

# THIRTY YEARS WAR

by Roy Schelper



F&M's Battle Reports are 'first impression' game reviews intended to assist our readers through the bewildering maze of titles in the burgeoning wargame market. The emphasis of these reviews is on how well the game in question plays, its feel and flow, with additional comments on physical quality, historical accuracy, and special design features. We hope these Battle Reports will serve as a useful source of consumer information and call attention to games of interest which might otherwise have been overlooked.

The Thirty Years War is a conflict long neglected by war gamers. SPI has tackled the subject in a quadrigame format, presenting four of the most significant battles of the war — Lützen, Nordlingen, Rocroi, and Freiburg — in the **Thirty Years War Quadrigame**. All four games of the quad use a common set of fundamental rules, and add special 'Exclusive Rules' to each game to reflect the unique circumstances of the individual battles. The mechanics are simple, the rules easy to learn and relatively errata-free.

**30 Years** is not simply a repetition of the old **Napoleon At Waterloo** system. Except for the move-fight sequence, there is little resemblance between **NAW** and **30 Years**. The **30 Years** game system features open-active Zones-Of-Control (which means that ZOC's don't affect movement, but combat is mandatory between adjacent opposing units), leaders, disruption, demoralization, as well as the normal rules concerning movement and combat.

The artillery in **30 Years** can fire and be captured, but can't move. The guns are supposed to represent 'heavy' pieces, and there is no provision for such things as the Swedish 'leather' guns which acted in an infantry support role. I assume such weapons have been factored into the various infantry strengths. All artillery is created equal, and its effectiveness is severely curtailed at ranges over two hexes, although its range is unlimited. In any case, artillery can only disrupt units, never destroy them. One sharp contrast between **30 Years** and **NAW** is that artillery fire occurs before combat, thereby eliminating the tactic of artillery soak-offs. Artillery is captured if an enemy unit passes through its hex. The artillery units are back-printed in the opponent's colors so they can be easily converted once captured. The rules do not specify if a disrupted unit may capture artillery, nor do they indicate if disrupted units may capture enemy artillery.

Leaders are among the most important units in the games. They possess a 'Leadership Rating' which can be added to the combat strength of the unit with which they are stacked. Their main value, however, is their ability to aid in disruption removal, to 'rally' their forces. Normally, a unit becomes 'undisrupted' by a die roll of '5' or '6'. If a leader is in the same or adjacent hex as the disrupted unit, however, the Leadership Rating is added to the die roll. Other than this, there are no command control rules — although the period cries out for it since the 'fog of war' was especially thick during the Thirty Years War.

Forces can become demoralized if they reach their limit of losses as specified in each game. In several games there can be partial demoralization of a player's army, reflecting the various states of morale for different types of troops. The effects of demoralization are the loss of the ability to 'undisrupt' and an increase in the movement allowance of disrupted units, representing the 'Let's get the hell outta here!' tendencies of a beaten army. Demoralization is usually possible for either side in all of the games, and some of the games award an increase in the losses allowed to an undemoralized army that succeeds in demoralizing its enemy.

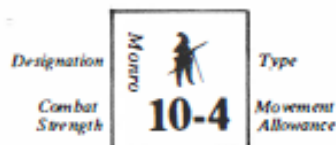
All four games in **30 Years** have the same scale: 1 hex = 175 meters, each unit strength point is the equivalent of 75-100 men, and each Game Turn represents 45 minutes of real time. The number of Game Turns varies from five to twenty-five.

The four, separate 17-in. x 22-in. mapsheets are in four colors, and feature forest, woods, town, road, slope, stream, river, bridge, rough, ditch, entrenchment, fortification, and gate hexes (although no single game features all of these various terrain types). Initial deployments are conveniently printed on the maps, and each of the 'extra-large' hexes are numbered. Overall, the maps are clear and colorful.

The games use only three charts: the Combat Results Table, the Terrain Effects Chart, and the Artillery Fire Table. The CRT results are: Dd (defender disrupted), Dx (disruption exchange), De (defender eliminated), Ae (attacker eliminated), and No Effect. The odds range from 1-5 to 6-1, and a 'No Effect' result is possible from 1-4 to 4-1. Disruption means that a unit's strength is halved, it may not attack, and its movement allowance is reduced to two hexes per Turn. Disrupted units also have no ZOC and need not be attacked by adjacent enemy units. A disrupted unit that suffers a second disruption is *destroyed*.



