

PANORAMA:  
**Sympathy  
for the  
DEVIL**

VIETNAM  
WAR,  
1965-1975



**by Rodger MacGowan  
with John Hill & John Prados**





**Author's Foreword:** It has been said that no man who has not seen and suffered and felt a war deserves to write about it. With this thought in mind, I wish to make my intentions clear in regard to this Game Panorama on the Vietnam War. My main objective is to bring to light and to your attention those games and those creative people who have attempted to simulate with thought and cardboard the complexities of a war which divided our nation for nearly ten years. To many of you the memories of those days are fresh and conjure up a myriad of images; to others the war is *just history*...

#### LAST REFLECTIONS ON A WAR

The man who could best help us in understanding Vietnam is dead. His name was Bernard B. Fall and he was killed in South Vietnam on February 21, 1967, while accompanying U.S. Marines on *Operation Chinook* — up in his old area, 'Street Without Joy' (between Quang Tri and Hue). The legacy of his literary insights is more valuable than ever. To set the stage for this Panorama on Vietnam, I quote from an article he wrote for American Heritage's *Horizon* magazine in 1967:

*There once was a country called Viet-Nam, at the eastern rim of the Southeast Asian mainland where it abruptly terminates in a balcony jutting out into the South China Seas. Significantly, German geographers called the area Hinterindien' (Beyond India) and left it at that; but as early as 1812, Malte Conrad Bruun, a Danish-born geographer working in Paris, recognized the essential characteristic which made it different from the rest of Southeast Asia — the intimate mixture of Indian and Chinese civilizations. It was Malte-Brun (as he was known) who gave the area the name Indochina.'*

*To be sure, the part of Indochina that is now called Viet-Nam (it has carried various versions of that name — Dai-Viet, Annam, Nam-Viet — for more than a thousand years) has not disappeared from the maps as a geographic location. It is still there, the size of New Mexico, stretching out like a very elongated 'S' for more than a thousand miles from just north of the equator to the twenty-fourth parallel. The Vietnamese like to think of their country as dragon-shaped, dragons being considered luck-bringing animals.*

*It is Viet-Nam as a cultural and historic entity which is threatened with extinction. While its lovely land has been battered into a moonscape by the massive engines of modern war, its cultural identity has been assaulted by a combination of Communism in the North and superficial Americanism in the South.*

*Viet-Nam's location has made it not only a melting pot of cultures but a battleground for foreign armies and foreign ideologies. The history of the South has been shaped by the kind influence of the Buddha; that of the North, where China has always prevailed, by the far sterner philosophies of Confucius and Lao-tse. And as far back as*

*history and mythology can recall, the Vietnamese have fought among themselves, though maintaining a surprising amount of cultural unity. Many remains of a long and glorious past, which had withstood the inroads of dozens of invasions and which archaeologists had lovingly-preserved, have now disappeared without a trace...*

The history of Vietnam as a 'battleground' stretches back to the late 3rd Century B.C., when the area was conquered by Chinese General Chao T'o during the fall of the Ch'in Dynasty. The Chinese occupation of Vietnam was to last, with a few brief interruptions due to rebellions, for 1,050 years, until 939 A.D.

Next came the Mongols. In 1215 Peking fell and the Mongol hordes flooded the Red River valley with over a quarter of a million men. The Vietnamese, as they would so often do later, abandoned their cities and headed for the hills. The Mongols, ravaged by the tropics, disease and their fruitless pursuit of the Vietnamese, *withdrew*.

In 1284, the third Mongol invasion of Vietnam began. The Mongols were by then more acclimated to the area. At this important moment a great military leader stepped forward for Vietnam: Marshal Hung Dao. He withdrew up into the mountains and wrote his *Essential Summary of Military Arts* and began to train his troops in what we now call guerilla warfare. He wrote, 'The enemy must fight his battles far from his home base for a long time... We must further weaken him by drawing him into protracted campaigns. Once his initial dash is broken, it will be easier to destroy him.'

And that is exactly what happened. The Mongols *withdrew* in 1287.

The Chinese invaded again in 1407. They were defeated by the same mixture of guerilla and attrition warfare.

At long last there were no enemies left and the Vietnamese settled down to what seems to be a 'favorite national pastime': bitter quarrels among themselves in general and between Northerners and Southerners in particular. This was also the time of European trade and colonial expansion, and the arrival of the Westerners further complicated the split. Thanks to the more modern arms the conflicts became more deadly.

First came the Dutch in 1637, then the French in 1680 and then the British in 1683 — by 1700 only the French remained, and the Catholic missionaries. With India, China, and the Spice Islands ripe for the picking, the European merchants lost interest in Vietnam.

Then came a period of internal power struggles leading up to the reign of emperor Gia-Long. For the first time in almost 200 years Vietnam was a single country. The influence of the small group of French waned as their numbers were depleted by disease. By 1820, when Gia-Long died, Vietnam was a consolidated state; it had even incorporated Cambodia.

Gia-Long's successors began to expell the Western merchants and Christian missionaries. Between 1827-1856, 130,000 Catholics were murdered; the largest persecution of Christians since Nero.

