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Napoleonic Brigade Series 3.0

AUSTERLITZ

MONTEBELLO (free download)

MARENGO

TALavera (in preorder)

ASPERN-ESSLING

VIMEIRO (in preorder)

ESPINOSA DE LOS MONTEROS (free download)

Designer's notes

Introduction

NBS might be the least popular Gamers series, and it is not hard to find reasons why. Only three games have been published so far, and they've all had different series rules. There were complaints that the NBS rules did not do a good job of simulating Napoleonic warfare, and that the conversion from CWB had not been an entirely happy one.

To that, I can only say: Right you were! And that's why we've done another version of the NBS series rules, this time totally rewritten.

The design goals of the NBS 3.0 rules could be summed up as follows:

1) The new rules should be an accurate representation of grand tactical Napoleonic combat, and any relation to previous versions of the rules or the CWB rules should not be allowed to stand in the way of that goal.

2) The new rules should be 100 % backwards compatible with older games in the series.

3) The new rules should make combat resolution go faster, allowing the players to focus more on making plans and execute them than executing repetitive moments in combat minutia. But combat resolution should still be interesting and have a Napoleonic feel.

4) The heart of NBS rules lie in the orders system, the gradual morale levels (shaken, disorganized routed), and the loss mechanism of stragglers and permanent casualties. Everything else could be changed if necessary to achieve 1 and 3.

We believe we succeeded with these goals, and the playtesters have been enthusiastic. Most of them, it seems, are now busy designing their own NBS games, which is as good a sign as any that we got things right this time.

For those still on the fence, I thought I'd step through the rules in a number of installations to show how things have changed from previous series rules and the CWB rules.

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Definitions - sequence of play:

Retreat and Withdrawal,
two different concepts

These rules contain mostly definitions and the sequence of play. Of interest here is that the rules separate between retreats and withdrawals. A withdrawal is subject to all the usual reaction stuff. A retreat can be reaction charged by cavalry but not opportunity fired at by artillery. The reason is doctrinary, artillery is conserving ammunition for more dangerous targets, while cavalry is standing by for just this kind of target of opportunity.

A few changes in the
sequence of play,
compared to the CWB

The sequence of play is on the surface mostly the same as in previous versions, and indeed Civil War Brigade Series (CWB), but note that infantry can no longer fire (more on that later), so only artillery and skirmishers fire in the fire combat phases. Instead, a close combat phase has been added for infantry close combat. Cavalry charges are still resolved in the movement phases.

An important change is that phasing fire takes place *before* movement, but non-phasing fire comes after movement. This provides some neat attacker-defender dynamics. The attacker can set up a grand battery and blast away, then immediately charge with the infantry while the defenders are disorganized from the barrage. The defenders, on the other hand get to fire on the incoming attackers using opportunity fire, then again in the non-phasing fire phase (unless the attacker has entered close combat with the artillery hex), then *again* in the phasing fire phase as the roles are switched. The net effect is that if you assault artillery as the attacker, you'd better win the attack, because if you stall in front of the guns, you will probably be shot to shreds.

Orders:

As stated in the introduction, the written orders system was deemed to be part of the core of the NBS system, and was to remain in the 3.0 revision of the rules. That didn't mean it could be improved on, however. And though the changes to the orders rules are probably less than to any other chapter of the rules, they are still many and subtle.

Adaptation of the CWB
system to the organization
of the armies of the
Napoleonic Wars

The orders rules in previous versions of NBS were lifted more or less verbatim from the CWB. That series assumes armies are organized in corps made of divisions. It has been adapted to handle independent divisions with some pain. In the Napoleonic Wars, however, the corps concept had just been invented, and the armies were rarely that tidy. You see lots of independent divisions and brigades, together with wings, columns and what have you organized in all sorts of possible combinations.

The first task of the orders rules was thus to generalize them so that they were not working under the assumption that an order applied to a corps, but might just as well be a division or a brigade (columns, wings and even small armies are classed as corps or divisions depending on the situation in the game specific rules). This took a lot of rewriting but not that much actual changing of the rules.

General orders
& Engage orders

Another fuzzy part of the old orders rules were the concept of simple and complex orders. We've renamed them General and Engage orders and gone to great lengths clarifying when one or the other applies. The basic rule is still: General orders for marching and defending, Engage for attacks. Units under Engage Orders suffer attack stoppage checks, units under simple orders do not. Beyond this, there are advantages and disadvantages to each and some subtle decision making to be made by the players writing the orders.

On defense or in reserve,
two different postures

The optional defensive orders rules from CWB is not included in the previous or current versions of the NBS rules. We felt the armies of the times proved to be able to stand and die in ways that defensive order failure checks would not allow. You will still see units fail in their defenses and retreat in disarray due to other rules mechanisms, such as HQs being overrun and losing units in combat routing and retreating 6 hexes (more on that later).

We took the opportunity to differentiate between units defending in place and units without orders, however. Units without orders are now considered to be in reserve, which means they accept new orders easier but are sitting ducks if attacked. The faster response time of reserves encourage players to not keep all of their forces in line constantly.

We also made some clarifications on how to send out units on their own (previously called divisional goals, now independent orders) and cross-attaching them between commands. One difference between previous rules (and CWB) is that these orders detaches the unit from its parent for the duration (or until it receives orders to reattach). Divisions can no longer freely return to their corps whenever they feel like it, nor do they automatically have to take the long march back to their corps if they fail their independent orders.

