

# Sweden Fights On

## System Analysis and the Fight for the Mountain Chapel

by Mark Kaczmarek

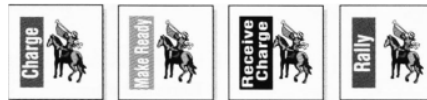
Sometimes the more obscure the period of history, the more creativity blossoms and game designers find a novel approach to accurately portray their subject matter within the constraints of a simple (yet elegant) game system. In my opinion, Ben Hull has succeeded admirably in this regard with his *Musket & Pike Battle System* (MPBS) game system, particularly, **Sweden Fights On**. This is the second volume in the MPBS series following the release of **This Accursed Civil War** (Vol I) in 2002.

This is a game system that is relatively easy to learn, yet it provides ample player interactions and decision opportunities, making it difficult to master. **Sweden Fights On** provides the opportunity to reenact four battles from the latter part of the Thirty Years War: *Nordlingen* (1634), *Wittstock* (1636), *Second Breitenfeld* (1642) and *Jankau* (1645). As a bonus, rules and leader counters are provided to allow owners of **Lion of the North**, Volume III in the *Great Battles of History* (GBoH) series, to convert and play that game using the MPBS series rules.

**Sweden Fights On** hosts a multitude of different nationalities, all splendidly portrayed graphically in their distinctive color uniforms. The main contestants include the Swedes, Imperials, Bavarians, Spanish, Saxons, and even the odd Scottish unit. The regiment is the main formation of the period (and the game), with each strength point representing between 80-100 men. Game turns reflect approximately 20-to-30 minutes of real time, with most scenarios lasting from 10-to-15 turns. The battle scenarios are very manageable, usually with less than fifty pieces per side, and most being playable in an afternoon (4-5 hours).

What follows is an after action report of the opening phases of the battle of *Jankau*, the *Fight for the Mountain Chapel* scenario, with corresponding commentary on the salient rules of play interspersed to provide the reader with a richer insight into the game system and its mechanics. For reference, my opponent has opted to play the Imperials while I lead the Swedes.

This scenario pits a force of approximately



16,000 Swedes under the command of Faltmarskalk Torstensson against a mixed, slightly larger force of Imperial, Bavarian and Saxon troops under the overall command of General Hatzfeld. The Imperial forces are on the attack, striving for control of the high ground and a mountain chapel just outside the village of Jankau, approximately 35 miles southeast of Prague.

Initial disposition of the forces involved see the Swedes already in possession of both the prominent hill terrain and the mountain chapel. In contrast, the Imperial forces are deployed on the far side of an extensive stretch of woods and must traverse some steeply sloped terrain before they can begin to engage the Swedes for possession of the key battlefield objectives.

Each opposing army employed the same battlefield command structure, namely a Central Infantry Group augmented by two Cavalry Wings, one on each flank, with the Imperials also employing a Reserve Group attached to their Center formation as well. The intricacies of the game's command system only allow for the activation of just a single wing/group at any particular time. This also assists with learning the game mechanics as you only have to worry about

moving around 10-15 pieces during a single activation phase. In addition, each wing/formation starts the game with an initial set of orders, defined (in decreasing aggressiveness) as either: a) *Charge*, b) *Make Ready*, c) *Receive Charge*, or d) *Rally*. This ordering system helps determine which side has the overall initiative (most aggressive side moves first), as well as governing the actions that any particular wing can perform. For example: a Wing under a *Charge* order must move at least one hex closer to the enemy when activated, but at the same time is also precluded from reforming shaken or broken formations via any rallying actions. Conversely a Wing under a *Rally* order cannot initiate combat or move next to enemy units, however they are free to reform their formations and recover morale. The other two allowable orders (*Make Ready* and *Receive Charge*) lie in-between these two extremes. Once a given wing has completed its activation it is eligible, unless under a *Rally* order, to attempt to gain continuation status. This will in essence allow that wing to move again, to a maximum of three activations. Continuation status is achieved by die roll, per individual leader ratings.

The *Jankau* battle scenario starts off with all Wings of both armies under *Make Ready* orders, so it's essentially a die roll to decide who moves first. As the Swedes are on the defensive and in possession of the good terrain, they are in no hurry to commit themselves. The Imperials on the other hand must decide on a plan of action. My opponent, after carefully perusing the historical synopsis, decided not to try and emulate the Imperial attack through the woods but rather split his army in two halves to enable him to hit both Swedish flanks. To this end he committed his Imperial Left Cavalry Wing, under command of Feldmarschall Gotz, to assume Open Order and move through the village of Zwistow so as to engage the Swedish Right Cavalry Wing under the command of General Major Wittenberg. The Imperial Right Cavalry Wing under Bavarian General de Werth, as well as the Saxon Center/Reserve under General-feldzeugmeister de Suys, both move off to their right to skirt the woods to their front

