

Borodino 1812 - A Player's View

by Mark Kaczmarek

Borodino is the second volume in the *Triumph & Glory* Napoleonic series by designer Richard Berg. Capitalizing on the success of the premiere title game **T&G, Borodino** offers some minor rules modifications designed to streamline play. The game focuses on the titanic struggle between the French and Russian armies near Moscow in the late summer of 1812. Game scale is 325 yards per hex, with most units depicted at the regimental level.

Each game turn represents 75 minutes of real time. Rules complexity is rated at the lower-end of *medium*, while solitaire playability is *high*.

The first scenario focuses on the initial French assault on the *Schevardino Redoubt* located approximately 2 miles in front of the main Russian defensive line. It is very manageable in scope (piece density is less than 50 units per side), only 5 turns long, and is playable in less than 2 hours. Elements of one French infantry corps and a supporting cavalry corps engage an equal number of Russians for control of the Russian held fortified position. Victory is determined by being the last player in possession of the redoubt hex. It's usually a fairly evenly balanced slugfest all the way, despite what the rulebook indicates (i.e., that the French are heavily favored) and a portent of things to come in the grand battle scenario. This short scenario is a great way to learn the game/system without an overwhelming commitment of time.

The grand battle scenario is the heart of the game. It depicts the day long (10 turns) struggle of the French attempt to take possession of a series of fortified hilltop redoubts from the gritty Russian defenders along the banks of the Moskva River. Both sides have multiple playing style options open to them, as well as an equal chance at victory. The outcome will probably hang in the balance until late in the game as victory is determined by being the last side to control certain geographical objectives, as well as the overall casualty levels suffered by each side. Expect the control of key VP locations to change hands multiple times throughout the course of the contest. The Russians will commit any and all troops to retain possession while the French are equally determined to wrest control away from the tenacious defenders. Those familiar with the game system can realistically expect to complete the grand battle scenario in about 6-7 hours while inexperienced players

should anticipate an additional 1-2 hours to reach a conclusion.

Game play in Borodino revolves around a back and forth series of random activations governed by the draw of command chits to activate your formations. At the start of each turn, both players need to secretly decide where their main focus of attack (or counterattack) will take place. Command constraints only allow for 3 French and 1, 2, or 3 Russian formations to receive orders on any given turn. While all the command chits are available to draw each turn, only those formations actually under orders are allowed to fire, enter enemy ZOC, and conduct shock combat. Formations without orders suffer restricted operations, typically half movement allowance and no shock combat options. Units of the Russian Reserve however, cannot move at all unless under orders. Most formations can, once their chit is drawn, exercise the option of rolling against their initiative rating for a one-turn reprieve, granting them full freedom of operations. Failure to roll less than or equal to the leader's initiative rating results in that formation forfeiting all movement for the turn; their only allowable action is to attempt to rally broken units. Also, the French Imperial guard must be committed by direct order of Napoleon; rolling for initiative is not an option here.

Under Napoleon, the French can freely redirect their command focus every turn, whereas the Russian ability to do the same is somewhat problematic. General Kutusov must roll against his orders delay rating value in order to change the formations

that are actually under command. Success allows for complete freedom in choosing formations while failure means that the very same formations that were under orders from last turn remain under orders this turn as well. As mentioned earlier, the number of formations eligible for activation varies depending on the army wing activated: 1st Army (3), 2nd Army (2) and Reserve (1). This makes for some interesting choices for the Russian player. The large 1st Army is located on the quiet northern end of the battlefield, far away from any initial action, and is thus not likely to provide any immediate help. The Reserve with its one activation point consists of the massive artillery and the Russian Guard, both extremely powerful, but again of little immediate use (rest assured, the artillery and the Guard will be needed before the battle is decided). The question then centers around when is the best time to commit them, and can Kutusov react to French attacks by changing his orders in a timely fashion. Most of the early Russian activations will likely focus on the 2nd Army whose disposition runs from the village of Borodino in the north all the way to your southern flank in the village of Utitsa. This is a long stretch of ground and units are spread pretty thin. Taking chances with these units until help arrives is not advised.

Once a given formation is activated, all units within command range are free to move, fire and/or engage in shock combat with enemy units. Units remain in command as long as they are within 2 hexes of another unit of the same formation that is also in command. Units outside of command range are treated as if they have NO orders, and therefore will be restricted.

Shock combat (infantry *melee* or cavalry charge) is the principal means to gain possession of an enemy held hex. However, the simple desire to conduct combat is not sufficient to guarantee that troops will actually engage the enemy. All units desiring to conduct shock attacks (*melee* or cavalry charge) must first pass a commitment check, subject to die roll modifiers, before proceeding to combat. Each unit has a cohesion rating (1=worst, 9=best) that determines the quality of the unit and the likelihood of the unit participating in combat. A die roll is made and compared against the lead unit's cohesion rating to

BORODINO Triumph & Glory Series, Vol. II

Battle of the Moskova, 1812
Published: 2004 by GMT Games LLC
Game Designer: Richard H. Berg
Game Developer: William F. Ramsay
Art Director: Rodger B. MacGowan
Counter Art: Simonitch & MacGowan
Map Art: Mark Simonitch

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Contents: Two Countersheets; One 22x34 inch Map; Rulebook; Player Aid; 1-die; Bookcase Box
Time Scale: 75 minutes per game turn
Unit Scale: each point = 150-200 men or 4 guns
Players: 1-2

Borodino — Triumph & Glory Series

see if the attack takes place. A modified die roll less than or equal to the unit's cohesion is required to succeed. Failure results in the units remaining adjacent without conducting combat.

