



## NAPOLEON'S LAST BATTLES

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It was with Napoleon At Waterloo that SPI tried out the idea of an "introductory" game with simple, unambiguous rules making for quick and enjoyable play. Since then, games from Borodino to Sixth Fleet have claimed descent from the "NAW System", as has the whole range of "Quad" games. And, the wheel has turned full circle. SPI return to the Waterloo Campaign to show just how far game-design has come in the six years since Napoleon At Waterloo.

The NAW mapboard was adequate but compare that of the equivalent "La Belle Alliance", with its blue streams, green woods, tan-coloured elevations and discreetly numbered hexes. The units, too, are vastly improved: appropriately colour-coded, serving as a reminder of the assortment of differently-attired troops under Wellington; browns, greens, and shades of grey padding-out the "thin red line". As to the play, with nearly twice as many units on the board (99 as against 53), "La Belle Alliance" still flows very nicely. The change from divisional to brigade level serves to increase the interest of the game but **without** the complication that was found in the "NAW Expansion Kit" rules.

Taken separately, each of the four games in this package has its particular appeal. Having tried myself to develop a balanced simulation of Quatre Bras, I now find that SPI have succeeded! Starting with just four units on the board, the Anglo-Allied player has to hold off Ney's entire force until the remaining 80% of his strength arrives, in dribs and drabs that will usually have to be flung straight into the front line. If "Quatre Bras" is the intricate needle-match, "Ligny" is the duel of steam rollers. A real Napoleonic set-piece this: army hammering against army. "Wavre" is interesting, if only for its novelty while "La Belle Alliance" is certainly one of the better games covering the classic among classic battles.

Fears the the "Campaign Game" would turn out a mere slapping-together of the separate Quads were unfounded. This really must be considered as a

game in its own right. There are additional rules, incorporating command-control by leader units. At first, these seem complicated but they work well, demonstrating the importance of the leaders' presence without recourse to the "idiocy" rules we used to see. These rules encourage corps-integrity; it pays to keep units in their historical formations. For one thing, "eliminated" units can be brought back by corps officers "to fight another day", albeit in depleted form. (To allay suspicions of misprints on the mapsheets, it is worth pointing out that in the Quad games, some units **start** in depleted state).

These extra rules are not just gimmickry. For the extra dimension they add, they detract very little from the ease of play. This really is not a complex game. Large, but not so complicated that it cannot easily and rewardingly be played solitaire.

Best of all, this game captures the "feel" of the situation. Even playing strictly to win, one is led by the rules to act in a "historical" fashion. Even after reading the books on the campaign, even after pacing over the battlefields, there is still a lot one can learn from this simulation. After all, you know that at the end of the history book, Wellington will win. Wellington himself realised all too clearly that Quatre Bras and Waterloo were touch-and-go affairs, the outcome uncertain. In this simulation, one realises some of the very real possibilities. In one game, Wellington was cut down by French Lancers before Quatre Bras. Something similar actually happened but he just managed to escape. What if he had not? (In this case, the Prince of Orange did a valiant job holding Quatre Bras until Blucher could disengage from the great Battle of Marbais, join hands with the Allies at Quatre Bras, and turn with them to inflict crippling losses on the pursuing French!)

In summary, "Napoleon's Last Battles" is a set of four highly enjoyable games. It is also one of the best **simulations** of the whole Waterloo campaign that you will come across.