

WELLINGTON'S VICTORY: A Variant Interpretation

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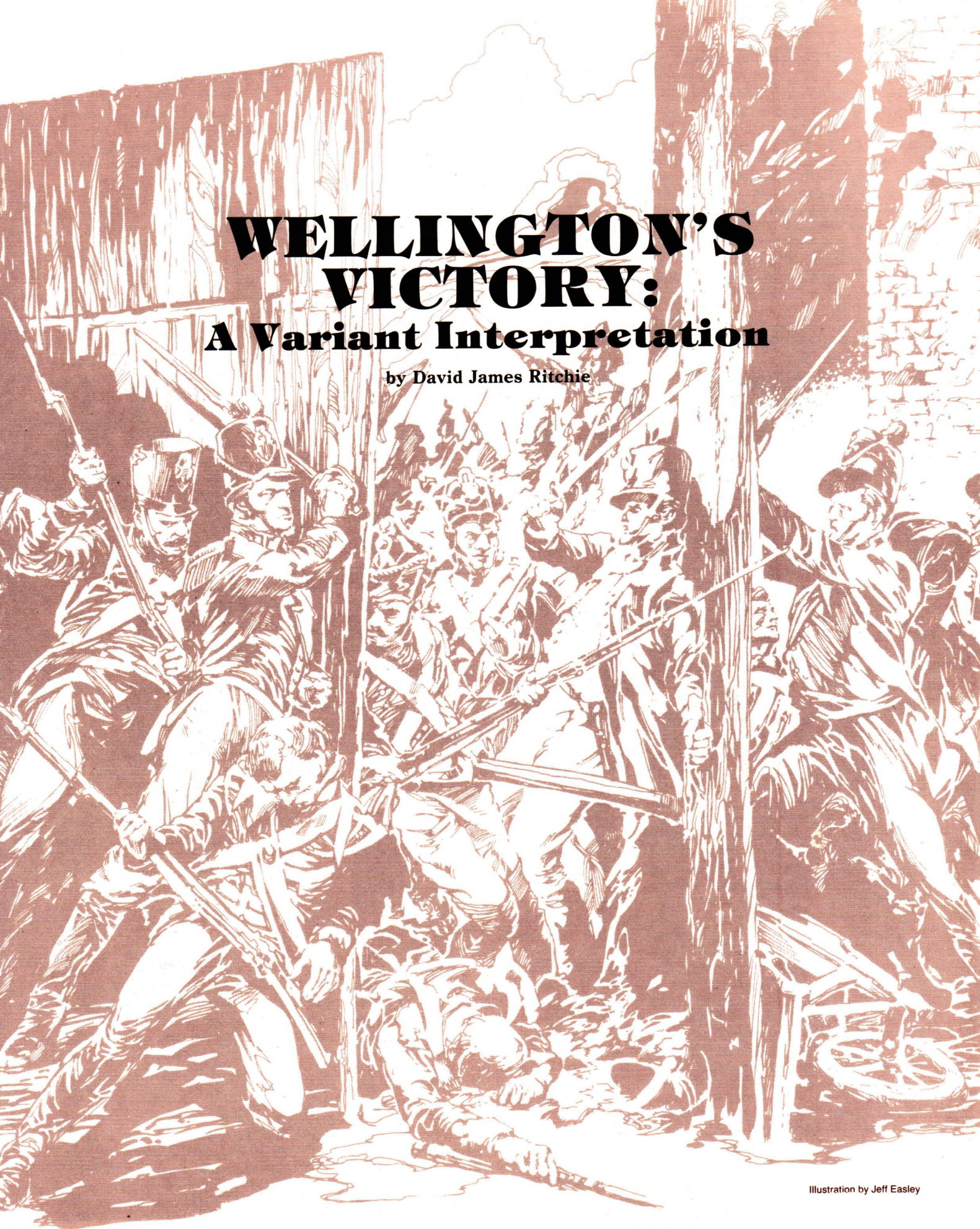


Illustration by Jeff Easley

"The history of the battle is not unlike the history of a ball! Some individuals may recollect all the little events of which the great result is the battle lost or won; but no individual can recollect the order in which or the exact moment at which they occurred, which makes all the difference as to their value or importance."

— Wellington



ALL BATTLES HAVE THEIR CONTROVERSIAL moments where lack of clear information or the presence of intangibles makes it difficult or impossible to reconstruct exactly what happened. But Waterloo is burdened with far more than its share of such moments. Despite the expenditure of literally forests of pulp in attempting to write that "true history" of the battle which Wellington said would never be written, historians are no nearer the truth today, than they were in 1815. Scores of explanations have been offered for the rout of the Old Guard, for example, yet all remain essentially speculation. Similar mysteries about the battle abound. Most will never be solved.