It was this persecution of the Catholics that brought the first United States military intervention in Vietnam. The time: May 10, 1845; a U.S. Marine detachment from the U.S.S. *Constitution*, under the command of Captain John (Mad Jack') Percival landed and marched ashore at Danang. They had been informed, while on duty in Asian waters, that the Vietnamese had sentenced French Bishop Dominique Lefebvre to death in Hue. Upon landing at the port of Danang the Marine detachment captured several high Vietnamese officials, held them hostage and thus secured the safe release of the bishop.

The French followed in 1856 with a landing of their own in Danang — ostensibly to save the Catholics from persecution. This time they came to stay as a colonial power.

For nearly a century, France controlled Vietnam. Then, during the Second World War, Vietnam had a new 'master' — Japan. The latter turned out to be less willing to understand the inhabitants than the Westerners had been. The Japanese collapse in 1945 left a total void in Vietnam. The only group willing and capable of taking power were the Viet-Minh (which included Communist and non-Communist nationalists under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh).

For a moment, Vietnam was an independent nation. But the French returned. And a new war began. The French held the cities and towns; the Viet-Minh held the villages and jungle. The French lashed out with ineffectual 'search and destroy' operations and the Viet-Minh, following Marshal Dao's doctrine, refused to be drawn into a major battle. Finally, the French offered them 17,000 troops in the valley of Dien Bien Phu as 'bait.' After a 56-day battle the French lost. Thus ended French control over Vietnam.

In the following year, 1954, the Geneva Conference on Far Eastern Affairs resulted in an agreement for a cease-fire and divided Vietnam into North (Communist) and South (anti-Communist) at the 17th parallel. The United States accepted the agreement, but refused to sign it, reserving the right to take whatever action was necessary.

Between 1954 and 1965 South Vietnam was involved in continuous insurrection by rebellious factions (Viet Cong) that were being supported by troops and equipment from North Vietnam (who in turn was being aided and supported by Communist China and the Soviet Union).

*Dateline: October 11, 1961, the United States agrees to support the government of South Vietnam against attacks by Communist Viet-Cong guerillas.*

*December 11, 1961, two U.S. Army helicopter companies arrive in Saigon.*

*February 8, 1962, U.S. Military Assistance Command is established.*

*November 1-2, 1963, South Vietnamese President Diem is overthrown and killed by a military coup d'etat.*

*November 22, 1963, U.S. President John F. Kennedy is assassinated.*

*August 2-4, 1964, finds U.S. naval forces on duty in the Gulf of Tonkin — a U.S. destroyer is attacked by Vietnamese PT boats.*

*August 5, 1964, President Johnson retaliates for the PT boat attacks by ordering U.S. air strikes against North Vietnam.*

*August 7, 1964, the Congress of the United States gives President Lyndon Johnson authority to take 'all necessary to repel' any armed attack' against U.S. Armed Forces.*

*February 7, 1965, the U.S. begins its air war against North Vietnam in retaliation for its continued assistance to the Viet Cong. In response, the Viet Cong intensifies its terrorism and sabotage against U.S. installations and personnel. Ominously, on the night of March 8, 1965, the people of the United States view on television the landing of a U.S. Marine brigade at Danang. By midsummer, U.S. ground combat forces number 25,000 — by the end of the year total U.S. strength in Vietnam is nearly 200,000...*

**VIET-NAM** (out of print)  
Vietnam War, 1965  
Gamescience Corporation, 1965  
Designer: Phillip Orbanes

This was the first game to cover the subject of the Vietnam War. It was a high-quality, boxed game with a mounted strategic-area style map and plastic pieces. It was sold through arrangement with Avalon Hill — they would accept orders which Orbanes would then fill. He later upgraded the game by printing the map on Texoprint (like oilcloth), with die cut counters and printed rules.

John Prados explains how the game plays: *'Viet-Nam handles the rice-roots war within a framework of multiple factors. Phil's design makes a distinction between territorial control of provinces and distance from 'victory' in the guerrilla war. Orbanes allows players to devote resources to psychological warfare, ambush, terror, cultivating 'world opinion' and to reinforcing political stability. When one player over matches the resources of the other devoted to psychological warfare, that player is able to take over provinces controlled by the other. A second, unrelated method of taking over provinces is moving troop pieces into them and forcing the opponent's pieces out. Provincial control that results from gains in psychological warfare counts toward victory, while the use of pure military force has no such effect. This pacification system was well-conceived and was basically realistic, except that it remains undifferentiated with respect to the use of particular resources. For example, there was a reason in Vietnam why particular military units that were regarded as elites*

*(e.g., U.S. 1st Air Cavalry Division) would be used for fire-bucket brigades, being shifted all over the country to intervene in places where the GVN/US programs were endangered. One sees nothing of this aspect of the war in Viet-Nam.'*

## THE BELLOWING SILENCE

**1966-1970** were the years in which the Vietnam War raged like a gigantic firestorm, yet it was a period of silence in the hobby — no games were published on the subject. For most of us this was a time of change, confusion and conflict...

