

The devil in the detail – playing solo battles

By Brian Cameron

In *Lone Warrior* 212 I described how I go about fighting solo battles. As I commented there, many of mine are set in the ‘horse and musket’ period which could be described roughly as 1750 – 1850 (ish, very –ish) but hopefully the ideas presented here will be of use in other periods. This article is by way of a follow up to the section I titled ‘The devil in the detail’ and goes into more depth about handling what happens when units start to clash.

Fifty-odd years of wargaming has produced quite a large number of armies, a lot of them in 6mm. They’re not easy (for me) to photograph so I’ve gone for a setting which makes use of larger figures, an imagi-nations one, the clash between two small German states, Oldenstein and Hesse-Damall. In case you look at the photos and wonder what the figures are, well they are Miniature Figurines original ‘S’ range figures from the early 70s. They’re smaller, about 23mm tall, and thinner by comparison with the later Minifigs but they were some of my first metal figures and I still have a fondness for them, lack of detail and all. Most are from the American Civil War, Crimean and Franco-Prussian ranges with quite a few conversions. An exception is the generals, not one of Minifigs strong points and a number are old Hinchliffe figures. They’re a bit larger but then they’re larger than life characters. They’re roughly organised as the classic ‘Red’ (Oldenstein) and ‘Blue’ (Hesse-Damall) armies featured in so many of the Grant ‘table top teasers’. I recently spent some time tarting them up, the paintwork having taken a battering over the years but I kept them in traditional style, no shading or decorated bases as I do for 28mm.

I use my own rules (which I’m constantly tinkering with) and won’t go into detail on them. If the battlefield looks suspiciously like that of the Blastof Bridge game in the classic ‘Charge or How to Play Wargames’, your suspicions are well founded. To help clarify some of the description the map shows the relative positions of the two armies at the start of the game. Oldenstein wishes to deny Hesse-Damall possession of the route across the bridge and the latter want it as the starting for an invasion of Oldenstein (the old Sturm-Geschutz inheritance raises its head again). By the way, the battlefield shows a grid as that’s used in the rules instead of measuring everything. As only the corners are marked its very discrete, but if you take a look at photo 4 you’ll see one of the corner markings.

I think I covered the planning and initial orders in enough detail last time, so we’ll assume that has been done and proceed with the game. I’ve attached the current order to each unit in the list below. The way in which generals are rated and can give orders was also covered last time.

A couple of game notes:

A turn has the active player declaring charges, moving, and firing. The ‘other’ player can fire units which are fired on. Resolve tests are taken as required. The next turn will have the ‘other’ player become the active player. After a ‘pair’ of turns, each side rolls for initiative to see who will be the active player first in the next ‘pair’ of turns. Each unit has a colonel with a particular characteristic. This can be applied to various game mechanisms, e.g. firing, and in helping to decide what the unit will do when a decision is required. Each characteristic has an effect on

decisions about reactions to events, what aspect(s) the characteristic affects and the modifier / extent of any re-roll conferred. A characteristic can only be applied once a turn.

I do also use characteristics for the units (e.g. disciplined firers, well-drilled, steady) but decided that it might be too confusing to use them for this game and instead have focused on the officers and their effect. Similarly, I normally use black polyfibre to represent the smoke from firing but left it off to make the photos clearer. It does, however, make a helpful reminder about the problems of visibility on a battlefield prior to smokeless powder.

Officer abilities

Characteristic	When	Effect	Decisions
Brave (Bold as they say in the artillery).	Resolve test (not one as a result of a charge)	Unit may re-roll lowest dice	+1 to options to go forward or hold against the odds
Give 'em a volley	Firing	May re-roll all the dice	+1 to options to open fire
Hero	During a resolve test to determine the outcome of a charge	Unit may re-roll	+1 to options to charge
Inspirational	Any resolve test	Unit may re-roll	Will always take the 'best' option
Jolly Good Chap	All the time	No effect	+1 to 'cautious' options
Lucky	During a resolve test, firing or combat	Unit may re-roll lowest dice	Will never roll for a 'poor' option
Steady	Resolve test to rally	Unit may re-roll	No effect
Up and at them	Resolve test to stand against a charge	Unit may re-roll	+1 to options to go forward

