

## SCENARIOS &amp; VARIANTS

# NLB: AN ANTI-VARIANT

## Balancing the Campaign Game

by Mark Brazas

OK you guys, I'm giving you S&V type articles in this issue, and now it's up to you to really use them and report to me whether or not they're worthwhile. We ain't got no time here on the game farm to test out these here hybrids. Up to you to actually play these things and validate them with your experience (and then drop me a note about what you learned, etc.). *NLB* is an interesting enough system to play, so none of you have any excuse on that score (and I've heard rumors about campaign imbalance that have encouraged me to print this).

—RAS

While other simulations burst upon the wargaming scene like lightning, only to fade with equal rapidity to dust covered obscurity, *Napoleon's Last Battles* (*NLB*) maintains a remarkable longevity. Like *The Russian Campaign*, *NLB* enjoys a wide constituency of repeat players; the pleasure of the game lies in the contest, rather than in cracking the system or extracting historical information. A game player's game, its lineage includes *Napoleon at War*, *Blue and Gray*, and the Avalon Hill "classics."

The reasons for *NLB*'s success are four-fold: the campaign itself; the game system; the graphics and physical systems; and folio play-balance.

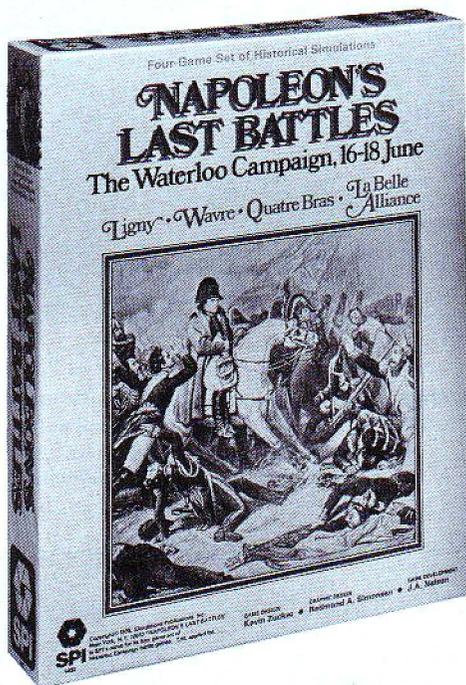
The historical campaign saw the unfolding of the "strategy of the central position." The French, numerically inferior to the combined Allied armies, sought to crush their initially-divided foes with successive concentrations, first against the Prussians, then against the Anglo-Allies. Hindered by command control, poor reconnaissance, wishful thinking, and the uniformly inept performance of Marshal Ney, they nonetheless came within the ace of defeating an enemy whose total strength numbered nearly twice their own.

In gaming terms, the battle went down to the last die roll. The Duke of Wellington conceded as much when he said, after the battle of Waterloo, "It has been a damned nice thing—the nearest run thing you ever saw in your life." Play-balance was definitely present in the original historical event!

The outcome was determined by the concentration of the rallied Prussian army with Wellington's "scum of the earth," who withstood the onslaught of Napoleon's veterans for nearly six hours to win one of the decisive battles in world history. A French victory here is one of history's great might-have-beens. Certainly a Europe dominated by France, rather than Germany, would have

had profound effects reverberating into the twentieth century. In short, the campaign is both eminently gameable and historically significant.

The game system and graphics practically speak for themselves. The system is easily grasped by novices as well as by experienced players who lack the time and/or inclination to spend hours getting into the game or fighting with their opponent over rules interpretations. The system captures the ebb and flow of Napoleonic battle elegantly for the scale used. The Combined Arms and Chateau rules are nice touches which give the game flavor without sacrificing playability. The



meticulously-researched map is one of the hobby's finest achievements (although "Mavelines" is an incomprehensible shorthand for "Sart-Dame-a-Velines," and the "o" is absent from Gemioncourt). The counters are appropriately colorful for a Napoleonic engagement, particularly the Anglo-Allies. Regimental commanders' names for the Prussians would have been excellent, but I have yet to discover this information anywhere. Finally—and most important, for competitive players—all four folios are well-balanced contests which reward careful placement and calculated risk-taking.

Unfortunately, the play-balance of the folios is not replicated in the campaign game.

One gets the impression that all the playtesting went into the parts, and little or none into the whole. This is a real tragedy, since more gamers' interest seems to be attracted to the big game. The Command and Reorganization rules are innovative concepts which deserve a better fate than to be interred in a battle which the French have no chance of winning against a competent Allied player or team. The same can be said for the entire campaign game, a mini-monster which two players can comfortably finish in a weekend or all-night marathon.