*When a man is born, a bullet is fired, his conscience — some will say his soul — and it ricochets off the events of his time until he is struck by it. That can be a shattering collision or an illumination. It is the time a man comprehends his purpose and his progress.*

*Mort Sahl, Heartland*

During this time a handful of designers worked on games covering the war, but unfortunately none of their efforts saw print. John Prados, one of those 'pioneers', fills us in on this interesting period in the history of our hobby:

*Jim Dunnigan's Viet-Nam (1967) was another of his hypothetical games, which had an 'average country' for a mapboard. The army was set up and then there were die rolls for rebellion, etc. Supply was important and insurgent forces could change mode (to guerrilla status) to conserve. The insurgent would have to concentrate forces in order to make attacks, and so forth.*

*Luis Romero's Viet-Nam (1968) was a primitive, hand-drawn game. He was one of four or five guys I knew in high school who used to game with me. In Luis's game we had two maps and used acetate overlays. There was a square grid, with brigades allowed to cover two hexes with their specific patrol areas (called TAORS in Vietnam), and divisions more. The players would note on the overlays the parts of the board covered by the patrol areas of all the pieces. The NFL would fight battles with the counter-insurgent forces wherever the patrol areas of the respective sides overlapped. It soon became clear that it was easier for the counter-insurgent to occupy the coastal plain than the central highlands. Airstrikes were plotted on hexes, based on the player's analysis of opposing dispositions in the previous turn and the player's strategic plan. When the simove (simultaneous movement) was complete a game judge took the Government of Vietnam/United States sheet over to the Viet Cong table. Combat was mandatory. The judge noted the number of attacks and the odds. The identities of the VC units involved were made known to the GVN/US player as the basis for his future strategy. I believe the turns were monthly and the game covered 1967-1968. It had rudimentary pacification rules and the device of a political events matrix which Luis borrowed from one of my games on the French Indochina War. (Luis and other members of that group are mentioned in GDW's Pearl*

Harbor, which John dedicated to them.)

Albert J. Morales' *Viet Nam* (1971), an unfinished project, came close to simulating agitprop (political agitation and propaganda). It had the most comprehensive arrangements for pacification in any of the games on the subject. The design distinguished between the general, countrywide pacification effort, and special 'showcase' provinces, or 'provinces of special responsibility, as Morales called them. Countrywide pacification is affected by a player's government effectiveness, disbursements of aid, and the proportion of his military forces committed to the province war. The combination of these factors designate a certain number of provinces of 'special responsibility, and the particular provinces involved are selected by the players. The general pacification results divide up the control of the remaining provinces of Vietnam between the players, while the control of provinces of 'special responsibility' are determined by a separate, more detailed, procedure. This shifting focus, increasing in resolution like a camera moving in on its subject, is a major strength of this game, enabling the design to contend with some of the fine tactical points of pacification without losing the strategic scope of the game.

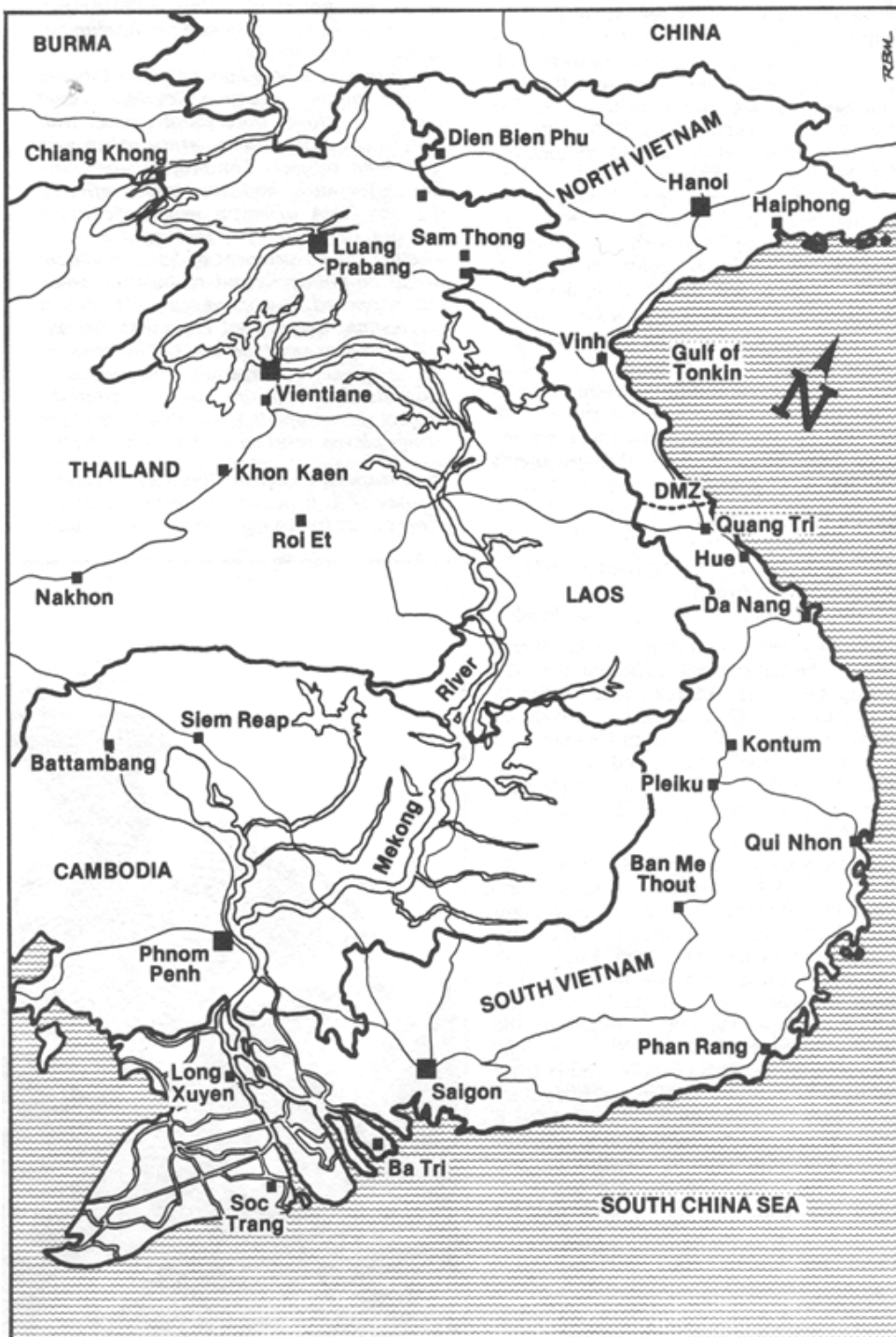
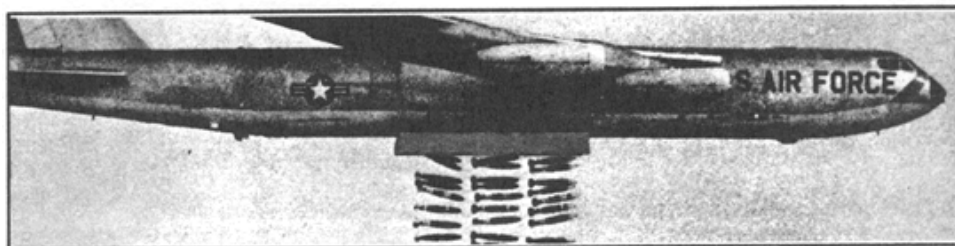
**GRUNT!** (Tactical Game 11: American Forces in Vietnam) Strategy & Tactics #26, March 1971 Designer: John Kramer

