

# Some Thoughts on Wargame Scenario Design

## Scenario-based Wargaming

Historical miniature wargaming is a many-faceted hobby; much study and craft is invested even before the actual game itself takes place. As a journalist interviewing a wargamer once astutely observed, the hobby seems to be less about playing wargames than it is about getting ready to play wargames. There are figures to be bought and painted, terrain to be constructed, and rules to be purchased, studied and learned. Even after all this is accomplished, but before a single game turn can be played, one must have a scenario . . . and here I am not referring to the kind of game where the players line up XXX points worth of units on opposing sides of the table, march to the middle, and roll dice until somebody runs away or time runs out. I am talking about a situation resembling one in which a historical commander might have found himself, with all the implied tactical problems that entails, in which a narrative is played out so that the players get to make relevant command decisions and observe the results of those decisions. This, for myself and a small subset of wargamers, is the epitome of historical wargaming. If you're the kind of gamer who enjoys exploring the command options and possibilities of historical conflicts, or fictional settings that mimic history, then hopefully you will find something useful or interesting in this essay. Even if you're not that kind of gamer, read on: you may discover insights into a style of game that's been around since long before there were army lists or point systems.

Many, if not most wargames are built around the central idea of a competition, with roughly equal forces on opposing sides, and played out with the purpose of determining a winner. The ways in which scenario-based wargames differ from this standard are several. First, it is not necessary for there to be an obvious "winner" for there to be a satisfactory outcome. While it is no doubt gratifying to crush your opponent in a demonstration of tactical brilliance, it can be no less so to conduct a skillful retreat while seriously outnumbered, or to execute a stubborn but doomed defense with a nominally inferior force. Second, while the terrain in a competitive game serves mainly as an obstacle to movement, or as a force multiplier, in a scenario-based game it also breaks up lines of sight to create fog of war, and (perhaps more importantly) serves as a temporal and geographical setting for the action, encouraging the engrossment of the players in the historical milieu in which the events take place. Third, it creates a stylized command structure similar to the historical forces from which it is derived, with all the attendant opportunities for difficulties in communication and cooperation which were such a significant component of historical military operations, and which are largely absent from competition-style

wargames where each player is usually entirely independent, and is concerned only with defeating his immediate opponent across the table.

Some of the most popular items among wargamers are scenario books. In these books, the author has done much of the work of preparing a scenario-based wargame for you, researching a historical battle or creating a fictional one, laying out the needed terrain, the order of battle and the goals or victory conditions for each side. However, there are some drawbacks; the author has no idea what figures you already own or what rules you use, so you may have to use proxies for some of the units, or engage in some lengthy and expensive preparation painting up the forces for a particular scenario only to find that they aren't precisely what you would need for any other scenario, or, if you don't have enough units for a particular scenario, engage in a little creative "bathtubbing" to get the game on the table with what you already have available. ("Bathtubbing" is the practice of using a smaller unit to represent a much larger one in an order of battle; for example, putting eight battalions on the table to refight a battle which was actually fought by eight brigades or eight divisions. Even though it gets the game on the table with the minimum number of figures, this seldom yields anything like satisfactory results because battalions did not fight in the same way that brigades fought, so the game both looks wrong and plays out wrong.) Another limitation of published scenarios is that they are often aimed towards the use of a particular scale or set of rules, which may not match the ones that you intend to use, thus requiring some "translation" in order to fit the game you want to run. The advantage to designing your own scenarios is that they always fit the terrain and figures you already have, and you can custom-select a particular type of tactical situation that you and/or your wargame buddies find interesting.

The goal of a scenario designer is to create a situation analogous to one that actually occurred in history, or one that is plausibly historical. The players take the roles of the historical commanders and are faced with goals to achieve and challenges that they must overcome with the resources available to them, in the face of opposition from other players whose goals conflict with theirs. The accomplishment of these goals will be all that much more meaningful to the players if the action is placed in some larger context, akin to the "general idea" proposed by Von Reiswitz's early nineteenth century "Kriegsspiel", which is widely considered to be the ancestor of modern historical wargaming; that is, a framework of consequences surrounding the specific situation being portrayed on the table should be provided to the players, to give context to their decision making. A good resource for types of situations that make workable, plausibly historical scenarios is Helmut von Moltke's *Tactical Problems from 1858 to 1872* (available in hard copy from Amazon, or digitally from the Internet Archive).

The primary idea to keep in mind when designing a wargame scenario is that its purpose is to be the outline for a social event, in which the participants will cooperatively create a narrative. While the gamers will be engaged in a

friendly competition, involving mental challenges and highlighted by the aesthetic aspect of well-crafted miniature figures and terrain, it should be remembered that the most important feature of the event will be the story it tells.

