

# **Field Commander Napoleon** **Published by DVG (Dan Verssen Games) 2011;** **Designer Dan Verssen**

## **Review by Paul Le Long**

### **Overview**

This is a solitaire game in which you play as Napoleon through all of the major campaigns of his career from 1796 to 1815. You move armies around on the campaign map, manage supplies and do the same for the enemy which is controlled by the game's

AI. When you encounter enemy forces, play transfers to a tactical board where battles are fought. Everything is quite abstract.



The campaigns are: Italy 1796; Egypt 1798, Marengo 1800; Austerlitz 1805; Jena/Friedland 1806/7; Spain 1807; Wagram 1809; Russia 1812; Leipzig 1813; France 1814; Waterloo 1815. Games take about an hour. Your army will vary in size from about 10-20 (sometimes more) counters representing, usually, either corps or divisions.

### **Can it be played solo?**

It can *only* be played solo.

Traditionally, games were designed for multi-player participation and wargames were often a 2-player affair. Recently, there has been a trend toward co-operative games where multiple players all play against the game and these games are good for the soloist because you simply play the part of several players. But specifically solitaire games are rarer and good ones are to be cherished.

### **What are the components?**

There are seven lovely mounted boards representing various campaigns (some are used in more than one campaign ó the same board is used for the 1796 Italian campaign and the 1800 Marengo campaign, for example). Armies engage in area movement rather than the more common hex and counter approach. The boards really are first rate.

There are counters for each campaign ó I haven't counted but there are hundreds of them. You use a specific set of French and enemy counters for each campaign and the abilities

of troops and commanders, including Napoleon himself, change over time. The counters are large, well-mounted, attractive and easy to use.

### **What is the level of complexity?**

It's a simple game; you'll learn it very quickly and after the first game you will be fluent and not need to refer to the rulebook.

### **What do you spend your time doing during play?**

The turn sequence is simple – you move your forces into adjacent areas on the strategic map, fight (if you bump into the enemy), force-march to another area (if you have enough supply points to do so), recoup and spend supplies (you can buy reinforcements and patch up damaged units). Then you work out (according to the game's AI) which enemy units move and how far, fight any battles and finally do supply for the enemy.

There will be a lot of battles and you fight them on an abstract tactical map which represents front, approach and reserve areas for both armies. You have various battle plans you can use (like flank march, cavalry charge and so on) and the enemy has some of these too. Battles are simple and abstract but fun (& sometimes frustrating!).

### **What are the tactical decisions?**

This depends on the campaign you are fighting as all of them are very different and impose different challenges, victory criteria and play out in a variety of ways. Russia 1812, for example, is a game where you simply march to Moscow and march right back again. The Russians are a push-over but the conditions will kill you – you score victory points depending on how many of your units survive. The 1796 Italian campaign forces you to move quickly to secure a lot of objectives before the game ends. The 1806/7 Jena/Friedland campaign forces you to move ultra-fast, force marching as you go and getting strung out along the way, making you vulnerable to small counter-attacks. In the 1813 campaign, you pretty much circle the wagons at Leipzig and try to survive. Each campaign sets you a different type of challenge, so while the core rules are simple, the play-style, difficulty and choices you have to make are all very different. Battles also impose tactical decisions, such as whether you tell a unit to stand still and deliver a volley or make a flank attack.

### **Web Links**

The Late Night Gamer (<https://www.youtube.com/user/lnightg/featured>) has the best play-through of this game, spread over 9 videos – he plays the 1796 campaign. If you watch this, you won't even need to read the rules.

### **Final assessment**

This is a terrific game. Yes it is a bit abstract and that won't be everyone's bag and one can always quibble about the ratings for units and generals (to my mind Napoleon is rated too low in 1796, not low enough in 1813). But I really like the game – it's simple to learn, the rules don't get in the way, each campaign feels very different and the variety of tactical challenges is great. The components are really top-drawer and a joy to use and you get so much in the box; great value for money. And not only can it be played solo,

**(More photos below.)**