**SEARCH & DESTROY** Tactical Combat Vietnam: 1965-1966 SPI, January 1975 2nd Edition Designer: John M. Young

**Grunt!** was the first contemporary-period game to come from SPI. It simulates squad level combat and is set in a village context. The black-and-white mapsheet depicts a typical Vietnamese hamlet and its approaches on a scale of 50 meters to the hex. The unit counters represent American or ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) troops versus Viet Cong or North Vietnamese troops (or NLF for short; standing for National Liberation Front).

A typical game of **Grunt!** starts off with the landing of a stripped-down U.S. Airmobile company near the 'enemy village.' As the troops land by helicopter they may come under enemy fire or be met by an eerie silence. Their primary mission is to search the area for caches of food and equipment. They are faced by a host of inverted counters spread around the map by the NLF player — the counters represent 'hard-core' troops of the NVA, NLF leaders, Viet Cong militia, snipers, non-combatants (peasants and porters), anti-personnel traps, ambushes, anti-tank mines, or just dummy counters. The task of confronting and dealing with these inverted counters is the heart of the game — it's a combination of cat and mouse, hide and seek, and Russian Roulette.

**Grunt!** does an excellent job of capturing the period 'feel' and flavor of the war in Vietnam in the mid-60's. For example, there



are extensive rules covering interrogation. The U.S./ARVN player is allowed to uncover the location of enemy caches by interrogating local peasants and porters who are discovered in the search. The die is rolled for each attempt to interrogate the 'prisoner'. The results range from no intelligence gained to the peasant's death. In this same vein, there are rules covering U.S. air strikes, Medevac evacuation by helicopter of U.S. casualties, 'body count' victory points, NLF ambushes and booby traps — in short, the bitter realities of this tragic conflict.

With the passage of a few years and the improvements made in the state of the art of game designing, SPI decided to rethink **Grunt!** The late John Young got the job, and **Search & Destroy** was the result. The mapsheet was enlarged by 30%, allowing for more varied terrain and to compensate for the doubling of movement allowances. The rules were cleaned up and expanded to include leadership, tanks, and APC's. The graphics were improved with new colors for the unit counters and color on the map itself. With a few minor exceptions the changes were all for the good.

**Search & Destroy** never did well on the SPI Game Ratings Chart (it reached a high of 5.87 in S&T #50). But in my opinion this is one of the finest games on the subject still in print. For more information on the game I recommend you read Phil Kosnett's excellent Profile in *Moves* ©23.

#### **YEAR OF THE RAT**

Vietnam, 1972

Strategy & Tactics #35, November 1972

Designer: John Prados

Developers: John M. Young, John Prados

Through a series of thirteen weekly turns, **Year of the Rat** covers the Communist 1972 Spring Offensive (March-June) in South Vietnam. The 22 x 34-inch multi-tinted mapsheet depicts all of South Vietnam and parts of Cambodia, Laos, and North Vietnam on a scale of 10 kilometers to the hex. The units are divisions, brigades and regiments.

The historical game normally opens with numerous NVA incursions into South Vietnam along its borders with Cambodia and Laos. U.S. forces are located in three bases — Danang, Vung Tau, and Long Binh (they are restricted from moving). The battle is principally left in the hands of the ARVN troops located throughout the various regions of South Vietnam. The ARVN's greatest direct support comes from strong U.S. airpower (which nearly doubles in strength by games end). The NVA/NLF forces attain victory points by seizing towns and regions. The game is normally nip and tuck with the Communists seizing a great deal of real estate, but hard pressed to 'hold on' to it.