Attachments, detachments and Independent Orders

We also did some tinkering with command ranges. Units in reserve have their command ranges halved, and command ranges are halved at night. On the other hand, units out of command have the option to stay in place (except when doing emergency withdrawals) instead of moving back in command, to allow for temporary disruption of the line.

Command ranges relative to postures

Formations:

The basic set of formations from previous rules remain the same: Infantry can be in line, column or square. Cavalry is normal or blown. Artillery limbered and unlimbered. Skirmishers skirmish. We made Routed a formation of its own (in addition to a morale state), as we felt that men running away weren't overly concerned if they were in line or column.

Same set of formations as in the previous version

More importantly, we decided we had to separate columns into march and combat columns. Unlike the American Civil War, columns were an important combat formation during the Napoleonic wars. For some nations, that is. While every nation used columns for marching, the French also loved combat columns, the Austrians and Prussians learned to use combat columns over time, while the British stayed in line if they could. Clearly, it would be anomalous to give each nation's columns the same capabilities.

Use of combat columns according to the national doctrines

On the other hand, we didn't want to have to keep track on which units were in march and which were in combat column. After some reasoning, we arrived at the following: Combat columns offered more or less the same movement advantages as march columns. In addition, changing between march and combat columns was very easy, costing less than one movement point in game terms. So, we felt it was a reasonable abstraction to give combat columns all the advantages of march columns in addition to the combat benefits of combat columns. Any actual change between march and combat columns are assumed to be going on below the scale of the game.

March column and Combat column distinction in an easy way

What this means in game terms is that being in column either means being in combat or in march column, depending on the nation and period (as listed in the game-specific rules). March columns are severely penalized in combat, and those nations using march columns will have to be in line formation to attack in any meaningful way. Combat columns, on the other hand, move quickly and are neat to assault with, but are vulnerable if the assault stalls, and *very* vulnerable to artillery fire.

There are some more things to columns, like attacking over bridges and in villages, that we won't go into here. Rest assured that we have it covered.

Oh, and we got rid of one silliness of the older NBS rules: Lines used to have 5 movement points and columns 8. That meant if you changed between the two, you would have to track 5/8ths of MPs! We felt this was ridiculous, and changed the line MP to 8 while adjusting the terrain cost for units in line. No more fractional accounting. It has the additional effect of making lines somewhat slower in open terrain. We felt this appropriate and a good incentive to use those maligned march columns whenever you could.

No fractional accounting when changing formation

Finally, squares can now move one hex if they pass a check. No big deal.

Facing:

The CWB mother rules had units facing hexsides and no facing change cost. The more unwieldy napoleonic formations have to pay MPs to change facing and can only move through the frontal hexes. This makes hexside facing a bit problematic (as well as aesthetically unpleasing, as you can't form proper lines on a hex map if facing hexsides). Previous NBS versions solved this by allowing units to face either a hexside or a hex corner. This could be incredibly fiddly.

There was another problem with facing: In both CWB and NBS, units were very vulnerable when attacked from the flank. This was appropriate for the civil war, where units tended to search out each other's flank, but the Napoleonic style was more to bludgeon a hole in the enemy lines to exploit. All this flank feeling just wasn't right for NBS.

Hex corner facing...

So, we wanted to have either hexside facing or hex corner facing, but not both. Hex corner facing was preferable for aesthetic and movement purposes, so we went with that. That, however, leaves a unit with a narrower frontage (two front hexes instead of the three you get with hexside facing). So, we took away most of the penalties for being attacked from the flank! This way, you won't be maneuvering around to find the best position to attack from, if you want to attack, you might as well go straight in.

And, it cut away a number of rules, modifiers and special cases.

... and all-around frontal facing skirmishers

In previous NBS rules, skirmishers sort of had to keep track of facing too. That is, for combat purposes, they could fire in any direction, but they could still only move into frontal hexes and had to pay MPs to change facing. We felt this was a little bit ridiculous, and made them all-around frontal facing for all purposes and cut down their MPs somewhat to cover the "maneuvering" costs. Again, it cleaned up the rules and made them simpler.

As for the formation rules, there are special facing cases for villages, routing units and such, but I won't go into these here. It is enough to say we got facing in its entirety covered in about half the words I've spent discussing it in these designer's notes.

Zones of Influence:

No Zone of Control but a Zone of Influence

CWB, the parent system of NBS has Zones of Control, which means you have to stop when moving adjacent to the enemy. This simulates skirmishers in that series. NBS, on the other hand, has explicit skirmishers, and so there were no ZoC rules in earlier NBS rules.

We felt this a bit generous, as formed infantry does have *some* effect when troops march by them at 200 yards, and reintroduced the concept as Zones of Influence. When we decided to get rid of infantry fire combat entirely, ZoIs became a good instrument for showing the effects of long distance infantry firing.

Zone of Influence effects

ZoIs extend into the two frontal hexes of an infantry unit, and has the following effects:

- 1) A unit moving from one ZoI to another, or changing formation in a ZoI has its morale level degraded by one (from normal to shaken to disorganized to routed).
- 2) A unit may not recover its morale level while in a ZoI.

ZoI induces controlled retreat

The second point provides some interesting dynamics, as units locked in combat will have to retreat out of a ZoI to recover morale. This is the game's way of handling controlled retreats by a defender, as the combat results table has losing defenders routing away. Gives a very nice ebb and flow when good units butt their heads against each other, as they do on the mountain slopes of Talavera.