Unit counters are brightly colored and go well with the maps. The four unit types — infantry, cavalry, artillery, and leaders — are differentiated by silhouettes and back-printed to reveal their weakened status when disrupted. (Several of my cavalry units in **Lützen** lacked this back-printing, which was irritating, but it made me appreciate the value of the feature.) Unit designation, combat strength, movement allowance, and the unit type are all easily discernable.



## LÜTZEN

**Lützen** recreates the battle in which the Swedish monarch, Gustavus Adolphus, seized the initiative and surprised a scattered Imperialist army under Wallenstein. The Swedes were losing, until they became enraged at the death of their king and swept the Imperialists from the field.

Several special rules are used in this game. One is 'Fog', which halves movement allowances and reduces artillery range to two hexes. Its occurrence varies, and is determined by a die roll. Fog can hurt the Swedes badly, but chances of several consecutive Turns of fog are unlikely. Another rule deals with the Imperialist supply train. The supply train unit may not move, and its destruction by the Swedes gives them ten victory points. Also, Swedish cavalry are allowed to double their strength when attacking disrupted enemy infantry, but are automatically disrupted themselves after doing so. Two optional rules cover the wide range of possible effects resulting from Gustavus' death and the early arrival of Imperialist reinforcements. Victory points are awarded for the destruction of enemy units and leaders, plus a bonus for destroying demoralized enemy infantry units and capturing enemy artillery.

The Swedes must attack swiftly to exploit their 4-3 advantage in number before the arrival of the Imperialist reinforcements. The three major terrain features in **Lützen** — a hill on the Imperialist right, a ditch in the center, and a stream on their left — are significant in this attack. The Imperialist center is much too strong to take head-on, and the Swedes must try to overwhelm one of the flanks.

The Imperialist player is on the defensive, and must react to the Swedish moves. His position can't be improved by either advance or retreat, so he should stand fast and hold onto his artillery. As the Imperialist reinforcements are fed into the battle, it is possible to force the Swedes over their demoralization level.

**Lützen** is fairly well-balanced, and will generally be resolved in the last few Turns. It's interesting to play as either side, and with equal players a big win is unlikely.

Despite the death of Gustavus at **Lützen**, the superb Swedish army remained intact. When the Swedes and some allies, commanded by Horn, got caught in a bad spot at **Nordlingen** by an Imperialist army under Hapsburg control, they were destroyed. This battle finally ended the period of Swedish dominance and heralded Hapsburg ascendancy.

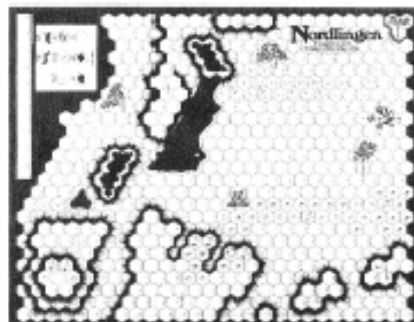
## NORDLINGEN

Included in the **Nordlingen** Exclusive Rules are the Swedish cavalry charge (which is the same as the rule used in **Lützen**), separate demoralization levels for infantry and cavalry, and a rule that triples Swedish infantry and leader strengths during the first Game Turn. All disrupted units of a demoralized army are destroyed if not stacked with a leader. Additionally, demoralizing an enemy category adds 25 combat points to a player's demoralization level, provided his force is not already demoralized itself.

The **Nordlingen** map is easily the most interesting of the quad, with eight major hills, rough terrain, woods, and four towns. Given the nature of the terrain and the initial deployments, the battle has two separate 'fronts'. The Swedes on the extreme right have a powerful force ready to assault a fairly strong Imperialist position, while the rest of the Swedish army is deployed far to the north and center of the map. The main Imperialist force is in position to strike either or both portions of the Swedish army.

The Swedes on the right must go all-out to capture the hill on the First Turn to benefit from the Initial Assault rule. As soon as the hill is taken and a defensive line established, this force should stay put. The remainder of the Swedes must stand on the defensive, counter-attacking when the chance arises, and hope that the Imperialist assault can be stopped.

Most of the game's real decisions will be made by the Imperialist player, who must decide how much to commit against the two Swedish groups. Both should be attacked, but the number of Imperialist troops allocated to each depends on the success of the initial Swedish assault on the hill.



**Nordlingen** favors the Imperialists, but a Swedish victory is possible. Attacking a position that is supported by artillery isn't easy, and a careless Imperialist player can suffer heavy losses. And because of the special demoralization rules, the situation can rapidly disintegrate once either army becomes demoralized.

## ROCROI

At **Rocroi**, the Duc d'Enghein opened the French phase of the war by shattering the cream of the Spanish *tercios*. The game, however, heavily favors the Spanish.