If the commitment check allows units to conduct shock combat, there is one additional proviso, namely artillery reaction fire. This is the great Russian equalizer, particularly if they can get the massive artillery Reserve activated and moved into the front line fortifications. Before shock, if the defender's hex has artillery it is allowed one reaction fire against an adjacent hex. Any units disordered as a result of this fire are unable to participate in the shock attack. Oftentimes what began as a great attack opportunity is thus quickly reduced to unfavorable odds by defensive artillery fire.

The design and development team have done a good job with the combat system. Combat resolution involves a single die roll. Numerous die roll modifications are possible to reflect differences in troop quality, terrain, and attack position (flank or rear). The corresponding outcome of combat is usually decisive with one side always becoming disordered, along with a significant potential for retreat (and possible pursuit for shock that involves charging cavalry).

Cavalry charges follow the same general combat procedure as detailed above, with a few minor twists. Enemy cavalry have the option to try and countercharge, or if they have a higher movement allowance to retreat before combat. Infantry can also try and form square in reaction, however failure to do so results in their becoming disordered prior to combat. As indicated, successful charges oftentimes allow for the attacking cavalry to conduct pursuit of their defeated foes.

A key to Napoleonic warfare is to retain control of the field of battle. To achieve this goal in **Borodino**, a player must force the enemy to leave the map. This is accomplished by a two-step process whereby you first cause a unit to disorder, followed by a second disorder result which then forces the unit to withdraw. Rally is of course possible for both disordered and withdrawn units. A single roll is made against the unit's cohesion rating which results in either full recovery or continued disorder. In an interesting twist, withdrawn units that fail this recovery roll are instead eliminated.

Herein lies the key to victory. Formations whose losses exceed two-thirds of

their initial units are deemed to have collapsed and count toward the victory point total at the end of the game. Needless to say, remaining units of a collapsed formation are virtually useless in conducting any type of further offensive functions in the game. The remainder of a player's victory points are garnered by occupying key hexes located on the game map as indicated (colored stars that list their corresponding VP value). Victory is simply determined by having the highest VP total at the end of the game. Don't be surprised if the margin of victory is as little as one VP. Historically, this battle was a near draw.

At this point one might legitimately ask specifics on how to achieve victory in **Borodino**. Following is a list of strategy tips that I have compiled after multiple game plays. Feel free to pick and choose from these suggestions to enhance your own style of play. Be advised that there is no sure road to victory in **Borodino**, but to ignore all the following hard-learned lessons would be courting defeat.

Russian Strategy Tips

- You start the game in possession of the majority of the VP locations and ALL the good defensive terrain. There is no need to unnecessarily advance beyond your own fortifications.
- Shift the bulk of your forces from the northern part of the battlefield down south ASAP. The terrain up north is militarily impassable and there are no VP locations worth defending. The troops down south will need your help.
- Activate the Reserve artillery as one of your first priorities. This will go a long way to help ensure victory. Place the artillery in all VP locations, particularly the Great Redoubt (3114, et al).
- Liberal use of the Reserve artillery with their high combat values will many times cause attacking French units to become disordered. Remember disordered units cannot participate in shock combat. This will help you retain possession of key locations.
- Resist the temptation to run down French stragglers if you must leave good defensive terrain to do so. Russians will generally tend to lose in a 1-for-1 exchange of units, as your formation collapse levels are lower than your French counterparts.
- Keep a portion of each formation in reserve. Use them to rotate fresh units into important positions, and retire disordered units allowing them a chance to reform

and or rally.

- Whenever possible, use your artillery to target enemy artillery. The French batteries will generally be used to help soften up your front lines prior to any significant commitment of French troops for a major assault.
- Pay very close attention to your southern flank. This is your most vulnerable sector. You have very few good quality troops and thus must maximize use of the defensive terrain. A loss of just 1 or 2 units down here can prove disastrous.
- The southern militia are almost totally useless. Use them only as a last ditch effort to hold the line. They won't last more than one assault.
- Your Cossacks are almost as useless. If you feel compelled to run down stragglers, these are your best choice. They are also useful for tying down an equal number of higher quality French units.
- Maximize use of defensive terrain, as this will cause the French to attack at a disadvantage.
- Use the Russian Guard as a mobile fire brigade. They are best employed late in the game to stop a French breakthrough or to recapture key VP locations. Don't frivolously stick them in the front line, as you will need them later.
- Finally, concentrate your attentions on the French III, V and VIII Corps, as they are the smallest French formations and the easiest to cause to collapse. The other French corps are just too big. Fortunately the III and VIII Corps are right in the center of the action, so you shouldn't have to go far to find them.