Creating a wargame scenario, like wargaming itself, has many facets and raises numerous questions. What forces do I select? How do I come up with a tactical situation? How should the terrain be arranged? How do I keep all the players involved throughout? Does the situation have to be "balanced", and how do I do that? In this essay, I will try to distill the lessons I have learned in over more than thirty years of designing wargame scenarios into basic principles you can use for your own scenario-based wargames. (I should point out, by way of a disclaimer, that the vast majority of my scenario design has been for horse-and-musket era games, but the general principles may apply to other eras.)

I won't even try to gloss over the fact that this can require a tremendous amount of effort . . . reading, planning, writing it up, and organizing . . . but I can tell you that it is also tremendously satisfying to see your scenarios played out by your friends and to share their enjoyment of trying to unravel the tactical problems you have devised for them. Another result of wargaming in this style is that the games create narratives full of drama and humor, whose events will be fondly remembered and retold by the participants over their post-game pints for many years to come.

## Building a Scenario

The first step is to decide upon an interesting tactical situation, one that involves some sort achievable goal for each player, without being too easily accomplished with the available forces. The most direct way of doing this is to lift an actual situation from a historical battle. This, of course, carries with it some of the same drawbacks as using a scenario book, but without the advantage of having some of the work already done for you. Nevertheless, it can be very engrossing for the players to find themselves in the boots of some historical commander and to try to accomplish as much or more than they did in the same situation. There is no better way to develop an appreciation for the challenges facing those who had to achieve these goals for real. I can affirm from personal experience that, having done so, you will never see that battle the same when you again encounter it in the histories.

One way to do this is to simply wade through as much history of the period in which you have an interest as you can, until a particular situation strikes you as an appealing idea for a scenario. This can be time consuming (but chances are, as a historical wargamer, you were going to be doing that wading anyway.) A good shortcut would be to consult a work that is a general accounting of battles and actions fought during your period of interest, hopefully with enough of an order of battle and a map that you can derive your scenario from a single source. Often, reference to a more detailed work will fill out any information missing from the more general history. If the available information is sketchy, don't be afraid to fill in the blanks with reasonable deductions or guesswork; after all, it's a wargame scenario, not a thesis. (One particularly good example of a useful single source is Digby Smith's Napoleonic Wars Data Book, which lists thousands of actions from skirmishes up to full battles in chronological order and linked by campaign, complete with lists of the forces involved; I refer to it simply as "my scenario book".) It is also possible to borrow a scenario from one war and, by substituting equivalent forces from another war entirely, create a useable scenario whose origins are hidden from the participants, thus preventing "20/20 hindsight" from shaping the players' decisions.

I generally prefer, though, to come up with a fictional situation, often based on an actual battle, and tailor it to the size of my table, the time I have available, and the figures I can get ahold of. This can be a bit daunting to someone who hasn't done it much, and it is this type of scenario design to which most of my comments will be directed.

One further note before I get to specifics; I am seldom too concerned about "balance", or giving each side an equal opportunity to "win". Even approximately balanced situations were a rarity in historical campaigns, and so should they be in historical wargaming. A wargame commander's success should be judged, as was his historical counterpart, by how well he does with the

resources he is allotted, not on a body count of destroyed opposing units or a tally of arbitrarily assigned victory points. One of the most important parts of scenario-based wargaming is the “post-mortem” . . . the discussion after the game of what went well, what did not, what could have been done differently, and why. It is this discussion amongst the players that will reveal if a victory was achieved, or if the result was indecisive. And, after all, clearly decisive victories were not all that common in history, and the victor of some battles is still in dispute after centuries of discussion. So should it be in our historical wargames.

# Types of Scenarios

There are several general types of tactical situations that lend themselves to workable scenarios, and I will address some of these below. The list is not exhaustive, but it covers many of the main types of engagements that happen in historical campaigns. You should keep in mind that none of these are "line 'em up and knock 'em down" types of scenarios, which begin with all the figures lined up on the table, and most involve some sort of grand tactical movement. One of the common objections to this type of pre-contact movement in a scenario is that it takes up time that could otherwise be used for rolling dice and blowing stuff up. This makes sense only if you are playing in a very constricted time window, such as a shop or club venue which is only available for a few hours. Games which cut right to the gunfire miss out on a couple important aspects of warfare and generalship. First, the deployment of large forces from column of march to fighting formations is a skill relevant to an understanding of military history, which many wargamers don't get the opportunity to practice. This is where the all-important and elusive "coup d'oeil" comes into play, judging the value of various terrain features and assessing the space needed to deploy effectively, as well as where to place reserves. Doing this in your wargames can give you interesting insights into the reasons why historical battles developed in the way that they did; and second, the pre-contact movements can have a significant effect on the subsequent action. By the time the troops are all deployed and in long artillery range, many of the most important (and fun) decisions have already been made. Starting at this late stage of the battle also means skipping additional opportunities for your opponent to make mistakes, of which you can then take advantage, if you have wisely deployed your forces to do so (or opportunities for you to make mistakes, of which your opponent can then take advantage, and which you can learn not to repeat in future games.)