The reappearance of the WELLINGTON'S VICTORY™ Game after a three-year absence offers an ideal opportunity to take another look at Waterloo and to reinterpret some of those mysteries. The designer has put together what he terms a "carefully constructed interpretation" of the final confrontation of Napoleon and Wellington on June 18, 1815 before La Belle Alliance. No one who has taken a serious look at the game would deny the truth of this estimate. The research is immaculate; the mechanics of the designer's model are realistic in the extreme. Playtesting indicates that when effectively used, his model does approximate the battle's results. Yet for all that, WELLINGTON'S VICTORY still leaves ample room for disagreement.

Despite the designer's description of the battlefield in the Designer's Notes as a place of almost infinite chaos: cloaked in smoke and haze which severely limited visibility; mired in mud and trampled crops which curtailed mobility; and oppressed by extremes of heat which would have "made a blast furnace feel cool by comparison," the battlefield environment portrayed in the mechanics of play is one of elegantly ordered masses of disciplined troops engaged in the execution of their commanders' master plans. Much of this dual in-

terpretation arises from attempts at making this complex game playable. The designer should certainly not be faulted for that. Still, the variance between his stated interpretation of events and the way that interpretation is modified by the necessities of the game medium can be distressing at times. The uses and effectiveness of cavalry, the strengths and weaknesses of certain formations, the use of artillery in advance, and the real effects of hard cover are not always handled to the best advantage by the game. All of which is not to say that the simulation is inaccurate as a whole or is even seriously weak, but merely that this writer disagrees with certain points of the design.

When historians disagree, they dun each other with learned theses; when designers (or players) disagree, they more often than not present each other with variants. The variant rules in this article present a different interpretation of the Battle of Waterloo than in WELLINGTON'S VICTORY. They are not an attempt to "improve" the game; that rises or falls on its own merits, without the "benefit" of extraneous tinkering. Each variant rule is preceded by a discussion of the factors that prompted its inclusion in the article. Lest too much damage be wrought to the structural integrity of the game, variant rules have been presented here as optional rules which players may use or not, according to their own evaluation of the battle. Few variants by themselves greatly change the nature of a game. However, these optional rules together paint a somewhat different picture of "Wellington's Victory."

The Uses of Cavalry

EVEN THE MOST COLDLY LOGICAL MILITARY historian has a soft spot in his heart for those colorful hussars and lancers who went racing into the jaws of death. The common image of Napoleonic cavalry, influenced by Lord Tennyson and others, conjures images of serried ranks of horsemen thundering at full

gallop toward a head-on collision with cringing masses of terrified infantry. The designer of WELLINGTON'S VICTORY is certainly not immune to this romantic canvas. His concept of Napoleonic cavalry is that they constitute a shock weapon . . . period. To better simulate the shock value of cavalry, he even includes a "freezing effect" where all units within six hexes of the supposedly fast-moving ranks of charging cavalry pay double the normal Movement Point (MP) cost to change formation, facing, or for movement. Even if one grants that the primary role of Napoleonic cavalry was as a shock weapon (and the question has been endlessly debated), the other role of cavalry is ignored — that of the battlefield goon squad. A close look at the development of cavalry since Frederick the Great indicates that all cavalry were not in fact intended to be used in a shock role. Chasseurs, for example, were originally used for the pursuit of a defeated enemy after the battle. Dragoons, on the other hand, were originally conceived as mobile infantry and pickets. But the crucial cavalry task ignored by the game was the one which the hussars were originally created for . . . to stand behind formed infantry with ranks closed, to prevent slackers and rational men from leaving the field. The division of cavalry into special units trained for different tasks had largely been discontinued by the time of Waterloo; all types of cavalry were expected to execute shock, pursuit, and intimidation missions. The roles were considered to be of equal importance.

Certainly, Wellington's initial deployment at Waterloo indicates a keen understanding of the potential of cavalry as a means of keeping his less enthusiastic infantry formations in line. At least four Anglo-Allied cavalry formations (10th, 11th, and 18th Hussars and 16th Light Dragoons) were used to intimidate their own infantry into remaining in place. In the case of the 18th Hussars, closing ranks ten yards behind a line of shaky infantry was not sufficient enough to keep order, and the unit's officers had to make use of their sabers, actually threatening to run thru the routing footsloggers. This sort of primal cruelty was the rule rather than the exception in Napoleonic warfare. Optional Rule 15.73 recreates its effect.