### Sweden Fights On (M&P Series, Vol. II)

*Battles of the Thirty Years War (four battles)*  
Published: 2003 Award: CSR Nominee  
Game Design: Ben Hull  
Game Developer: Dick Vohlens  
Art Director: Rodger B. MacGowan  
Map & Counters: Mark Simonitch



Contents: Three Countersheets; Four 22x34 inch Maps; Rule & Play books; One 10-sided die; Player Aid Card; Bookcase Box  
Time Scale: 20-30 minutes per turn  
Map System: Hex = 100 yards  
Unit Scale: Regiments; Brigades & Batteries  
Players: 1-2

## Sweden Fights On: *Musket 6-Pike System Analysis*

and therefore engage the Swedish Left Wing. Interestingly my opponent opted to leave these units in their regular, not Open Order, formations. As you shall soon see, these decisions will have major ramifications for the battle ahead.

Historically, units of the period were required to maintain formation and suffered significant consequences if allowed to disperse or become disordered. This is reflected in game terms by making units suffer formation hits for crossing significant terrain features (e.g. slopes, streams, woods, etc.) or engaging in combat. Units go from Formed to Shaken to Broken in a consecutive series of consequences for each additional opportunity for disorder. The only exception to the above is that units that assume Open Order can ignore formation hits caused by terrain features. The drawback here is that Open Order units are immediately formation broken (movement allowance of zero) after engaging in melee/shock combat. Formation hits can, however, be removed by choosing a reform action as the sole activity performed by that unit, orders permitting. This is one of the places where the overall orders for a given Wing come into play as certain orders preclude a reform action on the part of your active units.

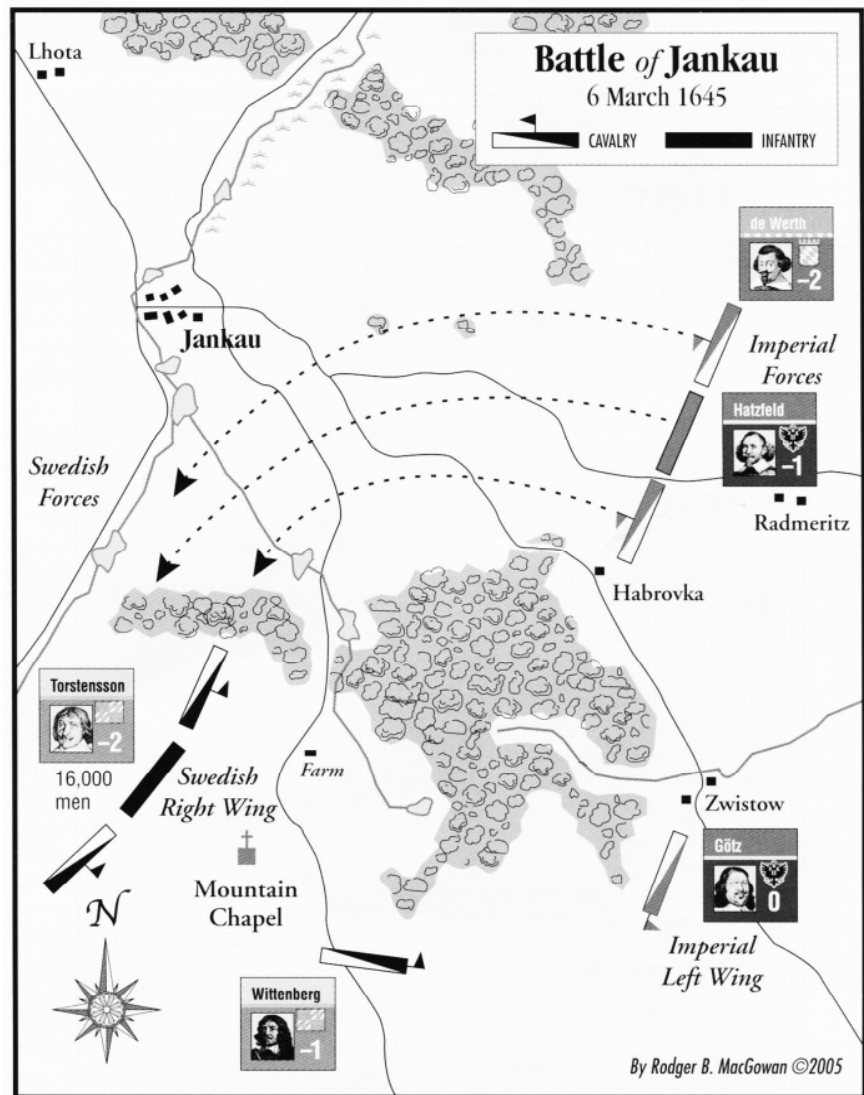
Another factor to consider is that changing orders for your Wings is also not automatic. A change of orders is initiated by a die roll at the beginning of your Wing's activation. An attempted orders change depends on multiple factors such as the quality of your leader, the type of order being attempted matched against your current orders, proximity to the enemy, as well as the overall morale of your units. Failure means you are stuck with your present orders until your Wing is once again eligible for activation.

