



BORODINO

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I support Rob Gibson's opinion that Borodino is a very playable game. The French numerical superiority is matched by the defensive strength of the Russian position, and there is plenty of scope for tactical variation. I should, however, like to raise two issues which SPI rules for battles of this period do not make adequate allowance.

The first issue is that of fresh reserves. I refer not so much to reinforcements arriving on the battlefield, as to units held in reserve to launch the crucial blow at the enemy battle-line which has already been weakened by attrition typical in battles of the Napoleonic period. The assault of fresh troops against the crucial point of the enemy's front which had previously been weakened by continuous bombardment and attack was an essential feature of Napoleonic battle tactics if not always working out in practise.

Such tactics are often difficult to simulate with SPI rules as the battleline tends to be jam-packed, there are no attrition rules, and overstacking is not allowed. I would suggest the following.

a) That after units have been in combat for three consecutive game turns, they be flipped over signifying that they are eligible for a decisive attack.

b) Unit strengths remain the same, but if a player has units available which have not been hitherto engaged in the battle, he can employ these to overstack units which have already been engaging the enemy units concerned on the basis of only one extra unit per hex, and for one phase turn only.

c) At the end of the combat phase he must unstack with the fresh unit nearest the enemy, and the previously engaged unit retreated if necessary one hex rearwards.

This rule should increase the fluidity of the battle, but more important place a premium on husbanding reserves instead of placing everything in the battleline as the SPI rules tend to encourage at present.

The second issue is the fog of war, or confusion on the battlefield. SPI rules put the player in the position of a general with a helicopter and two-way radio. It is well known however that major battles in this period involved armies which were really too large for effective control once battle had been joined. Aides de camp were shot up or lost their way, new orders were imperfectly drafted in the heat of the battle; a few scribbled words on a scrap of paper relied all too often on a degree of intuition and comprehension that the average corps commander did not possess.

Advantage can be taken of the fact that the Napoleonic game scenarios usually give a complete breakdown of the opposing armies at the corps level. Major battles tended to be fought tactically at the corps level. Corps commanders bore the brunt of the responsibility for carrying out the overall battle plan. Therefore failure of communication between the corps commanders and the commanding general often resulted in unfortunate consequences.

Moreover, distance, smoke and topographical features added further to the difficulties of battle control.

All these factors might be allowed for by a dice throw before new manoeuvres could be carried out. The dice throw would take into account the physical difficulties of control as well as weaknesses in communication. An army with better staff and/or rapport between corps commanders and commanding general would be less penalised than its opponent.

For substantial Napoleonic battles such as Borodino I would propose the following:

a) That before the game each player secretly writes battle objectives and instructions for each of his corps on scraps of paper. These are then placed on one side so that each player is unaware of his opponent's plans.

b) Players on their honour are expected to adhere to these corps instructions during the course of the game. If a player suspects his opponent is making dispositions that can not have been foreseen before the game began, he can ask his opponent to show him the relevant instructions.

c) No challenge should be made without reasonable cause, but if a player is unable to show he had foreseen and allowed for the developments concerned, he must shake a dice to see if he can issue new instructions. The dice must be thrown for each corps requiring new instructions. If his throw is a bad one, the corps must continue to adhere to its original instructions even though these may no longer reflect the real situation. It is assumed however that every corps is automatically entitled to take action to defend itself, and such action will have precedence unless there are instructions to the contrary such as coming to the aid of another corps regardless.

For example in the battle of Borodino the Russian player might have to shake a 4,5, or 6 to alter instructions while the French player can make changes on any throw but a 1 or 2. When using this rule playing Borodino my opponent developed major deep flanking attacks against both my flanks leaving a weak centre to undertake a very exposed holding attack. I, as the Russian player, overwhelmed this attack while his flanks were still moving up, and in a subsequent counterattack destroyed his centre completely. Unfortunately, I had failed to give the counterattacking corps instructions for assisting the rest of the army when their task was accomplished. A series of unlucky throws resulted in two corps being unavailable for resisting the French pincer movement on the flanks with disastrous effects for the Russian Army.

This rule, though somewhat cumbersome, does add considerably to realism, and by formalising the role of generalship, gives the players a more interesting game, not to mention written material for detailed post mortem.