Most sets of rules (the good ones, anyway) include mechanics for some type of accelerated grand tactical movement, either as a separate module or as a bonus to movement for units or formations that are well outside of engagement range. A few turns of this accelerated movement are usually enough to bring forces into contact, and will only take up about as much time as a single turn of tactical combat because there are no time consuming combat resolutions taking place, with their attendant calculations, chart consultations and die rolls.

What follows is a general description of the main types of scenarios that I have found useful and entertaining, with a few notes about the terrain and orders of battle that works best with each type. There will be more detail on these subjects in later sections of this essay.

1. The Meeting Engagement. These are generally much more common in wargames than they were in history. Usually, in a historical campaign, one side is forced by circumstances to offer battle to the enemy, either to restrict the enemy's movements or to defend strategic assets, and thus one side generally

deploys and awaits the enemy's effort to dislodge them from their chosen ground. Occasionally, however, two forces, both maneuvering, find elements in contact in unexpected places. This can lead to a free-for-all scramble to get as many forces in the immediate area to the point of contact as quickly as possible, in order to gain a local numerical advantage.

This type of scenario should involve forces of roughly equal size entering the table from different angles and attempting to identify and seize important terrain features before their opponent(s) can do the same, and then maneuvering to overwhelm a portion of the enemy before all of his forces can arrive. The danger with this type of scenario is that players commanding late-arriving forces may be held out of the game until a conclusion has already been reached, or the available time expires. This danger can be mitigated either by giving each player a separate entry point and arranging the entry schedule in such a way that the leading elements of each force arrive on the table within a few turns of each other. or, if the scenario's order of battle is large enough to permit it, giving each player a small subordinate role in the command structure of one of the other player's forces. Having them all arrive on turn one alleviates this issue as well, but it can also reduce the element of uncertainty by creating a too-even playing field, degenerating into a head-on sloggish match not very different from the all too common "line 'em up and knock 'em down" wargame. One device I have used to slightly stagger arrival times in this situation is having the players roll a die each turn, placing the dice at their entry point, and entering their forces when the total of the dice reaches a certain pre-determined number. This is more effective than simply entering when a die roll yields a certain result, which carries with it the possibility that some forces will enter very late, or not at all. Rolling cumulative dice totals ensures that all the forces will enter within a certain time window; for example, using six-sided dice and a target total of 6 would mean that some columns might enter on turn one, but all would arrive by turn six.

This type of scenario works well with fairly dense, line of sight blocking terrain, so that the various columns will need to move into the table for a couple turns before sighting an enemy column and being forced to deploy.

2. The Attack. In this variant, one force deploys on the table, either in plain sight, or using token forces or blinds to indicate the basic deployment while hiding detailed information from the attacker. The attacking force then plans its entry and deployment and the game begins with them making grand tactical moves until contact is made and the defenders are revealed. The goals associated with this type of scenario are very basic and don't require much subtlety; the attackers must move the defenders off of their chosen ground, causing as much damage as possible while accepting as little as possible themselves. Alternatively, the attacker can be given a specific terrain objective of which he must take possession; the defender need not be made aware in advance of what this objective is, or may have orders to defend a different

objective entirely.

The attacker's strength should be considerable greater than the defender's, perhaps two to three times greater, in order for this scenario to work well. By "strength" I don't necessarily mean just raw numbers; a much larger force of lower quality troops attacking a smaller, but higher quality force can yield some interesting tactical problems for both sides.

The terrain for an Attack Scenario should include an obvious defensive position in which the defender can deploy; a ridge, a stream bed, patches of rough ground, woods, or built-up areas, or something similar.

3. The Fighting Withdrawal. This involves a slightly smaller force, perhaps more elite than the attacker, beginning the game deployed on the table with the goal of withdrawing as much of their force as possible off the table, while delaying the enemy advance and taking as few casualties as is consistent with their other goals. The attacking force can either enter the table in columns of march, which will give the withdrawing force an opportunity to make small adjustments to their deployment before tactical contact, or, alternatively, the larger, attacking force can be made to deploy their forces on the table a certain distance just out of tactical contact from the position of the withdrawing force. The player(s) tasked with the withdrawal can then place their forces in whatever way deemed most advantageous to their goals.

The arrangement of terrain for this scenario should give the opportunity for successive fall-back positions, i.e., scattered woods or villages, which can be used by the defending forces as they are broken, outflanked, or otherwise forced back.

4. The Reconnaissance in Force. One of my favorites, this scenario involves one side launching a large attack against a small, deployed force with the goal of finding and contacting as many of the defending units as possible, but without allowing their force to be drawn into a pitched battle, and then withdrawing. The smaller force is continuously and gradually reinforced until it outnumbered the attacker, with the goal of driving off the attack without revealing any more of its strength than is necessary to succeed.

A good defensive position with terrain that blocks line of sight on the approaches, similar to the Attack scenario, is required for this scenario, but the overall terrain should not be so restrictive as to inhibit maneuver.

