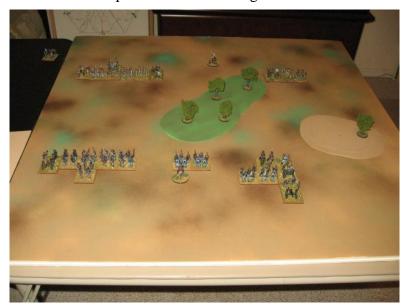# BACK TO BASICS
Step-by-step to simple horse and musket rules
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(Originally published in Lone Warrior 181)

After a long interlude of planning and playing miniature games on boards using hexes and squares, I felt the urge to go back to a more traditional game. As with many of the twists and sudden turns my approach to the hobby takes, the lure of more traditional game boards with more natural looking terrain came out of the blue. I did what I tend to do under the circumstances: I went with the latest shiny thing. It's a hobby, after all, a diversion. Not an activity that demands anything approaching consistency or even a medium-term commitment. In short, it's not work.

Almost invariably, the joy comes with following a path that might not have seemed quite so interesting yesterday. But a book, or a movie, even a glance at an old rule book – whatever – can change my interests in a flash. Call it being fickle, if you wish. I certainly have. These days, I just call it having fun.

Having read a couple of recent history books on the American Civil War – one on the Battle of Shiloh, the other a new biography of U.S. Grant -- I was primed to do something involving the ACW. In thinking about a one-off battle, I pulled out a simple rule set I'd worked up some time ago – and had used once or twice since then, always with some fine-tuning and with some hand-written notes for possible further changes the next time I used them.

I gamed out the battle, and it was entirely satisfactory. Well, it was as satisfactory as any game played with home-made rules is ever going to be. For me, there's always a tweak or two yet to be made to any such rule set, no matter how refined. But, over the years, I hope I have learned the great lesson about tweaking rules: When you do it, make your rules simpler, not more complicated. I owe much of this discovery to Bob Cordery, whose *Wargaming Miscellany* blog

http://wargamingmiscellany.blogspot.com/ is a gold mine of ideas about gaming and, especially, rule writing. Bob's patient efforts to polish his many rule sets are a pleasure to behold. Certainly, the way he goes about putting his concepts down on (virtual) paper are worthy of imitation.

That said, my rules for the ACW were brief enough to approach the ultimate standard of wargaming simplicity: They fit on a single sheet of paper – and, in their original, even more streamlined form, on just one side of the sheet. I achieved this by boiling everything down to a few sentences of explanation about how the procedure – the game – works. Then I broke out a number of numerical factors that come into play as the procedure brings the toy troops into conflict.

So, there's a section on the turn sequence, followed by a section that explains how the troops on the table can move, special rules for mounting and dismounting cavalry, a section on how weapons are fired, and a final section on handling melee.

The numerical factors are then listed for each troop type. There's a weapon range number expressed in inches; movement in various types of terrain, again in inches; and combat factors against other troop types. Simple, and mostly stolen from other rules sets that aim for a small-sized game on a smallish table.

My combat resolution system is based on the dice from the "Battle Cry" board game. In any given instance of firing at an opponent, or engaging in hand-to-hand combat, a certain number of the dice are rolled. The results indicate the casualties inflicted. For those unfamiliar with "Battle Cry," the game's six-sided dice have two sides showing an infantry figure with each causing an infantry casualty if the target is an infantry unit; one side showing a cavalry figure, causing a cavalry casualty if the target is mounted; and one showing an artillery figure, causing an artillery casualty if the target is an artillery stand. The other two dice are a banner, representing a forced retreat, and crossed swords. In my own game, each banner forces the target unit to fall back one base depth. Crossed swords represent an additional casualty on any type of opponent, but only in hand-to-hand combat.