The following approach to the *NLB* Campaign Game is titled an anti-variant because the intent, perhaps pretentious, is to supplant the published campaign game rules as the standard version fought by competitive players. The suggested modifications seem to me to provide a pronounced improvement in the campaign game's play-balance at little cost to playability. The rules modifications are presented first, as a body, followed by a discussion of the rationale behind the changes.

### Rules Modifications

[13.2] (*change*) Title of this section should be 'Folio Victory.'

[19.27] (*addition*) Blucher may move a maximum of one hex (of any kind) per Friendly Player-Turn, until either the Prussian Army is Disintegrated (see 22.6) or until 2100, 16 June, whichever occurs first. During the time when his movement is limited, Blucher must still conform to the normal rules of Leader movement (see 19.21).

[21.0] (*addition*) Reorganized units may not move on the turn of Reorganization.

[21.2] (*change*) An Officer must be within five hexes of a Friendly Commander belonging to the same Army to attempt Reorganization. An Officer attempting, etc. (rest of the Case as is). Officers reorganizing units do not count against the Command Capacity of the Commander. Any number of reorganizing Officers may use the same Commander, regardless of his Command Capacity Rating.

[22.6] **Army Demoralization and Disintegration** (*addition*) In addition to Corps/Nationality Demoralization, the three Armies are also subject to Army Demoralization and Army Disintegration in the Campaign Game.

[22.7] **Determination of Army Demoralization/Disintegration**

(*addition*) During the listed date, when cumulative Combat Strength Point losses of an Army equal or exceed the following levels, Army Demoralization (Dm) or Disintegration (Dis) occurs immediately.

	16 June	17 June	18 June
Army	Dm/Dis	Dm/Dis	Dm/Dis
French	60/-	90/-	90/-
Prussian	55/75	65/85	65/85
Anglo-Allied	25/40	40/50	45/55

Demoralization/Disintegration of one Army does not preclude Demoralization/Disintegration of another. If two Armies pass Demoralization/Disintegration levels at the same instant, the non-Phasing Player's Army is considered to have been Demoralized/Disintegrated first.

#### [22.8] Effects of Army Demoralization/Disintegration (addition)

[22.81] If the French Army is Demoralized, the French immediately lose the Game.

[22.82] If the Prussian or Anglo-Allied Army is Demoralized, the French Player is allowed the option of subtracting 1 from the die-roll on any attack made against units of the Demoralized Army exclusively. This option is exercised *after* the die is rolled. Attacks by the Demoralized Army are not affected, nor are French attacks on defenders which include units of an undemoralized Army.

[22.83] If the Prussian or Anglo-Allied Army is Disintegrated, all attacks by French units on the Disintegrated units may be shifted one column to the right on the Combat Results Table; i.e., a 2-1 would become a 3-1, etc. (A 6-1 would remain a 6-1, but a 9-1 may be adjusted to a 10-1 Automatic Victory—see 28.0). This odds-column shift is optionally applied by the French Player *before* the die is thrown.

[22.84] If units of a Disintegrated Army (only) attack the French, the odds are shifted one column to the left on the CRT; i.e., a 2-1 becomes a 1-1. Army Demoralization, Army Disintegration, and Corps/Nationality Demoralization are separate effects which are suffered cumulatively, in addition to any Combined Arms odds-column adjustment (if the Combined Arms rule is used). **Example:** If 7 Strength Points of Prussians are attacked by 22 Strength Points of French in a Combined Arms attack while the Prussian Army is Disintegrated, the French Player could employ any odds ratio equal to or less than 5-1 (normal 3-1, plus one column to the right for Combined Arms, plus one column to the right for Army Demoralization). In addition, the French could subtract one from the die roll after the attack was made. If the Prussian units belonged to a Demoralized Corps, they would suffer Corps Demoralization movement penalties and inability to advance after combat in their turn. Automatic Victory may still be achieved by Disintegrated units which attack at 11-1 (see 28.0). Attacks on or by units of "mixed" morale suffer penalties of the least-disadvantaged unit. Specific combinations are listed below; "Dm" refers to Army Demoralization:

Units	Penalty	
	Attacking	Defending
Dm + normal	none	none
Dis + normal	none	none
Dis + Dm	-1 on die roll	none

[22.85] If the Anglo-Allied Army Disintegrates, all non-British, non-KGL units of that Army are immediately removed from play (including reinforcements which have not yet entered the map) and considered eliminated by the French Player. Such units never return, even if the Anglo-Allied Army is subsequently "reintegrated" (see 22.86).