There are special rules covering NLF militia, NVA battle groups, dummy combat counters (to keep the ARVN guessing), supply (which tends to restrict Communist attacks), air and naval bombardment, and more. There are also numerous Order of Battle options, including direct US

intervention with ground forces.

I asked Designer John Prados how he felt about **Year of the Rat** after seven years:

*Year of the Rat was my first excursion into the realm of limited design. When all the work was just for a small circle we could make our games as complex as we wished. Anyway, the forces in Rat were originally on a regimental scale, with individual provinces. In particular the NVA independent regiments which had to be combined into 'provisional divisions' were very useful in the initial version. Airpower was not quite so powerful. Jimmy Dunnigan insisted on 200 counters and on the elimination of the regiments.*

*The forces were based on my understanding of the military situation developed over years of close observation and with previous experience simulating an Indochina subject. The project was fairly straightforward, and the game reflected that the NVA offensive would eventually run out of steam: the real question was whether the government of South Vietnam would be politically out of business when that happened. It worked out pretty well in playtesting, except that Dunnigan felt the NVA chances were too great. This resulted in the effects of airpower being adjusted upwards. I believe one statistic, after the project was completed, was that 52% of the games played resulted in ARVN victories.*

*In retrospect, it appears that Rat was largely successful. It was great fun for me to do, came out as fun to play, and was even judg-*

*ed to be worth a variant, by Phil Kosnett, for the 1975 operations. A number of gamers including yourself and Jack Greene remember the game warmly. I understand that Year of the Rat was given to the Canadian component of the International Control Commission as suggested reading and that it was played by a group in the U.S. Embassy in Thailand. The article (in S&T ©35) has subsequently been used as a source in Gary Porter's book A Peace Denied.*

**Year of the Rat** is one of the most important games on the Vietnam War and should be in your wargame library. When the game first came out it received wide acceptance and rated 6.53 in S&T #38 on the Game Ratings Chart, but with time its popularity has slipped — and today it is not even listed in the SPI catalog.

#### **BATTLE FOR HUE**

Tactical Game of the 1968 Tet Offensive  
SDC's Conflict #6, October 1973

Designer: John Hill

**Battle for Hue** is a company level game simulating street fighting in the old imperial capital of Vietnam during the Communist 1968 winter offensive (January-March). The 18 x 24-inch multi-colored mapsheet depicts the city of Hue and surrounding area on a scale of roughly 200 yards per hex. With 36 1/3 (daily) turns and the provision that play continues until the 'inner city' is cleared of Communist forces, the game can be lengthy.

The game opens with major elements of the



6th NVA Division inside the city and Viet Cong reinforcements about to arrive. The U.S. Marines have a small detachment of troops at the MACV compound on the south side of the city while elements of the 1st ARVN Division hold their headquarters compound on the north side. What usually develops is a desperate battle for the two compounds as the Communist troops try to overrun one or both before the Allies blow up their armories. Soon, strong US and ARVN reinforcements arrive and the Communists switch from the offensive to the defensive in order to hold on to their gains. The battle then rages in various 'hot spots' throughout the city, especially the northern airfield (where ARVN airborne reinforcements can be airlifted in). It is a bloody and bitter fight to the end.

The game has a number of special rules particular to the action being covered. For example, indirect fire for artillery and armor, naval gunfire, heliborne landings, the 'sacredness' of the Palace of Peace (use of artillery and armor is forbidden — your only option is infantry assault!), and more. The game received a facelift in 1975 when SDC released it as a 'Pouch' game, thus most of the rule questions were taken care of

I asked Designer John Hill for his views on **Battle for Hue** after six years:

In light of the final outcome of the Vietnam War, it is only natural that there would be much 'review' of the few Vietnam games' and **Hue** was certainly one of the more popular. Unfortunately, since the ending

was a disaster of the first order, many people feel that a Vietnam game should show the North Vietnamese as 'supermen' and the ARVN as hopeless incompetents. After all, didn't the final victory prove that? In view of this, it has been suggested that I was too generous in my ratings of the ARVN capabilities in **Hue**. But, even after much thought, I feel that my balanced interpretation of ARVN vs. NVA was still sound — despite the final debacle.

It is my opinion that the final collapse of the ARVN in Vietnam was caused primarily by the fact that we had taught them to over-rely on technological firepower with heavy use of air support and artillery. In essence, we modelled them after our own military, and as long as we were there to handle the logistical, technical, and administrative part of such a military system they could function rather well. But without us (basically to make sure all the loose ends were tied up) their armed forces simply could not operate. They were used to superb air support with American pilots in the best and deadliest aircraft. Their own pilots with smaller aircraft like the F-5 were simply a poor substitute. In **Hue** I portrayed both the ARVN 1st Division and airborne units to be as good as any of their opponents, and I stand by that evaluation.

As an historical parallel, when France disintegrated in 1940 there was still some very fine fighting done by a number of their units. Their North African units were as tough as anything the Germans had, and

displayed incredible tenacity. Even in the end the ARVN 1st Division and airborne troops showed that a losing military system can still produce some fine soldiers.