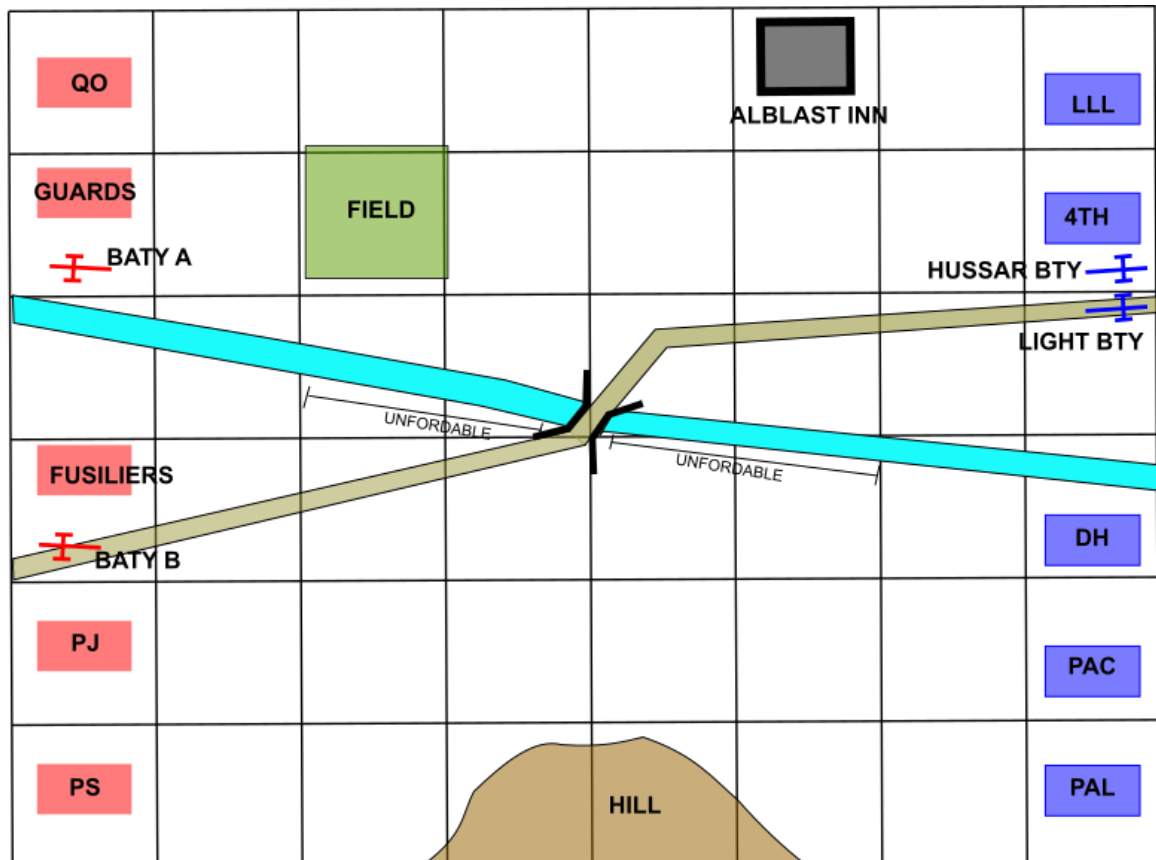
The Oldenstein units under the competent General Helmholtz are:

Unit title	Shorthand	Officer	Characteristic	Orders
Queen's Own Infantry	QO	Col Beckmann	Brave	Advance north of field and attack the bridge
The Guards	Guards	Col Bunsen	Lucky	Advance and occupy the field
The Fusiliers	Fusiliers	Col Dirac	Steady	Advance and take the bridge
Prince Johan's Own Dragoons	PJ	Col Oersted	Lucky	Support the attack if the Fusiliers, giving priority to attacking any cavalry.
Princess Sofia's Own Hussars	PS	Col Pauli	Steady	Support the attack if the Fusiliers, giving priority to attacking any cavalry.
1st Artillery Regt, Battery A	Battery A	Capt. Torricelli	Jolly Good Chap	Advance and support the attack of the Guards and QO.
2nd Artillery Regt, Battery B	Battery B	Capt. Wundt	Brave	Advance and support the attack of the Fusiliers