[22.86] Armies (except the French) may become undemoralized or reintegrated by the passage of time (i.e., arrival of reinforcements; see 22.7) and/or Modifications to Army Demoralization/Disintegration Levels (see 22.9).

#### [22.9] Modifications to Army Demoralization/Disintegration Levels (addition)

[22.91] At the instant the Prussian or Anglo-Allied Army is Demoralized, the French Demoralization Level is increased by 10 points for each Demoralized Army. This bonus may be earned only once per Allied Army by the French. Once earned, it is not revoked, even if the Allied army in question subsequently recovers its morale.

[22.92] At the instant that the first combat occurs between French and Prussian units on the *La Belle Alliance* mapboard, on 1100 June 18 or later, the Anglo-Allied Demoralization and Disintegration levels increase by 10 points.

[26.0] (*change*) Delete the Level of Victory section, and replace with the following:

#### LEVEL OF VICTORY

*French Decisive:* If the Victory Point Total reaches 230 or more Victory Points at any time, the French Player wins an immediate Decisive Victory.

*French Tactical:* 150 Victory Points at game's end.

*French Marginal:* 100 Victory Points at game's end.

*Allied Marginal:* Avoid French Victory.

*Allied Tactical:* 50 or less Victory Points at game's end.

*Allied Decisive:* If the French Army is Demoralized (see 22.6) at any time before the French have achieved a Decisive Victory, the Allied Player wins an immediate Decisive Victory.

#### [27.0] Allied Reliability (addition)

[27.1] Whenever a non-British, non-KGL unit of the Anglo-Allied Army is attacked, a die is rolled prior to combat resolution (**Exception:** 27.3). Results as follows:

1-3: Unit defends at normal Combat Strength

4-6: Unit defends at half Combat Strength, fractions rounded up. Halving for Allied Reliability and Terrain (see 5.6) is cumulative; a unit's Combat Strength may never be reduced below 1, however.

[27.2] Prior to any attack involving Anglo-Allied units, a die is rolled for each non-British, non-KGL unit immediately prior to combat resolution (**Exception:** 27.3). Results as follows:

1-3 Unit attacks normally.

4-6 Unit remains in place, but does not add its Combat Strength to the attack.

Units which can not participate due to Allied Reliability suffer the same Combat Result as other attacking units. Units which have "failed" the Reliability test may not advance after combat. If such units compose the entire attacking force, the result is an automatic **Ar**.

[27.3] On both attack and defense, Allied units are not subject to Reliability die rolls if they are stacked with, or are directly adjacent to, any British or KGL Combat unit.

#### [28.0] Automatic Victory (addition)

##### GENERAL RULE:

Automatic Victory allows destruction of Enemy units during the Friendly Movement Phase. As soon as 10-1 odds or better are achieved against a defending stack or single unit, it is eliminated without Friendly loss. All Combat Strength and CRT-column modifications for terrain and Army Disintegration are used in computing Automatic Victory odds. The Zone of Control of the eliminated defender, including occupied hex(es), may be ignored for the remainder of the Player-Turn. Friendly units may freely enter these hexes, paying only normal Terrain costs. The Friendly units which achieve Automatic Victory remain in place for the remainder of the Player-Turn (**Exception:** 28.4).

[28.1] Friendly units used to achieve Automatic Victory may not be used to attack other Enemy units (either Automatic Victory or normal Combat Phase attack) in the same Player-Turn. If units used in an Automatic Victory are adjacent to Enemy units in the Combat Phase, these Enemy units must be attacked by other Friendly units. If this is not done, all Friendly units participating in the Automatic Victory are eliminated.

[28.2] Automatic Victory may be declined; i.e., odds voluntarily may be reduced below 10-1. The attack is then conducted in the Combat Phase; the Enemy unit(s)' Zone of Control remains present throughout the Friendly Movement-Phase.

[28.3] For Automatic Victory purposes, Allied Reliability (see 27.0) is ignored. All Allied units defend against Automatic Victory at normal strength, modified for Terrain and Army Disintegration.