5. The Opposed River Crossing. Probably the most difficult to balance (and hardest for the attacker to pull off successfully), this scenario requires that an attacking force, considerably larger and much better supplied with artillery, select a crossing point and approach a river line with the goal of getting sufficient forces across to create a secure bridgehead.

For this scenario to work, the river should cross the entire table, and have multiple, widely spaced crossing points (either fords or bridges). The defender must have a large enough force to observe all the likely crossing points while holding back a mobile reserve strong enough to drive back any force the attacker can put across the river.

6. Defense of the Convoy. This scenario presumes the existence, somewhere on the table, of a valuable and not very mobile source of supply; for example, a column of supply wagons or a siege train. An outnumbered defender, to whom the convoy belongs, must delay and parry any attempt by the attacker to take possession of it long enough for it to exit the table or reach a designated place of safety, like a fortified town or entrenched encampment.

The only specific terrain requirement for this situation is a road along which the convoy must travel to reach safety. Its movement should be severely hampered if it is forced to leave the road.

Some truly fascinating situations can be created by combining goals from various types of scenarios. This can create situations where both sides may accomplish their goals and claim victory. For example, an attacker may be executing a river crossing while the defender is attempting to cover the escape of a siege train. In such a case, it is in the defender's interests to impede the river crossing only for as long as it serves to get the train to safety, while the attacker, focused on creating a bridgehead, may overlook the opportunity to seize a valuable prize.

# The Order of Battle

In an historical miniature wargame, it is natural to use the order of battle from an actual historical engagement. Occasionally, a few changes may be necessary in translating the actual OoB to the tabletop. If the available miniatures do not exactly match the units that were present, you can substitute equivalent units of different, allied nationalities, or even change the nationalities of entire forces. The historical record is not always very clear or complete, sometimes giving (for example) only brigade strengths instead of numbers and identities of individual units. A quick glance at contemporary OoBs from other sources will give you a good idea of typical brigade compositions, and dividing the strength of a large formation like a brigade or division by the typical field strength of individual units of that type (for most of the horse-and-musket period, that would mean about 100 cavalymen per squadron and 500-700 men per infantry battalion) will give you a workable approximation of the number of units for your game OoB. A good starting point for this type of information is the Nafziger Collection at the United States Combined Arms Research Library, located on the web at <http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/nafziger.asp>, which contains detailed OoBs for everything from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth.

If the forces you have selected for your scenario are not outlined by a specific historical battle, you will need to create your own order of battle from the figures you have available. You should take into account the relative strengths of each force, the capabilities of the units as assigned by the set of rules you are using, the number of players who will be participating, and the size of your table.

Overall, the deployed frontage of the force for each side should be limited to somewhat less than the width of the table. This will minimize the interference of "edge of the table syndrome" with the flow of the game, improve the opportunities for maneuver, and force the players to make choices about where formations will be deployed and where reserves should be located. I usually shoot for about two-thirds of the available table space. Packing the table with as many miniatures as will fit leads inevitably to repetitive and unmemorable head-to-head sloggish matches where luck, and not player choices, becomes the dominant factor.

The forces allotted to each player should be kept within a range bounded on the low end by the minimum number of units needed to execute the tactical maneuvers typical of the historical period of warfare in which the scenario is set (a good indication of this is the way units were actually grouped in historical orders of battle), and on the upper end by the number of units that can be comfortably handled without taxing the player's cognitive capabilities. This is generally considered by psychologists to be in the neighborhood of 7, plus or minus 2. The number can be pushed into the teens if the units are grouped into two or three larger formations that can be maneuvered as single, articulated

units; thus, two battalions of six companies each, or three brigades of four battalions each would be more manageable and less overwhelming to manipulate than twelve independent units.