Movement:

Movement is the usual stuff, and the basics haven't changed much. One thing we changed was how to handle terrain. Earlier NBS games used a layer-cake model where each hex had a single elevation level. When we moved to rocky Spain, that made the game maps like looking into a kaleidoscope. So we went for more naturalistic elevation curves. This changed slopes from a hexside terrain type to an in-hex terrain type that adds to the cost of entering a hex, which actually works out quite nicely in showing the difficulties in maneuvering formed troops in rolling terrain. Makes the maps look much better too.

Elevation curves instead of a layer cake model

Lines can now backstep by moving one hex into an adjacent hex, maintaining facing. This is very important in combination with the ZoI rules above.

Line backstep

Road movement does not give any great movement bonuses in open terrain in NBS, it only removes the facing change cost from following the road. This is because combat units usually didn't use road march while on the battlefield in the Napoleonic Wars. The roads were mostly useful for pointing out the direction you were going. In the rough terrain of Spain, however, you'll notice the difference of moving along roads or forcing your way across mountains and valleys. You also need to use the roads to force-march, which allows you to move a bit longer at the risk of additional stragglers.

Special road movement

Line extensions:

Extensions, allowing your unit to cover more than one hex, was one of those rules that work wonderfully in the simple environment of CWB, but gives rise to tons of questions when you add in the different formations and combat cavalry of Napoleonic times. Something needed to be done, and we went for simplification.

Since the purpose of extensions is to cover more ground, it would almost always be something you did in line formation, so we formalized that and renamed the rule Line Extensions. This cut down on the exceptions and special cases a lot. We also simplified the deployment and removal of extended lines. Now you just spend a fixed movement cost and put them down adjacent to the parent unit. Previously you had to "walk" it out of the parent hex, spending MPs for facing changes etc. This wasn't an issue in CWB where units don't spend MPs to change facing, but it was in NBS.

Only lines are allowed to extend to cover more ground

We also considered forbidding units in Line Extension from moving. This would have simplified the rules even further, but history was against it. The Brits often attacked with their units deployed in really long lines, and you can simulate this with the current Line Extension rules.

Line of Sight:

NBS 2.0 used a dead simple LoS rule, which was easy enough with the essentially at battlefields of Aspern-Essling and Marengo, but which quickly broke down in the mountains of Spain, especially with the new contour-line model of showing elevations.

Now, some people are going to hate us for this, but we ported a simplified version of the LoS rules in the Tactical Combat Series (TCS). Then again, people would hate us no matter what we did with the rule, it is just the nature of LoS rules.

The basic idea of these LoS rules is that you draw a straight line between two points and see if anything "stick up" in between. We've choose to let you implement this graphically, by letting you plot the high and low point on graph paper, and see if anything in between would be higher than a straight line between the two. Really, it's dead simple. For those who prefer math to drawing lines, we've also included the LoS formula from TCS, which does the same thing by math. For those who prefer neither, feel free to invent your own LoS rule.

Line of Sight graphically handled or by a simple formula

Note that you very seldom have to refer to the LoS rule, as it is mostly used for long-distance artillery potshots, in which case you have usually set up your guns where LoS is obvious.

LoS seldom used

Combat

Fire combat & Close combat but very different from their CWB equivalents

Now, let's get to the heart of the NBS 3.0 rules, and the very reason they have been five or so years in the making. Earlier versions of the NBS rules used the same basic framework as the CWB combat rules, which can be summed up as follows: Each player turn, both players get a fire phase where they fire with all their units. Results are measured in casualties and morale checks. There is also close combat in the movement phases, where a unit enters an enemy hex, an exchange of fire happens, both sides check morale and one ends up retreating.

Compared to CWB the combat system was modified by reducing the effectiveness of fire combat and increasing the effectiveness of close combat. The same tables with different modifiers were used for skirmisher fire and cavalry charges.

The problem with the combat system was that it was slow, complicated, gave distorted results and was ultimately boring. Slow because you got to resolve fire combat at least twice per turn for every unit, and the resolution process wasn't very fast to begin with. Complicated because of the many modifiers you had to remember for the tables to work for everything from infantry assault combats to skirmisher snipers. Distorted, because they didn't succeed in this despite all the modifiers. And boring because, due to the low effectiveness of the muskets of the time, all this fire combat going on was mostly pot-shots with little chance of achieving anything.

Very quick and simple Skirmisher Fire resolution

So, we set out to reduce the die-rolling and get more realistic results. The first piece to fall into place was Skirmisher fire, which was reduced to having mostly morale effects on the opponent, and a one-die resolution. (Ironically, the last part of the combat system that was finished, artillery combat, ended up using more or less the same procedure.)

Next up were cavalry charges, which were way too effective with the 2.1 rules. Anders Fager invented a Cavalry Charge mechanism, later expanded to include infantry close combat. It gave much more realistic results than the previous method, but had some concepts that were hard to remember in execution, was rather complicated and not really faster than the previous resolution method.

That left us with artillery and infantry fire. A design by committee process started to work out a better fire combat resolution, but the result tended to either be more complicated or slower than we wanted.

By this stage, the single overloaded combat resolution mechanism had branched out to three different mechanisms, two of them still too slow and complicated, that shared very few rules between them. This was just not going to work. We felt having different mechanisms was the only way to get realistic results, but then they'd better all be simple to use. So we went back to scratch.

In the Napoleonic era, firefights happened by accident

We felt our new skirmisher fire mechanism worked really fine, and left it untouched. Then we started analyzing Napoleonic infantry combat. A few interesting facts turned out: First, even the most vicious drawn out firefights seldom lasted more than 30 minutes, that is within the space of one turn. Second, units more or less never closed to within effective musket fire range without the intention to get close and personal with the enemy. The firefights that happened did so more by accident, when both sides refused to budge during an assault.

