

HOW TO RUN A TOURNEY

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This is my view on running a tourney, written as an after action report on a couple that I have run in the past (Spring Recruits 07 and Spring Maneuvers 08). This AAR isn't about games played, as in a "battle report" – but rather is a review of what went into planning and executing the event from the organizer/umpire perspective. I hope this is useful to others taking on the challenge of running a game event.

It is the habit in our game group for the winner of an event to take on running a future event. In the case of FoW, the way to go is to use our qualified players to run events.

GOALS

My goals for a gaming event that I run are:

1. To provide the best possible event for my friends and fellow FoW gamers.
2. To increase the quality of terrain being played on.
3. To maintain the high standards already set by my predecessors in running the event in terms of organization, prize support and other key elements.
4. To eliminate confusion over the scoring system and reduce to the minimum the amount of time players wait for the results upon conclusion of the games.

I'll talk about how well these goals were met at the end.

PROMOTION

I promote events by:

1. Maintaining an active thread about the event on the Flames of War Forum, the St Louis Gamers forum, the 10th Cav yahoo group and the KC FoW yahoo group.
2. Staying in contact with those groups most likely to be able to make it: Nebraska, Kansas/Missouri, to include eastern Missouri/St Louis/Illinois, and Colorado. Folks from our group go to events in all these areas and we'd like to continue to try and get folks from these areas to come to us.
3. Posters at the local games stores.
4. Personally seeking out those players in our area who are not part of organized game groups.

Promoting the event required setting the details early. That means making an early decision on time period, points, table size, game length, missions, special rules, number of rounds and prizes.

FORMAT

I determine the format by surveying the group and determining their wishes as to period (Early, Mid, Late), number of points, table size (although we have pretty much settled on 6'x4' except for theme events and special situations, and number of rounds. We have pretty much settled on 2.5 hour rounds for 1500 and

1750 point games. I am sure many of us would like to play in these 8-round marathons, but we find such a format impractical. I have given some thought to why and talked to folks and the consistent answer is that we in the US seem to emphasize multiple game systems in our play and with eight rounds, folks would miss out on too many of the other events at a convention. Clubs that play solely one game system are rare – in fact I know of none. With five rounds, the players have Friday night to sample other parts of the convention. Crushing the extra rounds into Saturday night would prevent hanging out socially, and adding extra on Sunday would not work as we often have to be out of the venue by 4pm or so. Our basic event is three rounds on Saturday and two on Sunday.

We do sometimes do one-day three or four round events. We have tried various special rules such as weather, terrain changes and "flavor" rules for the various forces. They are tricky to balance and we learn as we go.

MISSIONS

I spend a lot of time thinking about which missions to include. With five rounds and seven missions to choose from, it is really a question of which ones *not* to include.

The first question is if Encounter and Free For All would be played. The cons for using these missions are that they generally favor tank companies and can end in ties. The first is an issue tied to light terrain. Infantry companies playing these two missions versus tank companies have some real challenges. We have resolved though to not have any significant amount of sparse terrain, so this became less of an issue. As for the issue of ties, we try and use that to advantage. We often make Encounter the first mission – the first mission is often the wildest. It is when the matchups are the most uneven as all that is happening is a match of players who don't usually play each other without regard to relative skill. Now I will say in fairness that the new BF scoring system does have a feature for assigning skill levels to players, but we have not employed as of this writing.

Given all that and the feeling one another out in the first round, the unpredictability of reserves and the ability to have some ties so people do not feel the next game is already out of reach, Encounter is often first.

We often set Free For All last deliberately. It is the most balanced of the scenarios, with a completely level playing field and no randomness. In the last round there is more on the line for the contenders than in the early going, so the less to make one feel he got a raw deal, the better. Also, the possibility for ties here is actually a strength, as players who are behind the leaders can jump ahead if the top table or tables play for ties, especially low-scoring ones.

Of the middle three, it is often an issue of whether or not to

include Cauldron. Roadblock is a mission many of us feel is unbalanced and HTL, Fighting Withdrawal and Breakthrough are generally well-liked – although there are players who dislike each of those. I think, in the end, it is really about sampling the players that are likely to attend the event and getting a feel for their preferences as a group.

Note that for three and four round events that Encounter, Free for All and Breakthrough tend to favor mobile forces, especially in light terrain. If one chooses those three for a three round event, it screams “take a tank force” to some players. A three round event of Hold the Line, Fighting Withdrawal and Cauldron is a very different event.