Having already muddied the gallant image of Napoleonic cavalry as presented in the game, we might as well finish the job with a discussion of the "cavalry charge." The fact is that they didn't, at least not in the way WELLINGTON'S VICTORY would have you think. Standard doctrine dictated a slow walk throughout most of a "charge," to keep the ranks orderly until the last possible moment. At 200 to 300 yards from the intended victims, cavalry changed gait to a slow trot. Only within 100 yards of the objective did the cavalymen seat lances, lower sabers, and change to a full gallop. When faced with a formation which neither bolted for cover, nor opened ranks, the cavalry reigned in at about 25 yards and lapped around the objective. Thus, the speed and momentum of charging

cavalry differed not a wit from the speed of the other units until the last hundred yards or so of a charge and was often subject to rapid deceleration when faced with stiff opposition. Rule 12.51 should be modified so that only units within three hexes of or inside the charge zone of a charging enemy unit are affected by the rule.

The greatest danger to charging cavalry was success. Strange as that may sound, the punishment inflicted upon cavalry by forward artillery and infantry in square was mild compared to the utter decimation resulting from being caught in enemy territory with horses blown and ranks in disarray. Yet this was a common result of a successful cavalry charge during the Napoleonic era. Having picked up momentum during the last hundred yards of a charge, cavalry would, if not strongly opposed, charge straight through the open ranks of victims and fail to rein in until deep behind enemy lines. In part, this "overrun effect" was a function of simple momentum; more often than not, charging horsemen just got carried away and ignored their officers' frantic orders to regroup. In such a state, mobility and cohesiveness were unattainable, and fresh enemy cavalry arriving on the scene usually meant virtual annihilation for the scattered cavalry. The British were particularly prone to overrunning their objective; it was just such a situation which led to the destruction of the Union Brigade at Waterloo. Optional Rule 15.67 accounts for this effect.

OPTIONAL RULES

[15.67] Whenever a charging British cavalry unit executes a successful shock attack (one in which the enemy unit attacked is forced to vacate the hex), a die is rolled. On a roll of 1 to 4, the charging cavalry unit continues to move without changing facing for a number of additional hexes equal to the die-roll result, or until prevented from moving farther by an Impassable hexside, or by the presence of other units. If, in the process of executing its Shock Attack, the cavalry unit was routed, this rule may be ignored. Pursuant to this rule, units may move outside of their Charge Zone.

[15.73] Whenever a routing infantry formation first moves adjacent to an unrouted friendly cavalry unit, that cavalry unit immediately checks Morale. Unless, as a result of that Morale Check, the cavalry unit itself becomes routed, the adjacent routing infantry unit is considered to have been forcibly rallied by the cavalry unit. The unit immediately ceases its rout and becomes disordered instead. Whenever an infantry unit begins its rout next to an unrouted friendly cavalry unit that is closer to the board edge toward which that infantry unit would normally rout, the same procedure is followed as when the routing infantry unit initially moves next to an unrouted friendly cavalry unit.

Formation and Morale

ONE OF THE STRONGEST POINTS OF WELLINGTON'S VICTORY is the detailed morale system used to recreate the effects of battle upon the will to fight of both units and entire armies. Morale is one of those sticky prob-

lems loaded with imponderables. Certain objective factors do play a part in the morale level of a unit; the game handles these quite effectively for the most part. There are two objectively verifiable factors in the unit morale rules which are not really dealt with in the simulation, however. One is the question of officer density; the other is the dynamic of crowd pressure.

Frederick the Great felt with reason that a soldier should fear his own officers more than the enemy. The greatest single factor keeping the Napoleonic soldier in combat, aside from the pressures of group status and the chance of getting shot in the back by an armed enemy, was the presence of his officers and NCO's. Officers led both by example and by the judicious application of either saber or halberd against recalcitrants. It was an effective combination . . . especially where the relative density of NCO's and officers to OR's was higher than average. As a battle progressed, this ratio tended to decrease rapidly, casualties among officers usually being higher per capita than among the troops. A not uncommon tactic when officer casualties became excessively high was to adopt square formation. Since the officers occupied the center of the square, they could instantly rush to whatever side of the square was being threatened, thus increasing the man-frontage coverable by 400%. This same reasoning explains why the famous British Line was seldom used at Waterloo (or anywhere else, for that matter). The primary factor restricting the use of the square, except against cavalry, where it was often the only defense, was the low firepower deliverable by units in square, a factor already accounted for in the game rules. Optional Rules 15.74 and 15.79 simulate the difference in morale value of square and line formations.

