

THE CRIMEAN WAR

Down the hill, down the hill, thousands of Russians

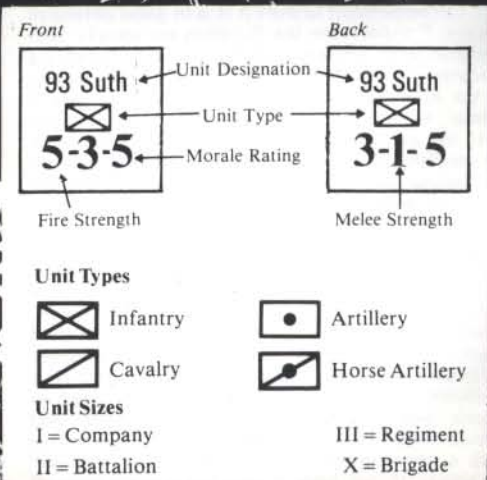
D I A MACK

With 'Crimean War' SPI have expanded on the original quadrigame idea, using the familiar framework of four related battlepieces, similar game-scales, limited numbers of counters and fairly concise rules, but then going on to add a 'little something' to the very simple mechanics of the earlier quads, to increase realism at some cost to playability (compared, that is, to other 19th-century quadrigames). In this recently published set the 'little something' has been included with a view to bringing out more of the tactical 'feel' of battalions of infantry, regiments of cavalry, and batteries of artillery moving and fighting on a fairly large-scale map in the school of warfare of the 1850's. To the move-fight system of the earlier works has been added a good pinch of 'Terrible Swift Sword', a soupçon of 'Musket and Pike', a dash of '1815' and a new set of CRTs which turn on unit morale and esprit rather than on bayonet strength; the result is a distinctly different sort of quad. I intend to discuss the general game-system and then to go on to have a look at each game — a brief look; the reader will do well to remember that to write an article such as this on a quadrigame it is necessary to have played four games at least once each, a very different state of affairs from having played one game three times.

The System

The four battles are 'Alma', the first battle on the road to Sevastopol on 20th September 1854; 'Balaclava', the Russian attempt on the British base on 25th October; 'Inkerman', the massive counter-stroke on 5th November against the besieging Allies, and the lesser-known 'Tchernaya River', the final Russian offensive on 18th August 1855. The clear, pleasant maps, on scales varying between 180 and 275 metres to the hex, owe more to 'TSS' and 'Stonewall' than to earlier quadrigame maps, emphasising slope, contour and ridge and their effects on movement and combat. Infantry battalions are the predominant units on either side, though there are variations on this in certain of the games, with artillery — especially Russian artillery — a close second; cavalry, except in 'Balaclava', is very much a supporting arm. British units are a jolly scarlet (even unto the Rifle Brigade!), the French are a cheerful blue and even the Russians have adopted a brighter shade of green than usual, all making for a colourful and easily distinguished mustering on the map. Pastel-blue Sardinians and dark red Turks complete the forces, these last two making one appearance each.

Unit factors look familiar but are in fact not what they seem, the treble-number display signifying instead fire strength, melee strength and morale factor; the first and last of these are, of course, based to some extent on abstract qualities but morale strength appears to stem from the equation that 200 bayonets = 1 strength point, taking the unit strengths given (for both sides) in Kinglake's 'Invasion of the Crimea'. Movement factors are not shown, being supposedly a standard 5 for infantry, 3 for artillery, and 7 for cavalry; in fact MF are different from the standard and from each other in 'Alma' and 'Inkerman' but only in the former game has the MF been added on the right margin of each counter, a useful extra which, I feel, could have been made throughout the entire set. Artillery units show a letter in lieu of a fire-strength factor as their effectiveness declines as their range increases; a separate table, soon memorized, gives fire-effectiveness at each hex-distance but then it is that one discovers that 'Inkerman' has an artillery table peculiar to itself and that 'Alma' has certain batteries so specialized that it takes the errata sheet to mention them!



The turn sequence gives those familiar with 'TSS' and 'Stonewall' a clear idea of what the game will feel like. It is:-

- Move
- Non-phasing player's defensive fire
- Offensive fire
- Melee
- Rally

For the benefit of others, this means that the phasing player, having moved, must stand his opponent's fire before he himself can initiate combat, possibly finding that units on whose presence he was relying have been disrupted, retreated or even destroyed before he so much as picks up his dice. Yes, the turn-sequence, like the weapons-system of the day, is defence-oriented and especially favours a defender well supplied with artillery; as artillery moves more slowly than other arms and may not fire in the turn in which it moves its value as a supporter of attacks is limited.

