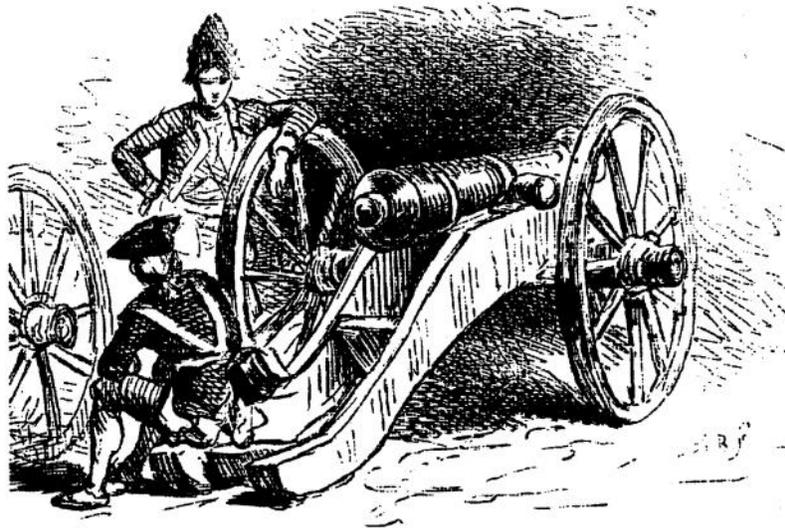# HisEntCo

A Whiff of Grape Shot

I Want Answers, Scotty

by Phil Johnston

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Okay, I admit I've been raising more questions than answering them in this column to date. That's because I'm more interested in getting people thinking and talking about wargaming as simulation than I am in providing canned solutions to particular problems. That, plus the fact that my solutions are not likely to be the last word in wargame command anyway. Wargaming is an evolving phenomenon, a fact which we will explore in a future column when we look at how command rules have developed and how the current realism-playability debate fits into the history of wargaming. That's right the history angle again.

In this article I will begin to provide some suggestions I hesitate to call them answers for creating a more realistic command environment on the wargames table. They are only one man's opinion, but they are grounded in much study and reflection.

In the last issue we looked in some depth at fog-of-war and friction as analyzed by Clauswitz. We saw how Clausewitz's description of uncertainty (the lack of or unreliability of information) and chance (the incalculable interaction of minor events which frustrate a commander's plans) make up the largest part of what might be simulated in wargame command. Clausewitz's other two attributes of the environment of war danger and physical exertion are harder to simulate.

A Matter of Chance
Wargamers are accustomed to dealing with chance at some levels that's why we play with dice. The effects of fire, close combat, morale these are all areas in which we feel chance must play a critical role.

Just an interesting side note at this point: Traditional U.K.-style wargame rules tend to limit chance to a relatively minor role two average dice which might cause the fire, morale, etc., to be modified slightly but not be radically altered. American rules tend to have much wider ranging results possible on the roll of the die. As usual, there are exceptions to this general analysis.

This is a fundamental difference in design philosophy and, possibly, in the respective views of how warfare occurs. The former philosophy is largely deterministic: if the circumstances are right (my unit's morale, weapons, advantage of position, etc., are superior) I should win. The die determines whether it's a big win or a little one. The latter is a probabilistic approach: if the circumstances are right, I increase my odds of winning, but I could roll snake eyes and see my best units streaming broken to the rear.

I would argue that the latter more closely reflects chance in war, at least as Clauswitz, Tolstoy and I understand it. Even if everything I can control is set to my advantage, that which I can't control may turn the tables against me, and the Old Guard routs. The odds are small, but it could happen. Likewise, the Neapolitan militia may win the day though the odds are similarly small. That's not to say that the right circumstances should not go a long way toward increas-

ing the odds in my favor, so there's much more to winning than just chance.

Because of this, I strongly prefer 2D10 to 2D6 or a single die roll. It gives a much smoother, longer bell curve, and that's what is needed to reflect complex interactions of minor events, such as those involved in large unit morale, close combat, etc. The bell curve tends to give average or normal results, but it allows for extremes at both ends, so the longer and smoother the curve, the more realistic the range of results. Thus, the right circumstances tend to push the results toward the higher success end of the curve, and a more balanced set of circumstances (again morale, weapons, position, etc.) tend to cause results to fall in the indecisive center of the curve.

One die just doesn't work for wargaming functions other than to-hit numbers or other simple routines, since it is entirely linear. The odds of rolling 1 are the same as rolling 10, while with 2D10, the odds of rolling a 2 or 20 are much smaller than those of rolling a 10 or 11.

I Digress Further
Another by the way: by imbedding complex routines in a bell curve with modifiers, you can dramatically simplify rules without sacrificing reality, since the real world conditions are included but rendered transparent to the player. Thus, instead of having to follow a lengthy flow chart to determine each of the subsidiary events in close combat that affect the final outcome, you can imbed them in a single table and one die roll.

Take two hypothetical examples. In one, the player (a corps commander) moves his units into tactical combat range. He then selects the first unit to launch its assault. He rolls to see if they advance; he rolls to see whether they attack with enthusiasm or elan. The defending player (also a corps commander) rolls to see if the unit targeted by the attack stays or leaves. If it stays, he rolls to see at what range it fires. He then rolls to see how many casualties he inflicted. The attacking player now checks to see whether his unit is stopped by the fire or continues the charge. Assuming now that both attacker and defender don't break, the actual impact is resolved. The players move flanking stands around the enemy's unit, if possible, bonuses for additional ranks of figures are determined, and the die is rolled. Somebody stays; somebody doesn't. The entire procedure is repeated for each attacking unit.