Only two Exclusive Rules are used in **Rocroi**: the Cavalry Charge (which is like the Swedish cavalry rule, except that both sides may charge against disrupted enemy infantry), and the demoralization levels. Two optional rules provide for the arrival of a Spanish force that could have participated in the battle, but didn't, and Increased Leader Effects, which gives each leader the ability to increase his range of effectiveness for combat and disruption removal to a number of hexes equal to his Leadership Rating.

Dull is the only word for the **Rocroi** map. The entire map, except for some unplayable forest hexes on the fringes, consists of clear terrain. The fault, however, is history's, not the game's.

Because the French demoralization level is fairly low and the enemy Spanish infantry is enormously strong, a frontal assault is out of the question for the French. A careful attack on the Spanish flanks, however, might draw off Spanish troops from the center. If this happens, the French can utilize their superior movement rate to make a sudden thrust at the weakened center and try to split the Spanish forces. Unfortunately, this is very unlikely against an aware Spanish opponent. The best tactic for the French is to stand on the defensive and make the Spanish attack. The Spanish, however, are under no compulsion to attack, and the game can easily degenerate into a fruitless, long-range artillery duel. In order for the French to win, therefore, the Spanish must make some serious errors.

## FREIBURG

**Freiburg** was one of the last major battles of the Thirty Years War, during the Duc d'Enghein's campaign to take the important fortress of Freiburg from the Bavarians under von Mercy. The fighting was some of the bloodiest of the war.

Entrenchments in **Freiburg** add 'one' to the defense strength of the entrenched units, and French cavalry units are prohibited from remaining adjacent to an undisrupted, entrenched Bavarian unit. Other Exclusive Rules include the familiar Cavalry Charge and a unique system for handling demoralization. When a force category — e.g., Bavarian, French regular, and French mercenary — reaches its loss limit, a die is rolled to determine whether or not that force is demoralized. Also, the destruction of a leader results in the automatic demoralization of his force.

**Freiburg** is unique in that it has scenarios for each of the three days of fighting, plus a Campaign Game that links the three days together. There is also a siege game that covers what might have happened if the Bavarians had tried to hole-up in Freiburg itself. The Campaign Game has special rules for redeployment, regrouping, and exiting the map, while the siege game offers mechanisms for breaching the fortress walls.

The August 3rd scenario is short, sharp, and bloody. It is slightly in favor of the Bavarians. The August 5th and 9th scenarios offer little hope to the Bavarian player. Tactics in all of these single day scenarios consist of headlong attacks by the French and desperate counterattacks by the Bavarians. Charging the enemy is the only possible French maneuver, while the Bavarian's best ploy is prayer.

The **Freiburg** Campaign Game heavily favors the French. The disparity in numbers makes any Bavarian move, aside from retreating off the map, pointless. Furthermore, there is a contradiction between the rules and victory conditions that rob the Bavarians of what little chance they do have. The rules

state that if the Bavarian Player achieves his August 3rd victory conditions, he has the option of redeploying in the August 3rd positions for the August 5th segment. The victory conditions, however, state that if there are no Bavarian units atop the hill used in the August 5th scenario at the conclusion of the August 5th campaign day, the French automatically win. This presents the ludicrous situation of fighting all day for a position that has nothing whatsoever to do with the August 3rd line. And should the Bavarian hold, he must detach a unit to occupy the hill or lose!

The siege game of **Freiburg** should invariably result in a French victory. The walls of the fortress are easily breached by the French, and to avoid defeat the Bavarians must fight their way through the superior French army that surrounds them and exit a large portion of the Bavarian force off the map. Even if the Bavarians should effect a breakthrough, the French have ample cavalry with which to pursue them. The siege scenario vividly demonstrates why the Bavarians retreated instead of defending the town.

Two of the four games in the **30 Years** quad — **Lützen** and **Nordlingen** — are superb. They are reasonably balanced and offer challenges to both players. **Rocroi** suffers from the unanswered question of why anyone should attack. Players could rectify this by adopting some homemade rule that reflects the actual circumstances of the battle and forces the French to attack (they were trying to lift a siege). **Freiburg**, except for the August 3rd scenario, is not much fun for the Bavarian player since his situation is close to hopeless. The **Freiburg** scenarios are short enough, however, so that it is feasible to play them twice in one sitting and give each player a taste of annihilation.

The **Thirty Years Quadrigame** is one of the more attractively produced quad efforts, and the games are ideal vehicles with which to introduce novice players to wargaming. In a hobby that sometimes seems to be overwhelmed by panzers and esoteric complexities, the **Thirty Years Quadrigame** is a pleasant, playable alternative. ●●