French Strategy Tips

- The French have better quality troops overall. You must use this fact to your advantage to offset the benefit the Russians gain from defensive terrain.
- Use your cavalry to good effect as you have superiority in this arm at the initial points of attack, particularly down south.
- The French possess a superior command structure; you must take advantage of this. Napoleon can automatically give orders to 3 formations without resorting to a die roll. Conversely the Russians can only activate 1 to 3 formations. To change their focus also requires a die roll (only 60% chance of success).
- Aside from taking Borodino (3316/3217) and securing the VP hex located behind the village, the French should not focus too much attention at this end of the

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Intelligence Condition Table for Empire of the Sun

there is a 30% reduction in the number of surprise attacks — events which I felt were happening too often in the original system. Since this reduction in surprise attacks works for both the Japanese and Allied players equally, it should not affect playbalance.

Because the Reaction numbers are nearly the same if using the original system or the ICT, it would be a legitimate game element to allow players to use either one and let him decide on a card-by-card basis (before he rolls the die). He could go for all or nothing and use the original system, or decide to spread out his luck a little and use the ICT (with the full reaction being less likely).

While testing the Optional Rules I was careful to study how the table influenced my playing decisions. As the offensive player I noticed that I felt slightly safer conducting an offensive because the ambush and response cards are watered

down some and I was not overly worried about the '13' and '1' results. As the defender I felt less anxiety from a surprise attack and was grateful that there were '13' and '1' results. The 'P' and '1' results give the defender some measure of protection — although they are not enough to mount a powerful reaction against a Military Event or a 3 OPs card. All-in-all it was a positive experience for me and helped me to enjoy this extraordinary game even more.

Special Reaction Moves

It seems to me that the limitations on Special Reaction Moves are too restrictive, especially given the small number of air and ground units in the game. For example, most Allied players don't garrison Johnston Island so the Japanese can land there unopposed. Why would a massive Japanese invasion force heading to Johnston Island have no chance of being intercepted, yet the same force heading to

Midway might (assuming the Allied player still has an air unit there)? Why would a ground unit on Midway help the Allied naval units intercept the invasion convoy? I also noticed that an Allied invasion force can sail into the Sea of Japan and land troops in the hex northeast of Tokyo without the Japanese player having any chance at intercepting it — because the hex contains no airfield or port.

Why not allow Special Reaction Moves against any friendly hex? If you are open to this, use the following rule: If the hex contains a friendly airfield or port, allow Special Reaction per normal rules. If the offensive player's forces enter an enemy air ZOI on the way to that unoccupied hex, apply a -2 drm to the Special Reaction roll. If the unoccupied hex does not contain an airfield or port, apply a +2 drm to the Special Reaction die roll.



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map. They do need to maintain the bulk of the IV corps in the vicinity of Borodino, as they will be required for the inevitable assault on the Great Redoubt.

- Strike hard down south, as the Russians are relatively weak and outnumbered. The woods just north of Utitsa (3204) make reinforcing this sector fairly difficult. Divert the bulk of Davout's I Corps to assist the Polish Vth Corps.

- Attack the victory objectives sequentially, as you don't have enough troops to hit them all simultaneously. Concentrate your initial efforts on the Fleches — these earthen redoubts are located on the hilltop just north of the woods on the Russian southern flank. This will give you a secure flank to work with and keep your troops from getting into a crossfire from both the Fleches and the Great Redoubt.

- The Russian artillery, particularly the Reserve, is deadly. Don't present the Russians with massed targets to shoot at. Maximize use of terrain to avoid line of

sight. Stay out of range of the Russian guns until you are ready to make your assault. This way, the enemy only gets one shot.

- You might want to consider a diversionary attack up north to try and draw off some of the Russian hordes. If the Russian player bites and activates the 1" Army by putting some formations under orders to counterattack, he might just be stuck with this same order while you then refocus your attack on the other flank. Remember, the Russian player cannot split his activations; he must choose the 1" Army, 2'd Army or the Reserve for activation. *Note: This rule is specific to the grand battle scenario and is not part of the general series rules.*

- Your III and VIII Corps are relatively brittle and likely to collapse if overworked. If you commit these Corps to battle, make sure they are amply supported by either the I or IV Corps at a minimum. No sense giving the Russian some cheap VPs.

- The French Imperial Guard is the ace up your sleeve. Their commitment will oftentimes be decisive. Their cohesion ratings of 8 and 9 mean they are virtually indestructible unless surrounded and forced to retreat. Keep them within striking range of key objectives. Once the Russian player shows signs of being stretched to the limit, give him a taste of Napoleon's finest.

In Borodino, both sides have the potential to win the game. The tide of battle will often seesaw back and forth, right up to the very last turn. It is left to the player's skill, and a little luck of course, to determine who controls the battlefield and thus can add the battle honor of *Triumph and Glory at Borodino* to their banners. Anyone with an interest in Napoleonic warfare should seriously consider adding Borodino to their gaming library.



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