

OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS

NEY'S VICTORY

A Concerted French Attack at Quatre Bras

by John Scarbeck

Ney vs. Wellington is an interesting collection of contrasts: a big game system in a relatively small frame of components; a refinement of a magnum opus by another designer that works better than the original; and a decidedly period game that has won converts from every rank and quarter. Except me, of course — there's just something about tactical games that leaves me cold, and I'm getting too curmudgeonly to change my tastes. Nevertheless, my shortcomings shouldn't deflect you nor prevent the publication of solid material on the game. To wit: — RAS

Historically, the battle of Quatre Bras ended in a draw. However, due to strong reinforcement, the Allied army was in a tactically superior position; it had blunted the French attack on all fronts and regained the ground it had temporarily lost during the battle. Consequently, Marshal Michel Ney, commander of the French forces at Quatre Bras had not accomplished his mission: the defeat of the Allied army. Tactically inept, Ney had ordered four unsupported cavalry charges against the center and bulk of the Allied line, resulting in the decimation of his cavalry. Incredibly, Ney had failed to engage some of his infantry units in any of the fighting (see Joseph Balkoski's *Ney vs. Wellington: The Battle of Quatre Bras*, in S&T nr. 74). Clearly, an adept tactician would have had the French army in a better strategic position, as well as better physical condition, at the end of the day.

By playing *Ney vs. Wellington*, it is possible to cheat history. Even against an opponent of equal ability, the French player can attain at least a marginal victory and finish the battle in a better position (i.e., having gained and held ground) than did Marshal Ney on June 16, 1815.

Leaders

The French army has seven leaders, all of whom are present at the start of the game. The Allied army also has seven, although only four are initially deployed. The leaders include all the army, corps, and division commanders (with the exception of the French 11th Cavalry and Imperial Light Guard Cavalry divisions' leaders) present at the battle of Quatre Bras.

Leaders affect morale and, more importantly for the attacking French army, shock combat. For the first three game-turns, the Allied player has only four leaders. He receives the Duke of Brunswick on game-

turn four, but no others until the tenth game-turn. Thus, the French army has a leadership edge for shock attacks, and should execute as many within each leader's effectiveness range as possible. This edge lasts for only the first half of the game; the French player must utilize it while he can.

Six of the French leaders have an effectiveness rating of two. The seventh, Ney, has a rating of three. Therefore Ney should be advanced to the center of the fighting, where he can influence the most shock attacks.

Leaders should, if possible, be placed one hex *behind* the units they are affecting. When stacked with a unit that suffers a loss due to fire or shock combat, a leader usually stands a 33% chance of being inverted. (When a unit suffers a loss from fire combat, and the fire was from maximum range, the leader has a 16% chance of being inverted.) Inverted leaders are practically worthless, as they may only rally routed units. Sometimes, though, the leader must be placed on units adjacent to the enemy (because of enemy units to the rear); also, placing a leader directly on the line will sometimes bring another friendly unit within his range. Ideally, a leader should stack with a unit that has suffered considerable losses and been pulled out of line. If the unit is then forced to check morale, the leader will lessen its chances of rout.

Infantry

Skirmishers. Skirmishers have two intrinsic advantages over regular infantry: mobility and defense. They may move five hexes per turn, regardless of terrain costs. Also, they are a class three target that possesses all-around facing (they cannot be enfiladed, and may attack through any hex-side). Conversely, skirmishers possess a few disadvantages: they may not execute shock attacks against formed units; they receive no benefit from leaders; and they have a greater susceptibility to rout than other infantry formations. Nevertheless, when employed correctly, skirmishers become an invaluable arm to the French attack.

Skirmishers reach maximum effectiveness in Bossu Wood. There they may shock attack any Allied unit. There they can easily outmaneuver any Allied non-skirmish unit. Therefore the bulk of the French skirmishers should attack through Bossu Wood.

The French player should immediately, during his initial facing/formation phase, dissolve his six westernmost light battalions (those nearest Bossu Wood) into skirmishers.