[28.4] One unit participating in an Automatic Victory may advance into the hex occupied by any eliminated defending unit, at any time during the Friendly Combat Phase.

[28.5] Units which begin the Friendly Player-Turn in Enemy Zones of Control may not leave, even if the Enemy unit(s) suffers Automatic Victory. The Friendly units may, of course, be used to achieve Automatic Victory—provided they are in Command (see 20.0).

### Rationale

The Blucher movement limitation attempts to capture the "hussar mentality" of *Alt Vorwärts*. Blucher's offensive spirit was a key element in Napoleon's decision to attack the Prussians first and in the eventual Allied victory. (Over Gneisenau's objections, Blucher moved the Prussian Army to the aid of Wellington—the most important decision of the campaign. The subsequent enshrinement of the lily-livered and Anglophobic Gneisenau in the pantheon of German military glory remains a mystery to this writer).

The Prussian Army included a substantial number of green *Landwehr* and militia with shaky commitment to the Army or to this war. Only a year previously, recruitment efforts had met with rebellion in several provinces. A concentration in the face of the enemy, followed by immediate retreat upon any sign of offensive activity by Napoleon, was not the ticket to confidence for the Prussian Army.

The existing rules encourage a conservative Prussian first-day strategy. The leaders run for the rear while the Army sacrifices as few troops (preferably 2-4s) as possible. The fleeing leaders reorganize the losses as soon as they occur. This is not the way battles were fought, especially under Blucher. His was a young, impressionable army, only recently reorganized by Scharnhorst's reforms, still stinging from the humiliation of 1806. To maintain this army, he must maintain his own reputation, and face the French on the ground he had chosen.

Army Demoralization/Disintegration is a straightforward adaptation from the original folio rules. It simply reflects the fact that armies concentrated to fight, and the word got around rather quickly when defeat was at hand. It would have been more realistic to have some sort of "group" morale—perhaps a percentage of total strength points—for each independent detachment, but this would have burdened players with the tedious job of

calculating and recalculating morale levels, and deciding to which detachment troops in transit properly belonged. I think the rule works well—the majority of casualties will generally be incurred on the significant “front.”

Allied reliability is likewise simple. Some Allied troops spent the 18th of June cooking din-din in the Forêt de Soignes. Others fought like lions or Englishmen. Wellington's dispositions at Waterloo deliberately sandwiched these unreliable elements between steady British and KGL regiments.

The Automatic Victory rules prevent the Anglo-Allies from stalling a French exit with a succession of 1-7s lined up along the road to Brussels. They also add a new dimension of tactical difficulty for the Allies which reflects their qualitative inferiority in cavalry and artillery. Wellington's retreat must be conducted with a good deal of skill to prevent pins and early losses. The 10-1 attack may be considered a rout which allows the attacking waves to penetrate the line.

The reorganization changes effect a more realistic pace for Prussian recovery from Ligny. They also nullify the conservative Prussian strategy discussed earlier. With Automatic Victory, the French can cause Prussian headaches on the 17th with an energetic pursuit. The role of personal leadership by the top Commanders is given more appropriate weight.

The new victory levels attempt to rectify the absurdity of the old ones, under which the French could destroy both Allied Armies (twice over, at that) with scant losses, and still lose the game. Doubtless some will object to the interpretations of victory. After all, the French still had the Russians, Austrians, and another corps of Prussians to fight. But military force does not operate in a vacuum. I remain convinced that a French victory in the campaign, as I define it, would have taken the political wind out of the Congress of Vienna's sails. Provided, of course, that Napoleon had exorcized the vaulting ambition of 1813, when in a fit of *hubris* he rejected the coalition's recognition of his throne in exchange for return of the French annexations in Germany of 1810, Illyria, and the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. Certainly the political climate in France, bled white by the wars of conquest, encouraged a moderate view of Empire.

### Conclusion and Suggestions for Further Development

I think that evenly-matched opponents will find themselves having a more exciting and realistic time with the Waterloo campaign under the rules presented above. The new version eliminates the artificial and ahistorical first-day strategies fostered by the old rules. It also discourages the Allies from playing lazily, which the old rules allowed them to do. Rather, Blucher and Wellington must fight artfully on the original battlefields of Ligny and Quatre Bras. Further, they are rewarded for appropriate offensive action by possible French Demoralization. (This is by no means a chimera.)