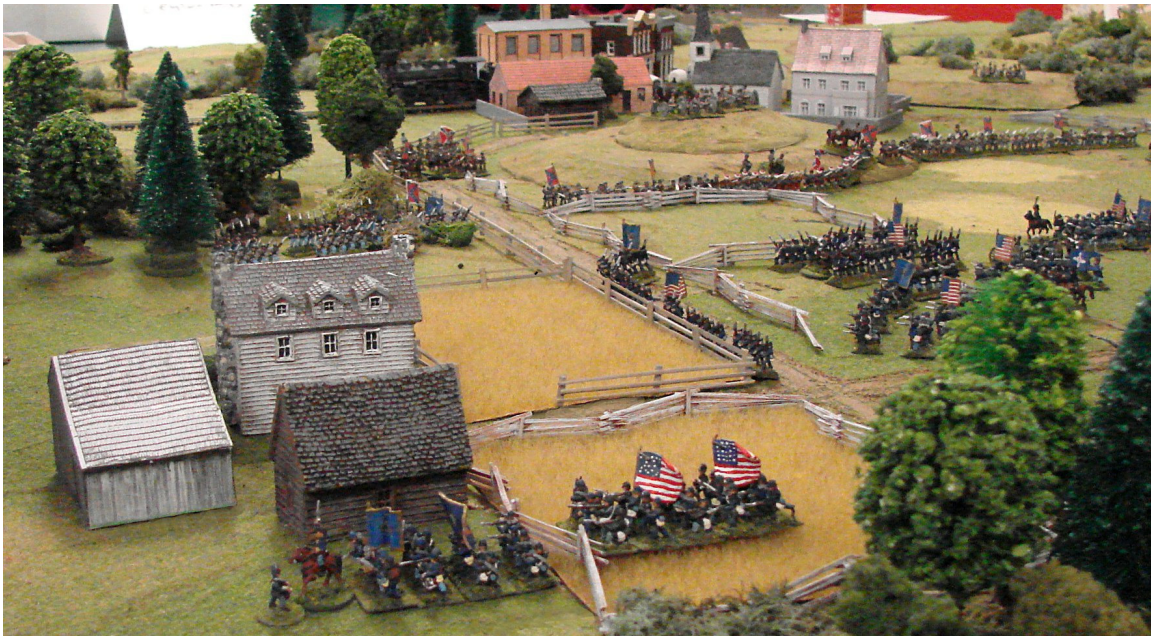
While keeping things as balanced as possible is not a high priority in this style of game, it is possible to adjust the relative strength of forces by making all or part of the forces of one side more or less capable than the opposing forces. This, of course depends for its effectiveness on the advantages given to troops of different qualities by the ruleset being used. It is this very effect that army lists and point systems are designed to accomplish, but not everyone agrees that they do this accurately, or even very well. Doing it intuitively yourself, based on your knowledge of the period in question and your experience with the rules, will probably yield as good a result as abiding by the rules author's judgment on the attributes of various troop types. Using a particular ruleset's army lists or "national differences" can give you a good starting point, but feel free to tweak the numbers in whatever way you think will make your scenario work, since not every unit of a given nationality and type was equal, and transient conditions (like length of marches, availability of victuals, the moral effect of recent events, etc.) could greatly alter a given unit's performance on the day of battle.

## The Terrain

Entirely too many wargames I have seen are set up with little regard for the terrain, aside from tossing out a couple trees and a building or two. A little consideration for the visual and functional effects of the terrain will go a long way towards making your scenarios interesting and memorable.

The terrain set out for the game, as I mentioned previously, serves multiple functions. The first is to establish the geographical location and period of time in which the action is to take place. If you are not recreating a specific battlefield, the landforms, like hills and watercourses, should at least be derived from those that actually predominated in the part of the world in which you have set your scenario. The types of trees in the wooded areas and the architectural style of the buildings can serve to set the stage for the action, and draw the players in to the time and place of the battle's setting. Though the uniforms of the figures themselves are always the centerpiece of an historical miniatures game, the effect is greatly enhanced by providing an environment for them that evokes the period and location.

In this picture of one of my American Civil War games, even if the figures were absent, the style of the buildings and fences (not to mention the train engine in the background) would allow you to guess that the setting was 19th century North America:



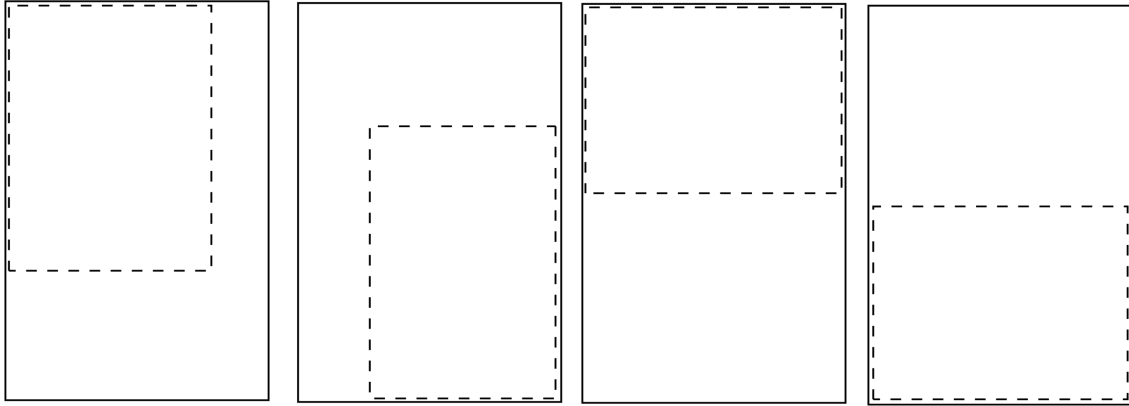
Many wargamers use terrain boards as the base for their tables. These have the advantage of some flexibility in the way the road net and watercourses are laid out for the game, since they can be rearranged to suit different scenarios and geographic locations. I have a set of terrained interlocking foam rubber floor

tiles that I have used for many games over the past twenty years, as shown in this example:

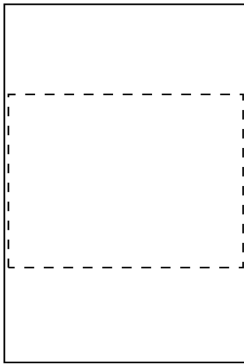


The seams are somewhat less visually obtrusive than the straight edges of tiles based on MDF or insulation board, and the interlocking edges prevent gaps from opening up between the boards during play. I prefer, however, to use terrain cloths as the base for my wargames tables. They provide a seamless and much more natural look than rigid terrain squares. The downside is that they require a little more time and effort to set up, and they impose some limitations on the layout of roads and watercourses, although experience has taught me that they are not nearly as restrictive as most gamers assume them to be.