The same physical distribution which made column formation the ideal offensive shock formation for Napoleonic infantry, also plays havoc with certain aspects of the game's morale system. Units in column advanced, by definition, on a fairly narrow, deep frontage, making them relatively immune to enemy fire, excepting the very front ranks. The pressure of masses of men behind tended to keep those front ranks moving forward, despite losses and the desire those up in the front ranks might have had to run. Even when battalions were echeloned in brigade column, this dynamic continued to come into play. Only when the rear ranks had already given way, was it possible for the front ranks to break and rout. As long as rear ranks remained in place, those in front simply had nowhere to go except forward. Units in column therefore tended to rout when those in the rear, uncertain of what exactly was going on up front and only dimly aware of what awaited them when their turn came, decided to get while the getting was good, thus opening up an escape route for their comrades in front. Optional Rule 15.77 simulates the mechanics of routing columns.

OPTIONAL RULES

[15.74] Infantry units in Square Formation

add 1 to their Effectiveness Ratings when forced to check Morale.

[15.77] Whenever the top unit in a Column Formation routs as a result of a Morale Check, the bottom unit in the stack also checks Morale. If the bottom unit fails its Morale Check (with any result), the entire column routs. If the bottom unit passes its Morale Check, the entire column becomes disordered instead of routed. The column cannot make a Shock Attack in the succeeding Shock Phase.

[15.79] Infantry units in line or extended line formation subtract 1 from their Effectiveness Rating when forced to check Morale.

Forward Artillery

IT WAS COMMON PRACTICE IN THE AGE OF limited-range smoothbore cannon to station one's batteries thirty yards or so forward of the infantry line. In this manner, effective range from the actual firing line was increased and some visibility was retained, the clouds of musket smoke which hung about the infantry being far more dense than the smoke produced by artillery battery fire. In addition, this practice allowed the guns to work over an advancing enemy long before that enemy got within musket range of one's infantry. Obviously, this practice posed a considerable hazard to the advanced crews. Thus, tactical doctrine dictated that artillery crews continue firing until in imminent danger of being overrun, and then seek shelter behind the firing line or within the nearest square. In practice, "imminent danger" was defined in terms of whether or not the unit could get off one more round before the enemy reached the crew. Since WELLINGTON'S VICTORY does not use a standard "retreat before melee" system, this tactic is virtually impossible to simulate within the normal game structure. Optional Rule 15.66 is submitted to cover this situation.

OPTIONAL RULE

[15.66] Whenever Shock Combat is initiated against an artillery crew, that crew has the option of retreating up to two hexes to any hex containing friendly, formed infantry. The artillery crew may fire pursuant to Rule 11.24 before retreating. Artillery crews which employ this option may be fired upon as per Rule 11.26. Only artillery crews may utilize this option, not skirmish companies being used to man a battery. Whenever this option is exercised, the unit which initiated the Shock Combat may enter the hex containing the abandoned battery as if by normal combat. Artillery crews which are not manning a battery when Shock Combat is initiated may not exercise this option. Friendly units occupying hexes into which an artillery crew retreats pursuant to this rule are unaffected by the retreat.

Musket Smoke

BY ALL ACCOUNTS, WATERLOO HAD TO BE one of the most confused battles in history. While visibility was bad almost everywhere on the battlefield, it was so bad around infantry formations that most rankers were literal-

ly firing blind. Since Napoleonic marksmanship was notoriously terrible, poor visibility had little effect on fire combat. It did, however, affect command control. The discharge of hundreds of muskets in volley in a restricted area kept infantry units immersed in their own smokescreen throughout the battle. The common complaint among infantry officers was that they could only account for that portion of their command that was within ten feet of them. Optional Rule 15.84 adjusts the command control radius for "engaged" units to reflect this problem.

OPTIONAL RULE

[15.84] Whenever an infantry unit has any enemy unit within its Maximum-Range Fire Zone, that infantry unit is considered to be out of Command Control if the hex which it occupies is outside of the *depleted* Command Radius of the unit's Command counter. This Rule applies regardless of the status of the Command unit (full strength or depleted) and regardless of whether or not the infantry unit has fired previously.