Combat examples

Let's say an ACW Confederate cavalry unit has moved into frontal contact with a Union infantry unit and both sides then spend the pips to engage in melee. The cavalry unit rolls one Battle Cry die (cavalry vs. foot on the chart) and gets an infantry icon as the result, meaning one casualty has been caused to the infantry unit. The infantry also rolls, but gets to do so with four dice (rifle infantry vs. mounted). The result is three crossed swords and an infantry icon. The infantry icon is a miss against the cavalry unit, but each of the crossed swords scores a hit since this is a melee – three hits in all. And since my ACW cavalry units generally have a strength of 3, the hits wipe out the cavalry unit. (Obviously, it's not usually a good idea for ACW cavalry to charge the front of an enemy infantry unit that's able to fight back.)

At the end of the melee, the cavalry unit is removed from play and the infantry unit is marked with one permanent casualty. (My ACW infantry units generally have a strength of 4, while artillery units have a strength of 2, with cavalry at 3, as above. "Strength" simply means the number of hits a unit can take before being eliminated; a more accurate term is probably "staying power.")

Now, let's see how artillery combat works. Let's say we have a French Napoleonic field artillery battery (one stand) able to fire at either of two British infantry units in the open, one at a range of just over 6 inches, the other just under 10 inches away. The artillery unit has a maximum range of 10 inches, and fires at targets using various numbers of dice at 2-inch increments, out to its maximum range. Here's how that works: The artillery would roll five dice at 0-2 inches; four dice at 2-4 inches; three dice at 4-6 inches; two dice at 6-8 inches; and one die at 8-10 inches.

In the example, the artillery unit has a choice between firing at one enemy unit 6+ inches away (2 dice), or at another unit just under 10 inches away (1 die). The artillery unit chooses to fire at the nearer target, with better odds of getting hits on it (2 dice) than on the farther target (1 die). The artillery unit rolls the two dice and gets one artillery icon and one banner. The artillery icon is a miss against an infantry unit, but the banner forces the target unit to retreat one base depth. Since neither infantry unit can fire at the French artillery battery (it's out of their musket range), the combat ends and the results are applied. In this case, the British infantry with the retreat result is moved back one base depth.

The rules don't spell out everything – and that is a potential drawback in submitting them for public consideration. Naturally enough, I know what underlies the wording of my rules and I know, in every single sentence, exactly what I mean the rule to say. But, you respond – and rightly so -- that, crystal clear as my shorthand rules might be to myself, they might not always be as clear to somebody else who has not gamed inside my own head over the years – which is everybody else in the world. To which I can only nod in agreement and admit, true enough.

But, what's to confuse? On the movement factors, the headings of "GG" and "BG" are nothing more than terms lifted from the *De Bellis Antiquitatis (DBA)* rules: They stand for "good going" and "bad going," or open terrain and more difficult terrain/obstacles.

I have only included a couple of modifications to the number of dice rolled in each combat. An accompanying general adds one dice to a unit in melee. Any attack into unfavorable terrain (uphill, for example), or against an enemy in cover or behind an obstacle halves the number of dice rolled (rounded up).

There are no modifications for some obvious advantages, such as attacking a unit's flank or rear, as those situations are covered by the firing and melee rules. Firing is only toward the front of the firing unit and melee is likewise only to the front. A unit attacked from the flank or rear is not able to defend itself at all, a potentially devastating circumstance if the enemy is able to maneuver into position to make such an attack.

And that's about it. The rules I cobbled together were specifically designed for the ACW. But when I finished them, it occurred to me that they could be extended backward to cover the Napoleonic period just as well. A few range adjustments for the less advanced weaponry of an earlier time and adjustments to the battlefield capabilities of various cavalry types were the main changes.

These rules don't account for every nuance of tactical circumstances, but they're also not burdened by a multitude of complicating numbers and factors that add little excitement to the game, but do add more than their share of tedium. I'd rather play my games without getting a headache as a side effect.

Final thoughts: Since the rules call for simultaneous movement and combat, I've found it helpful to use some simple markers (I use bits of pipe cleaner) to note which units have moved this turn and which have absorbed retreat markers so far in the turn. I also use some small, numbered counters to reflect the number of hits absorbed by a unit. At the end of the turn, when any effects have been applied, I remove all the markers, except the casualty counters, before proceeding to the next turn.

