



NAPOLEON'S LAST BATTLES
FRENCH STRATEGIC OPTIONS
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There you are - it's June 16th 1815 and you are in command of a French Army which has terrified all Europe for over twenty years. Once again you have surprised your enemies with the sheer speed of your approach march and caught them at a disadvantage. Wellington has not yet got his motley army in place, Blucher awaits your assault with a force inferior to your available strength.

How are you to turn your advantage into a great victory over these two opponents and give yourself the chance to fall upon yet a third enemy which is advancing from the east? This is the dilemma which faced Napoleon and which confronts the French commander when he sits down to play SPI's excellent *Napoleon's Last Battles*.

There are basically two options open to the French commander during the first day of the campaign. He can concentrate on the Prussians at Ligny, hoping to administer the decisive defeat which Napoleon mistakenly thought he'd achieved. Alternatively, he can make a major effort against the Allied Army, under Wellington, at Quatre Bras, hoping to smash it completely so that it cannot recover during the course of the rest of the campaign.

Let us initially consider the first option. Its chief attraction is that the Prussian Army is immediately to hand and can be attacked from the opening move by the bulk of the French forces. Also, the French have a substantial advantage in combat factors (if you include the 1st Corps) of 208 strength points to 163; a much more flexible artillery command of nine units totalling 39 strength points against six units totalling 28; and more cavalry, fourteen units of 45 strength points to ten units of 27, which gives you a much higher degree of mobility. With Blucher able to give command to only two of his three corps at a time, while the French commanders can control five corps per turn, it should be possible to inflict demoralising losses on the Prussians. Once they are pushed out of the good defensive terrain behind Ligny a series of high odds attacks might even succeed in leaving them with insufficient units to maintain a cohesive line during the night turns; which will result in a virtual rout, providing the French with a rich harvest of victory points.

What are the drawbacks to such a plan? Primarily, it delays deployment of the French Army onto the Brussels road, giving the Allies (who will hold Ney alone with little difficulty) time to concentrate. This will make the end game hard to win, for the main French hope of achieving sufficient victory points depends on exiting units off the map towards Brussels. It can be done, but it will certainly be "a near run thing". Also, the Prussian commanders will, unless vigorously pursued by an adequate force, reorganise some of their troops and despatch reinforcements to stiffen Allied resistance.

This should lead us to consider the second option of concentrating large forces against Wellington on the first day, intending to destroy his initial strength and then fighting Waterloo on the next day with smaller numbers than were actually employed.

Its attraction is that the Allies can probably be driven so far back, and with such high losses, that they can't stop the French breaking through to Brussels early on the third day, thereby winning the game. Any Prussians, despatched from Ligny as reinforcements, cannot hope to march as quickly over the trails leading to the Dyle bridges as corresponding French units, from their rearguard position, can use the main Charleroi-Brussels road. The longer the Prussians delay marching north, the worse the Allied predicament and it may even be possible for the French to capture the Dyle Bridges from the west, thus irrevocably dividing Blucher from Wellington.

This plan's obvious disadvantages are that a largely undefeated army is left facing the French supply lines, which means a substantial rearguard needs to be left to guard against the possibility of a Prussian attack. Secondly, the French Army needs redeploying onto the Quatre Bras-Ligny road whilst in contact with the enemy, which consumes valuable time.

To those who question what happens if the Prussians rush forces along the connecting road on the opening turn, to create a combined Anglo-Prussian front, I would say that such a move is an invitation to disaster. It spreads the Prussian Army out of its strong Ligny position so that the French can concentrate high odds attacks, in the open, against selected points, for the whole of the 16th June. They will be destroyed.

In reality, of course, Napoleon rightly chose the first course of action outlined above. It was essential for him to defeat the Prussians before taking on the Allies, but then he didn't get more victory points for exiting units down the Brussels road than for obtaining a victory at Ligny. Therefore, in game terms I would favour the second strategy, for the bulk of the victory points are to be obtained, as I've stressed, by getting units off the map. The undoubted drawbacks of this plan can be overcome by careful tactics.

During the first couple of game turns manoeuvre the French Guard and 3rd Corps against the Prussian right, advancing northwards as rapidly as possible while making holding attacks against the centre prior to regrouping the forces under Grouchy. Move Napoleon up to command the attacking corps from around hex 2420. Meanwhile, Ney should be attacking the Allies with the 2nd Corps and the 1st Corps should be moving up to take up position near him. Around 17.00 hrs. it will be possible to detach the 3rd and 4th cavalry Corps and the independent 2nd Corps units down the Quatre Bras road complete with Napoleon. The rest of the army then pulls back to a line running Marbais-Fleurus, under Grouchy, to act as the rearguard.

There you are then - you've got him. It just requires that you play brilliantly, making no mistakes, and he won't have a chance to stop you.

TRAD. vs SF CONTINUED

More people are being introduced to games via SF/F games than by any other kind. It is the most rapidly expanding section of the hobby and it is here to stay.

Getting back to my original question; have you worked out why you play wargames yet? If you disagree with my comparisons between Traditional and SF/F games I would ask you to think again. I would say that whatever Traditional games can offer you, SF/F games can offer you more - unless you prefer 'restricted' games and 'restricted' is not a word anyone associates with wargamers.

There remains only one more question - Where do we go from here? After Science Fiction and Fantasy - what next?

What next, indeed?

Bibliography and acknowledgements: Roget's Thesaurus, Spelling Made Easy, The Phoenix 1-11, numerous amateur and not-so-amateur publications and the manufacturers and designers of SF/F games everywhere.