Throwing Away Fire

A PERSISTENT PROBLEM ENCOUNTERED BY Wellington at Waterloo was the tendency of some of his less reliable units to "throw away fire." When faced with charging enemy cavalry, such units often discharged pieces prematurely (usually firing high into the bargain). Veteran French cavalry took advantage of this tendency by making a false start on their final charge approach, i.e., by breaking into a gallop and then almost immediately reining in while the green ranks fired. A cavalry unit which was able to tempt a square to throw away its fire could then approach to within skirmish range of the square while the infantry was reloading. In this manner, the initial impact of infantry fire upon massed cavalry could be somewhat dissipated. British, King's German Legion (KGL) and French units usually refrained from wasting fire in this manner, but the various Brunswick, Netherlands and Hanover detachments were quite persistent in the practice. Optional Rule 15.54 recreates the effect.

OPTIONAL RULE

[15.54] Whenever an Anglo-Allied infantry unit other than a British or KGL unit fires pursuant to Rule 11.24 against charging enemy cavalry, the cavalry unit is fired on as a Class 3 Target.

Hard Cover

IN WELLINGTON'S VICTORY, IT IS almost impossible for artillery to effectively fire on units protected by either a hard-cover hexside or hard-cover hex. While it is difficult in the extreme to hurt units in towns and farm buildings (hard-cover hexes) by musket fire, such is not the case with artillery fire. The narrow confines of town streets and courtyards offered protection for units, but these places also added their own element of danger from secondary missiles and ricochets. Contrast these dangers with open-field conditions in which the battlefield, matted as it was with

"Artillery...was the only weapon short of the bayonet which could dislodge infantry from stone buildings."

trampled crops, absorbed the "bounce" of the cannonballs, which the gunners counted upon to cause maximum casualties. In light of overall battlefield conditions, the low hit probability given to artillery when firing at hard cover, as opposed to the greater hit probability when firing on troops in open muddy fields, is somewhat baffling. Even if one grants that the cover provided by towns and farm buildings outweighed the added danger of deploying within them, one is still left with the undeniable nemesis of infantry in hard-cover areas – fire. On at least one occasion during the battle, Wellington was concerned that the fire which had broken out in Hougomont as a result of the French cannonade would get out of hand and result in the abandonment of the chateau. Among its other attributes, the fighting at Placenoit was marked by a number of fires within the town. Both French and Prussian troops were forced out of these burning areas by the thick, acrid smoke which the fires had created.

The low rating of artillery in the game when firing on hard cover areas does not reflect the real capability of the guns. Artillery was simply not that ineffective against towns. It was, in fact, the only weapon short of the bayonet which could dislodge infantry from stone buildings. Optional Rule 15.55 is a somewhat unsatisfactory attempt to simulate the ability of artillery to dislodge units from hard-cover hexes without actually changing the Relative Firepower Table.

OPTIONAL RULE

[15.55] Whenever an artillery battery fires upon an enemy formation which occupies a hard-cover hex (not hexside), the unit being fired upon must make an immediate Morale Check upon a combat die-roll of 5 or 6 regardless of whether or not any casualties were inflicted on the unit.

Fortress Hougomont

HOUGOMONT IS NOT QUITE AS UNASSAILABLE in practice as the Designer's Notes for the game make out. This writer's playtests indicate that in three cases out of five, the chateau falls to any determined French attack

before the arrival of the Prussian forces. Unless the Anglo-Allied player is willing to detach substantial forces to meet the assault upon Hougomont, the French player can mount a battle of attrition against the chateau and garden simultaneous with a double envelopment; the position may then be taken early in the battle. This should, of course, not be the case. Historically, Wellington dribbled skirmishers into the battle a company at a time, not *en masse*. Optional Rule 15.65, reflecting the fanaticism of Hougomont's defenders, makes the chateau a bit tougher for the French to take.

OPTIONAL RULE

[15.65] Except as a result of shock combat or artillery fire, Anglo-Allied units within Hougomont and the adjacent walled garden are never forced to rout. Artillery fire may require units within Hougomont itself to check Morale as per Rule 15.55. Units within the walled garden, however, are not required to observe this rule, since they are not occupying a hard-cover hex. Anglo-Allied units within the chateau and adjacent garden are never forced to check Morale for any reason except as outlined here.

Personalities

THE DESIGNER OF WELLINGTON'S VICTORY has rightly refrained, for the most part, from providing any system of special capabilities reflecting the personalities of the individual leaders. Important as this aspect was to the battle, this would probably be more trouble than it's worth if used a lot. However, at least two leaders did affect the battle in a fundamental, if restricted, manner – Wellington and Ney. Blucher might have had a profound effect upon the conduct of Prussian troops, except that he was not on the field that long. As for Napoleon, the rule reflecting his lethargy during the battle is probably as accurate a simulation of his negative impact as is consonant with good manners.

