided a great deal of game savvy to the original design. I must say that I learned a great deal from him.

After Craig joined Avalon Hill, I had **MBT** ready to go, so having enjoyed my experience with him previously; I approached him and the company about possible publication. As fate would



Craig Taylor at
Origins 1979

JAMES M. DAY Interview

have it, I had just accepted a new job at a hospital in Baltimore, so I was moving to the same city as the game company. **IDF** followed on the heels of **MBT**.

After Avalon Hill got out of the game business, Craig came to work at MicroProse Software where I was then working as a producer/designer, so we were able to maintain our friendship.

He left the Baltimore area for a while and then returned. We struck up our friendship again with the local gaming group. He then moved forward with *Lost Battalion*.

C3i: Craig Taylor is among the designers I admire. What lessons did you learn from him?

Day: Craig demonstrated the value of extensive research and designing fun games. Those elements have stuck with me.

C3i: Panzer has some miles on it: Yaquinto, Excalibre, Lost Battalion Games, and now StrikeNet. Can you expand upon that journey?

Day: **Panzer** was originally designed as a set of miniature rules. When Yaquinto approached me about publishing the game, they wanted a board game to be part of their initial rollout. I had to convert it into a board game format. That was not too difficult since the game still plays more like miniatures even in the board game format.

Well, as you know, Yaquinto went the way of many game companies, and the three titles sat there doing nothing for a period of time.

For the next version, I completely disavow any connection to the Excalibre game. I was not involved in that decision to republish the game. The owner of Excalibre contacted Yaquinto directly, not me. As far as I am concerned, it is an aberration. Using side views for a top-down game makes absolutely no sense. And the

manual is almost unreadable due to the choice of font. I know this comes across as quite strident, but I do not want to be associated with that version of the game. I hope when the new board game version of **Panzer** is released, the Excalibre version will be wiped from gaming memory.

Lost Battalion is another story altogether. I was in the process of redesigning the system to be re-released as a set of miniature rules. Craig Taylor approached me and stated he was forming a new game company. He asked if I would be interested in rolling the new version out as one of their initial titles – *déjà vu* all over again. That was good for the initial release and five follow-on releases (PaK 1-5), as well as the first iteration of **The Kaiser's Pirates**.

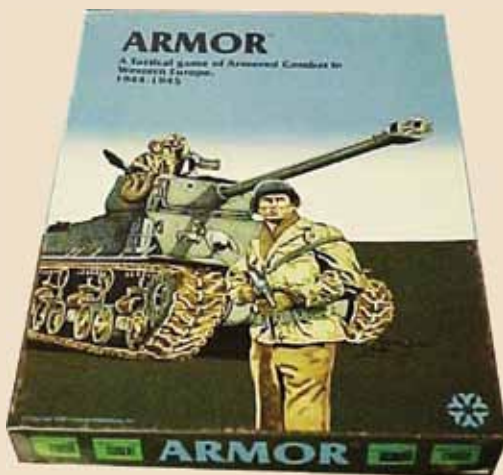
Well, Craig Taylor left *Lost Battalion Games*, and the company started going in a different direction than I was comfortable with, so I decided to publish the titles myself through *StrikeNet Games*.

C3i: Interesting. Did you not retain the rights for Panzer when it moved to Excalibre?

Day: At the time of the Excalibre print run, the ownership rights were still in Yaquinto's hands. Excalibre secured a one-time, print-only option for the game as you see it. The rights were subsequently passed back to me.

Excalibre no longer has the rights to print the game, and for that matter to even sell the game because they have not kept the royalties current. However, it is not worth going after them (now *Decision Games*) as it would cost me more than I could ever possibly recover.

I believe it should meet a fitting end when the new **Panzer** board game is published.



Game Designs by James M. Day
Published by Yaquinto Publications, Inc.
Cover designs by Rodger B. MacGowan

C3i: Why did you decide to start StrikeNet?

Day: StrikeNet was originally created in 1996 as the means for me to work as a contractor in the computer game business. At its inception, it was not viewed as a game publishing company. It was just as a holding company for my contact work. It became that entity once I moved away from Lost Battalion.

C3i: What do you hope to achieve with StrikeNet? Where is it headed? What can the public expect of the StrikeNet line?

Day: I really see StrikeNet as a vehicle to support and publish some of the less broad appeal topics and as a vehicle for me to continue design and development of games published by other companies, e.g., **The Kaiser's Pirates, Iron & Oak, Panzer, MBT and IDF.**

C3i: You've been in this hobby for some 30 years. What are your observations of the hobby over these years?

Day: The hobby has gone through a number of changes over the past 30 years (has it really been that long?!). The heyday of the board game business has come and gone. I can remember the first few *Origins* conventions where the gamers were lined up 25-deep to purchase the newest releases. In those times, you easily sold out every single copy, and even mediocre games easily sold 5,000 or more copies.

The advent of computer and console games really changed the whole landscape of gaming. Even during the boom years, many gamers still played solitaire because finding available opponents wasn't the easiest task. Electronic games answered that need, even though the early games were rudimentary and lacked any real graphic quality.

I also believe the world of fantasy games, while it brought a number of new gamers into the hobby, also took a bite out of the limited hobby pie.

Miniatures games, while never as big as board games, were hurt less by this new medium because they are often multi-player in nature and much more visual than board games. The electronic games of the time couldn't really compete in that world.

C3i: From your perspective, as a long-time designer, and now publisher, what is the state of the hobby today?

Day: I believe the hobby has reached a point of relative stability. Given that, I also believe it's in a fairly strong position that bodes well for the future. I attribute this to a few factors, including the advent of many top quality *Euro* style games (they seem to have a broader "family" appeal that the typical military game) and the overall quality of the games, both traditional and military. I don't see the hobby just doubling in size overnight, but I think steady growth is a reasonable expectation.

C3i: Jim, it's been a pleasuring speaking with you. Do you have any last words for C3i readers?

Day: I'm convinced that our hobby hasn't seen it all, and the best is yet to come.

Thanks very much. I enjoyed the opportunity to answer your questions.



Pz V PANTHER	T-34/76 M43	STuG III/G	IL-2M3	8.8CM FLAK 36
G-21 400	S-15 240	G-30 540	S-71 742	G-82 1325
				
5T 6-10	6T 8-12	4T 6-9	AIRCRAFT	0L 0

PANZER

NEW EDITION

Game Design by James M. Day

Currently on GMT Games P500 List