

NAPOLEONIC 20 DESIGNER'S NOTES

By Joseph Miranda

My challenge was to design a realistic, playable game of a major campaign with only 20 units or less on the map. I chose the Waterloo Campaign as my starting point and designed the first game in this series for *The Strategist* wargaming newsletter back in 1999. This new **Victory Point Games** edition is a better-tested and refined, graphically enhanced version of what I hoped would become a new 'classic' game system – sort of a modern, miniaturized version of the old **Avalon Hill Waterloo** game from the 1960s.

Why Start with Waterloo?

The Waterloo Campaign worked nicely for my initial design goals because the number of corps adds up to 18, because of the colorful units, and because of the nature of the campaign. The campaign itself was actually a series of battles fought over a three day period, involving four major actions (Ligny, Quatre Bras, Wavre and Waterloo), so I designed this game system to give the players tactical and operational elements. This type of campaign was perfect for what I wanted to accomplish.



Combat Strengths

Combat strengths were based on a variety of factors, including manpower, number of artillery pieces, and training. By keeping the values relatively low, the Differential Combat System works particularly well. The variety of combat results and their various effects show the nature of an engagement in battle at this time. Results range anywhere from indecisive to Routing (with the die roll nicely simulating the varying degrees that units might flee before recovering) to Breaking (where a unit is *not* 'completely destroyed,' but it is ineffective until formally Rallied).

Cavalry

Given the scale of the game system, there was an issue to portraying cavalry. In **WATERLOO 20** I gave the French their four cavalry corps and the British get one big cavalry unit. Thus, the British cavalry is more effective as a massed shock force,

but less useful for screening and pursuit, as are the more granular French corps are.

The Prussians did not get a cavalry unit because their cavalry formations were intrinsically part of their infantry corps. Admittedly, we could have had a special 'combined arms' rule or something in built it into the Prussian units to show this, but to keep the game simple I just factored the cavalry into the Prussian unit strengths.

The idea is that the French get a better balanced force, while the Prussians and British each have their own strengths.

Rout Effects

People have commented that, because Rout effects are removed at the end of a player's turn (i.e., the end of his Combat Phase), that the penalties seem much less severe when an attacking unit routs than it does when a defending unit routs. This is correct and intentional for the following reasons:

First, as a principle of game design, performing administrative stuff at the *end* of a player's turn is usually 'neater,' especially in near-introductory level wargames (like the **NAPOLEONIC 20** system). Interrupting the flow of a player's turn to do housekeeping chores has a bad feel and can make the game's Sequence of Play clunky and hard to master.

Second, let's consider the matter of simulation 'realism,' and for this we'll consider the implications of the Optional Rule concerning rout effects.



Suppose you suffer a **DR** result; your unit routs and essentially loses its next Movement (it can only move back toward your LoC) and Combat Phases (suffering greatly reduced strength, but more likely will have routed far away from being in any position to attack whatsoever), all because it will not recover until the end of its owners' *next* Player Turn. Essentially, it is knocked out of action for a single turn (perhaps two if it routed a full six hexes).

If you suffer an **AR** result, your attacking units are pushed back one die roll's distance. Unless you roll a very low rout number, you should not be able to get back into a position to attack for at least another turn. Thus, that attacking unit is effectively out of action during your next Player Turn.

The key concept with an **AR** result is that *the attack failed*. My design reflects that when a defending is routed it is going to be in worse shape than when an attacking unit routs. This is because when a defender is routed, the attacker is making a deliberate

effort to upset that unit's cohesion and may be pursuing. Conversely, when the attacker routs, he is just being thrown back out of the immediate vicinity of the battle.

This system is designed around large scale formations (i.e., Corps level units). You are not seeing individual regiments rout as they might in a more detailed miniatures game. My task was to consider the overall impact of routing at *higher scale*.

Movement Rates

The movement rates were deliberately kept low to prevent players from conducting unrealistic outflanking maneuvers. The low rates also show the significance of using roads and forced-marches to enhance maneuverability during the types of campaigns that the **NAPOLEONIC 20** system was designed to simulate.

Terrain Effects

Some players have wondered why the defender gets only the single most advantageous benefit when defending, and not *all* the benefits that hex might provide. That is, if a unit is in a town *and* behind a river, shouldn't they receive a cumulative benefit in defense for *both* terrain types?

