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K MILITARY ROLE-PLAYING

Serious role-playing games are built around drama, and there is no situation more dramatic than that of a soldier in wartime, so you might think the military is a natural setting for role-playing. However, RPGs work best in anarchic situations---where the player characters are their own bosses--- and, in the army, discipline and coordinated group action are the keys to success. To get around this, the most successful military RPGs have settings where small groups can act with a large degree of autonomy, on commando raids, during guerilla warfare, or (most popular of all) after civilization has broken down due to holocaust or invasion.

The first attempt at military role-playing was Eric Goldberg's **Commando** (SPI, 1979), which was primarily a board game of small-unit combat that had some role-playing features. The first version of **The Morrow Project** (Timeline, 1980) was also mainly a set of combat rules, but the designers were perceptive enough to set it in a post holocaust future where the players could have freedom of action. This was also the case with **Aftermath** (Fantasy Games Unlimited, 1981), a game of paramilitary survival after a nuclear war.

These were followed by **Behind Enemy Lines** (FASA, 1982), a World War II game; **Recon** (RPG Inc., 1982), set on the fringes of the Vietnam War; and **Merc** (Fantasy Games Unlimited, 1983), which tried to capitalize on the brief public fascination with mercenary soldiers fighting in Third-World nations. None of these games met with sustained success. It looked as there might not really be a steady market for military RPGs until GDW released Frank Chadwick's **Twilight: 2000** in 1984. Once again the setting was after civilization was shattered by World War III, but this time background was more believable and worked out in great detail. The rules were unexciting but solid, and GDW supported them with a steady stream of scenarios and supplements that catered to players' fascination with modem military machinery. Other contemporary military systems debuted in 1986 (**The Price of Freedom**, West End Games; **Phoenix Command**, Leading Edge Games; **Delta Force**, Task Force Games; **Freedom Fighters**, Fantasy Games Unlimited), but none have been able to make much headway against **Twilight: 2000**, which recently received a complete updating and revision.

Lawrence Schick
Heroic Worlds, *A History and Guide to Role-Playing Games*,
Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books 1991

Game Designers' Workshop began to make a name for itself in modern military wargames with the introduction of the **Assault** series in 1983 (**Assault**, **Boots & Saddles**, **Chieftain**, and **Reinforcements**). This tactical level wargame series dealt with the capabilities of small units and individual armored vehicles in the modern (read World War III) military environment. Close on its heels came the **Third World War** strategic warfare series (**Third World War**, **Arctic Front**, **Southern Front**, and **Persian Gulf**) starting in 1984. That series laid out all of Europe in consistent scale maps in four different games. The contemporary interest in modern warfare helped make the two series extremely successful. In 1986, **Assault** and **Third World War** games together accounted for 17.6% of GDW's sales while Twilight: 2000 accounted for 41%.

Is it any wonder that GDW turned its attention to a military role-playing game? The initial design concepts were extreme environments with features of Mel Gibson's **Mad Max** and Andre Norton's **Star Man's Son**. Unfortunately, such concepts were common (and not especially successful) in the market place already. The breakthrough came on a long drive back from the Origins Game Convention in Dallas in 1983. In an overloaded rental van, Frank Chadwick, Loren Wiseman, Bill Keith, and Andrew Keith talked for hours about a modern military role-playing game which concentrated on equipment and realistic military situations, and by the end of the trip the concept for **Twilight: 2000** was far enough along for design to begin in earnest.