No infantry fire combat Only Close combat

The conclusion that came from this was that we could do away with infantry fire combat entirely! Infantry would use solely close combat to engage, and firefights would be a possible combat result in close combat. Units at one hex distance could be assumed to be just outside effective musket distance, and whatever little effect the firing had on the troops covered by the ZoI mechanics (covered earlier).

Infantry close combat: three cases

That established, we did a general outline of how infantry combat worked. The attacker would close in on the defenders, and one of three possible things would happen. Either the defenders broke, ran away and were chased by the victorious attackers. Or the defenders stood firm and delivered a volley or two into the attackers that broke and fell back to reform. Or neither side refused to budge, in which case you had the two firing volley after volley into each other in a firefight, until either side disengages.

We made the combat system model this by having the players checking if their troops stand. The results of the check to stand rolls give an attacker win, defender win or firefight, each with their separate tables on which you roll to see the results. The end result worked great, *and* was fast and easy! Finally we were getting somewhere.

Check to stand:
effective resolution system

Next, we made the same type of analysis on the cavalry process and arrived at a similar flow, somewhat more complex and with its own charts to determine the results, but still fast and easy to resolve.

Cavalry charges handled
in a similar way

That left only artillery fire, and as previously mentioned, we used the Skirmisher model to get a really simple one-die resolution method that didn't even require a table (though we included one anyway, as a memory aid).

Artillery use the same
model as Skirmisher

So, we ended up with four combat resolution procedures (five, really, since cavalry uses a different procedure when attacking other cavalry than when attacking infantry), but kept each procedure as simple, clear and related to the others as possible. We feel the end result makes the game play faster, gives realistic results that are more evocative of Napoleonic combat, are easy to handle and a lot of fun! We hope you will find the same.

Different resolution
procedures related to the
type of combat

Infantry close combat:

As we explained, close combat is the infantry's way of attacking. Close combat is initiated in the movement phase by entering an enemy hex and paying 2 extra movement points. Cavalry and skirmishers can (and usually have to) retreat away.

After the movement phase and non-phasing fire phase, close combat is executed. First, one or both players check to stand. This is a simple die roll. The base chance depends on the morale on the unit, from 1 or better for an A morale unit, to 5 or better for E morale. Yes, this means A-rated units quite often stand automatically. The die-roll is modified for things like morale state, leader advantage, skirmisher disadvantage, comparative size, or being attacked from the rear. Note, being attacked from the flanks give no close combat disadvantage, as discussed earlier.

Chances to stand
depend on morale and
various modifiers ...

Units in line gets a negative modifier when attacking, which is the big advantage of combat columns. This can hit back at the attacker in column if the result is a firefight, however. More on that later.

... including formations

Who checks to stand first, the attacker or the defender? That depends. The basic rule is that the smallest stack checks first, but this can be adjusted by attacking uphill/downhill or if the defender is in a fortified hex.

Checking order

If the first checking player fails its check, the other player stands automatically. Otherwise, the second player checks. If the attacker failed his check, he is repulsed and retreats out of the hex. If the defender fails his check, he is routed and retreats 6 hexes. If both sides stand, it is a firefight, after which the attacker backs out of the hex.

Depending on the result:
retreat, rout ...

Depending on the result, each player rolls for his losses on the loss tables. A successful attacker usually takes a few permanent casualties and a bunch of recoverable stragglers. A successful defender takes few, if any, losses. A repulsed attacker takes heavier losses, but not as heavy as the routed defender. In addition to the losses, the units get a morale reduction result (except for the losing defenders who are always routed), which is the number of steps a unit has its morale state reduced by (from normal to shaken to disorganized to routed).

... losses and morale
reduction

A note to old hands: The morale check table is completely gone, replaced by the much simpler concept of morale reduction. There *is* something called morale checks, but it is used mainly for straggler recovery. More on that later.

The loss tables have columns for the base morale of the checking unit. They are constructed so that a good morale unit will generally take more permanent casualties, much fewer stragglers and lesser morale reduction, while the poor morale unit will usually rout and dissolve in a cloud of stragglers that lives to fight another day, but without taking a lot of permanent casualties. This nicely shows the frustration the French must have felt when fighting Spanish militia.

Losses and stragglers
depend on morale

Note: The winner never suffers more permanent casualties than the loser, so poor

morale units can't be used to get a profitable attrition rate against good units from the above.

There are very few modifiers to these loss tables, and they mainly adjust the losses up or down for big or small units.

Defender retreats are now under player control

Some might balk at the fact that the defender either stands or routs and runs away 6 hexes, no gradual retreats. There *are* gradual retreats, however, under the player's control. Remember you couldn't rally while in a ZoI? So, if the defender repulsed the attacker but became disorganized in the process, the player will want to move out of the enemy's ZoI in his next turn to rally. In effect, a controlled retreat.

In firefights, losses mainly depend on formation and size

If both sides stand, which is quite common when A and B morale units clash, we have this system's portrayal of infantry fire combat: a firefight. In a firefight, you use different tables to resolve the losses. Here it is the opponent's size and formation that matters for determining losses, not the morale. In a Firefight, a unit in line is usually in great advantage to a unit in column, as the line will get more firepower per size and the column will take heavier losses for density.

Special cases

There are quite few possible special cases of close combat, like defending artillery/skirmisher combinations, routed defenders, skirmisher vs skirmisher close combat, march columns and line extensions. No need to get into the details here, let's just say we covered them all in the "Close Combat special cases" rule for easy reference once you encounter the situation. There is also village fighting, but that's a story of its own that will be told later.