The Hesse-Damall forces under General Brahms (also a competent chap) are:

Unit title	Shorthand	Officer	Characteristic	Orders
Her Ladyship's Loyal Guards	LLL	Col Satie	Give 'em a volley	Advance to west of the inn and hold any enemy advance
4 th Foot	4 th	Col Verdi	Inspirational	Advance and take the northern end of the bridge
Duke Horace's Fusiliers	DH	Col Berg	Lucky	Advance and take the southern end of the bridge
The Princess Anna Cuirassiers	PAC	Col Bartok	Inspirational	Advance and attack any enemy cavalry
Prince Albrecht's Own Lancers	PAL	Col Bach	Up and at them	Advance and attack any enemy cavalry
Hussar's Artillery battery	Hussars	Capt. Stravinsky	Brave	Advance and support the 4 th
The Light Battery	Light	Capt. Mahler	Jolly Good Chap	Advance and support the DH

The battlefield of Alblast:





The Oldenstein 'army' moves forward



As does the Hesse-Damall force

The first two turns saw each side advance in accordance with their orders and no decisions were necessary.

General Brahms won the initiative and thus had **Turn 3**. His cavalry, following their attack orders moved forward. PAC automatically charged as they were able to reach their opponents. PAL was able to see their opposition once they'd crested the hill and charged down (though, on reflection, given that charges have to be declared at the start of the turn, they shouldn't have).

The DH needed to decide about deploying as they move on the bridge in accordance with their orders. Given I operate a move or fire rule they knew the opposition wouldn't be able to fire on them (they were currently in column) so could move closer and then deploy. I split the die roll as 1 – 2 deploy, 3 – 6 move closer and deploy; it came up 5 so they moved closer, almost at the bridge and in range for the next opportunity to fire.

The 4th, accompanied by General Brahms, marched right up to the bridge before deploying – no problem with this as the 'player' is present (for purposes of illustration I made decisions for both sides though there's nothing against it, I'm more interested in a good narrative than winning for one side. With the units dicing for reaction it's almost possible to sit back and watch it happen). The LLL faced a similar decision to DH so I diced for it (1 – 3 deploy, 4 – 6 advance and deploy) and they advanced and deployed.

The artillery advanced and diced for the same options. Captain Stravinsky being Brave (though Bold is the term in the artillery), added 1 to the roll and they advanced to the front line, though unable to unlimber (too bold perhaps?)



The overall situation after movement during turn 3 – The cavalry clash!



The position of the infantry at the end of Turn 3



And the cavalry before the resolution of the fight
I'm going to include some of the resolution of actions as they involve the officer abilities and will help to explain the course of the battle. So, the mighty cavalry battle.

PJ almost faltered when checking their resolve upon being charged but Col. Oersted is a lucky devil and they got by on the re-roll. Both sides took losses before the PAC broke (might the army minister regret his parsimonious move to withdraw their cuirasses?) pursued by the PJ (victorious cavalry must pursue for one turn before they attempt to rally.)

The flow of battle turned the other way with the next fight and the PAL routed the Hussars. This took them off the battlefield with the Lancers in hot pursuit. Apologies, I didn't take a photo of the outcome.

Turn 4 was then the opportunity for General Helmholtz to counter his enemy. The Hussars could not rally while the enemy still pursued. Col Oersted again needed his luck to rally the PJ from its pursuit and they fell back and reformed.

Though not strictly true for the mid-19th century, infantry in my game only use column to manoeuvre so both the QO and the Guards had no option but to deploy before they got too close. Battery A proved to be a little more cautious than the enemy batteries as the die roll came up for the 'advance and unlimber ready to fire next time opportunity' option.

