

Bloody Big Battles

House rules for Napoleonic Era

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1 INTRODUCTION

This document sets out my house rules for using Chris Pringle's Bloody Big Battles (BBB) for the Napoleonic era, with special reference to Waterloo.

BBB are a well-crafted set of rules stripped down to the bare essentials. It is tempting to add bits of "chrome" - but this interferes with the careful design. I have tried to resist this temptation and to restrict the adaptations to the minimum needed.

2 BASICS

2.1 ITEMS LEFT OUT

Given the later weapons innovations some elements can be stripped out:

- Only smoothbore muskets are used in small arms
- Only smoothbore artillery for heavier weapons, though these are adapted slightly (see below)
- The rules on skirmishers are dropped.

Rifled muskets and skirmishers were used in the Napoleonic era, but there is no need for their special treatment in BBB, which applies to later tactics.

2.2 SCALES

We use a ground scale of 1" to 150m, and a troop scale of one base to 1,500 infantry, 750 cavalry or 36 artillery pieces. These can be varied (e.g. one base to 1,000 infantry, 500 cavalry and 24 guns), but this scale worked well enough for a compact battle like Waterloo.

3 CAVALRY

Cavalry played a much bigger role in the Napoleonic era, and, significantly, was much less dominated by firepower. Its use has quite a different feel to that implied by the rules, which leads some major changes to the rules.

3.1 TROOP SCALE

Cavalry bases comprise half the number of men as infantry, instead of the same number. This gives beefier, less vulnerable units - or allows a large number of units to be represented.

3.2 CAVALRY TO INFANTRY ASSAULTS

This needs to be given an altogether different, Napoleonic, feel, with often futile assaults sitting alongside spectacular successes with little middle ground. This entails an extra column for the assault results table for these combats:

Difference	Outcome
+7	Defender surrenders and is removed from play. Attacker MUST exploit but is not disrupted.
+4 to +6	Defender loses 1 base for every attacking base. Remainder retreat 12" Disrupted . Attacker loses 1 base. Disrupted. Pass through and exploit, or retire 6".
+1 to +3	Defender loses 1 base. Holds ground. Disrupted. Attacker loses 1 base. Disrupted. Pass through and exploit, or retire 6".
0	Defender disrupted. Holds ground Attacker disrupted. Retires 6".
-1 to -3	As 0
-4 or lower	Attacker loses 1 base. Disrupted. Retires 6". Defender unaffected.

A separate set of assault modifiers is needed too:

Condition	Modifier
Defender in cover	N/A
Defender outflanked	+2
Numerical advantage	N/A
Aggressive	1
In depth	N/A
Square	2
Disrupted - infantry	2
Disrupted - cavalry	1
Low on ammo	N/A
Fragile	1
Spent	2

Note that there are no modifiers for relative numbers in these combats.

Further points:

- Cavalry may not assault infantry in cover, even in terrain such as villages that they may move through freely.

- *There is no penalty for cavalry attacking upslope.*
- *May pass through & exploit, means that the cavalry carries out an exploitation attack passing through the infantry it has attacked.*

3.3 SQUARE

Square is a mode that can be adopted by infantry in line or in depth to reduce its vulnerability to cavalry. Of course troops in any of the game formations (except march column, perhaps) would form square formation. This Square status reflects a precautionary adoption of the formation, and more cautious movement generally, which gives them a reduced chance of being caught by surprise.

3.3.1 Forming Square

This is not a formation change, and does not cause a move deduction, but must be carried out before movement. Cannot be done in difficult terrain (Villages are not difficult terrain). Face the front rank flank bases sideways. It may not be adopted in cover. This means that square cannot be adopted in the same move as passing through cover. This applies to steep slopes and marshes, but not gentle slopes.

3.3.2 Moving in Square

The maximum level of movement is 6". This is not affected by half moves. Units may not conduct an Assault in Square.

3.3.3 Firing in Square

Causes one left shift if half or more of the fire points are from units in square.

3.3.4 Changing back from Square

Square is lost automatically on entering cover, disordering terrain or on being forced to retreat. It can be lost without cost at any time during the side's own move.

3.4 COMBINED INFANTRY AND CAVALRY ASSAULTS

Treat as two separate combats. Infantry resolve first, and do not count the cavalry in the numerical advantage calculation.

4 ARTILLERY

4.1 BOUNCE-THROUGH FIRE

At Waterloo, as in several other major battles, bounce-through and indirect fire proved important. This rule applies for Offensive Fire only.