Some organizers like to announce missions in advance, some like to reveal them on the day of. What I would say is, there are definitely players who look at which of their forces to take based on what missions they know they are going to play. If you have a lot of newer players or many with only a single force at their disposal, you may want to keep the missions secret until the day of the event.

VENUE

You are looking for the following things:

- Space between tables.
- Power for the laptops, printers and other electronics.
- A place for people to put their figures.
- Good air conditioning.
- Restroom availability.
- Good lighting.
- Food availability.
- Places to stay nearby for those who travel or arrangements to have them bunk up with locals.

Tourneys held in conjunction with a convention can benefit from its resources, but also incur con fees and just because it is a con does not mean all of the player’s needs will be met by the venue or con staff without some prep by you.

PRIZES

Our group has developed the following prizes over time (this is the order in which we give them out):

10th Cav Military Misfortune (lowest placing player)

10th Cav Black Heart (best death by a unit contributing to its own side’s win)

Unknown Hero (best finish by a player who has never finished in the top half of an event, general-wise)

Death March Award (player who came the furthest to play)

Torni Award (top general-score Axis Minor player)

Anders Award (top general-score Allied Minor player)

Pine-Coffin Award (top general-score Commonwealth player)

Vasilevsky Award (top general-score Soviet player)



Rommel Award (top general-score German player)

Turnbull Award (top general-score American player)

Best Table

FoW: The Next Generation (highest scoring of the young players)

Player’s Choice (player’s vote on army)

Best Painted

Best Historical Army

Best Sportsman

Best General (and 10th Cav bronze, silver or gold star)

Best Overall

For each of these awards we gave a certificate. The big five awards also get a trophy. Prize support is divided up amongst all the various prizes, with some trends:

Death March – a road terrain feature

Best Table – a quality large terrain feature, this time it was a hedgerow piece

Military Misfortune – book on tactics or famous lost battle

The Nationality awards – gift certificates (sometimes the blister of the named warrior)

Historical Army – general WW2 history book

Unknown Hero, Next Generation, Player’s Choice – painted FoW unit

Painted, Sports, General – merchandise or gift certificates

Overall – large merchandise product, in this case, the Normandy terrain box.

Also, in our events, every player who does not get a named prize gets at least one BF blister.

We have given more than \$1000 in prizes in some events.

SPONSORS

Prizes are provided by:

- Local game groups
- The con staff and dealers
- Individuals who like to contribute
- Local game stores
- Battlefront (be sure to go to the website and meet the requirements for requesting prize support well in advance.

People will support your event. You just need to make the time to get out there and get their help.

SCORING

There are three basic scoring systems of which I make use.

The “I95 Card System”. A group of gamers on the East Coast – ones who run FoW events at Historicon, Cold Wars and Fall In – has developed a simple system of using color coded cards with certain information written on them to do pairings, track scores and show who is matched with whom on what table. If you are not familiar with this system, look for firstzouaves (John Desch) or VAEric (Eric Lauterbach) on the forum and ask them to send

you a copy of the file.

10th Cav has developed its own spreadsheet written in excel to track scores and tables. I always use it as a back up no matter what other system I may be using. You can get a copy from me if you like.

There is also the **BF scoring system** available on the FoW website. This software is in Access, although it comes with Access runtime if you don't have Access software of your own. This system has many advantages:

1. It prints individualized scoring and voting slips with table numbers and player names.
2. It scores sportsmanship as a 5, 4, 1 score for each opponent of each player. This alleviates some of the problems with the old sportsmanship system.
3. It permits the organizer to set his own percentages for weights of army, generalship and sportsmanship, as well as the components of army scoring.
4. It automatically sets match-ups but also permits the organizer to make changes manually.

My comments on it:

1. It prints one score slip per table for both players. The sports score for both is on the slip and this made some players uncomfortable because they had to mark their opponent's score in front of them. Also, the sports score was underneath each player's name – is that the one you are giving the other guy or where he is supposed to indicate your score? We treated it as where the opponent assigned your score.
2. The automated match-ups often produced 4-5 point splits in battle score. Yes, the software is going out of its way to keep guys from the same club apart and keep the games axis v allies as much as possible. But a 4-5 point split is not fair to either player. However, as long as those event organizers that care can go in and fix the match-ups, it's a non-issue. And I was able to routinely get things down to only two games of like nationalities per round out of eleven even with manual match-ups. I think the manual matchup provision is a **MUST** use feature and a tourney organizer using this system needs to be aware of how to use it. Otherwise you'll get results that will be unfair to the players.
3. At the end of the event, the players vote on player's choice army and most sporting opponent of the five they played. These votes can seriously outweigh all other considerations in determining overall scoring. My suggestion is to set the scoring at 70% general, 20% army and 10% sportsmanship scoring. You will still get army and sports determining overall among players with very close battle scores and you will get a fair winner of best army and best sport from player's choice.