No. This is a simple 'design for effect' mechanic reflecting to the short range of weapons of this period and ground scale of each hex. Basically, a unit would either defend in one position or another. Thus, a unit might defend at the stream's edge or back in the town, but they could not effectively combine *both*.

Random Events

Random events add an element of uncertainty into the campaigns, help 'tell the story' for each one by including events that are very specific to it, and generally increase the friction of war (as von Clausewitz calls it). As students of history know, variables such as these can be decisive when campaigning at this scale.

Because of these random events, players must think intuitively about what *might* happen, carefully consider how and where to allocate their forces, which routes of march to take, and where they want to fight their decisive battles. It's a delicious puzzle that makes for great gaming.

Terrain Features

Like everything else in this game system, the goal was to keep things simple. The different terrain types are generic enough



to cover a wide variety of campaigning locations for other games in the series.

The Objective Hexes were an addition that playtesting revealed the need for. They're included to keep players geographically focused around key areas important to each campaign's 'story' and give players a place to maneuver to and make their stand (or assault) at.

Morale Points

Extremely critical is the trade-off when allocating Morale Points for movement, rally and especially combat purposes. These decisions are actually easier to make when using only a small number of units, and so this mechanic is particularly suited to the **NAPOLEONIC 20** game system.



In essence, Morale Points are a resource that the players can collect (during Night turns, by breaking enemy units, and through the occasional random event), lose inadvertently (through battlefield reverse and, again, through the occasional random event) and wisely spend at critical moments. Committing Guard units (e.g., the French Imperial Guard) can also have a serious impact on army morale, so this is *not* a decision to be made lightly. Above all else, Morale Points are directly tied to the game's Victory Conditions, so players must be judicious about every Morale Point expenditure that they make.

Summary

So there you have it. My goal with the **NAPOLEONIC 20** system was to give players the big picture and have them make the big decisions: which way their army will go, cost effectiveness of constant attacks versus morale loss, dealing with the fickle and ever-changing fortunes of war, etc.

Joe Miranda lives in the Los Angeles area. He has been the editor of *Strategy & Tactics* magazine for many years now, and is responsible for innumerable game designs on topics ranging from ancient warfare to galactic conquest, in sizes ranging from huge (a.k.a. multi-map 'monster' games) to diminutive (such as this small-format offering published by **Victory Point Games**).

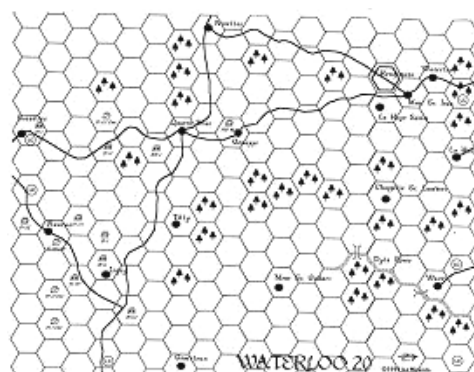
Joe's gaming website can be found at: <http://home.earthlink.net/~jamiranda/gaming.html>

DEVELOPER'S NOTES

By Alan Emrich

Long before **Victory Point Games** was a glint in my eye, Joe Miranda sent me a computer scan of a dim photocopy of a mimeographed newsletter that looked like it was revived from the wastebasket moments before being thrust into an incinerator. If you *tried* to give a game a worse presentation, you would have been hard pressed to top my first encounter with **WATERLOO 20**. I glanced at it, wished it were nicer looking and fully developed, and filed it away on my computer where it faded from memory for years...

Then, along with my students, we started up **VPG** to make small-format games, and suddenly I needed some 'example' games to publish and thus demonstrate to future classes what we could do together. Finding favors with Jim Dunnigan and Christopher R. "Doc Decision" Cummins was a start, but my old amigo Joe Miranda wanted to help. Among the games he graciously submitted for consideration, *none* was this game! Instead, I blew the cobwebs off my dusty memory banks and remembered that I had this old chestnut on my computer somewhere; the search was on!



This is the original black-and-white look of the *Waterloo 20* game map. The original counters are shown further on in this article; they were black-and-white too, so I 'colorized' them for you. -AE

Finding it, then rolling my eyes at all the development work there was to do, I dove in and started putting together our **Victory Point Games** edition of '*Loo 20*.'

