Le Baton

(Because Napoleonics is serious business)

One Page, Brigade level Napoleonics rules for 25mm figures

(And in case you're wondering, there are no rules in any of this drivel)

By Clay Smith and the DFWIrregulars

(Skip this page, nobody reads it anyway)

IF YOU ARE LOOKING HERE TO RESOLVE A RULES QUESTION!

What are you doing? The quick play sheet has all of the information you need to play. Don't be a rules lawyer. **Put this down and go back to the game immediately.**

It happened on a weekend in Austin. No, not the fake phone call from the city jail to Mike Preston at 3:00 AM. That was many, many years ago, from a time when I had the patience for extremely detailed rulesets and could wargame all night. This was a weekend in 2007 when I was playing as many Napoleonic wargames as possible at MillenniumCon, the state's premier wargaming convention (as far as I'm concerned).

One particular game was scheduled to begin on Saturday afternoon and last all day, maybe until midnight. There were thousands of beautiful 25mm miniatures, organized as 'big battalions' of 24 figures. Wow. This was going to be fun. But before we started gaming we had to learn the rules.

First was the eight-page 'quick-sheet', printed in micro-dot format. I swear when I was younger I could read these things. A thirty-minute explanation of the rules produced mostly confusion among the players, so we decided to just work it out as we played. To aid us in our game, the organizers had created a very clever measuring device that included a variety of measuring lengths, protractor angles and markers. It looked like a precision engineered jet aircraft part. Paper was torn into tiny shards that would ultimately decorate the table, as each unit needed a written order for every turn.

It was at this moment that I thought "Hey, this is a beating." Sure, 25mm Napoleonics is the grand-daddy of wargaming, the elite of the hobby. We have all endured this for who knows how long and considered 'fast play' rules with scorn because they denigrated our beloved hobby.

Well I have a nice collection of 25mm figures and want to play a game that doesn't cause a brain hemorrhage. It was time to write my own fast play rules and receive the scorn of others….

Don't blame me. I didn't write the scenario. - Napoleon

Introduction

These rules are an attempt at putting our 25mm Napoleonic collection on the wargaming table and playing wargames that have some sort of resemblance to history in a reasonable amount of time. Trying to combine the complexities of warfare during the age of Napoleon with a diceless set of rules for a brigade level game that can be completed in an evening is pretty much impossible, so we use dice. Sorry Allen. These rules represent the closest we can get to the 'feel' of Napoleonic warfare without requiring a degree in history and taking vacation days to play.

Game Design Theory

Our collection of 25mm Napoleonic miniatures are organized and based for the old WRG 1685-1845 ruleset. We will continue to use that basing and unit scale for these rules. (1/50 scale, 15mm frontage for infantry, 20mm frontage for cavalry)

The game will represent a 'slice' of a larger battle, where fighting may have taken place earlier in the day and will continue afterwards. The forces on the table occupy only a portion of the battlefield. We are recreating an important part of that day's battle.

Players will function as brigade commanders, and will command one or more brigades during the battle. It is assumed that all of the higher-level orders have been issued, the battalions organized and prepared for the fight, and the order to begin the action has been received.

While other rulesets have attempted to incorporate important details such as ammo supply, weather and hat size, these rules have no time for such things and they are left out. If this bothers you just consider them 'factored in' to the dice rolls.

These rules attempt to achieve the following:

> 1. The playing aid "Quick Sheet" must be ONE regular size piece of paper. It can be printed on both sides, but must be easy to read.
>
> 2. Artillery sticks are fun. Let's use them.
>
> 3. The game should flow easily with players able to use the quick sheet to perform all of the necessary activities and work them out without assistance. It is assumed everyone involved is more interested in camaraderie than winning.

It is the designer's opinion that the three basic arms, Infantry, Cavalry and Artillery, have differences that are significant enough to have separate rules for each. While some functions (such as movement) have been combined to conform to the concept of a one page quick sheet, each of these arms function differently in the game.

Figures are not removed from formed infantry and cavalry units for two reasons. First, we mark the hits to show how the unit loses combat effectiveness. When the number of hits equals the number of figures the unit is removed. Until that happens, the unit is still capable of maintaining the same frontages and formations. Second, we do not want our figures placed on the edge of the table, knocked to the floor and stepped on. (If they're

not your troops, don't worry about it.) It is okay to remove skirmisher and artillery casualties (because we get confused and this way is easier on the old people).

It is important to understand that a twelve figure battalion with eleven hits is not "fighting to the last man". The unit is merely reaching the end of an endurance level that no morale test can pass.

Finally, this is also the section where rules designers might mention about how all other rules suck and these are the best rules ever made. For extra flavor I should talk about the size of my personal library, which is certainly larger than yours. Or not. Does it really matter?