In example two, the attacking player simply advances each of his attacking units toward the nearest enemy units (remember the player is a corps commander who is not going to be able to select the targets of each unit in a real assault). Then, each defending unit fires, and the casualties are calculated this is done using the interaction of the unit's quality and a die roll, even a linear die roll suffices. The attacker and defender then total up their impact modifiers, and there's another die roll. Casualties, mass, unit quality and enthusiasm, advantage of position, etc., are considered modifiers to this single roll they are not simply ignored in favor of a simplistic comparative die roll, high die wins. As a result, somebody stays; somebody goes.

In the former example, players have to make multiple decisions and die rolls. This not only slows down the game and renders it less playable; it also gives the player much more in-volvement in close combat than his historic counterpart would have had. In the latter case, the same results occur, with the interaction of the same events and attributes, but with only two die rolls and virtually no player involvement. To the corps commander, only the final result of the assault matters anyway, not whether each unit had advanced with enthusiasm, only to be whipped or whether a unit was able to envelope its opponent's flank. The latter is quicker, more playable and more realistic. Reality and playability; they are not mutually exclusive.

Another Chance
Back to the matter at hand. Chance is a normal part of most wargame rules; it's just not usu-ally a big enough part. About the only thing that's not affected by chance are your own plans, and they should be drawn up with the effects of chance in mind. Once the order leaves your hand, chance begins to create the friction that hinders your success.

In a future column we will look at how different rule sets have dealt with command, limitations and chance. For the remainder of this piece, I want to focus on the other half of the battlefield simulation, uncertainty or fog of war. First let me say that using an umpire or gamemaster is an enormous advantage in this regard. There's all sorts of things this enables you to do. Hid-den deployments, scouting reports, prisoner interrogation, reports of dust or movement hav-ing an umpire makes all these realistic sources of intelligence practicable for a wargame.

But, that's for another column. I promised some time ago, I'd pass along a set of fog-of- war rules, so the general parameters follow. It's based on card deployments I first encountered in Koenig Kreig and again saw in a Legacy of Glory game run at a recent convention. There's not enough space in this column to detail all the mechanics, but I can at least give you an overview. For those who are interested in the complete version, it's available free at www.hisentco.com. Look for Fog of War Rules on the Downloads page.

Finally, Something Useful
We begin with the premise that even on a clear day, you can't see forever. At a distance troops are only vaguely discernible they tend to darken their surroundings or create dust on the march. Their type, nationality, and numbers are impossible to determine. This is why Na-poleon and his staff hoped for some time that the troops appearing on their right might be Grouchy. Only much later, when the troops were closer, did the awful truth emerge.

As the forces close the distance between them, cavalry and infantry can be distinguished and numbers estimated. Only when very close several hundred yards at best can flags, uniforms and other details be determined.

Unfortunately, in wargaming we often know everything about the enemy, including where

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Hood's Texas brigade is deployed, much too soon. On the other hand, hidden deployments really only work with an active umpire. Here's one possible solution. Remember, this is just the general outline of the complete rules.

Each grand tactical unit brigade or division, etc., is assigned a marker. The ones we use are 8.5x11 sheets of card stock with a military symbol on one side (cavalry, infantry, etc.) and a short write-up of the unit on the other side (name, higher organization, number of battalions, morale level, movement rates, etc.). We created these on a computer, and if you want a set you can run through a copier to duplicate for your own use, just write as above.

In addition, a number of dummies are made available. The number is based on the quality of the army commander and represents his ability to mislead the enemy. An A commander might get 4, a B might get three, etc.

Each player deploys their markers well outside of visibility as determined either by terrain or distance. The only figures placed on the board are those visible to each side at the outset, which should be almost none. An important note: each player must be careful to maintain ad-equate deployment space for each grand tactical unit. If, when identities are revealed and fig-ures placed on the table, there is not enough room between markers to deploy them, then se-vere morale, efficiency and other results occur. You can't go back and adjust the markers to make room. (The mechanics for determining the negative results will depend on your rules used, but they must be severe. There are some samples in the complete rules.)

Next, begin the game and move the markers as though they were the actual units, or not in the case of dummies. This speeds up this portion of the game, which often tends to drag since players are moving large numbers of figures without being in combat.

When two cards are in visibility range (a mile to mile and a half, depending on telescope, weather, etc.) dummies are removed. This encourages players to send probing forces to de-velop the opponent's position.

When cards are within artillery range, figures are placed on the table for the affected grand tactical unit. Imagine your surprise when what you suspected was militia turns out to be the Iron Brigade. Ouch. From this point, the game proceeds normally, reinforcements and mark-ers not yet revealed continue to move as before, i.e. hidden.

Okay, it's simple, but we've found it to be very effective at creating some of the uncertainty and surprise often found in real battles. If you're interested visit the Downloads page at www.hisentco.com. Look for Fog of War Rules.

There's really no grand conclusion in this column, just a few suggestions and a bit of analysis. In future issues, I hope to begin making suggestions on friction and looking at how command rules have evolved.