Cavalry charge:

Having worked out infantry combat to our satisfaction, we set out to design a model for cavalry charges that was similar enough to infantry close combat for comfort, but not fettered to any concept or flow that would diminish the accuracy of the modeling of cavalry charges.

Get rid of three myths about squares:

they are automatically formed,

Our model is based on a couple of assumptions that might come as a surprise to some. First, square forming for defending infantry is automatic and can be done without risk. It is our firm opinion that it is a myth that cavalry raced to hit infantry before they had time to form square. Infantry usually had plenty of time to form square when the cavalry appeared, and if they didn't, it was usually because they were in bad condition and they ran away instead of forming squares. In the game, square forming is at the choice of the defending player, and the only real reason to not form square would be if there were lots of enemy infantry and artillery waiting for the opportunity behind the cavalry.

they are not unbreakable,

Another myth, by the way, was that a square was broken by cavalry only once during the Napoleonic wars. You can find lots and lots of those "the only time a square was broken by cavalry"-moments in the history of Napoleonic warfare, once you start looking. Still, it was rare. Instead, the usual way of a successful cavalry charge against formed troops was to send wave upon wave of cavalry against the square, breaking off at the last minute, until the defenders cracked under the pressure and ran. This will work in NBS. A more effective, if less glamorous, use of cavalry is simply to go like vultures for the demoralized and routing troops that won't form square.

and are not efficient to hurt cavalry.

The third assumption is that squares really weren't that good at hurting cavalry. Most tactical napoleonic rules show cavalry charging squares and failing to recall as being shot to shreds. In reality, infantry in square don't have many means to hurt the cavalry. They can fire, but would do that much better if they were in line. So, in NBS 3.0, a cavalry unit bouncing against a square will mostly have its pride hurt, but if the defenders manage the feat of repulsing a cavalry charge while in line, you will see a bloodbath of horses.

Charges are resolved during the movements

Unlike infantry close combat, cavalry charges are resolved in the movement phase in NBS 3.0. They were over much faster than infantry combat, and you can get the "wave upon wave" effect by sending in several cavalry units in succession against the same target.

The flow is as follows: First, the charging cavalry picks a target, then the defenders decide if they want to form square.

Next, the defenders check to stand, like in infantry close combat. The attacking cavalry never needs to check to stand. The main modifiers for the defender check are the morale state and formation of the defender. A good order, decent morale defender in square will usually pass more or less automatically, while a disorganized defender (that can't form square) is in for trouble.

If the defender breaks, they rout and the result is a successful charge. Losses are checked on a table for the occasion. The attacker's losses are usually light, while the defenders losses are dependent on the size of the defenders and attacker. The attacker can then make a follow-up charge against the same or a different target. If a different target, start the charge process over again, but if the same, just roll for defender losses again. With up to 3 follow-up charges allowed, this can easily add up to disastrous losses if the attacker pursues the routing target.

If the defender stands, the attacker tries to make a recall. If successful, it will only take a possible morale state reduction. If it fails, it will take some casualties as well. In either case, there is a 50% chance that the defender has its morale state reduced by one (here is where the "wearing down" kicks in).

After the charge is resolved, the cavalry rides off and becomes blown, a state of tiredness that it needs to recover from. Something basically unchanged from previous versions of the rules.

Cavalry charges against other cavalry use a simpler procedure. Pick a target, then both players check to stand, usually the defender first, and the result is a win, draw or loss. There are separate loss tables for each, with permanent casualties and morale reductions. No follow-on charges.

There are reaction charges in NBS 3.0, very much like those in previous versions of the rules, but we've clarified a lot and removed some oddities. Most importantly, we've changed the trigger to when you enter a hex in the charge zone rather than when you leave a hex. The latter just felt backwards, in theory and practice.

Reaction charges are usually the best use for cavalry. Either to keep infantry to get at your infantry by forcing them into square before they can get anywhere, or standing by to go at any defenders being routed by your infantry close combats.

As for infantry close combats, there are a number of special cases, like defending artillery/skirmisher combinations (cavalry is good at killing those), routed defenders and march columns, all conveniently located in the "Cavalry Charge Special Cases" section for easy reference.

Skirmisher fire:

Skirmisher fire was one of the first things we revised in the NBS rules, long before we had even started considering changing the rest of the combat rules. The problem with old skirmisher fire was that it was way too lethal. It also added a lot of die-rolling to the game. Since skirmisher sniping isn't exactly the heart of NBS, we went for the dead-simple.

Going to the sources, we figured skirmishers should be good for degrading the morale of formed infantry and lethal to artillery by picking off their horses. So, the basic procedure is, you add up your skirmisher factors (French and British skirmishers are worth 2 each, others usually 1 each), subtract the skirmisher factors in the defending hex, and roll a die. If the result is equal to or less than the sum above, it is a hit, no table required. A hit on formed infantry causes one straggler and a reduction of the morale state by one (from normal towards routed). Cavalry just has its morale reduced, while artillery loses one gun point and reduces morale. The skirmishers can always target the artillery in a mixed stack.

Defender checks to stand

Follow up charges

Attacker is recalled or repulsed

Blown cavalry

Quicker resolution of cavalry versus cavalry fights

Reaction charges waiting for a trigger

Special cases

Need for change

Skirmishers are lethal to artillery and morale breaker to infantry without any table

This simple rule alone cuts a lot of die rolling and combat processing time compared with earlier rules versions.