Game Preparation/Setup

In addition to the one-page reference sheet, each player will have a card that describes the brigade under his command. This includes details on how many units, what size they are, their morale and any special abilities. Also described is how they are setup or enter the battle, plus any special scenario rules. This allows variations in the game without cluttering up the reference sheet.

The brigade force card will have command distance, unit names, a description (i.e. 12 man infantry battalion), morale ("veteran") and any special rules (i.e. "*May skirmish*"). At the bottom of the card will be the setup information for the brigade and any special rules or restrictions. It may have a delayed deployment, an order to capture a specific objective before doing anything else, or be restricted from performing certain actions.

Sequence of Play

Sequence of Play

- Both sides adjust and fire artillery

- Both sides check morale for casualties from artillery fire

- French move/Allies shoot

- French check morale for shooting casualties and closing to contact

- Allies check morale to stand for close combat

- Fight melees

- Both sides check morale for losing melees

- Allies move/French shoot

- Allies check morale for shooting casualties and closing to combat

- Allies check morale to stand for close combat

- Fight melees

- Both sides check morale for losing melees

- Both sides recall cavalry

Infantry

Infantry are the backbone of the army and the most important part. These rules focus on what happens to the infantry in various situations, representing the unique strengths and weaknesses of each nation's army.

Formations

Infantry units are always battalions and are in one of the following formations:

- Column – any formation more than one base deep.

- Line – a solid group of stands one base deep.

- Square (or Battalion Masse for Austrians) – Shaped like a square. One of the great things about our collection is that we can actually form square. Austrians in 1809 reversed the rear company of a column and tightened the gaps in response to a cavalry charge because it was fast (for them).

- Skirmish – two-figure stands that are spread out.

- Some French infantry can use "Ordre-Mixte" This is represented by a regiment of three battalions with the two outer units in column and the center unit in line. If allowed, it should be in the brigade force card.

Movement distances:

Inf. Column/skirmishers: For all nationalities, move 8"

Inf. Line   For all nationalities, move 4"

Square/Masse French: 4" Allies: 0"

Shooting

1 die/2 figures for everyone except Russians

1 die/3 figures for Russians

Well painted troops can fire three shots a minute. - Sharpe

Cavalry

Cavalry are more than just infantry that moves faster and doesn't shoot. A discussion of the roles of cavalry in a Napoleonic army is beyond the scope of this document. For the purpose of what happens with the miniatures in our wargame, cavalry have two functional roles: Shock troopers who crash into the enemy and an 'escort' or covering force that protects the infantry from enemy cavalry attacks.

The more dramatic of these roles, the cavalry charge, should not be thought of like infantry marching steadily towards the enemy, braving incoming musket fire and forcing a decision over who will own the ground. Instead, cavalry will crash into and flow around an enemy. Think of them as a wave of water moving as far as possible, then receding back whence it came.

Therefore, in these rules cavalry that charges will first mark their position at the start of the charge as their rallying point, pass through enemy infantry formations until the full distance of the charge is met, resolve combat against all of the units contacted, and then will recall back to their starting point (unless they're British!).

Cavalry are very powerful in these rules and infantry that are unprepared will be destroyed. Instead of worrying about combat resolution between infantry and cavalry, we simply say that infantry not in square are destroyed while infantry in square survive intact. When fighting against enemy cavalry, there is no bonus for charging first which should relieve some stress from the game.

Formations

A great deal of research went into deciding how to handle the various formations for cavalry. The end result is that so many cavalry charges were performed in so many different ways that we aren't going to fuss with columns of squadrons vs. regimental lines. Cavalry may be in any formation of width and depth and it will not affect them in this game other than the type of target they are when being shot.

> *It's pronounced "kav' ul-ree". - Jesus*

Artillery

Artillery fills one very important role in this ruleset – it punishes players for bunching up! Unless the players are told not to touch the figures and are forced to watch, they will always succumb to the desire to cram as many figures into a space as possible and then claim that they had no choice since that was all the room they had available. They will forget that brigades would form multiple 'waves' of battalions, instead insisting that every battalion be on the front line. Well, in these rules they will be punished heavily by enemy artillery.

It is also important to use artillery to 'soften up' an enemy before assaulting them. Again, players have a habit of moving as fast as possible from Turn 1, and then become

surprised and disappointed when their attack on fresh troops fails. All they need to do is wait and put some artillery damage on the target first.

It is still important to represent artillery correctly. In these rules it does not function as simply a slow-moving unit that shoots far but can't charge. Artillery has a separate shooting phase and this impacts how it is used in the game. It is also extremely vulnerable if left unsupported while enemy infantry and cavalry are near. Don't count on that last second canister fire to stop a charge against your guns!

Formations

Artillery batteries are represented by two gun models and then a number of crew equal to the number of guns that were historically in the battery (generally six or eight). They are either limbered or unlimbered. Horse artillery are allowed to unlimber in the artillery phase. 12 pounders are restricted to firing directly ahead. This makes them ideal for moving the enemy off of an objective, but not responsive enough to wreck the rest of the game.