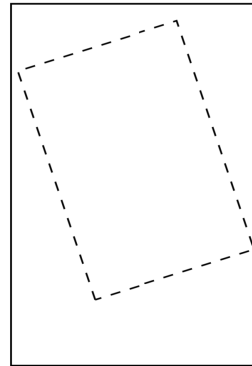
I make most of my terrain cloths on 6' by 9' canvas drop cloths, which makes them large enough for a good sized convention game. Since my own game tables are usually 4' or 5' by 6', I can get several different terrain arrangements out of a single cloth by draping different portions of the cloth off the edge of the table, as shown in the diagram below, where the portion of the cloth that shows on top of the table is marked by a dotted line:



or:



or even:



Even though I have only three different terrain cloths, I have never failed to find a section of one of them that would suit the scenario I wanted to play.

The arrangement of terrain elements on the table can also have a significant effect on the way the action plays out. Thoughtfully placed woods and villages can channel movement and provide focal points for the action. While the location of roads as entry points will definitely determine how the forces deploy, the location of those in the middle of the table are less critical, since by the time forces arrive there they are generally deployed for battle and no longer able to make use of the road net.

Most wargames are arranged orthogonally on the table; that is, the two longer edges serve as a baseline for the opposing forces, and the action mostly takes place along a line bisecting the table in the long direction. This makes good use of the available table space, but you should consider the additional advantages of arranging the terrain so that the battle takes place more or less diagonally on the table, making use of its longest dimension. Setting the entry points around diagonally opposite corners causes the players to advance into an ever-widening field, which creates more opportunities for maneuver and more interesting tactical problems for the players. Filling the lateral corners with difficult terrain features like a town or a rocky, wooded hill will steer the action

towards the wider middle of the table and will minimize the effect of the table edges.

As an example, in the picture below, from a Napoleonic scenario I ran on a 5' by 6' table, the French forces entered from the upper left, while the Allies entered from the lower right corner. The town in the upper right and the wooded hills in the lower left caused the action to develop along a diagonal line between the two major terrain features. Some units were able to maneuver through both the town and the woods, which kept the flanks from being as closed as they would have been by table edges, and utilized the entire 7.5' diagonal dimension of the table.



If significant cavalry forces are involved, providing large open areas where they can deploy and operate will allow the players to make the best use of them. This can also be used as a force-balancing factor if one side has considerably greater cavalry strength than the other, since the effectiveness of an advantage in cavalry can be blunted by the lack of good cavalry terrain. The same applies to the provision of good fields of fire for a force with an advantage in artillery.

# Victory Conditions

It is natural for wargamers to want to end a game with some sense of whether or not they have achieved victory. The traditional ways of doing this have been to either count casualties, or to assign points values to various terrain objectives on the table. While this is simple and adequate for purely gaming purposes, it does not give a very convincing view of how victory was historically determined. A general could take and hold terrain features and still lose a battle; or, like Pyrrhus, suffer horrendous casualties and still “win”.

The problem with victory points for terrain objectives is that the terrain features on a historical battlefield actually had no intrinsic value; their value lay entirely in the degree to which they aided a particular force to achieve their object in fighting the battle, and that value could change during the course of the action, in light of events on the field.

Part of the utility of an historical wargame in helping the players to gain insights into historical conflicts is in the way it causes them to think like historical commanders. If they are thinking “I’ll hold this village because it’s worth 3 Victory Points”, then they are not thinking “If I hold this village that anchors my flank, it will take my opponent so long to take it away that I’ll have plenty of time to bring up reinforcements”. If they are thinking “I’ll take that crossroads because it’s worth 2 Victory Points”, then they are not thinking “Having possession of the crossroads will allow to move my cavalry reserve quickly to either flank.”

Instead of tallying losses to determine a winner, or assigning an arbitrary value to a terrain feature, allow the players to assess to what degree they have achieved their objectives as outlined by the scenario . . . if they can. And if they can’t, allow the ambiguity of the outcome to be part of what they learn about history in the process of playing the game. If they are just playing for points, then all they are learning about is how to win games. While that might be considered a valuable skill in some circles, it’s not history.