Artillery Fire:

Resolution close to skirmisher fire

Artillery fire was one of the last pieces of the combat system to fall into place, and ironically we copied the skirmisher resolution. Once it was clear that we had succeeded in getting rid of infantry fire, it didn't make sense to have a complex fire rule left just for the artillery.

A table free system based on one modified die roll

To resolve artillery fire, you find the adjusted fire value due to range and type (light or heavy) on the tables. Then roll a die, modified by a few obvious things (most importantly, cavalry and column targets get -1 while targets in towns or fortifications, and skirmisher targets get +1). If the roll is equal to the fire value, the result is a permanent casualty to the target. If the roll is less, the difference is the number of casualties, with half (rounded down) being stragglers, half (rounded up) permanent casualties. Further, if the result was odd, the target suffers a morale reduction. If no losses were taken, the morale state is reduced by one. If losses were taken, it is reduced by two.

It is so simple that no table is needed for resolution, but we made one anyway for those who prefer one. Unfortunately, to work in table format, the morale reductions would have to occur on a modified odd die-roll, when an unmodified result would have been easier to read at a glance if you play without tables. If you're perfectly comfortable without the table, feel free to play, as an officially sanctioned house rule, that an unmodified odd roll is a morale reduction.

Good morale units can stand to artillery fire

One thing that made good units good was their ability to stand up to artillery fire without inching. Therefore, A and B morale units as well as C morale units accompanied by a leader reduce the effect of a morale result by one, so that a reduction of one becomes zero while a reduction of two becomes one.

Grand battery

The grand battery rules put national limits on how many artillery units you can fire together on a single target. Usually, it's one per target.

Very lethal cannister fire at short range

Artillery was really lethal up close, and the Cannister rules represent this. Basically, the artillery gets to fire twice at enemy units entering their hex (to charge or close combat), adding the results together. The addition of the morale results in particular could really halt an attack in its tracks.

Opportunity fire

Like previous versions of the NBS rules, artillery can fire opportunity fire. We have loosened the restrictions on when you can fire (the previous rules were, shall we say, strange), but the artillery unit can only fire at the given target once per movement phase. Basically, you can fire anytime an enemy unit moves or changes formation in front of and within 3 hexes of an artillery unit. If you want to fire cannister as above, you would have to hold your fire until the enemy enters your hex.

Village fighting:

Historical need of a special treatment

When we were almost done with the new NBS rules, there was still one thing that didn't feel quite right, and that was how the fighting in villages progressed. All tactical Napoleonic systems I'm aware of treat villages as some kind of fortified defensive position, and so did earlier versions of the NBS rules. But in almost all Napoleonic battles, you find descriptions of villages changing hands dozens of times. That obviously won't happen if villages are fortresses, but if we just took away any benefits from being in a village, why would anyone fight over them at all, let alone with the single-mindedness of Aspern or Gross-Görchen? To solve this dilemma, we had some intensive discussion, analyzing and sifting through the sources. We

came to the following synthesis of what village fighting was like in Napoleonic battles:

Villages provided protection against Artillery as well as a safe rear area behind the village. As cavalry and artillery became more dominant on the battlefield as the wars progressed, so did the villages. If you wanted to defend in a village, you put a not too large number of troops and spread them around on the streets and house roofs to harass any approaching enemies. Artillery was hard to deploy on narrow village streets and were usually kept outside to fire at any approaching attackers.

Villages as protection

Any attackers wanting to assault the village formed up into a narrow column, like a battering ram, and started a rush for the village main street. Either the defenders got them to hesitate before they got into the village, or they were through. Once inside the village, there was really nothing much more the defenders could do except try to get out in as good order as possible without losing too many troops in the process.

See-saw dynamic

The attackers were now in possession of the village, but to defend it, they would need time to spread out and set up a similar defense. There was no better time to strike back than before this could happen, so a fresh set of defenders in reserve behind the village then rushed in in turn to clear the village again, and hopefully deploy in defensive matter before the attackers could return the favour. And so the see-saw fighting was on. We think we have managed to capture all of this with just a few special rules for villages, that even simplifies combat resolution in villages compared to regular combat.

Cavalry, Artillery and skirmishers are limited in their abilities

First, villages prevent cavalry charges and provide die-roll modifiers against artillery and skirmisher fire. On the other hand, only a single artillery point (about 3 guns) can fire out of a village. Zones of Influence don't extend into villages.

Units in line in villages have all-around frontal facing, give any attackers a negative modifier to their check to stand and you have to be in line to recover from morale reductions, but a line moving into a village immediately becomes disorganized, so you want to enter the village in column but then deploy to line.

Adaptation of the effects of formations in this particular terrain

Units in march column are treated as combat columns in village fighting. Actually it's the other way around, combat columns become march columns, but march columns are actually effective in village fighting. We thought the first way to put it made the rule clearer.

When attacking a village in close combat, *only* the attacker checks to stand. The only thing the defenders can do to improve their odds by reducing the chances for the attacker to stand is to be in line, have more or better skirmishers than the attackers, or being at least twice the size. If the attacker passes his check, and good troops without any disadvantages usually do, the defenders are routed out of the village. If the attacker fails, he is repulsed. Either way, losses are checked on the normal tables. There are *no* firefights in villages.