Each of the three light battalions starting play on hex 0215 has six strength points. Thus, upon movement, the eighteen skirmish units should be divided into three separate stacks of six. The three light battalions on hex 0223, with five strength points each, should be divided into three stacks of five skirmishers. The three westernmost skirmisher stacks should move northwest, into Bossu Wood, and then turn northeast, heading for Quatre Bras and squashing any Allied resistance in between. The three lesser skirmisher stacks should head for the eastern boundaries of Bossu Wood, where they can either skirt the Wood and try to outflank the Allied line, or plunge into the Wood to encircle the Allied units therein.

The French player has thirty-six available skirmish units; these initial detachments will leave him three. He need not detach the rest immediately, but may want to subsequently; if so, these skirmishers should be sent to the east flank, where they can best make use of their mobility.

Column. All of the French infantry battalions begin the game in column. They should remain in column until the formation phase immediately prior to the movement phase that would place them within firing range of the Allies.

Line. All French infantry battalions form three-rank lines. On the other hand, the Allies have twenty-one battalions which form the more efficacious two-rank lines. Seven of these Allied units are present at the start of the game. There is little the French player can do about this disadvantage, except for eliminating those seven two-rank battalions via shock combat and/or artillery fire before game-turns ten and fourteen, when the rest of the Allied two-rank battalions appear.

Square. The French player, being on the attack, will rarely form his infantry battalions into square. Further, the Allied player has only four cavalry regiments, two of which are among the initial deployment.

Cavalry

Though subsidiary to the infantry, the French cavalry can help disrupt the Allied defenses, spreading disorder and rout as well as inflicting losses. The French player begins play with six regiments, whose strengths range from three to six points. The huge nine strength point lancer regiment arrives during game-turn nine, and two dragoon regiments (strengths of six and five) arrive on game-turn seventeen.

Kellerman and two cuirassier regiments (starting on hex 0225) should advance due north, along the eastern side of the road leading to Quatre Bras. Rather than splitting up, the two regiments should move together, stacked with Kellerman. Together they form a more potent charging force than when separated.

The two chasseurs regiments (hex 0229) should parallel Kellerman's advance, but remain several hexes distant. Traveling stacked together, these chasseurs should strike a spot in the Allied line west of the marsh bordering Materne Pond.

The remaining two regiments, the lancers (hex 0230), should gallop northeast with Pire, heading for Thyle and, ultimately, the Namur Road. These, along with the rest of the French cavalry regiments, should charge all token resistance (e.g., Allied skirmishers) before the Allied army deploys into battle-line.

As an overriding consideration, the French player should remember that unsupported cavalry attacks will take ground only against weak resistance, and even then will not hold it. Infantry should always be close behind each cavalry charge.

Artillery

In the actual battle of Quatre Bras, many (if not most) of the Allied casualties were inflicted by French artillery fire. If the French player is to win *Ney vs. Wellington*, he must re-create this punishing fire.

The French army has five artillery batteries (all present at the start). The Allied army has only two among its initial deployment, and receives no others until game-turn ten. Hence the French player must utilize his preponderant artillery as early, and as often, as possible.

The two westernmost batteries (hexes 0117 and 0123) should move as quickly as possible to the high ground bordering the southeast corner of Bossu Wood, south of Gemioncourt Brook. From that position the batteries will be able to fire upon any Allied troops situated within range on a lower level. They will even be able to fire "over the heads" of their own troops on levels four and below, because the high ground is still five meters above the heads of troops on level four.

The batteries on hexes 0627 and 0530 should move toward the main Allied line, between the northbound road and Materne Pond. They should stay four or five hexes apart, in order to bring as many Allied units within range as possible.

Meanwhile, the lone horse artillery battery (hex 0130) should swing northeast, with Pire's two cavalry regiments, toward Thyle. It will afford additional support to the French player's diversionary attack toward eastern Namur Road.