QUALIFIER

Be sure you follow the guidelines set by BF on the website to make your event a qualifier. There is a small amount of paperwork and reporting involved.

TWISTS

In order to make things even more fun and exciting, I often

include a "twist" with each mission. I try to include things that would not overly benefit one side but that would make the game interesting. As examples, here is what I came up with for Spring Recruits 07 (remember that round 4 was the first round on April Fool's day...):

Encounter: Rain: Shooting and range in attempts over 24" (or those of aircraft) are +1 to the number needed to hit.

Fighting Withdrawal: Mud: The player who enters the round with the lower battle score on his table places a mud feature (provided by the umpire) anywhere on the table entirely in clear terrain BEFORE table sides are selected. If both players have the same battle score, both roll a die with the high roller getting to place the mud. The mud feature is very difficult going, does not block LOS or provide bullet-proof cover.

Hold the Line: No Quarter: Both players may reroll platoon morale tests. Platoons that may already reroll platoon morale tests (not due to commissar or command teams) get a +1 to their die roll.

Breakthrough: April Fool. The player who enters the round with the lower battle score on his table starts the game with the April Fool. If both players have the same battle score, both roll a die with the high roller getting the Fool. At any time between when a die is rolled and when the effects of the die roll are resolved, the player with the Fool may call for the reroll of that die – even if rolled by the opponent. The rule on no multiple rerolls is in effect – with the exception of Commissars. When used, the fool is passed to the opponent and these game effects now apply to him.

Free For All: Battle Lust: Both players may reroll tank terror tests and tests to counterattack in an assault. Platoons to which British Bulldog applies may add 1 to an attempt to counterattack in an assault.

TERRAIN AND PRIZE CAPTAINS

Tourneys of any size should have three people involved: the tourney organizer, the terrain captain and the prize captain. The terrain captain works to ensure there are enough tables of quality terrain by tracking who is bringing what tables and what, if any, terrain has to be acquired or made to fill out the event properly. The prize captain works with donors and sponsors and BF to acquire prizes and print up certificates and make trophies/ plaques/medals. He also helps the TO at the end to determine who got what.

PREPARATION

Tracking Potential Players

I continually check in with the various sources of potential players as time grows closer to the event and keep the names of guys who said they would be playing and their planned armies in the spreadsheet. Everyone who shows has already been loaded into the software. I use the spreadsheet with names and armies to make a registration form – all I need to do the day of was have them check for spelling and verify I had the forces correct.

Makes registration very simple. If someone shows who was not on the sheet already it would have been very easy to add them in.

Player Folder

I buy some very cheap two-pocket folders and make some stickers to put on them that have the player's name and the name of the event. I place the following in them:

- 5 generic score sheets
- schedule of the rounds and other events
- player's choice/most sporting vote card
- a card for the player to track his opponents and results that he could keep
- a feedback form on the event

Each player is given one when they signed in. Putting these 32 folders together took some time that an event coordinator has to account for.

Hardware and Software

I have a laptop with all the info on the event, our scoring spreadsheet, BF's scoring spreadsheet, the award certificates and other documents. A friend brings a backup laptop. We bring a printer, digital camera, USB cable for the camera, power cord for the laptop, extension cord, printer paper, extra batteries for the camera.

Certificates

I print two copies of every certificate (there are 16, one for each prize) and have Merle, the 10th Cav Commander, sign them in advance. We find someone with nice handwriting and print them a list of the names and prizes, after carefully spell-checking names. You can also print the certificates on site with the names loaded in.

Prize Matching and Getting

I have a general plan for giving out prizes, but really you cannot be 100% sure until the moment comes. Yet, you don't want to make your players sit around and wait too long. By having someone work the certificates I can focus on determining the best way to give out prizes and triple-check the scoring results. Some prizes are easy – a road feature for the guy who travels the farthest, a nice terrain feature for best table, etc. I like to associate any donated painted units with the prizes given to the younger/newer player as they generally can put them to best use.

Then there is the question of doubled up prizes. We have accepted the method of spreading out the basic prizes, as in the case where the best overall had the best battle score. We awarded him the best overall and awarded the best general prize to the player with the next highest battle score.