Ranges are measured with a 36" stick divided into three equal parts of 12" each. These parts represent close, medium and long range. We paint our sticks in the national colors of the various nations. While 'bunching up' units is not prohibited, every unit within 3" of the target can also be hit! Think of the artillery stick as the 'discipline stick' for these rules!

The Napoleonic Wars were fought because Napoleon had no class….

Command and Control

Command distances suck. But what other mechanism will prevent players from sending their battalions all over the table like they are guided torpedoes? It is important to understand that the high level command functions have already occurred – the battle we are fighting is operating under conditions already in place.

Each brigade is commanded by a general figure who has a command range. This is simply a mechanism designed to encourage players to keep their battalions functioning together instead of running around independently. It is still possible to drop a battalion back to defend a position or artillery battery while the rest of the brigade moves on.

Understand that there is no high level command because all games are scenario driven and the orders are issued as part of the scenario.

National Distinctions

Each of the major nations involved in the Napoleonic wars practiced different tactics and were subject to flaws unique to their situation. These differences even changed over time, so a Prussian army in 1813 would fight much different than in 1806, for example.

The following is a brain dump of what the designer was thinking when he made up this crazy stuff and is limited to the figures in our collection. When we get around to painting up some 1806 troops, we'll make the rules for them.

Austrians

The current focus of the Austrian rules is on 1809. During this period, Archduke Charles had implemented some changes in tactics that were not fully embraced by the junior army officers. The infantry tended to want to fight in line and these rules reflect the desire of the local commanders to change formation into line against the will of the army commander.

British

The British infantryman is held in a bit too high regard by wargamers. The significant difference between them and their French opponents is their tactics. Therefore, British infantry will shoot and move the same as French. To reflect their tactical doctrine, British infantry fight very well in line. The sequence of play will give the initiative to the French, but allows the British an opportunity to 'shoot first' and gain a slight advantage. This offsets the fact that they will be outnumbered in all arms and have slightly weaker cavalry than the French.

British cavalry actually performed very well when fighting against the French. However, they would get carried away and pursue too far, taking themselves out of the battle (sometimes with unfortunate results). The rules reflect this by hindering their ability to recall, which is a key game mechanic that allows cavalry to regain a place in the fight.

French

The French will always move first in a turn. This represents their tactical edge over their opponents and allows them to pin their opponent down and get the first cavalry charge in. French infantry columns that failed to impress their opponents to withdraw also liked to fall into line and get into a firefight. This is reflected in the rules.

I'm of the opinion that French Dragoons were not as good as other cavalry.

Russians

These rules reflect the Russians of 1813-14 where they were not necessarily forced to remain in column, but still did not have the tactical awareness of the French. The basic Russian infantry battalion will be conscript, but this is offset by a morale bonus. The effect is to cause them to want to fight in close combat, but not do as well as their numbers would normally represent. The battalions we use are a bit larger than scale, so this represents the resiliency of the Russian infantry.

Prussians

The Prussians in these rules are for 1813-15 and represent the total transformation of the army that occurred after 1806. For now they just fight like the French because so much was copied from them, although they will have restrictions on their lesser trained troops.

"Wellington cheated" - Napoleon

Heroic Events

"Why can't my infantry line stop a cavalry charge?" "How come my infantry can't charge cavalry?"

Okay, sure there are exceptions to the absolutes in these rules. But it's a waste of mental effort to have to check every time to see if cavalry breaks a square. They did it – a few times – but why do we as wargamers have to roll for it every time?

These rules will use 'Heroic Events' to represent such circumstances. It will be based on the scenario, but in general here's how it works:

- Each side may attempt ONE Heroic Event in the game.

- Roll a die to see if the attempt will occur (4+), failure means no Heroic Event and the attempt is lost.

- The event may be attempted any time one of the following situations occur:

    - Cavalry are charging through a square. The square tests morale and failure means it is destroyed.

    - Infantry in line receive a cavalry charge. The infantry test morale and success means they may shoot at the cavalry, which then flows around them like they were in square.

    - Unsupported artillery are charged. Roll 3d6 and retire limbered. If they outrun the charging infantry/cavalry, they survive the charge.

    - Unsupported artillery are charged. Fire canister! Immediately fire like infantry at the charging units, rolling one die per gunner.

    - Infantry want to charge cavalry. After the 4+ is rolled for the Heroic Event attempt, a further '6' must be rolled to see if this nonsense will go on! You still have to pass the morale test to charge as well.

    - Enemy guns are captured and you want to turn them on the enemy. An infantry battalion that captures an artillery battery can remain with the guns and fire with two dice . French Old Guard can fire with eight dice.

> *"I'm the greatest soldier ever." - Marbot*

Email me at clay.smith@dfwirregulars.com with any questions.