Fire combat between infantry units is possible only between adjacent units: being at discretion and not affected by ZOC rules, fire can be concentrated on selected targets. Melee combat on the other hand is mandatory between adjacent **undisrupted** units and the usual rules about all units in ZOC being required to have combat apply also. You can close with the enemy and choose your target but you have less choice about whom you cross bayonets with, so the fire-fight had better go as you had hoped that it would!

Morale, as I said earlier, is crucial to both fire and melee combat; a unit's morale rating determines how well it is likely to stand up to enemy fire without disrupting, its elan in offensive melee, and its ability to rally, that is to say recover from disruption. Fire attacks are resolved on the Fire CRT and can result in disruption and perhaps retreat too, dependent on whether the resultant figure is equal to or greater than the target unit's morale rating; disruption on disruption means elimination. Melee combat is resolved on a separate table, an integrated and rather complex one in which terrain determines the column to be read and the **attacker's** morale rating the horizontal line to be used. One picture is very much worth a thousand words here; graphic representation, Mr. Editor, please..... As you can see (I hope) a unit with a morale rating of 4 or 5 (most of the British) can melee at 1-1 or even 1-2 and still have a chance of success or at least of getting away unharmed, given the right terrain — and at 2-1 a good die roll makes it deadly. Finally a disrupted unit rallies on a die roll equal to or less than its rating — this can be enhanced by the proximity of unshaken friendly units or modified by that of the enemy.

British infantry tend to have good firepower and morale, making them a match for their Russian counterparts, but a shortage of melee strength points can be a problem if the Russians have closed in mass — this comes out particularly well in 'Inkerman'. The Russians are generally poor on both firepower and morale, some units being incapable of offensive fire and most becoming thus disadvantaged on being disrupted; morale varies from unit to unit, even among battalions of the same regiment. On the other hand, melee strength is high, markedly so in 'Alma' and 'Tchernaya' as Russian counters in those games represent two and four battalions respectively (a regiment has four battalions in their army); even a disrupted Russian unit can be difficult to shift if it is in good defensive terrain. Furthermore the Russians are usually well provided with artillery and this arm, traditionally a favoured one in Russia, is as good as that of any of the Allies. The French, who play a large part in 'Alma', have 'Tchernaya' mostly to themselves and put in an appearance (varying according to circumstances) in 'Balaclava' and 'Inkerman', are just below the British in firepower and morale but are well endowed with melee strength, making them dangerous to the Russians.

Cavalry, an arm which plays a significant role only in 'Balaclava' is a shock force and therein lies the rub. It is **automatically** disrupted after melee, whether offensive or defensive, and a disrupted cavalry unit which goes on to engage or be engaged in another melee is eliminated once combat is resolved! As a result cavalry should be used to attack enemy cavalry or isolated infantry and should then fall back to reorganise — scrimmage with a strong infantry force will be fatal. However its ability to fall back during the owning player's

defensive fire phase makes it very useful for delaying advancing enemy infantry over two or three turns.

The opportunity for putting a spoke in one's opponent's wheel with one's defensive fire is particularly appealing and brings in that "War-is-the-province-of-chance" touch which I appreciate in wargames. Attacks have to be in strength and have a good fire-plan so that the subsequent melee is not only at advantageous odds but also stands the best chance of tumbling fire-disrupted units into final ruin, and the best use of combined arms must be considered, especially in 'Balaclava'. Frontal attacks can be very bloody, and are frequently Pyrrhic victories when they are not beaten back in disarray, inducing one to think in terms of concentration of force and of flanking movements.

The rules follow the usual quad format of Standard Rules plus a Special Rules folder for each game. However the greater complexity of 'Crimean War' means that the Special Rules are more than just trimmings on the Standard ones; variations between games are more marked — for example 'Alma' and 'Inkerman' have different MF allocations, 'Inkerman' as already stated, has its own artillery fire table and also has quite different rules about stacking, and 'Alma' has its own rules regarding terrain effects and line-of-sight for artillery. As a result it is less easy than in other quads to pass from one game to another, especially when one is playing through the series for the first time, and a **close** study of the Special Rules folder is most advisable before starting each game.

Short notes on the games follow. However a criticism which applies to all four is one concerning unit designations, which are minuscule although in certain games it is most important to be able to see quickly what a unit's identification is or at least to which division it belongs. One has to look very hard and players whose eyesight is less than AI could have problems. In a number of recent games (NLB, 'Red Sun Rising', 'Fulda Gap' and 'Green Fields Beyond') quick recognition of unit or formation is essential to smooth play and yet the two last-named are the only SPI games which I have seen, in which the required information is printed in large type. This is due, I suspect, to Redmond Simonsen's avowed dislike of, or at least indifference to, historical designations on counters but if SPI are going to design games in which these are more than mere icing on the cake, then RAS must allow for this in his graphics.