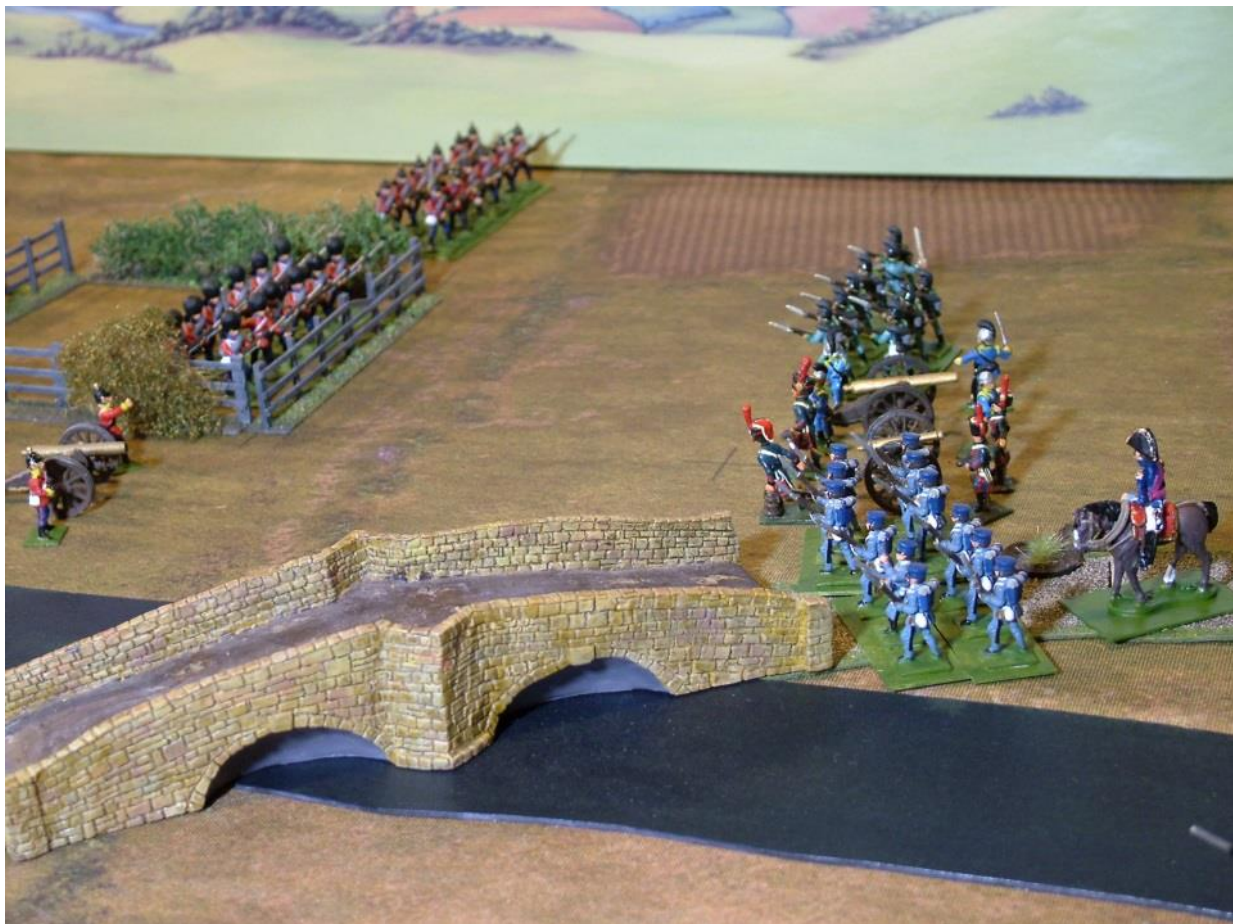
The Fusiliers really could go no further in column and so deployed, rather nervously probably given the cavalry rampaging back and forth.

The options for battery B were to advance and unlimber or do so where they were. Captain Wundt is a bold chap but caution weighed more heavily apparently and they unlimbered on the spot (effectively 3 - 6 would have led to moving forward as Wundt added 1 but the die came up a 1).