As an example of what can happen and possible fixes, we had three double-ups at Spring Recruits 07 that I let go. First, I always award the best of nationality prizes to whoever earned them whether they got another award or not. Case in point is Todd winning both Best General and Best

Allied Minor. Second, we awarded the Death March to Jeremy even though he won Best Historical because he did in fact make the longest trip. Lastly, and a funny one, when the votes were counted for player's choice, Paul and Steve were tied and Paul had already been assigned Best painted. I needed a tie breaker, yet Paul had painted Steve's force! So he got it because he had effectively painted the #1 and #2 player's choice armies...lol

The bottom line – some flexibility in prize awarding should be provided for.

Once all the prizes had been awarded, I call off the remaining names and they come to the table and choose from among a pile of BF blisters. I tell the group to make a quick choice so no one had to wait and they could trade lunch-room style once everyone had theirs.

Trophies

Trophies were provided by a local shop – Barbie's Trophies. I have been a customer for years and Barbie knows exactly what to do for me, in fact all I have to do is drop off a power point of the trophy engravings and she does them in a day.

Bottom line – have a trophy plan, order them and pick them up in advance.

Set-up

I come in the day before the event and set up tables and check for power and computer set up, lighting, location of rest rooms and food, and an area with tables for players to store their figs and gear.

Registration

Player folders and registration form are on the main table as guys start to show. Players check the spelling of their name, verify army types and nationalities, provide their email address, what club they play in and their background, if any. They were each given their player folder. If someone has not yet registered with the con and does not have a badge, we send them to con registration.

Intro

I prep notes for my "welcome speech" noting the schedule, contents of the player folder, how the event will be scored, and location of restrooms and food. I then walk the players through each table and note terrain rules.

We are developing a master sheet of terrain rules so that we



can have one at each table in the future.

EXECUTION

Umpiring

Over the years I have umped literally dozens of events. I have learned that no matter how much I think I know the rules, it is still the right answer to look them up—esp. when as a playtester I may have worked with several versions of the same rule in the same game over the course of its development. Never does a tourney go by where I don't learn at least one thing I thought I had right. If an ump tells you he knows the rules cold and doesn't need to look them up, he's a liar. That said, I tell the players the following: First, it's ok for the players to look up the rules. The game needs to be played correctly and looking up a rule is NOT bad sportsmanship. Constantly challenging an opponent on the rules may be, but not simply making sure you got it right. Second, the umpire is there to help, so if you're stuck, it's ok to call him over. Now, we have the good fortune to be playing in an amazing group of people here in the Midwest US and in 50+ games in a weekend, there are only ever a handful of rules questions and none contentious. Third, if you do call the ump over, that ruling will be final, so if you want to work it out yourselves, to include just rolling the die and moving on, that is often the best course.

Sportsmanship

In the FoW community, choosing a best sport is choosing the greatest among the great. Now, any guy would be challenged to have a heart of stone when rolling 10 failed infantry saves out of 13 hits or to see an entrenched enemy AT gun make a dozen saves in a row, so a shaken fist at the dice gods is ok by me. A victory dance after killing a Panther with a desperate Priest side shot is also understandable. All part of the game. What I don't want to see is elastic moves, scooped dice, stalling, challenging an opponent on a tight move you play very loosely when it is your own turn, and other bad forms.

Admin

The player folders have the FoW scoring slips in them. Players bring me their scores, I put them into two different pieces of software (our own spreadsheet and the BF access one), check the matchups and change them manually if need be and print out the matchup form before the next round started. With a lunch break between 1 and 2 and 4 and 5 and an evening between 3 and 4, all I need is the 30 min break between 2 and 3 to make it easy.

I call out time remaining at 30 minute intervals, 15 minutes if I remember. Many games end before the time was called for the round and that helps me keep ahead of the game with inputting the scores.

Helping Hands

These things don't run themselves and many people were involved.

- Many people provided one or more of the tables of terrain.
- One or more people to help set up tables and check my work with the scoring.
- One person to help me take photos, put names on the

certificates and give out and collect score sheets.

- Two people not associated with the event, who are accomplished painters and modelers, help me judge the painting.

Judging History

I put in the announcement for the event on the various fora and egroups what my standard is for judging historical backgrounds. That standard is simply a more detailed breakout of what BF says should be done to get each point of background score. I sit there during round one with each background and those standards sitting on the table in front of me with the software open to background scoring and have it all done in about 30 minutes. Some VERY good backgrounds out there and it is usually quite clear who had done their research. This also allows me to fill out the first entry in my prize plan before the first round is even over.