The rule allowing Anglo-Allied batteries to fire when within the command radius of Wellington does recreate to an extent the firm control which he had over the battle line. It ignores, however, the impact his personality had upon the battle, in that Wellington's constant roaming of the front had a steadying impact upon whatever troops he was near. Rumor of his passage stiffened the sagging morale of more than one tired battalion. While his presence probably had little effect upon the Brunswickers and Hanoverians under his command and even had less effect upon the Netherlanders (who seem to have felt greater loyalty toward Napoleon than the House of Orange), the effect upon British and KGL units was, according to contemporary testimony, universally beneficial. Optional Rule 15.76 simulates this effect.

The effect Ney had upon the battle is not quite as clear-cut. In fact, if one were to assess the man's generalship purely on the basis of his performance at Waterloo, one might almost be tempted to conclude that "the bravest of the brave" was something of an idiot. But brave he was. There is no denying

that, nor is there any denying that his personal example had something to do with the French cavalry's repeated charges into the funnel. Long after it should have been apparent that no support would be forthcoming and that further charges could not break the enemy squares, the cavalymen continued to follow Ney into the maelstrom. It is difficult to explain this phenomenon in light of the fact that the Napoleonic soldier considered it his inalienable right to run away from a suicidal situation. Certainly, the berserker fury of Ney played its part in this curious interlude; Optional Rule 15.75 attempts to recreate Ney's impact on the French cavalry.

OPTIONAL RULE

[15.75] Any committed French cavalry units within Ney's Command Radius are considered to be in Command Control for purposes of initiating a charge. All French cavalry units within half the current Command Radius of Ney need not check Morale when initiating a charge and should subtract one from the die roll when otherwise checking Morale. Cavalry units stacked in the same hex with Ney add 1 to their Effectiveness Rating for purposes of Shock Combat.

[15.76] All British and KGL units within three hexes of Wellington add 1 to their Effectiveness Rating when checking Morale.

Army Morale

IN LIGHT OF THE CONSIDERATIONS ALREADY included in the game's army morale system,

the absence of one morale element has always puzzled me: namely, the anticipation of victory. Army demoralization rules simulate the obverse (anticipation of defeat), but there is nothing in the army morale rules to simulate the reaction of an army to the realization that the enemy is beaten and with a little more effort may be destroyed. The letters and diaries of Waterloo men are filled with stories of how near to simply packing it in they were, immediately prior to Wellington's ordering a general advance. Yet, their exhaustion was forgotten when they realized that the end of the battle was in sight and that they would be victorious. If an army on the threshold of defeat is a terrorized rabble, than an army on the threshold of victory is a murderous mob. Twilight at Waterloo was no exception. Units which had spent an entire day motionless under the French cannonade were loath to take prisoners or even, strangely enough, to stop their advance to loot the dead. That the Anglo-Allied Army did not stop to loot is probably the best indicator of the single-mindedness with which that army attacked, once assured that victory was at hand. It is not unreasonable to assume that the French Army would have reacted in like manner, had victory been theirs. After all, both sides had marched and counter-marched for a number of days, often with little food and less sleep. The night of June 17th had been passed in futile attempts to keep dry in the midst of a downpour; the day of the 18th had

been spent by most soldiers in mute, waterlogged ranks, subject to constant harassment from shot and shell. By the end of the 18th, the prevalent mood in both armies seems to have been one of getting the final facedown over with one way or the other so that both sides could get some sleep. Optional Rule 15.78 simulates the morale effect of imminent victory upon an army.

OPTIONAL RULE

[15.78] Whenever either the French or Anglo-Allied Army becomes demoralized, the opposing army immediately is relieved of the necessity of observing Rule 13.33 for the remainder of the game. This rule does not apply to the Prussian Army.

WELLINGTON'S VICTORY remains, despite all that has been said in this article, a landmark in simulations design. Serious wargamers and students of history alike should find much to recommend it for many years to come. As for those mysteries surrounding the Battle of Waterloo, hopefully some of what has been said here will spark others to do their own research and come up with their own interpretation of the battle, using WELLINGTON'S VICTORY as their starting point. A good beginning would be made by playing the variant rules listed in this article to see how the flow of events is changed. We'd love to hear from others about their experiences with these variants; if enough readers respond, we will do an update. ■■