Love at First Fight

The first playtest kit I produced – with my quickie map, NATO symbol adorned units, and nice draft rules – taught me that Joe had designed not a mere game, but a true game *system*. Right from the outset, I was developing *two* projects: **WATERLOO 20** the game, and **NAPOLEONIC 20** the game *engine*. I could sense the potential,

but knew it would be even *more* work to completely realize this project as a potentially expanding game *series*.

Joe has a lot of clever ideas packed into this game system. His use of Morale Points was inspired, as was brilliant way that he caught the 'feel' of operations at this level of campaigning. It was terrific how many cool decisions a player faced each turn.

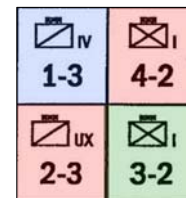
The random events, however, were too narrow and repetitive, being initially designed as a simple D6 Table. I'm a guy who likes a little more *story* with his game, so I put the random events onto cards, made a few more of them, added a variant unit (Frederick's corps) and ran it by Joe. He loved it and suggested further improvements. Like the great teams of the past (Abbot and Costello, Rock and Roll, Hitler and Mussolini), Designer Joe and Developer Alan hit it off right away, playing to each other's strengths as we constantly exchange emails and phone calls to make these games. It was like the old days when I worked on Joes, *Crisis 2000* game for *GameFix* magazine and Joe, myself, and the playtesters were having a great time!

So we scrupulously playtested both the Standard and Exclusive game rules, ironing out the kinks in both the game and system. It became fast apparent that player's lacked 'direction' on the map, and so Objective Hexes were added to help 'steer' things beyond just the LOC hexes around the map edges. That was a huge addition, especially as I had started working on a proof-of-concept game design to demonstrate the versatility of the game *system*: **JENA 20**.



Drawing Blanks

Joe's original vision for the game was to use twenty 1/2" counters.



Unfortunately, the game also needed a Game Turn and Morale markers at the very least, so we upped the size of the counters to 5/8" and made 40 of them. Now we had plenty of room for markers and variant pieces, so we got busy cooking them!

Optional Rules and units began to flow – ideas that would build onto the game's *system* and not just **WATERLOO 20**. It was the development of the Fog of War rules that took the game to a new level. Joe



came up this idea, but developing it into a richly working system was no mean feat. Now, I believe, it is one of the crown jewels of the game. If you haven't played with a live opponent and hidden units yet, you should!

The Cadres were a response to the requirements to garrison locations like LOC and



Objective hexes, without dispatching the large-formation units in the game to do so. They also incorporated themselves naturally into the Fog of War and Rally mechanics of the game.

Turn and Turn Again

The game system (to say nothing of the first two games, **WATERLOO 20** and **JENA 20**) went on to success. However, players kept asking questions, rules were being clarified, and many new designers stepped forward to follow in the footsteps of **JENA 20** to design their own entries into the exciting **NAPOLEONIC 20** series. This called for some new terrain types to be added (minor rivers, redoubts, slopes, etc.), a new units type (artillery, plus Exclusive Rules for Cossacks and Militia infantry units), which led us back to our *artiste extraordinaire*, John Cooper.

Let's face it, all the development in the world won't get noticed without some nice graphics (or, as my daughter says, "boys don't notice your brains first"). We were very fortunate that I had seen John's work on his personal redesign of the counters for SPI's old *Napoleon at Waterloo*. The fruits of his private labors are now made public, to much ovation, in these games.

Now it's a matter of going through the backlog of submissions for **NAPOLEONIC 20** system games, and then seeing what new systems might be in store for future series! For that, let me introduce the new Game Series Developer who is taking my place, Lance McMillan:

NAPOLEONIC 20 SYSTEM DEVELOPER'S NOTES

By Lance McMillan

Unit Values

At the very broad-brush scale of the **NAPOLEONIC 20** games, the quality of a corps worth of troopers really doesn't make a whole heck of a lot of difference: with perhaps only one or two exceptions (and those based chiefly on raw numbers and not training/experience), they're all going to end up rated at '1' strength.

However, there are other issues involved because of the game system itself. Take for example the notion of 'elite' troops. Thus far, we've only rated a

very few select formations as 'elite.' During our playtesting of **RUSTERLITZ 20**, the question came up about giving the Austrian heavy cavalry an 'elite' rating.

Now, arguably, they might warrant 'elite' status based on their training, motivation, historical performance, and so forth – but in game terms, giving them (or any cavalry unit) 'elite' status would create major problems.

A Horse is a Horse?