Initiative time again, General Brahms won and took **Turn 5**.

PAL failed to rally and thus continued their pursuit across the pleasant countryside of Oldenstein. PAC, with inspiration from Col Bartok did rally (they failed the initial roll but Bartok's re-roll saw them pass) leaving the two cavalry units ready to set to again.

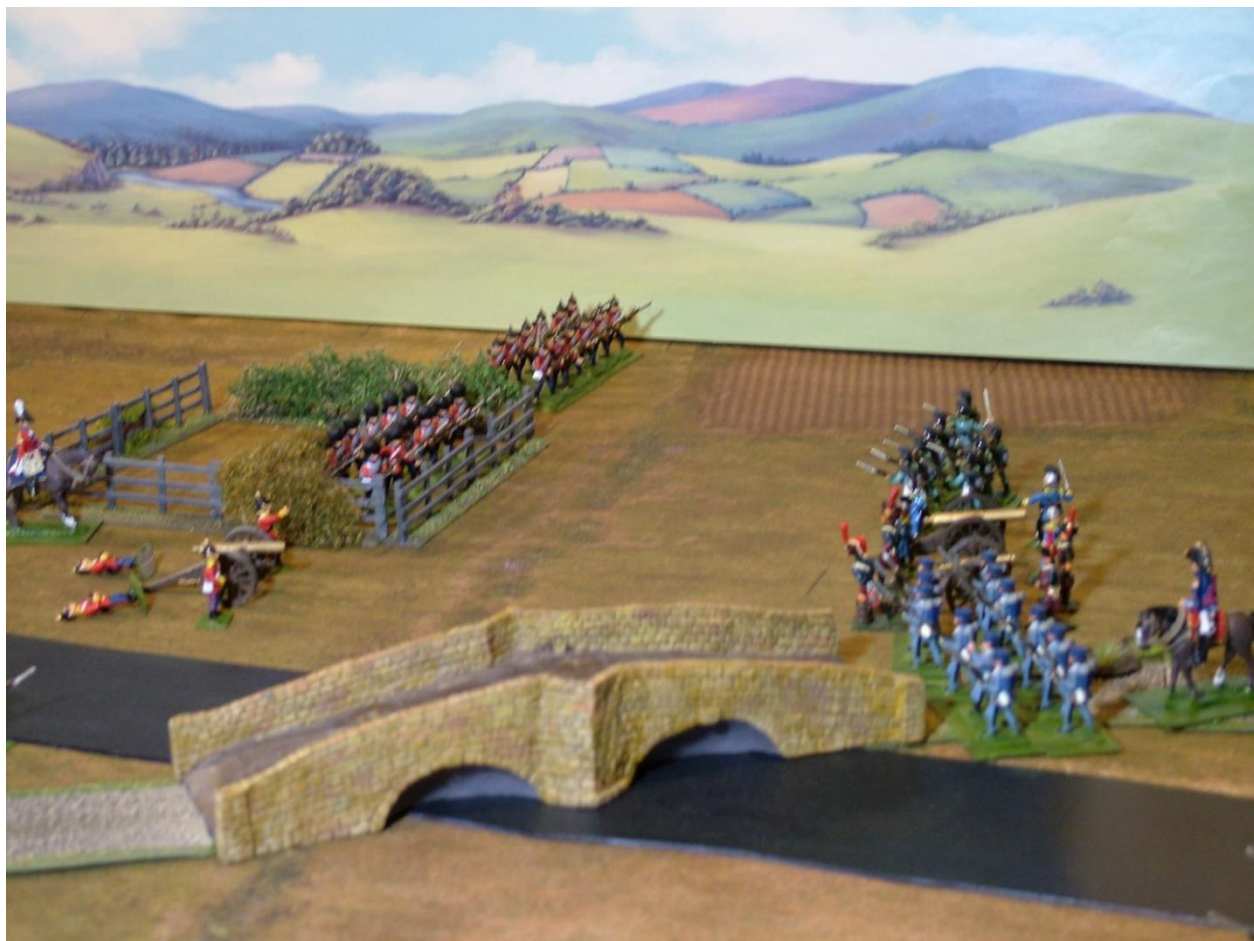
The infantry opened fire along the line (no dice were rolled, with both sides in range; opening the firing seemed about the only option as infantry needs to be stronger than the enemy to charge).



