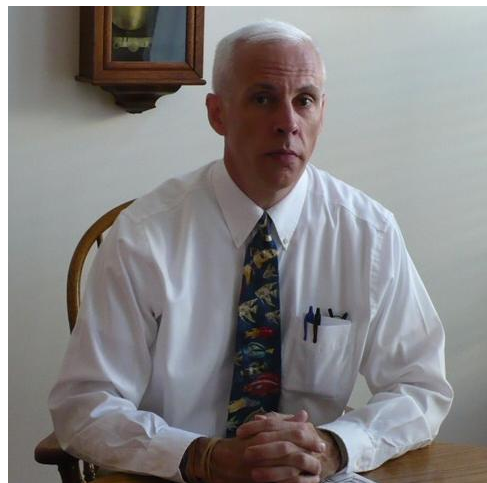


Much Ado about MARCH ATTACK

Napoleonic Rules Review

By Chris Hahn

Attracted by an advertisement in a recent issue of Miniature Wargames, and frustrated by my evident inability to stage a decent if also perhaps too large and counterfactual a game for a solo wargamer to handle using one of the several Napoleonic rule sets I already own, I went ahead and made what might be called an impulse purchase. Having spent an amount of money on the aforementioned rule books and the “terrain” and “figures” for my repeated failures, I opted to buy the PDF version of these new rules from Crusader Publishing.



I am pleased to report that not only did I save myself 14 pounds (roughly 22.50 American dollars), but I also discovered what appears to be an excellent set of rules and in this process, reignited my faltering interest in this popular period. (It was something of a coincidence that I was given the access to the PDF link and printed the pages to devour - I mean read, on Columbus Day of 2011.)

My first and second impression of these rules is positively positive. In contrast to some other sets, there is not a preponderance of “eye candy”; the emphasis is on text, designer notes and examples. The Table of Contents lists 16 Chapters, covering Game Scale and Troop Stats to Movement, Firing, Melee and Morale, all the way to Terrain, BUA (Built Up Area) Effects as well as Weather & Nightfall. In addition to these clearly written chapters, again, examples abound and serve to make the procedures and processes understandable to “rule challenged” individuals like myself.



In addition to the clearly written chapters and numerous examples, the last section of the book contains sections on Troop Ratings and Leader Ratings. There is also an Extended Example, wherein several turns of a Plancenoit Scenario are detailed. The Troop Ratings cover forces and formations from Austria to Westphalia. (I was both a little disappointed but at the same time relieved, however, to see that there was no listing for troops of the Ottoman Empire.) The Leader Ratings do not match the range of the Troop Ratings. Only the “great captains” of France, Great Britain, Prussia, Austria, Russia and Spain are listed. Still, the level of detail is admirable. It is also nice to see that leaders are rated on “Charisma” - their ability to inspire, and on their ability to command. So, for example, one might have a

general who is rated very well in terms of his ability to inspire troops, but he is an absolute incompetent when it comes to commanding troops in battle.

I must confess to some familiarity with these rules, even though October 10 marks the first time I actually sat down and scanned and then read them (marking relevant passages with a highlighter). At the risk of annoying readers of this review, I identified (or thought I identified) pieces and or concepts of other rule books in MARCH ATTACK. This is not to say that Mark Sims simply copied and pasted popular and proven ideas. Not at all. It is to admit that I probably have been spending too much time reading and rereading the Napoleonic rule sets I had prior to October 10, 2011.

That much admitted, I think the turn sequence and combat mechanisms of MARCH ATTACK are very good. Splitting the game turn into a strategic and tactical phase will help, in my opinion, to speed things up during larger games. (The rules are designed to enable players to finish a corps versus corps action in an evening and bigger battles in the space of a day.) The rules on skirmishers are simple and effective; these light troops are handled by die rolls and not by moving around individual stands. The exchange of musket volleys and artillery fire is considered simultaneous, which helps to save on the die rolling and again, speeds up play. Both fire and melee combat rely heavily on the Combat Value of units. Modifiers are also used, but compared to some other sets, the lists of modifiers in MARCH ATTACK are 'lean and mean' as opposed to being crowded with every imagined possibility.

The rules are simple without being simplistic. There is a level of detail provided that appeals, and as far as I am able to tell, allows for fast-paced turns and therefore games, without slowing things down or requiring the use of multiple charts, a calculator, or even a PhD.

I mentioned the ratings of commanders. In MARCH ATTACK, there are seven (7) categories of troops. Formations consist of Untrained (Levy) all the way up the ladder to Guard. Artillery is divided into three categories: there are horse batteries, field or foot batteries, and siege guns. Field artillery is divided into three separate classes: light, medium and heavy.

The established ground scale of MARCH ATTACK is one inch on the tabletop represents 60 actual yards of terrain/ground. This means that even a modest six by four-foot playing surface can be transformed into a decent-sized battlefield. Regarding the always-present problem of unit representation and scale, I am going to quote from the Designer Notes box on page 2 of the rules: "The overall deployment area of a brigade, division and corps is well within the boundaries of historical accuracy. I make no apologies for the fact that the basing is designed for ease of game play rather than being detailed down to the specific frontage . . ."

Echoing that sentiment, I make no apology for writing an enthusiastic review of these new rules. I am looking forward to staging a play test as soon as possible. I am looking forward to tinkering with them as well. (If I adjust the stated ground scale a bit, then my six by four table can represent a bigger battlefield . . .) And finally, I am looking forward to writing up a battle report or two, detailing not only the "miniature" action, but also reporting on how the rules worked for me.