## An Example

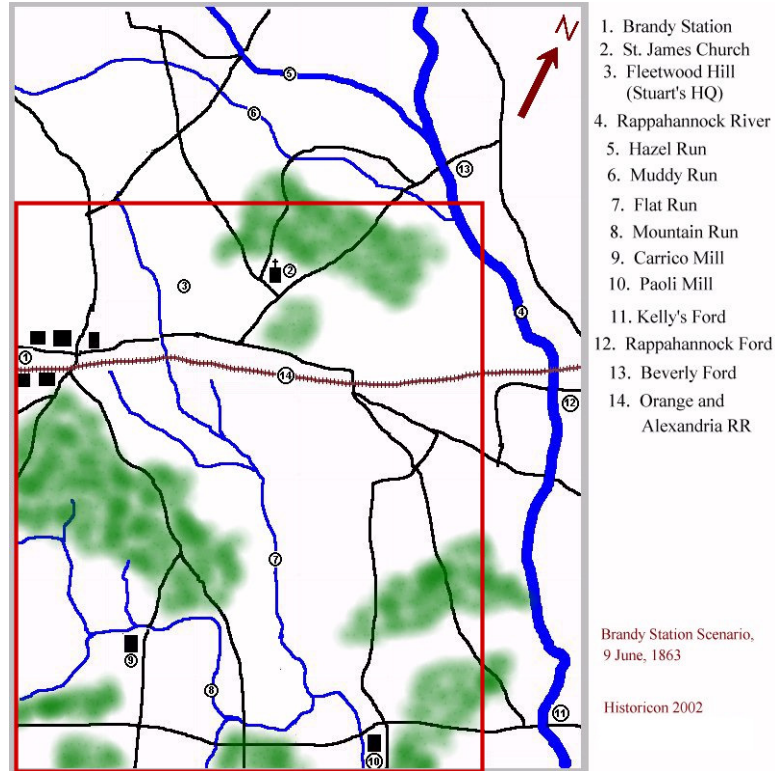
To better illustrate some of these points, allow me to walk you through the development of a sample scenario. Step one is to pick a tactical situation. For this example, I will use a basic Fighting Withdrawal type. While the steps are in a particular order, there are aspects of each that are interdependent, so that the choice of tactical situation and terrain should be made with the types of units that are available in mind and, conversely, the number, strength and ratings of the units should be chosen with the terrain and tactical situation in mind.

I'm going to set this scenario in the Peninsula in 1810, during the Anglo-Portuguese retreat after Bussaco. The Allied forces will be about half the strength of the French, but some of the units will be of slightly higher quality to offset their inferior numbers slightly. There will be three French players, one of them senior to the other two; each will command two infantry brigades of average quality and a battery, and there will be a light cavalry brigade of two regiments which the French overall commander can either keep together as a brigade, or distribute as separate regiments to different commands. One of the Allied commanders will have two Portuguese infantry brigades of average quality, with a battery and an average quality light cavalry regiment. The other will command the reserve, consisting of a veteran brigade of British infantry, with a battery and a veteran brigade of heavy dragoons.

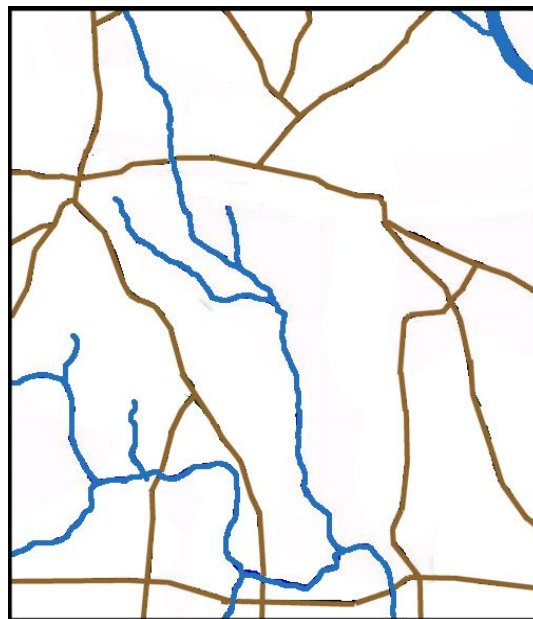
The French objective will be to pin and destroy as much of the Allied force as possible, while the Allied objective will be to delay the French advance as long as possible without serious losses, while withdrawing from the table.

With the scenario in mind, the next step is to consider the terrain. Since I use terrain cloths for the base of my wargame tables, I look over what options I have to find the most suitable cloth (or portion of a cloth). I'm looking for a piece of terrain that will have multiple entry points for the attacking forces wrapped around one of the corners. There should be an area around mid-table where a first line of defence can be placed, like a line of low ridges or wooded areas, perhaps with a small village. In the opposite corner from the attackers' entry points there should be a place for a town or encampment, from which the defenders' reinforcements can issue.