Lastly, how to determine winner and loser? I'm of the school that believes that such results become readily apparent at a certain point in the game. It's obvious when one side has been beaten. An alternative method for a quicker game: Use another DBA rule. When a side loses one-third of its units at the end of a turn, that side is the loser. In case of a tie, play another turn to see which side then has the higher percentage of losses.

Horse and Musket House Rules

This game can be played on a standard-size card table (33"x33") with armies of about 10-20 elements/units. Set up each side at least 12 inches apart. Movement can be by individual elements/units, or by groups (all elements in at least half-edge contact, and all facing the same direction).

Turn sequence:
1) Roll 1d6 for each side. Side gets that many moves (individual units or groups) this turn.
2) Both sides simultaneously move units as allowed by pips.
3) Roll another 1d6 for each side. Side gets that many combats (firing or melee) this turn. All combat is by individual units only (not groups).
4) Both sides fire simultaneously. Apply results after all dice rolling is completed.
5) Resolve any hand-to-hand combats.

Movement:
1) Field artillery can move or fire each turn. It cannot do both.
2) Horse artillery can move and fire each turn, but firing is at half-effect if moving that turn.
3) All others can move and fire each turn, but firing is at half-effect if moving that turn.

Cavalry mounting/dismounting:
1) Eligible troops can mount or dismount during the movement phase, at a cost of one dice pip per group or individual unit.
2) Eligible troops can mount/dismount or move each turn. They cannot do both.
3) Eligible troops that dismounted may fire in the same turn, but firing is at half-effect.

Fire:
1) Field artillery can move <u>or</u> fire each turn. It cannot do both.
2) Horse artillery <u>can</u> move and fire each turn, but firing is at half-effect if moving that turn.
3) Artillery fire must be within 30 degrees of straight ahead.
4) All other fire must be within 45 degrees of straight ahead.

Melee:
1) To use its dice in melee combat, a unit must be in at least half-edge <u>frontal</u> contact with any edge of the unit being fought.
2) In melee, a crossed sword result on the combat dice causes a casualty on any type of target unit.

Napoleonic Factors

	Range	**Movement**			**Roll # BC dice in combat***	
		GG	**BG**	**Road**	**vs. foot**	**vs. mounted**
Heavy cavalry	---	3"	2"	4"	3	4
Medium cavalry	---	4"	2"	4"	3	3
Light cavalry	---	5"	2"	5"	2	2
Field artillery	10"	2"	---	3"	5-4-3-2-1	5-4-3-2-1
(2" intervals)						
Horse artillery	8"	3"	---	4"	4-3-2-1	4-3-2-1
(2" intervals)						
Musket infantry	2"	2"	2"	4"	4	4
Light infantry	3"	3"	3"	4"	3	2
Jaeger infantry	4"	3"	3"	4"	3	2

ACW Factors

	Range	**Movement**			**Roll # BC dice in combat***	
		GG	**BG**	**Road**	**vs. foot**	**vs. mounted**
Cavalry	---	4"	2"	5"	1	1
Dismounted cavalry	2"	2"	2"	---	2	2
Mounted infantry	---	4"	2"	5"	1	1
Dismounted mtd. Infantry	4"	2"	2"	---	3	3
Field artillery	12½"	3"	---	4"	5-4-3-2-1	5-4-3-2-1
(2 1/2" intervals)						
Horse artillery	12½"	3"	---	4"	5-4-3-2-1	5-4-3-2-1
(2 1/2" intervals)						
Musket infantry	2"	2"	2"	4"	4	4
Rifle infantry	4"	2"	2"	4"	4	4

* Combat modifiers:

1) In melee, increase the number of dice rolled by 1 if own unit is accompanied by a general.

2) Decrease the number of dice by half (rounded up) if the unit is attacking into unfavorable terrain, cover or obstacle.