The outcome of the first-day battles will do much to determine the subsequent course of the game, but so will the retreats and pur-

suits of the 17th. In several solitaire playtests, I've had results ranging from Allied victory on the first day to decisive French victory. The later tests tended toward the marginal decisions.

These rules are proposed as an anti-variant. Ideally, SPI would reproduce these pages and include them in a 2nd edition of *NLB*. Many players are reluctant to use magazine articles and other unofficial sources of rules. This is not surprising in light of the uneven quality of these sources. Also, using magazine rules puts the non-subscribers—who presumably include a high proportion of novices and “amateurs” without financial and/or obsessive interest in games—at a disadvantage. It leads to player fragmentation and makes it harder to get a decent contest up where both players know what the game looks like. This would be most unfortunate for a game with as much potential for mass fan appeal as the *NLB* Campaign.

As mentioned previously, these rules were designed to redress play imbalance without destroying the playability of the original. I think the effect of the real campaign is captured; players make the right moves, though perhaps for the wrong reasons. Another job remains to be done with a tournament version of the *NLB* Campaign. This would give us a real live operational simulation of the Waterloo Campaign, replete with hidden movement and scads of tables, as a worthy companion to *Wellington's Victory*. Such a Tournament Game would include:

- *Improved logistics* rules providing for resupply after engagements (e.g., the first day's battles). Muffling, the only Prussian commentator translated into English, mentions removal of ammunition supplies from Gembloux to Wavre—logistics might be tied to...

- *Off-board movement* to provide a satisfactory rationale for the movement of Thielemann's corps and Grouchy's detachment to Gembloux in terms other than madness. (In the published rules, such a move is not simply idiotic—it's illegal.)

- *Fatigue*. Unlike cardboard counters, exhausted men must occasionally pause to sleep, hungry men to eat.

- *Limited intelligence*. In a strategic sense: not only was Napoleon ignorant of Bulow's whereabouts on the 16th—so was Blucher! The positions of their opposite numbers were a matter of guesswork to the Allied commanders throughout much of the campaign. The French had similar problems. Tactically, the French had little idea what was waiting for them on the reverse slopes of the Waterloo position. The Nassau brigade on Wellington's extreme left lost more heavily to their oncoming Prussian allies than to the French. The unannounced arrival of D'Erlon's corps on the French left at Ligny came close to demoralizing Vandamme's hard-pressed corps through mistaken identity.

- *Multi-commander rules* for multiple players which reflect the coordination/communication difficulties of the 1815 campaign.

- *Movement differentials* for tactical, strategic, and forced march movement. An uncertainty factor—to simulate, for instance, the

fire in Wavre which slowed Bulow's march on the 18th—would be nice:

- *Command control* to provide for the peregrinations of D'Erlon's corps, and the tactical ineptitude of Ney and Orange.

- *Improved night and weather* rules.

I haven't seen OSG's *Napoleon at Leipzig* yet; from the ad copy it seems that many of these innovations may be appearing on the hex-grid. Perhaps they can be transferred, with appropriate reworking, to the 1815 campaign. The physical and game systems of *NLB* are begging for state-of-the-art development. Address correspondence to:

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### Napoleon's Last Battles Addenda

[8.17] (*addition*) If a unit(s) is attacked through Stream, River, Bridge hexesides by artillery bombardment only, the unit's defense strength is not doubled. Artillery may bombard across Pond hexesides at one or two hex range.

[9.11] (*addition*) Entry of reinforcements may be delayed to later Game-Turns. If reinforcements' entry hex(es) are blocked by Enemy units or their Zones of Control, the reinforcements may enter at the closest open board-edge hex. Reinforcements which do not enter the map are not counted in the Victory Point total of the Campaign Game or Folios.

[10.3] (*change*) Delete the parenthesized section “(and . . . command).”

[13.1] (*clarification*) The definition of occupation given in this rule applies to the Supply rules of the Campaign Game (see 24.2).

[14.3] (*clarification*) If French losses reach 35 Strength Points and the Prussians are undemoralized, the French immediately lose the game.

[24.0] (*clarification*) Delete the parenthesized reference to 0900 hrs. Supply is determined during the Command and Reorganization Phase of each day's initial daylight Play-Turn.

[24.1] (*change*) This rule should read: . . . All Prussian Supply is traced to any hex on the *eastern* map edge. All Anglo-Allied Supply is traced to any hex on the northern or *western* map edge.

[25.0] (*clarification*) When using both 25.3 and 25.4, 25.3 takes precedence over 25.4. ■■