Specifics of the infantry combat:

only attackers check to stand, ...

no firefights, ...

and attacker's mad rushes

If the attacker wins the combat, he can continue his mad rush along the village main street, moving additional hexes attacking anything he finds along the way in new close combats. The end result will most likely be the entire village cleared of defenders unless the attacker is repulsed. The attacker might also be shaken, and probably still in column. There will be no better opportunity to wreck that good good-quality enemy infantry than right after it has won a village fight, so the defenders should immediately find a good unit of his own to send in before the opponent can form line. Note that the French has one special ability to form line right after a close combat, that comes in *real* handy in village fighting.

Before you know it, you will have shot up a corps each fighting over the village, which will have switched hands a dozen times. Just like the Napoleonic wars!

Morale checks: gone and back

Morale results included on combat results tables reducing the playing time

One of the design goals of NBS 3.0 was to reduce playing time by cutting down on the repetitive moments of the system. One thing that was killed was morale checks. Previously, whenever you suffered something bad, you rolled two dice and checked a table (with a *lot* of situation-dependent modifiers) to see if your units stood firm, became disorganized or ed. In 3.0, we've simply baked the morale effects into the combat results in the form of morale reductions. A morale reduction of, say, 2, means a unit moves two steps (from bloodlust, normal, shaken, disorganized to routed) along the ladder of worsening morale states. Unlike previous versions, this means combat losses and morale results are now linked. For those who prefer increased randomness at the expense of added die-rolling, feel free to roll separately (on the same table) for losses and morale results.

Morale checks now devoted to various actions linked to quality of troops.

Later on, we re-introduced the term morale check for a different purpose: To take care of the numerous little unit quality-related die-rolls (for straggler checks when force marching, moving while in square, reaction charging outside the charge zone, straggler recovery etc) that had a bewildering ora of tables. We made them all a single roll against the morale rating of the unit (essentially a check to stand with a -2 modifier to it, so that an A-unit passes on 3-6, a B on 4-6 etc). Except for straggler recovery which we gave a few modifiers, the only die-roll modifier is a +1 to the roll if stacked with a decent commander.

Casualties and stragglers

Two different kinds of casualties noted on loss charts

As in previous versions of NBS (and CWB), you keep track of looses on a roster sheet in the form of stragglers and permanent casualties. Permanent casualties are killed, wounded or people otherwise gone for the duration of the battle. Stragglers are people that might return later.

Stragglers may be recovered

To recover stragglers, you basically have to do nothing, be nowhere near the enemy and not under attack orders. You get a positive modifier if you are in no orders-status. If you qualify, make a morale check. If you pass, you recover one straggler. On an unmodified 6, A and B morale units recover two stragglers. No more trying to decipher 11-66 rolls for something this peripheal.

Morale states

Five morale states with effects on combat, movement and freedom of action

As mentioned above, there are several morale states, of which bloodlust, normal and shaken mainly affects a unit's chances to stand as well as how serious a further morale degradation would be to the unit. A disorganized unit, is much more limited in its actions: It can't form square, has no ZoI, artillery can't fire, skirmishers can't fire or defend against other skirmishers firing, etc.

The final and worst state of a unit is routed. Basically, it can do nothing except running away from the enemy, and is easy target for any sort of combat, especially cavalry charges. A unit that becomes routed for whatever reason (including close combat) immediately retreats 6 hexes away. It can either try to rally (by passing a morale check) in the rally phase or keep retreating until it is 6 hexes away from the enemy, player's choice.

Other than routed units, rallying is usually automatic, from disorganized to shaken to normal. But remember you can't rally while in a ZoI.

Blood Lust

Blood Lust, units going berzerk, is a concept inherited from CWB that we really wanted to keep in the new NBS 3.0, despite doing away with the morale check table. So, if an A, B or C (the latter only if stacked with a

non-abysmal commander) morale unit rolls an unmodified 1 when checking losses on certain tables, its morale state is *increased* by 2, instead of whatever the tables say. If this would put it above normal, it becomes blood lusted, which can be a real advantage in combat.

Combat frenzy

Wrecked units

As in previous versions of the rules, a unit that takes losses that passes a certain breakpoint becomes wrecked. In NBS 3.0, its game effects are an increased chance of attack stoppage for its parent formation and a reduced chance to stand in combat, among other things. In addition, a unit that becomes wrecked immediately suffers an additional morale reduction of one.

Very hard beaten troops become weaker

Retreats

Units usually retreat when exiting combat, while moving away from a cavalry charge or when becoming routed. The first two hexes of the retreat must be away from the cause (except for artillery fire) and no hex of the retreat may be closer to enemy units within 6 hexes than the previous hex. If a unit can't retreat because of impassable terrain, mark off its remaining strength as stragglers that can be recovered later, as impassable usually means impassable in any form of organization. If the unit can't retreat because of enemy units, it surrenders and its remaining strength is marked off as permanent casualties. If you manage to maneuver the enemy into a bad position, like the French did at Austerlitz, you should be able to cause massive surrenders with this rule.

Impossible retreats may lead to prisoners.

Cavalry

Like in the old rules, cavalry can withdraw before advancing infantry. In fact, it either has to, or reaction charge the infantry. So you don't have to worry about cavalry being in infantry close combats, something that could happen in previous versions of the NBS rules, but without any real explanation on how to resolve it.

Special retreating capabilities

Limbered horse artillery can retreat like cavalry too.

British cavalry was notorious for doing more harm to itself than its targets. In the game, British cavalry can only recall from a charge if stacked with a leader. Also, British cavalry becomes blown directly after the charge combat, before retreating back from the charge. This makes them tempting targets for reaction charges as they retreat away.

British cavalry

Another special form of cavalry is cossacks. While they generally have nothing to do on a battlefield, their use is to harrass marching troops and pick off stragglers and foragers, sometimes they do appear. Cossacks can only charge disorganized or routed units, and will retreat away from enemy cavalry charges.