One of the chief in-game effects of 'elite' status is that you subtract two from your rout rolls. If you couple that with the fact that cavalry won't generate a morale loss unless it rolls over its movement rating (a three), then you end up with the bizarre situation of heavy cavalry being pretty much immune to routing and becoming the supreme defensive units in the game.

What I'm getting at is that the entire process of deciding how we rate an individual units in the **NAPOLEONIC 20** series is a very subjective process, dependent not *just* on our historical research, but also heavy influenced by discussions among the design team, and the results of fairly extensive playtesting.

Matters of Scale v. Unit Types

Some have commented about the "feel" of having cavalry units attacking into or defending in town hexes, or artillery units that can attack into cities, but not support an *adjacent* city hexes in defense (Optional Rule 16.3) because it's ZOC does not

extend to and adjacent city hex. At first blush, these game mechanics might raise eyebrows, but really it's all a matter of scale and perspective.

Remember, these games tend to be corps level, with hexes that are 1/2 to a full mile across, and turns that are roughly 4+ hours long. There's plenty of room in there for a squadron or two of cavalry, quite likely with horse battery support, to maneuver and threaten or drive off a foe – also keeping in mind that many cavalry formations had troopers equipped with carbines and trained in skirmishing tactics.

There's a great anecdote I came across in my research for the **SMOLENSK 20**

Expansion Kit, where a single Russian cavalryman in a small wood held up a French



regiment for several hours by taking pot shots at them! They eventually had to bring up a battery of guns to blow the copse of trees down to finally take him out so the regiment could resume its advance. Those kinds of stories get lost in the background with an operational level system like this, but they're still

"Between the Event cards and the rather mercurial combat resolution, players never really *know* whether they're doing as well as they think they are, yet they still maintain the feeling that they're in control.

It's almost as if (system designer) Joe Miranda has somehow given the players the "illusion" that they're in control and know what's going on, when in fact they don't. It's very similar to what I suspect their historical counterparts would have felt."

– Lance McMillan

happening "just below the radar" of the units of maneuver in the game. So, yes, cavalry can (and did) attack into/out of towns with considerable determination.



The artillery units in these games are the great "grand batteries" or "artillery parks" of upwards of 100 guns, and

the large trains of ammunition wagons that supported them. These formations were notoriously slow, unwieldy, and occupied large sections of the line when deployed.

Our feeling was that while it was certainly feasible to line up the guns in a convenient field or open square and blast away at some building or other that was being used by the enemy as a strongpoint for their defense, it was much more difficult to maneuver several batteries through an unmarked series of narrow streets and effectively deploy them to counter an emergent enemy assault.

Remember, this "they can't support certain adjacent friendly units" issue only applies in situations where the artillery and

adjacent friendly unit are in adjacent town hexes or across a river or there is some other such obstruction between them. If you want defensive artillery support, keep the field artillery outside the town (i.e., in the field).

Design for Effect

We don't just count muskets and arbitrarily say, 'okay, this one's a 3' and leave it at that. We playtest it as a 3, and as a 2 and a 4 as well – and sometimes we even try it out as a 1 or a 5. And we keep trying until we get the in-game effect we're looking for. It's all an evolutionary process – an *iterative* process, if you will, in our quest to get the right game *effect*.



Could some tweed-wearing scholar take exception to the fact that we failed to address the fact that the 32nd *Ligne* had pewter rather than brass buttons on their facings? Sure. Is the way we do things perfect? No, not by a long shot. But does any of that matter in what is supposed to be and was always intended as simply a simple, quick playing, and above all **fun** game system? Nope, not one damned bit – because if you're looking for an historical simulation that covers all those sorts of esoteric details that enable you can gain a greater insight into the deeper operational nuances of the campaigns our games cover, this is the wrong game series for you.

Get Series

The **NAPOLEONIC 20** series games are made first and foremost to be *played*, not studied. Most of them take only about an hour to get through a full game (and that's even with utter 'n00bs' who've never seen a hex-and-counter wargame before in their lives). We've only got eight pages of Standard Rules, and we've struggled with every game in the series thus far to keep the Exclusive Rules down to two pages.

With that in mind, you're just not going to get rules addressing the riding skills of Nappy's horsemen in that kind of a package – at least not in any recognizable detail. Do we try to address that and similar issues? Yes, albeit we do so very indirectly: in how we rate various units in comparison to one another. We try to 'abstract in' those elements via the unit values and core game systems.