The Games

'Alma'

A single-scenario game and the only one in the set in which the Allies have numerical superiority, although restrictions on French movement offset this advantage in the early stages. The Allies have to ford the steep-banked Alma and assault the Russians who are in a strong defensive position and

well-provided with artillery; a command control rule prevents a helter-skelter advance up the Heights as each division must be complete on the Russian bank before it can resume the advance, necessitating sensible deployment on the part of the Allied player. Russian infantry units in 'Alma' are half-regiments, i.e. two battalions representing the columnar formation, so imposing in appearance, so weak in fire-power, which the Russian used on that day.

Oddly enough there is little incentive for the Russian player to hold his position, other than its natural strength. Once his losses have reached a certain level Russian Preservation is likely to be triggered and when it is he gains victory points by withdrawing at least two units down the Sevastopol road on each turn — and loses points if he does not. Withdrawal is made easier if the Russians have already begun to fall back from their original position, especially as their artillery is rather slow-moving. In addition the cavalry of both sides is omitted from the OB due, says the designer, to the fact that neither side's cavalry did anything; this is very true but in fact the presence of large masses of Russian cavalry was the reason for the British 4th Division's being kept in reserve throughout the battle and for the cautious advance of Buller's brigade on the British left. The game places no such inhibitions on the Allied player and he is well advised to send at least one division on a march round the Russian right with all the insouciance of the French in 'Waterloo', secure in the knowledge that his own outer flank is safe as the Bank of England, whatever history may say. Talking of the French, the French Army in 'Alma' will advance farther than its historical counterpart ever did as there is no 'French Packs' rule: the real French declined to advance beyond Telegraph Hill on the grounds that they had to wait for their packs which they had off-loaded before crossing the Alma. As a result the 'game' Russians will find the Allied pursuit more of a danger than was actually the case.

Nonetheless, while 'Alma' lacks something as a simulation it is an enjoyable game and does not stray too far from the course of history. You can, if you like, try the French plan of having themselves attack the Russian centre and left while the British turn their right; this plan Raglan declined to implement due to the danger posed to such an operation by so numerous an enemy cavalry. But now....

'Balaclava'

Historically the 'battle' was a series of separate actions at the conclusion of which both sides called it a day with the Russians in possession of the three easternmost redoubts on the Causeway Heights and the British retaining the three westernmost ones; the British 1st and 4th Divisions, which arrived during the battle, were never committed.

[8.4] MELEE COMBAT RESULTS TABLE

Terrain (attacked into or across)	Combat Ratio (Attacker to Defender)								
	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	7-1	8-1	9-1	
Town, Redoubt hexside, Vineyard	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	7-1	8-1	9-1	
River hexside, Steep Slope hexside	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	7-1	8-1	
Woods, Gentle Slope hexside, Stream Hexside	1-2	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	7-1	
Clear, Aqueduct	1-3	1-2	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	
Swamp*	1-4	1-3	1-2	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	
Attacker Morale:	1	2	3	4	5				
III	1					E	3*	3*	2*
	2	1				3*	2*	2*	2
	3	2	1			2*	2*	1	1
	4	3	2	1		2*	1	1	R
	5	4	3	2	1	1	1	R	R
	6	5	4	3	2	1	R	1	1
	6	5	4	3		R	R	1	2*
	6	5	4			R	R	1	2*
	6	5				R	R	1	2*
	6					R	R	1	2*

Explanation:

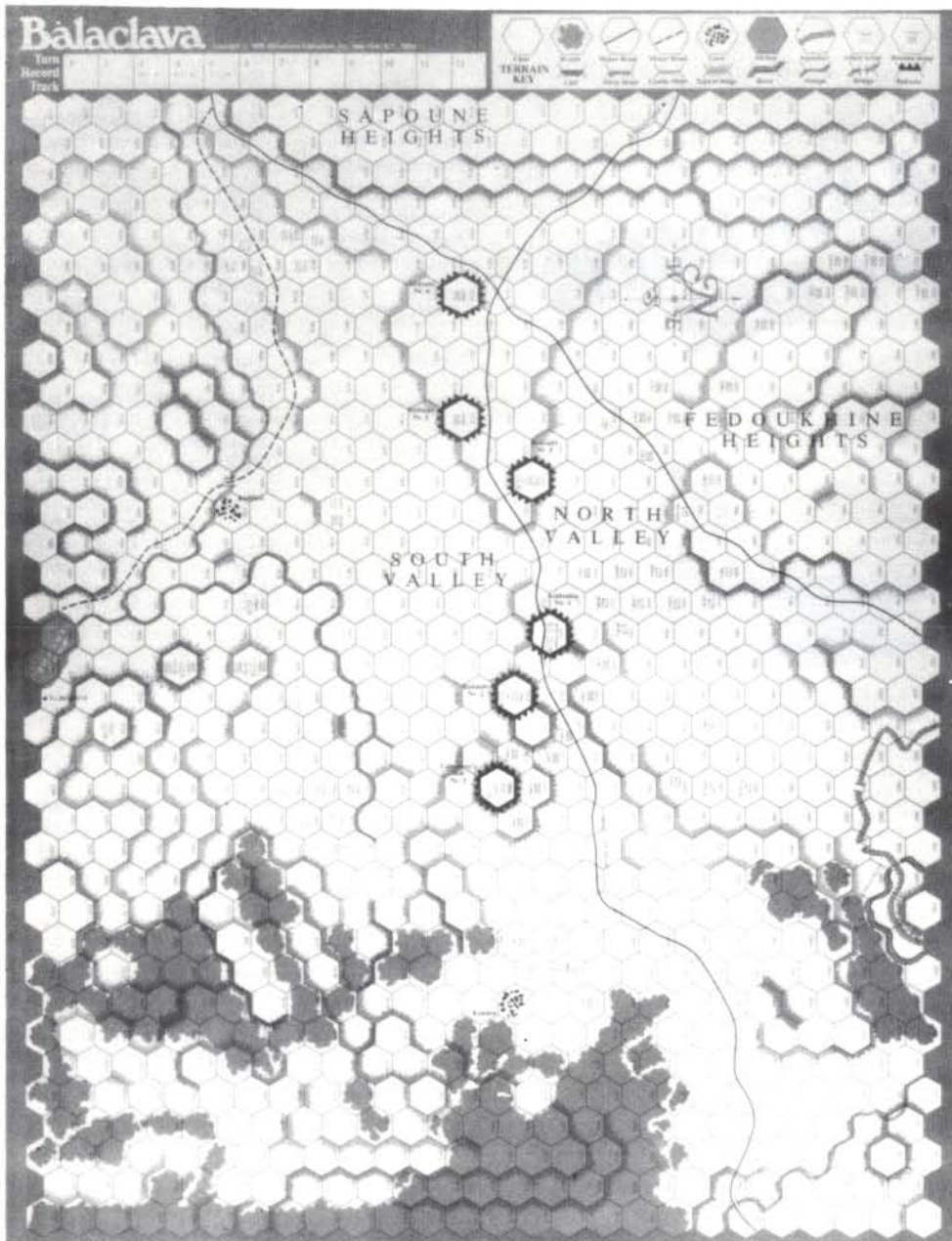
E = Eliminated; R = Retreat 1 hex (no disruption); 2 or 3 = Retreat 2 or 3 hexes (with disruption); * = Cavalry unit or already disrupted unit is eliminated; † = If attacking unit is also in a Swamp hex, use Clear terrain line.

Light results refer to Defender.

Retreat Modifiers:

Units with a Morale Rating of 1 add 1 to the number of hexes they must retreat.

Units with a Morale Rating of 5 subtract 1 from the number of hexes they must retreat.



The Balaclava mapsheet from SPI's 'Crimean War Quad'

As the designer says, a 'Balaclava' game needs to have more action induced into it and this he has done by giving the Russians an incentive to do better on the Causeway and the British another to recapture the lost redoubts; there is also an inducement for the Russians to make a more determined effort at raiding the British base at Balaclava Harbour. The result is a game which begins historically with strong Russian forces of cavalry and infantry having things pretty much their own way at first and then develops into a general action as the Russians fight to retain their gains. The Russian player will also have to decide whether or not Balaclava is a prize worth going for in the context of the situation; the naval and Royal Marine artillery batteries are a strong deterrent but their cordon can be breached. On the other hand the Cavalry Disruption rule, already outlined, makes the strong Russian cavalry force of limited value in fighting through to Balaclava; some of the slower but less brittle infantry will have to come too. A step-by-step advance to retake the Causeway Heights on the part of 1st and 4th Divisions is also on the cards — but will they recapture enough of the lost redoubts in time? It has been said that the best wargames give both sides a turn at attack and defence — well, 'Balaclava' does just that. It is a balanced and interesting contest even if history has had to be souped-up a little: like 'Alma' it has a single scenario. Unlike any other wargame which I have ever seen, its Designer's Notes consist entirely of two poems — Tennyson's panegyrics on the charges of the Light and Heavy Brigades!

