

# My Year at Avalon Hill

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In 1964, *Battle of the Bulge* came out from Avalon Hill. So that was your main game for the next year. I went to the Base Library and took out the Official History of the Bulge, with the fold-out color maps. I read these during English class...Comparing the game with the book, certain glaring inconsistencies. For their own convenience, AH had given ahistorical designations to the Landwehr Rgts. So smart ass 14-year old that I was, writes me a letter to the AH Co. in Baltimore, and receives a reply, from Tom Shaw, "that's the pot calling the kettle black."

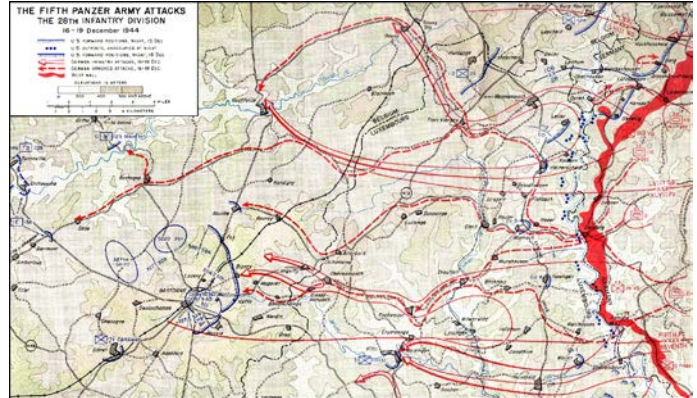
A few years later, I met Tom Shaw in Baltimore, and fifteen years later, I worked for Tom Shaw. Tom was not really involved in the content, that was handled by others. The design staff had very little supervision. We operated out of a brick townhouse on Read St. and St. Paul, in Baltimore. We had to punch in and out, but there was a catch! We could sign out for library research without clocking-out! I spent a lot of time at "the library."

My office was the only one on the third floor. It was nice. It had a fireplace and a great view of the sky. Tom had a game leg so he never came up there. I spent hours just looking at the sky and daydreaming. I only did actual work on Fridays. I was still recovering from Epstein-Bar Virus and intense 105° fevers and had lost a lot of brain cells. I had to learn how to design all over again. To rebuild my neural pathways, I would practice doing arithmetic. I'd corral a handful of No. 2 pencils, nice and sharp, and a yellow legal pad. Then I'd go down and write random strings of numbers and then solve them. It actually helped.



The Iran Hostage Crisis was in full swing, with a groundswell of support for "our troops." One bitterly cold day I stepped on to a city bus in my Navy bridge coat carrying my laundry in a white dufflebag. I must have reminded the passengers of a sailor heading off to war,

because I got a round of applause and someone gave up their seat to me. I didn't want to disillusion them.



At AH, if you published one game a year, they were happy. By their standards, I still produced a lot of goodies, besides my own *Struggle*, the *Air Force Dauntless* games, re-cycling a lot of SPI product, such as *Panzergruppe Guderian*, and some OSG product came through me a few years later. They definitely got their \$6.85/hr. out of me. They printed 20,000 copies of *Struggle of Nations!* But they could afford to, they were the printers.

Your Christmas bonus was a pair of cheap sneakers. High-tops. I refused to accept this gift. You knew the boss probably got those shoes from a client who went broke.

I replaced Randy Read as the Co. scapegoat. Part of my salary package was supposed to be a house that I could live in rent-free. As I saw it this was a commitment by the head of the printing company. However, the always-angling boss decided that he wasn't happy with that deal, and he announced that he would be sending a staff-member over to open a "game store" in my living room, with a big sign outside on the main road.

The house also had a barn and many old trees. The entire property was haunted. It was next to the Post Office, with nothing but stubble cornfields in the opposite direction. Just arrived from NYC to this desolate outpost, in early December of 1979, I had to use the pay phone at the gas station on the corner. When my girlfriend came to visit over Christmas she attested to the ghost(s) in the house. I noticed their dark energy outside under the bare trees at night.

I tolerated the game store as it was "only for a few weeks." On the day after Christmas I helped the AH employee box up all the unsold merchandise and pushed him and the goods out the door. Well, this got me in hot water with the boss who really had thought about keeping that store open

on a regular basis (even though it may not have been zoned for commerce). At this point I realized that the offer of a place to live was not genuine, so I moved into Baltimore. On that move I backed the company van onto the yard to facilitate the move, and the van got muddy, which added another black mark against my permanent record. Mark Herman, bless him, was there to help with the heavy lifting.

I brought with me from New York the research for the game *Struggle of Nations*, which, compared to *Napoleon at Bay* was a massive undertaking. I was breaking new ground—just managing to compile the order of battle for both sides, with one million troops altogether. I was determined to see this game into print, despite the opposition of the Avalon Hill management. I had been ordered to stop working on it, but I continued work anyway and the company finally caved.

After a year, I "resigned" to go back and get my BA in music, age 29. The head of the printing company, which owned AH, called me in to his office... he intercepted my last paycheck otherwise he knew I'd never show up.

So I go up to 4507 Harford Rd and walk in to the back corner, where the boss had his office. As you pass through the building you notice the caustic smell of lithography chemicals... one guy had his desk in the hallway... sign on the wall: "Anyone who doesn't believe in reincarnation hasn't been here at 5 O'Clock." Once I had my check, on my way out, I fessed-up: "All that time at the Library, I was at Louie's."