But since the ARVN did collapse, deprived of the expert support elements of the Americans, the real warning should be for us. The American army has some superb elements in it, as did the ARVN. In many ways we made their armed forces a miniature model of our own. And as a 'military system' it failed. Then, since it was a model of us, what will happen to our army should the fortunes of war knock out or neutralize our airforce and our complex logistical and support elements? This penetrating question concerns me as I re-evaluate **Battle for Hue** and the final collapse.

**Battle for Hue** didn't rate too well on the SPI Game Ratings Chart (a 5.92 in S&T #45), but in my opinion it was short-changed. It is an exciting game on an unusual subject and can be recommended to those with a strong interest in the Vietnam War.

#### LAST DAYS AT SAIGON

1975 Campaign and Fall of Saigon  
Bridge V.4 N.1, November 1975

Designer: John Prados

Developers: James Dingeman, Al Nofi

**Last Days at Saigon** is an operational-level game covering the final, apocalyptic chapter of the Vietnam War. The 11 x 16-inch black-and-white mapsheet depicts the upper regions of the Mekong Delta in the south to the town of Phan Thiet along the Cham coast in the north. Its east-west boundaries stretch from the South China Sea to Cambodia. Saigon is roughly in the center of the map and is the 'objective' of the game. The unmounted black-and-white unit counters represent regiments, brigades, and divisions. The game stretches from late March to late May, 1975 (nine game turns).

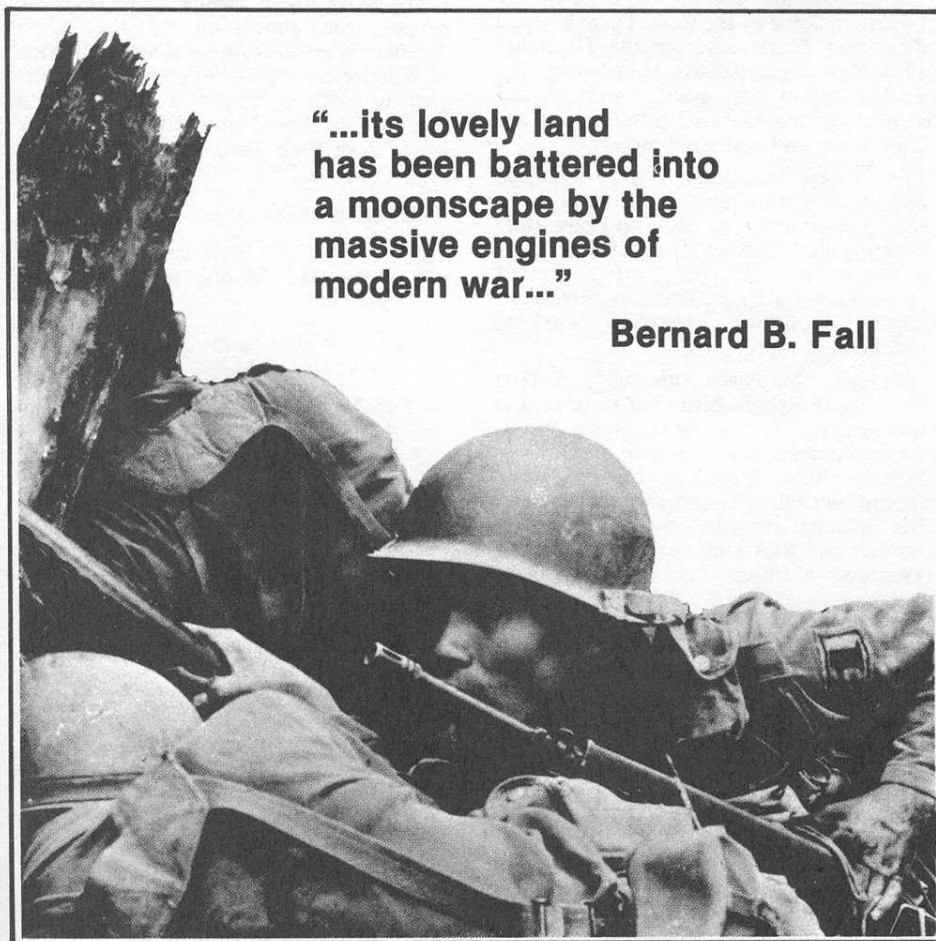
**Last Days at Saigon** was produced by the Basement Workshop Inc., an independent, non-profit, cultural organization of Asian Americans in New York City. The game was printed in their magazine, entitled *Bridge*. John Prados explains how the game came about:

**Last Days at Saigon** was fun to do. It wasn't intended as a serious game, as it had to reach the level of the layman and because it was done as a free project for the editor of *Bridge*. I worked it up in the fall of 1975 from contemporary accounts and my extensive Vietnam Order of Battle and other material. **Last Days** was playtested only a few times, sufficiently to ascertain that the historical outcome was possible and that the ARVN player had at least some chance of a defense through a number of turns. Nofi and Dingeman both played the game with me at different times.

As John makes clear, **Last Days at Saigon** is not a super-polished effort, but it is an interesting game. If you would like to add it to your collection you can write to: "Bridge", P. O. Box 477, Canal Street Station, New York, NY 10013 (The price of the back issue is \$1.50.)