Firing commences north of the bridge. Oldenstein: Battery A, Guards and QO from bottom to top. Hesse-Damall: 4th, both batteries and LLL from bottom to top. General Brahms poses behind the 4th.

The LLL opened fire to dismal effect; however, Col Satie shouted ‘Give ‘em a volley’ for a re-roll and they scored two hits, one of which was neutralised by the cover. The Guards responded (enemy units fired on can return fire) and scored 2 hits. Col Bunsen’s Luck (re-roll the lowest dice) brought them another. The LLL thus lost a base (3 hits in the case of formed infantry) and thus had to test their resolve for the loss of a base and coming off worse in the exchange of fire. They squeaked through both and held on.

The 4th opened fire on Battery A cutting down half the gunners. The battery’s reply caused 2 hits on the 4th so the fire was equal and no one needed to test their resolve. However, losses require the Battery to test resolve and they squeaked by both inspired, clearly, by the presence of General Helmholtz (they’ll doubtless be a paragraph in the official history, possibly the general will even have got off his horse and laid the gun personally while he gave a rousing speech).



General Helmholtz (far left) just before dismounting to rally the gun crew of Battery A!

DH opened fire and the Fusiliers replied but there was far more smoke than effect (no hits for either despite Col Berg’s luck!)

Turn 6 saw General Helmholtz ride down to the river, cross and make it to the battery B (Generals make all their moves first) which he ordered to deploy in case the enemy lancers

should return (I was aware that the lancers wouldn't return but really Helmholtz wouldn't and as he is merely 'competent' I assumed he didn't. Now, a 'gifted' commander would have had a brilliant insight that the lancers would continue to pursue and had more options.

The QO, in line with their attack orders, wheeled to the right and advanced on the LLL (so no die roll). The Guards continued to fire (I felt there was little chance of them climbing the fence, reforming then charging), gallantly supported by Battery A; no wonder Captain Torricelli is widely thought of as a 'jolly good chap' (actually he added 1 to the cautious option of withdrawing but they still stood and his reputation will doubtless rise, either as 'he is a jolly good chap' or as 'pity, he was a jolly good chap').

On a fifty-fifty roll the Fusiliers 'chose' to hold their position and continued to generate large quantities of smoke. DH's musketry in reply was, however, of a much improved quality causing three hits and the loss of a base (Col Berg's luck was back in form). The Fusiliers thus required two resolve tests (losing the fire fight and the loss of a base). They passed the first but needed the steadying influence (he provided a re-roll) of Col Dirac to pass the second.

With little alternative Battery A continued to fire on the 4th (at reduced effect due to losses) and again scored 2 hits. Sadly, this was their last moment of glory as the 4th shot the last gunners down (General Helmholtz had clearly picked a good moment to leave; he would have been at risk of being a casualty).

The Guards scored two hits on the LLL causing the loss of another base before they could respond. Courtesy of Col Satie shouting 'give 'em a volley' they responded with two hits so only needed the one resolve test which they passed with a magnificent score of 12!

It was at this point that I realised that I'd not unlimbered the Hesse-Damall artillery last turn! – clearly, I was caught up in the excitement... To compensate I gave them a 'return fire' at the Guard which resulted in three hits and a resolve test for the guards. Col Bunsen required all his luck (+1) to get them to just scrape through the test.



The end of turn 6, 'Gunner' Helmholtz is now with Battery B. The Fusiliers can be seen to have lost a base. In the background, QO has wheeled to flank the rather reduced LLL.