The French player should fire his five batteries at the best target within range, as often as possible. Each French battery may fire six times (two more than the Allied batteries); since there are twenty game-turns, and since each French battery is constantly

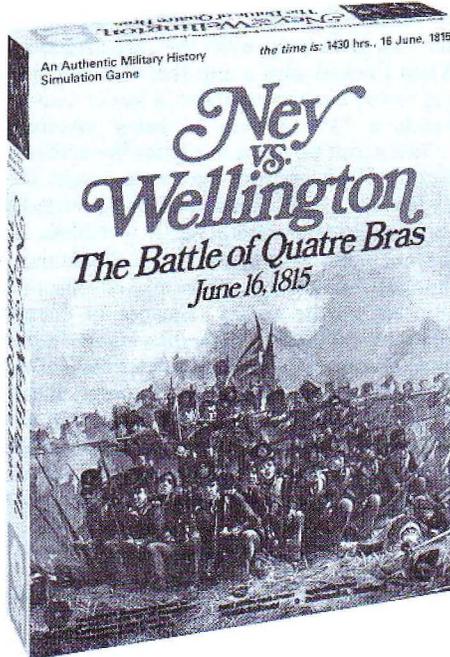
moving north, it will rarely (if ever) run out of ammunition.

Reinforcements

The French army receives one cavalry regiment during game-turn nine, and two on game-turn seventeen. That is the extent of its reinforcements. Obviously, the French player must plunge into the Allied army from the start, enjoying his temporary numerical superiority for the first half of the game. When his reinforcements do arrive, they should use grand tactical movement along the northbound road, moving wherever needed (hopefully toward Quatre Bras).

Strategy

The French player's main objective is, of course, Quatre Bras. For a substantive victory, he need "just" have at least fifty troop points north of Namur Road by game's end. For a decisive victory, he must also hold all four hexes of Quatre Bras. Evidently, the thrust of the French army's attack must be in this sector.



On the west flank, the French skirmishers should sweep through Bossu Wood, heading northeasterly toward Quatre Bras. As most of the Allied army will be engaged on the plains north of Gemioncourt Brook, the French skirmishers (with the help of two or three infantry battalions) should mop up whatever Allied resistance exists, sustaining few casualties. Then they will emerge from Bossu Wood, unite with the majority of the French forces, and capture La Bergerie, Quatre Bras, and the three building hexes north of Quatre Bras before the Allied reinforcements arrive.

On the east flank, a force consisting of Pire and two cavalry regiments, the horse artillery battery, and five infantry battalions (starting hexes 0529 and 0532), should make a diversionary attack toward Thyle and the Namur Road. Though this attack can be par-

ried by the Allied player, he must commit his six rifle skirmishers (hex 2738) and his Brunswick Corps (entering game-turn four) to this sector, as well as other skirmishers (those deployed just south of Materne Pond). This diversion will thus thin the Allied line in center, which must bear the brunt of the French attack. Though a diversionary attack, its components are strong enough to create havoc in the Allied rear if allowed to reach the Namur Road.

If all goes well, the French forces should occupy the four hexes of Quatre Bras and the three building hexes just north of it before the multitudinous Allied reinforcements arrive. Generally, the French army should arrive in Quatre Bras between game-turns twelve and fourteen.

The French player should stack as many infantry units (including skirmishers) and leaders as possible in Quatre Bras and in the three building hexes (3421, 3422, and 3522). The units stacked therein should be the strongest units available. The remainder of the French forces should be strewn about Quatre Bras, with at least one unit in La Bergerie. The French army should then make itself at home and wait for the Allied onslaught.

Though grossly outnumbered (the Allied army, with reinforcements, will have twice the strength of the French), the French army's situation won't be hopeless — for those units in building hexes are class five targets. And for all attacks, by both infantry and artillery at any range, the attack requires a die roll of six to deduct *one* enemy strength point. However, the Allied player won't waste much time firing into the building hexes — he will organize his troops and then shock attack. Thus any shock attacked unit would add three to its effectiveness rating. The French units in building hexes, possessing all-around facing, should fire at (but not shock attack) the nearest Allied units, with the rest of the French army supporting. Then it will be a matter of seeing whether the French can hold their positions or not.

(Tactical note: When stacking, the French player should *always* place the unit with the highest effectiveness rating on top. Usually this will also be the strongest unit.)

Ney vs. Wellington is such an accurate historical simulation that, with an opponent of nearly equal ability, the French player stands little chance of winning a decisive or even substantive victory. Though no plan is fail-safe, I believe my system of attack will maximize the French player's chances of victory, and will unquestionably put the French army in a more strategically advantageous position than did Marshal Ney, on June 16, 1815. ■■