"...its lovely land  
has been battered into  
a moonscape by the  
massive engines of  
modern war..."

Bernard B. Fall



## LAM SON

The War in South East Asia  
Attack Wargaming Association, 1978  
Designer: Edward G. Tillton, Sr.  
Developer: Dave Casciano

**Lam Son** is a strategic-level game covering the ten-year period of direct U.S. involvement in Indochina (January 1965 — December 1975). There are two 22 x 27-inch, three-color mapsheets depicting all of Vietnam with parts of China, Laos, Thailand, and Cambodia on a scale of approximately ten kilometers per hex. There are 180 die-cut counters representing combat units from the many nations involved in the war (brigade/division level).

The game can be broken down into five separate scenarios: *The Ky*, covering ARVN's holding action in 1965 awaiting U.S. involvement; *The Tet Offensive*, the 1968 Communist assault; *The Cambodian Offensive*, when U.S. and ARVN forces invaded Cambodia in 1970 to destroy Viet Cong sanctuaries; *Year of the Rat*, the 1972 Communist Offensive; and *Lam Son*, the final Communists drive for "total victory." There is also the Campaign Game covering ten full years (264 bimonthly turns). (As a side note, *Lam Son*, according to the rules folder, is Vietnamese for "total victory" and may also be spelled *Lam San*.)

In terms of victory in the game the overriding objective is acquisition of cities and towns. Destruction of enemy units is of secondary importance.

Generally speaking, the rules are clear, familiar, and easy to understand. There are special rules covering air mobile units, gunboats, militia, helicopter gunships, hidden units and air combat. (The air combat system in **Lam Son** is very close to the one used in SPI's **Year of the Rat** - only bloodier. This can also be said of the combat results table.)

As a campaign **Lam Son** falls short of its true potential. Lacking rules governing the complex psychological and political aspects of the war, it cannot be considered a "simulation of history" (as we all know, the Vietnam War was not decided simply by the acquisition of cities and towns). As it now stands, **Lam Son** is a wargamers' wargame — full of action and military combat. It is not an exhaustive study of agitprop so long desired by the history-oriented player.

## ROLLING THUNDER

Air War Over North Vietnam, 1965-72  
Commando Wargames, June 1979  
Designer: Steve Weiss

**Rolling Thunder** is a simulation of tactical air operations over North Vietnam played on a two-tier system: (1) An Operational Phase where aircraft formations move over a 22 x 34-inch Operational mapsheet of North Vietnam, Laos and Thailand on a scale of 20 kilometers per hex and 8 minutes per turn; (2) And a Tactical Phase whenever U.S. planes enter an Operational hex containing a designated target or enemy aircraft. Whenever the latter occurs play moves to one of the three 22 x 29-inch Tactical mapsheets on a scale of 500 meters per hex and 9 seconds per turn. (These



maps depict Hanoi, Haiphong and other targets.)

Aircraft movement is controlled on Aircraft Control Panels which keep a running record of speed, fuel, vector, attitude, stores, altitude and destination. There are also Missile Guidance Panels to control guided missile movement. The above noted maps and panels are all printed black on green stock. The graphic highlights of **Rolling Thunder** are the 800 counters depicting both sideviews and overviews of all the important aircraft of the war (printed blue or red on white, two-sides).

The first three scenarios (1965-68) depict Operation Rolling Thunder. Authorized by President Johnson, this operation concentrated on targets in North Vietnam's southern panhandle. Scenario Four deals with Operation Linebacker I. Authorized by President Nixon, this operation was a response to the Communist 1972 Spring Offensive (**Year of the Rat**). There is also a Campaign Game covering the December 1972 Bombing Offensive (Linebacker II). Each scenario has specific and detailed victory conditions based primarily on aircraft losses and destroyed targets.

The 44-page rulesbook is well organized and packs a storehouse of information — this is a complex game. There are rules covering all the elements of flight, air-to-air gunnery and missiles, air-to-ground gunnery, anti-aircraft, bombing, precision-guided munitions, electronic warfare, weather and more.

Although "hardware oriented", **Rolling Thunder** is rich in historical insights and perspectives. The designer, Steve Weiss, was an intelligence analyst with the U.S. Air Force's 6910th Squadron overseas while Operation Rolling Thunder was in progress. His technical expertise, coupled with Ron Burnett and Rick Umbaugh, make **Rolling Thunder** a most important Vietnam wargame.

## VIETNAM: THE WAGES OF FEAR

As you have seen, a good many of the games covered in this Panorama are either out of print or collectors' items (and I know of no plans to reprint any). In this same vein, I know of no Vietnam War game in the design or production stage or being planned for future release by any game company in the hobby. Of the games released most have sold poorly and rated quite lowly on the game rating charts.

By and large, the games that have been designed on the subject have been valiant efforts. Some have not lived up to their potential and others have been misjudged or simply overlooked.

As for historical accuracy, most of the games have done fairly well. Vietnam is not a simple war to simulate — many of its complexities remain unresolved. It was a war as much of the mind as of the body — maybe even more so. Thus, the elements of agitprop, psychological warfare, world opinion, video participation, and internal dissent all must be covered in some manner in a strategic simulation of the war. Otherwise, the war is being misrepresented. On the tactical/operational level, the games must capture the elements of terror tactics, ambush, interrogation, etc.