Looking at a terrain cloth I originally made for the Battle of Brandy Station for Historicon 2002, I select a 6' x 5' section in the southwest corner, outlined here in red:

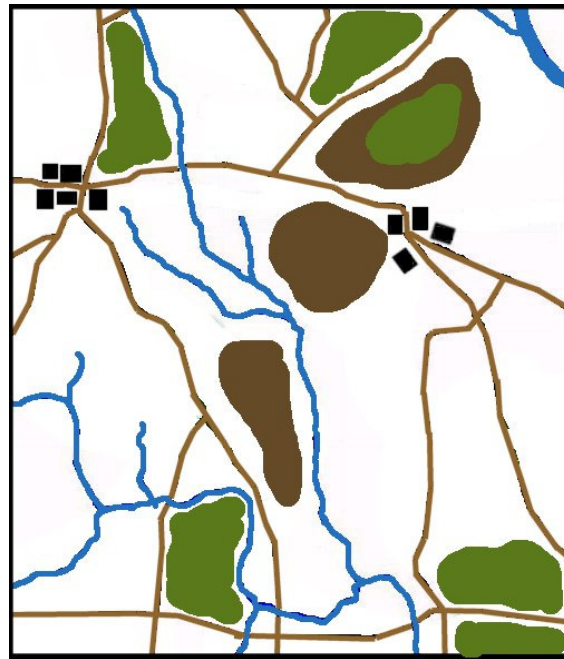


With the woods, buildings and railroad removed, the battlefield will look like this:

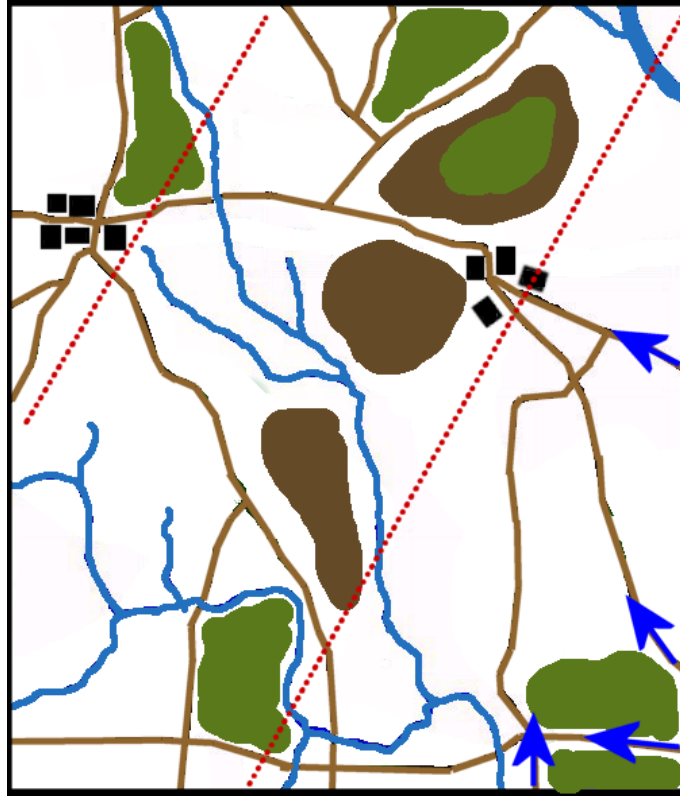


The roads in the lower right corner will provide entry points for the attacking forces, so the main line of defense should be roughly diagonal from the top right to the lower left. I will add a line of low hills and a few woods, one placed to conceal a couple of the French entry points. A village will be placed in

one of the passes between the hills to provide a focal point for the defense, and to impede the French advance. A second village at a crossroads in the upper left corner, about a mile to the rear, will be the location of the Allied reserve.



In the illustration below, the blue arrows indicate the possible entry points for the attackers. The French commander will plan his advance without knowing the exact strength and location of the opposing forces; only that they are in the general vicinity of the ridgeline, and that he outnumbers them. The Portuguese will deploy along and/or to the left of the long dotted line, placing only a marker or command stand to indicate the location of each unit until the French have entered the table and gained a line of sight to the units' location. The British reserve will deploy behind the shorter dotted line, and may not move until he either receives a message from the Portuguese commander or he hears artillery fire to his front.



Looking at the overall situation and my collection of miniatures, I will decide to make the French brigades of three to five battalions each, with at least one legere battalion in each brigade. The French cavalry will be eight squadrons; four of hussars and four of chasseurs a cheval. The Portuguese brigades will each consist of three line battalions and a battalion of cacadores, and the cavalry regiment will be four squadrons of light cavalry. The British infantry brigade will be four battalions of line infantry, with two companies of rifles attached, and the cavalry will consist of six squadrons of heavy dragoons.

Note that the arrangement of the terrain will tend to focus the action towards the center of the table, while still allowing for the possibility of some movement on the flanks. Allowing the players as much latitude as possible in the deployment of their forces, with limited knowledge of their opponents' dispositions and specific intentions, will cause the outcome to be significantly influenced by the players' decisions rather than luck, making the game a potentially much more satisfying experience.

Constructing my own scenarios in this way has made it possible for me to provide challenging and fulfilling game experiences for my players, while enriching their understanding of the problems facing their historical counterparts; the very best, in my opinion, of what historical wargames have to offer.