

by David C. Isby

IN THE COLD, EARLY LIGHT OF 23 JANUARY 1970, I stood before the basement door of a tenement building in New York City's East 13th St. The night before Jim Dunnigan, whom I had known for some years through occasional playtesting, asked me if I would like to assemble games in the office he had just rented for Poultron Press, his newly-formed games company. It sounded like fun. By nightfall on the 23rd I, along with my buddy Nick Maffeo, had become the first hired employees of Poultron Press.

Poultron Press had two products. STRATEGY & TACTICS® Magazine had been bought from its previous publisher for \$1 in late 1969. Though two interim issues had been published that year, my arrival helped blend the mixture of history and games which became S&T's signature. Issue 20, with the BASTOGNE™ Game included, was our first example of this mixture. I assembled the issues and delivered them into the hands of the Post Office. Soon afterwards, our subscription list reached 1,000. I was amazed. Who would have thought there were as many as one thousand wargamers out there? Test Series

Games, an offshoot of Jim's company, had been started in frustration over the Avalon Hill Game Company's monopolistic marketing tactics, especially the limit of one or two new games per year.

The subsequent rapid growth of what became Simulations Publications, Inc., soon confirmed that this frustration was widespread. But back in January of

1970, our games had one-color "soft" card-stock maps — then an innovation, when the Avalon Hill Game Company's "hard" mounted maps were standard. Everything else in our games was typed and photocopied. Counters were made by gluing photocopied sheets to posterboard, which was then cut up on a guillotine-like paper cutter and the result was dumped into a sandwich bag — no sissy diecutting here. But the key was that they were new, innovative.

We were few in number. At first the whole operation consisted of Jim Dunnigan, who did the games; Redmond Simonsen, who did the artwork; Al Nofi, who did the magazine articles; and Nick and myself,

S&T™ RETROSPECTIVE: AN INDELIBLE PUBLICATION'S RENAISSANCE BEGINS AN ENTERPRISE WITHOUT PRECEDENT.

who did everything else. For me, this included editorial duties. I became the copy editor of S&T™. My name first appeared on the masthead in that capacity in Issue 22. I've been on the masthead ever since, in one capacity or another. Issue 22 also saw my article on the Me-109 fighter and air combat in general over Europe in 1939-1945, my first breakthrough into print.

At the same time, I started work on my first game design, the SOLDIERS™ Game which was about 1914-1915 tactical combat. I spent two years trying different prototypes and doing research. My introduction to game design was all a Shackleton's expedition into a vast *terra incognita*, an enterprise without precedent. So when I write this for Issue 100, it is as hard to imagine as was our thousandth subscriber in 1970.

Today, sometimes I inadvertently date my checks for years in the early 1970s. That the years that I spent at Simulations Publications were receding into history was also once inconceivable, but true. While I still keep involved in the wargames field (I've got this great idea for a First World War tactical game), anyone reading STRATEGY & TACTICS re-

cently will know that I keep writing for it. But now my main occupation is working on Capitol Hill, where 13th-St.-basement offices tend not to impinge upon my daily activities. Yet, every so often, when I am calling this government agency to check statistics or that airline to change reservations, my name is greeted with, "Aren't you the guy who writes for STRATEGY & TACTICS?" And, for a few minutes statistics and reservations are put aside and we are, for a moment, initiates in an arcane fellowship, talking over games and articles and conventions. Memory is more indelible than ink is, and in looking back over 15 years and 100 issues, it is the people who

dominate my impressions. My colleagues at Simulations Publications, for the nine years (1/23/1970 to 1/23/1979) that it was a part of my everyday life, were a remarkable group. They included heroes and villains, craftsmen and buffoons, but all provided to the legacy that you, the reader, have inherited and now hold in your hands. The readers of STRATEGY & TACTICS Magazine are, like all wargamers, rich in their diversity. The Friday night playtests, the conventions, the people I converse with over the phone or meet on the street — all have contributed not only to what I recall of my involvement in this field, but also to my education and my life. To all these people I can only say, with the Scots, "I would be much the poorer man if I nae had known thee."

The rewards of my years at Simulations Publications included, along with much else, the chance to do some things right. It was indeed something to remember when I sat down and played Scenario 1 of the SOLDIERS Game and things worked like they were supposed to. The articles allowed me to turn thoughts in my head to words on paper; and from these, to people who understood and cared what I was writing about. It was all great stuff and highly addictive. I cannot conceive of living life today without writing. I only wish it was all as satisfying as some of my moments at Simulations Publications.

All of which may go some way toward explaining why I am looking forward to working with STRATEGY & TACTICS Magazine for the next hundred issues as well. True, it is not the same magazine I knew intimately, but change is inherent in life, adaptation being the Darwinian key to survival. Simulations Publications died, but I do not think the long, strange trip up from East 13th St. was wasted. What it gave me was priceless. At the very least, it gave you the magazine you now hold; but I hope it has brought you into the fellowship of the craft that I shared with all those I met, starting on 23 January 1970. To Jim, Redmond, Al, Chuck, Ginny, Manny, Sal, and to all of you: I wouldn't have missed it for the world.



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