Cossacks

Skirmishers

We have been touching on most of the special rules for skirmishers already. Skirmishers used to have facing for movement purposes, but could fire in all directions. We thought that silly and gave them all around frontal facing and took away some movement points to compensate for the maneuvering. We also thought it a bit silly that you'd have to look up the firepower and morale of skirmishers, from Talavera on, the ratings will be printed on the counters.

With the British in Talavera comes special rifle skirmishers. They are treated like normal skirmishers, but with higher morale, the ability to stray 3 hexes away from friendly units and a die roll modifier to skirmisher fire. The famous British light infantry tactics didn't develop until late in the war, and will be covered in game specific rules when needed.

British Riflemen

Commanders

Commander loss and recovery

Every time a commander is stacked with a unit taking losses, you make a leader check. Roll 2 dice. On 11-12, the leader is wounded and carried off the gameboard. If it's a multi-day scenario, you check at midnight to see if the commander survives his wounds. Roll one die: On 5-6, he is back in action, on 3-4, he's still out but can be rolled for next night, on 1-2, he has died of his wounds.

Fighters: very inspiring commanders

Some commanders were better at inspiring troops than at staff work. For that reason, we've introduced the concept of «fighters». A leader marked as a fighter on the counter are treated as rated 2 higher for anything but order purposes.

Levies

Untrained troops

With the introduction of the Spanish in the system comes the really poor units, troops that don't even know the most basic drill. Just rating them E morale doesn't do them justice, so we've marked them as levies. Levies can't form square and use up 4 movement points (half their movement rate if in good order) to change formation.

French Columns

The French tactical superiority

There is a lot of mythology surrounding French battle formations. The «ordre mixte» was rarely used and anyway didn't work as shown in earlier rules. What the French did do was attack in rather wide columns, essentially a three times deeper than usual line. We have considered that one of the many varieties of «combat columns» that appeared during the war, with similar capabilities, only that the French usually have them before the other nations. The French combat columns do get one special ability: after winning a close combat, they can automatically change formation to line. This comes in very handy when the enemy can be expected to counterattack right away, like in village fighting.

Night

Night reduces activities and makes coordination more difficult

Night fighting during the Napoleonic wars was very uncommon, and when it was tried it usually ended up in fiascos. But it was tried from time to time, not the least at Talavera, the subject of the next NBS game. Previous rules versions had a number of restrictions to night turns, and we've added a few, one of which is optional, but really cool.

First and most obvious, night turns are one hour instead of 30 minutes. Visibility is one hex only, and cavalry and skirmishers are more or less useless at night. This means there is no fire combat at all at night. A number of tables have night modifiers, most importantly the check to stand table (for both sides, the defender might as easily be spooked as the attacker at night) and the attack stoppage table. Command range is halved at night (but remember that troops out of command can always elect to stay in place, so no mandatory contraction of the lines just because darkness sets in). Also, orders are executed and checked for stoppage per division rather than per corps, making coordination more difficult.

'Get lost' optional rule

The final, optional rule allows units to actually get lost when moving by night. If you move along hexes that don't contain either a road or watercourse to follow, buildings or friendly units, count the number of hexes moved. When you get back into safety or encounter the enemy, roll a die: If the roll is less than or equal to the number of hexes moved, the unit got lost. Move it back to where it started, then the other player gets to move the unit the same number of movement points! This is sure to throw some real chaos into anything but the simplest night attacks.

Random Events

Now that we're into the optionals, another highly recommended optional rule is random events. They add a lot of chaos to the game, as well as a great excuse to why you lost afterwards. Each player turn, you roll a die, on a 1, a random event has occurred. The standard random events table includes results like advanced or delayed reinforcements, lost orders and loose cannons, cavalry recovery (allows you to recover permanent cavalry losses like you would stragglers for one turn) and commander losses. Several of the results lets you roll again on the game specific random events table. These cover all the fun stuff that happened or could have happened during the historical battles, and there is one table for each battle. And of course we have included tables for Austerlitz, Marengo and Aspern Essling in the rules!

Unpredictable events can influence the way the battle runs

Concealed Forces

This optional adds more than a little chaos to the game, and changes the dynamics a lot. While not for the casual gamer, everyone should try it at least once, and some might end up preferring to play the games this way. The rule lets you better appreciate the difficulties the commanding generals of the time faced.

The basic concept of the rule is that a formation out of sight from the enemy is replaced by a «concealed force» marker. These markers can then multiply over time breeding dummy markers (or real split-offs), until the forces bump into each other and the troops are redeployed to the map. There is of course a number of technicalities to it, but the basic concept is as simple as that. Incidentally, concealed forces also make the games play *faster*, since you don't worry about the movement of individual units, only the Concealed Force marker.

Optional limited intelligence rules that ...
... speed up the play

No optional Defensive Orders

One final note on an optional rule that *is not* included. The Civil War Brigade Series, the NBS ancestor, has optional rules for defensive orders. These rules means not only attacking, but also defending units have to check for orders stoppage. Personally I love these rules and always play with them in CWB. We didn't feel them quite appropriate for the Napoleonic era, however. And, after just one play with the NBS 3.0 rules, you will find that they aren't really needed. Losing defenders will definitely be melting away, abandoning their position due to the combat tables, without any further encouragement from any stoppage tables.

Not relevant in Napoleonic battles

This concludes the NBS 3.0 Designer's Notes. We hope you have enjoyed them!
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