A better view of the infantry clash

General Brahms snatched the initiative again and took **Turn 7**. Just as well or the LLL would have been in lots of trouble. He directed them to fall back (no die roll, 'player' decision) and the Light battery turned to fire on the QO (1-4 to fire on the QO, 5 – 6 to continue to fire at the Guards). Captain Mahler was clearly just the sort of jolly good chap one needs at a critical juncture.

With the enemy battery silenced the next question was what the 4th would do? I thought the best option was for them to advance so that they'd be able to fire at the guards or the fusiliers. Col Verdi, being the inspirational sort, went for the best option but which unit to be in position to fire at? 1 – 3 it would be the guards, 4 – 6 the fusiliers. The die roll came up a 2 so the guards it was.



The 4th has moved to attack the Guards while the LLL have fallen back.

Given the fire fight was going their way, it looked like DH would continue to fire, however the die roll came up for the option to attack and forward they went, intending to charge home. There were really three options here, remain stationery and fire, charge home (the Fusiliers were the weaker unit) or stop to be able to fire (later) at close range and I split the chances evenly. With both the DH and 4th going forward this was looking like a co-ordinated manoeuvre by General Brahms, something one can get in a solo game.

The Fusiliers held without any encouragement from Col Dirac and were able to fire and scored two hits. The DH were thus halted and returned fire and scored three hits, taking out another base. The Fusiliers narrowly passed the first test but failed the second, despite the re-roll from Col Dirac, and fell back.

PAC under the inspirational Col Bartok now lacked any orders (a new order is required after a rout) but what is a blue-blooded cavalryman to do except charge the enemy! Once again Oersted's luck was required but the PJ counter charged. But that was where his luck ended (a characteristic can only be used once in a turn) and the PAC routed the PJ. Battery B took a resolve test as the cavalry went past ('ere sarge, weren't them cavalry supposed to come from other direction?) they took a resolve test and passed (blooming cavalry, no damn good I tells 'e)



The view from Duke Horace's regiment: The Fusiliers fall back as the Prince Johan's Own Dragoons race past, pursued by the Princess Anna Cuirassiers. The two round bases with tufts are the markers I use for casualties (I'm really not keen on counters or whatever which clash with the scene).

The Light Battery fired a devastating blast at the QO which killed a base. Not even brave Col Beckman could keep them in position, and they fell back. The Hussar Battery however failed to inflict any casualties on the Guards who punished their presumption by killing one of the crew; the remainder passed their resolve test.



The Queen's Own fall back

So, **Turn 8** and over to General Helmholtz. He ordered the battery to turn and fire on the DH, rather hoping the cavalry would continue into the distance; player decision, the Fusiliers needed support (and I felt the battery should really have the opportunity to get one shot off!). The Fusiliers reformed and thus could not fire. The battery scored two hits on DH. I made the choice of target for the DH 50:50 and they fired at the Fusiliers, scoring 1 hit. Overall they were losing the fire fight, failed the resolve test despite Col Berg's luck, and fell back. 'Gunner' Helmholtz saves the day once again!



The DH can be seen to have fallen back. The cavalry rout and pursuit should have headed off the table by now.

With the possibility of being enfiladed, the Guards dived to see if they would reposition themselves to fire at the 4th (but would not be able to fire this time); another 50:50 decision that went for repositioning. The QO's attack order was still 'live' so accordingly they advanced.

With 3 of the starting 7 units lost, the Oldenstein force now needed to assess its army morale (when half (rounded down) the starting units are lost). It just scraped by but as the day was now drawing to a close (I thought they'd been enough action to give the flavour of the system and the situation looked favourable to Hesse-Damall – they pretty well had the bridge) General Helmholtz decided to cut his losses and retire while his remaining units would be able to fight another day (no 'fighting to the last man' in a campaign setting). General Brahms was pleased to hold the bridge and with a pleasant inn beckoning decided not to pursue.

I do hope that has provided the flavour of how I manage the detail. Obviously, one could just do the die rolls but I feel that giving some character to the colonels adds to the narrative. I'd love some feedback, particularly as a new-ish contributor, and to hear of how other people handle this type decision making (and, no doubt, so would the editor!)