Judging Best Table

Like painting, have a neutral judge or two to help.

Judging Painting

I walk the games and look at the armies as the first round plays out. Pretty much the scoring is easy given the guidelines, except for the top 3-5 armies. I form my opinion and have my assistant judges (people I know who are great painters and modelers who aren't playing in the event) come in and give their own independent opinion while the players are at lunch, without me telling the other judges how I had rank ordered them

Some feedback for all players:

- Details matter.
- Its better to have a force all themed together well than a force with one or two showcase units with some not quite the same standard units included.
- A force with appropriate washing/inking/weathering/highlighting will be better perceived than a nicely painted "factory-fresh" looking force.
- A high level of gloss usually hurts.

LESSONS LEARNED

What follows are the combination of my own observations and the comments from feedback forms. I really appreciate the time the guys took to fill them out, it's a major help to improve for next time.

Scenario Twists

The twists for each mission have been generally well-received. One player was on the short end of No Quarter, his opponent constantly rerolling and passing with the same platoon that would not die...lol I would keep them all unchanged as possibilities for the future with the exception of Mud. The Mud was deliberately a small piece, about 4"x4", with the idea that the player who placed it would guess at a choke point and liven up the table in a small way. Instead, when the tankers got it, which happened often, it was placed tucked in an out of the way corner. I will need to refine that rule. I loved the April Fool twist and watching the psychology of it changing hands...

More Tables Than Pairs

We ended up with less players than we originally anticipated so had more tables than pairs of players. To me, this is a very good thing as it allowed variation in the terrain played on and made it easier to avoid having a player play on the same table twice. The BF software, however, tends to assign tables in number order from low to high first and so your table 1, 2, 3 will always get played on and tables 12-16 were the only ones ever selected to be kept out of the round due to the first come first served nature of the way the software does matchups. The good news was, tables 1 and 2 were two of the best tables.

Scoring Algorithm in New Software

I am still looking into what happens with the BF access software and final scoring. I cannot yet tell how much impact player's choice and the single most sporting opponent vote have, but at first look it seems to be too much over other considerations. Given that the excellent 5, 4, 1 system seemed to fix the issues we have long had with scoring sportsmanship the BF way, this *seems* like it just keeps the same problem. But I don't yet know the algorithm of the software and cannot yet speak definitively about what is happening. I can tell you that the BF scoring system and our scoring system were tracking almost exactly but when I put the player's choice and single sports votes in, everything went haywire. Changing to 70-20-10 fixes the whole problem.

Also, the scoring picks a second and third overall and therefore can (and did in this case) knock Best General down to the fourth best guy. Its one thing to split overall and BG when the overall guy has the most battle points. But it is another to give a best general award to a guy with 2 losses – which we do not. I suggest BF takes a look at that too.

Sports Score on Combined Slip

The round-by-round sportsmanship score in the BF system is recorded on a combined scoring slip that has places for both players' scores at each table. This was roundly disliked by all. I would suggest to BF that they do away with one scoring slip for both sports scores and in any case, I will separate them out in future events I run to give the players the ability to score this in private.

Photos of Laid Out Armies

My biggest mistake by far was not to have myself or someone walk around during the time when the armies were laid out and take a clear photo of each one. Total brain lapse. I will try and collect them from any players that might have such photos and post a link to that album on the forum. That is not to say we don't have some excellent shots of armies – which can be found here along with many other photos.

Get a photo of each table and each army and as many in-game photos as possible. Recruit someone to help with this.

SOME ADDITIONAL THOUGHTS

1. Have **MORE TABLES THAN PAIRS**, especially if using the BF software.
2. Test printer driver beforehand if not the printer with which the laptop is usually associated.
3. Have terrain cheat sheets for each table.
4. Provide clear stands with table numbers.
5. Be more proactive is having guys balance axis v allies among those coming with multiple armies. Maybe give and incentive.
6. Scissors are important. Bring a paper cutter, too.
7. Have lighting that works after dark if a lot of the venue's daytime light comes from windows.

The contents of this article originally appeared on Battlefront's *Flames of War* forums and have been reprinted here with the express permission of the author. For more information on the *Flames of War* miniature game or to visit the online forums, go to www.flamesofwar.com.

Photographer - Mark Gunter Event - Spring Recruits 2008, Lee's Summit, MO
This .pdf can be downloaded at www.bardsabode.com/tactics.html.



Best Table, Spring Recruits 2008 - Dave Potratz