Since no one game published to date captures all these elements, there is no single, true simulation of the *whole* Vietnam War. Instead, we have a collection of creative efforts that in combination present us with a wealth of insights and lessons. We should study these games and learn from their lessons — we dare not forget this war.

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# VIETNAM SCENARIOS

There are a few multi-scenario, tactical level games which simulate combat in the Vietnam War, but that can't be categorized as *pure* Vietnam War games. I'll cover them briefly here for your information and consideration:

## **PATROL!**

Man-to-Man Combat in the 20th Century  
SPI, October 1974

Designer: James F. Dunnigan

Developers: Irad Hardy, Edward Curran

**Patrol!** is a simultaneous-movement game covering small unit (mostly squad) actions on an individual man level. It is played on six geomorphic mapsheets which portray various types of terrain (slopes, shrubs, trees, rocky, and clear). Three of the forty-one order-of-battle options presented in the game cover combat in Vietnam. These OOB options are broken down into five scenario situations: Patrol, Recon, Raid, Ambush, and Assault.

The three Vietnam OOB options are as follows: (1) *Mekong Delta, 1968* - the 60th Regiment of the US 9th Infantry Division becomes involved in "pacifying areas" of the Mekong Delta and is faced with stiff Viet Cong resistance; (2) *Quang Tri, 1968* - the 1st US Marine Division engages the North Vietnamese 324B Division; *An Loc, 1972* - surrounded by regular NVA units, the ARVN 1st Parachute Brigade holds out under siege at An Loc.

Since combat in Vietnam was so personalized, **Patrol!** helps one visualize the horror of being caught in a lush, green hell, not knowing who or what is behind the next bush or tree. It should be in your Vietnam War game library.

## **RAID!**

Commando Operations in the 20th Century  
Strategy & Tactics #64, September 1977

Designer: Mark Herman

Developer: Tony Merridy

**Raid!** is a tactical level game covering a large variety of commando and special

forces operations from World War II to the present. It is played on a 22 x 32-inch multi-color mapsheet on a scale of 25 meters per hex and 2 minutes per turn. There are special rules covering observation, command and control, communications, and special weapons.

It seems that most games dealing in whole or in part with the Vietnam War era do poorly on the SPI Game Ratings Chart. **Raid!** is no exception (5.9 in S&T #67). The game was criticized most for its incomplete rules and mapsheet and for its lack of "realism". It still deserves your attention in terms of its treatment of combat in Vietnam.

Four of the eight scenarios presented in the game are Vietnam oriented, they are (1) *Dawn Raid* - an airmobile operation with the objective of capturing enemy documents (quite reminiscent of **Grunt!** and **Search & Destroy**); (2) *The Son Tay Raid: 21 November 1970* - this was the ill-fated Green Beret airmobile assault on Son Tay Prison in North Vietnam, near Hanoi. The objective was to rescue 61 American POWs. Unknown to the Green Berets, the captives had been moved to another prison before the raid; (3) *Convoy Ambush* and (4) *The Sweep* are general purpose scenarios that closely simulate "typical" combat actions during the Vietnam War.

## **AIR WAR**

Modern Tactical Air Combat  
SPI, September 1977

Designer: David C Isby

Developer: Greg Costikyan

**Air War** is a simulation of modern aircraft-to-aircraft combat. The game is played on eight geomorphic mapsheets on a space of 500 feet in diameter and 250 feet in depth per hex. Each game turn represents 2.5 seconds of real time. (For an in-depth study of the game see *Fire & Movement* #10, *Moves* #37 and *Little Wars* #8.)

**Air War** is a complex game and requires

some effort in understanding. The reward for this extra effort is well worth it. The game covers a wide variety of air operations and presents a number of historical scenarios. Three of these scenarios cover air combat in Vietnam: (1) *The First Kill, 10 July 1965* - two F-4C Phantom jets were attacked by two MiG-17s while covering another element of F-4's. This was the first air engagement of the war; (2) *'Thud Ridge, 21 March 1967* - while returning from an airstrike over North Vietnam, two F105D Thunderstreaks were attacked by two MiG-21's; (3) *The Death of Colonel Tomb, 10 May 1972* - Colonel Tomb, the highest-scoring ace since the Korean War, pits his MiG-17 against Randy Cunningham's and Willie Driscoll's F-4J Phantom (a one-way ticket to the Hanoi Hilton?).

## **MIG KILLERS**

Jet Combat through the 1980's  
GameScience Corporation, 1977

Designers: Michael S. Kurtick, Rockland  
Russo

Developers: Lou Zocchi, Michael S.  
Kurtick

**MIG Killers**, like **Air War**, simulates modern aircraft-to-aircraft combat. The game is played on a 21 x 34-inch mapsheet on a space scale of 245 meters per hex and per level of altitude. Each game turn represents five seconds of real time.

**MIG Killers** is quite detailed and complex. It covers historical air operations from the 1940's to potential engagements in the 1980's. Of the many scenarios presented in the game, seven concern the Vietnam War. Two cover U.S. Air Force and Navy missions in 1967, three others deal with revised U.S. tactics in 1972 and the final two concern the missions of U.S. Ace Randy Cunningham and Steve Ritchie.