'Inkerman'

Readers familiar with 'The Brand New Monty Python Paperbok' will remember the man who, in the midst of explaining the menace posed to human society by pet hamsters, cries "Oh God! I've burst my brain!" and falls lifeless to the floor with bits of cerebrum gouting from his ears. I rather think that the designer must have come near this moment when devising the multitude of optional rules for 'Inkerman' and I fear that the unsuspecting gamer may reach it if he decides to use them all, interesting as some of them are.

There are two scenarios, one historical, starting at about 0600 hrs. and the other, which allows freer and faster Russian deployment, starting in the small hours. Optional rules provide for random events (e.g. Soimonov not killed), for extra restrictions on movement in the thick fog that shrouded the battlefield, and even for clearer weather. The historical scenario may seem to impose crippling movement restrictions on the Russians but a study of Kinglake shows that no liberties have been taken with the timetable. Over-hasty Russian deployment can lead to early envelopment and defeat (I lost my first game in four turns!) but a more methodical committal of forces, building up to a relentless pressure on Fore Ridge can, given a few good die-rolls, push the British back in ever-increasing disorder. Stacking allows the Russians to pair battalions in the assault columns of Inkerman and the British to deploy certain regiments as two wings or to combine them

into complete battalions as soon as the fog clears. The optional rule which restricts movement in the fog is recommended, especially if players think that things are a little too easy for the British in the early moves; certainly the 'basic' fog rule, which merely reduces MF slightly and cuts down artillery line-of-sight, does not reflect the confusion and mystery of that famous Sunday morning.

It may seem that the British units are impossibly strong for their size: the astounding fact is that time and time again handfuls of British troops halted and disordered entire regimental columns. 270 men of the 77th stopped two Russian battalions in their tracks and about 200 of my own regiment sent another column "to the rightabout", as the sergeant major put it in a letter, without firing a shot or even crossing bayonets; this is reflected in the game but conversely Russian mass, if properly co-ordinated, can beat down the thin red line.

Footnote: Certain British battalions start the game as two counters (designated Skirmishers but actually the battalion divided into two wings as the organisation of the day allowed for) identified by the regimental number prefixed by the letters 'a' and 'b'. Eventually these counters may stack permanently to form full battalions and at this stage players will find the teeny-weeny unit designations aforementioned the very devil. The addition of markings to each half-battalion counter, e.g. shaded corners, underlined designations and so on, so that each pair may be identified at a glance is strongly recommended — and don't be like me; do it before you punch out.

'Tchernaya River'

The game notes say that in the actual battle Russian mass had the advantage at first but that superior French and Sardinian firepower told in the end. When we had at last finished the game both my opponent and myself asked, "What superior French and Sardinian firepower?"

What struck me as particularly odd was that by Move 10 the Allies' position was still securely held, apart from some giving of ground on the right flank and only five out of thirty-nine units had been lost — yet the Russians had won a decisive victory in a slow-moving encounter with little real combat!

The victory condition give the Russian VPs for overrunning or occupying certain hexes, the majority of which lie well outside the area defended by the Allies and to which the extension of the defended area would require dangerous overstretch. All the Russian player has to do is to edge slowly forward, supported by his plentiful and powerful artillery: French counterattacks will be blown away by the Russian guns and French defence can be disrupted by those same guns firing in the Russian offensive fire phase — The French artillery is so short-ranged as to be useless except against the Russian assault which never comes. As the game lasts for fifteen turns the Russian player has plenty of time to build up his front and then roll slowly across the map until he has the VPs he needs — and this without ever assaulting the main French position! Our game lasted for ten turns before we gave up, bored into near-somnolence despite the Russian 'victory'.

'Westwall' had 'Arnheim' as its one really good game; contrariwise 'Crimean War' has 'Tchernaya' as its one really not-good game — a pity, but there it is.

Taken as a whole 'Crimean War' is a good quadrigame with its own flavour, a rather richer flavour than that of the average quad due to the increased complexity of its rules. 'Inkerman' I put first for its potential variety, and 'Balaclava' a very close second for its wide-ranging activity and balance. 'Alma's' weakness as a simulation I have pointed out, but don't let this discredit the game — a 'French packs' rule and an inhibition of 4th Division crossing the Alma before Turn X or before Objective A has been captured can be added to spice it still more; but study Kinglake first! Who knows, perhaps I may come up with my own suggestions once this engrossing profile has sent you all scrambling to Hale with your piggy-banks. (Usual fee, Watson; cash, used notes, no Confederate money).