If artillery is firing at a target beyond 3", then it claims additional targets beyond its declared target if the central line of fire passes through other units at

any point up to 6" beyond the front of the first target, including up or down different levels. Points to note:

- *Count fire points in accordance with normal rules for the actual range of the bounce-through target (remember that target is not available for Defensive Fire). The same applies to any modifiers.*
- *Bounce-through is stopped by difficult terrain, including steep slopes, woods, marshes and towns, but not counting gentle slopes or villages. Villages, however, will provide the relevant cover to any fire that passes through them.*
- *Players may pick a dummy target of plain ground that would otherwise be available, simply in order to use bounce-through fire on unseen units. In other words this rule is used for pure indirect fire.*
- *High dice throws in adjudicating bounce-through fire do not cause Low on Ammo - except the first throw for indirect fire (previous bullet).*

4.2 HORSE ARTILLERY

At Waterloo both sides had access to horse artillery in numbers that were concentrated to something of grand-tactical significance. These units are more mobile, but ammunition constraints restrict their use in longer range fire.

- *Horse artillery gets a bonus of half a move of movement. It can use this free move to extend normal movement by 6" (or 3" if subject to a half move), to unlimber at start of move and fire at full effect, or to unlimber after a half move and fire at half effect (including a move subject to a half move). In other words the bonus can be used to limber/unlimber or to move extra. It cannot use the bonus to get more than a full move of fire!*
- *Like cavalry horse artillery may change direction once during its move.*
- *Horse artillery has a maximum range of 12", and does not do bounce-through fire. But it has the same points up to 12".*

5 OUTPOSTS

A special rule is needed to cater for Hougoumont and La Haye Sainte. While in theory this rule could be made a general one, I cannot think of another battle where it would apply.

Hougoumont and LHS are designated "outposts". They are marked by structures of not much more than a base in size. These may be occupied by units whose main body is up to 6" to the rear.

5.1 MARKING OUTPOSTS

Place one base to the rear of the outpost, referred to as the "outpost". The rest of the unit is referred to as "the main body".

5.2 TREATMENT OF OUTPOST AND MAIN BODY

These are treated as a single unit for the purposes of spent status, and for determining minimum size. They are treated separately for:

- *Fire combat and assault determination*
- *Disruption and "out of ammo"*

5.3 STATUS OF OUTPOSTS

Outposts:

- *Exert a Zone of Control of 3" on infantry and may not be bypassed within this by infantry or artillery. Cavalry may not conclude a move within this ZOC unless facing directly towards or away from it, but may otherwise bypass the outpost.*
- *Fire only in the Defensive fire phase, but against any target within the ZOC.*
- *Are treated as fortifications when receiving fire or being assaulted. LHS is treated as an entrenchment (-2) and Hougomont as a fortification (-3).*
- *Make a separate movement throw only to rally after disruption.*

If outposts are to lose a base, this may be taken from the main body; otherwise the post is abandoned.

5.4 CHANGING HANDS

A new unit may take over an outpost during its normal movement if it starts within 6" of the outpost. If it is already occupied then this base is returned to the main body.

If the outpost falls or is abandoned, it plays no future part in the game. The structure may be removed, or otherwise ignored.

5.5 SEPARATION

If the main body is forced more than 6" from the outpost:

- *The outpost is treated as Spent and any loss of a base destroys the outpost. But it remains in play.*
- *The main body treats the outpost as a loss for the purposes of spent status and minimum unit size. If it is reduced to a single base, it is removed from play.*

5.6 ASSAULT

Attackers can count neither numerical advantage nor any advantage for depth.

If a draw is scored, both sides are disrupted and another round is played, but no bases are removed.

5.7 ARTILLERY

There are no special artillery rules, but both Hougomont and LHS are actually quite hard to target from artillery, due to folding ground and woods.

6 OTHER RULES

6.1 FIREFIGHT

There are no firefight penalties for cavalry or limbered artillery as targets. These are more appropriate to later weapon technologies. In the Napoleonic era cavalry could endure significant periods under fire.

The firefight table is cut off at a maximum of 25 points rather than 50. There are fewer points in play, and major concentrations of fire on a single unit not easy to achieve.

6.2 MAXIMUM & MINIMUM UNIT SIZES

These changes mainly reflect the use of 1,500 men per base, rather than BBB's usual 1,000. Napoleonic formations tended to be more compact.

The maximum unit size is six bases. Divisions of 9,000 should be represented by three base units.

The minimum unit sizes remain as in BBB - two for cavalry and exceptional infantry units; three normally for infantry.

Under BBB if units are reduced to a single base they are removed. The presence of quite a few two and three base units makes this quite significant - these smaller units do not have much stamina. So:

- *If a two base unit is required to lose a base under Firefight or Assault, a base is not removed unless the unit is already Spent, but instead the unit is automatically treated as Spent, regardless of its rating. If it is already Spent, the unit is removed.*
- *If such a unit qualifies to recover a base then this Spent status is recovered, but not a further base.*