As noted earlier, the Imperial Left Cavalry Wing under Feldmarschall Gotz, moved off (in open order) to their left through the village of Zwistow. The Swedish reaction was to in turn send their Right Cavalry Wing under General Major Wittenberg to head them off and engage before the main Imperial force could march all the way around to the Swedish left flank. The Swedes possessed a slight numerical as well as qualitative advantage over their opponent and so decided to press their luck and force an early engagement before the Imperial cavalry could reform into battle formation.

In addition, the Swedes sent Faltmarskalk Torstensson, their Army Commander, along for his additional command bonuses. Combat was soon joined on the Swedish right flank. The first line of Swedish cavalry charged and completely routed their open order Imperial counterparts. Interspersed with the main action were a flurry of pistol shots and an occasional interception/countercharge to add some flavor to the battle. The Imperials subsequently got the initiative and sent in their second line to engage the disordered Swedes but met with only limited success. The Swedish second line was then committed and the Imperials broke and eventually fled the field with the Swedes in hot pursuit. In the process, Feldmarschall Gotz was killed in action; historically this was also his fate. The survivors were hunted down and the Imperial Left Cavalry Wing was virtually

destroyed and thus was out of the battle.

Shock combat in the *Mer!* *Battle System* is almost always decisive. One side or the other usually breaks and runs. Results can range from unit elimination to various stages of morale degradation (Shaken or Broken) with a subsequent retreat. Shock involving cavalry also offers the potential for pursuit. Victorious cavalry units may be required to roll for such pursuit. Pursuing cavalry units are considered to eliminate the unit they have just engaged, but at the consequence of exiting the game map with no return possible. Leaders may also get caught up in the pursuit, but unlike their units they have the potential to return. Unfortunately, leader return is determined at the end of the turn so activated Wings whose leader exits the map forfeit all possible continuation die rolls.



## Musket & Pike Battle Series, Vol. II

Inactive friendly cavalry units can attempt to intercept a charging enemy cavalry unit. Success once again depends on a die roll modified by the unit's current morale and orders status. Any interception related combat is resolved immediately before any other units are moved. This process can therefore set off a chain reaction of interception attempts and combats, which can be quite exciting.

Cavalry units also have the option to fire pistols both before and/or during combat. Each cavalry unit is equipped with two pistols, both having a single shot before needing to be reloaded. Chances to hit are slim (20-30%) but can have significant effects to shock combat by causing a casualty and thereby changing the attack odds ratio (by forcing a morale check) and/or acting as a die roll modifier. The downside as noted above is that they are usually single use weapons. Reloading a pistol is considered a reform action and is low on

the priority list of potential options for units who are often engaged in the heat of battle.

The advantage to having the Army Commander in close proximity to his troops is that he allows for one rally or reform action every time a Wing is activated. Therefore, even if units of the active Wing are precluded from performing a given action (reform or rally) because of their current orders, the Army Commander can momentarily overrule those orders. Army commanders also contribute die roll modifiers to a Wing Commander's attempt to change orders, seek continuation, or to adjacent units seeking to engage in shock combat. Judicial placement of the Army Commander can therefore make a significant impact to your overall strategy for any given scenario.

The entire cavalry engagement described above on the Swedish right flank was over

in just a couple of turns. The main Imperial force by contrast was still working their way around to the Swedish left. My opponent's decision to leave his units formed and not assume Open Order further delayed this maneuvering. Troops were either disordered by steep hills to their front or by the stream near Jankau, forcing them to avoid such obstacles or take the time to reform. This allowed the Swedes time to complete all the action on their right flank and move their army commander back to join their main body in the vicinity of the mountain chapel. Now it was time to just sit and wait for the Imperial forces to arrive.

Eventually the main Imperial Bavarian and Saxon force arrived in position in front of the Swedish main body. However, all this maneuvering had chewed up the game clock so to speak and time was running out in the scenario (turn 12 out of 15). The main Swedish host held all the important high ground, including the mountain chapel and nearby farmhouse, and could stand in reaction to any Imperial moves. The Bavarian cavalry under General de Werth moved to the far right so as to exploit the gap in the woods and thus fall on the Swedish left. Meanwhile, the Saxon and Imperial infantry slogged through the narrow strip of woods in front of the Swedish center. At this point the Imperial army decided to abandon all caution and launched an immediate all-out assault.



Infantry units in the *Musket 6. Pike Battle System* come in two

flavors. There are the light infantry (commanded muskets and dragoons) whose primary task is skirmishing and providing support fire for the cavalry. These units are expendable and rarely survive contact with the enemy. Then there are the heavy infantry, phalanx-like formations. These formations are typically two hex units that are comprised of a combination of pike armed infantry in the center with musket-armed men on both flanks. The Swedish infantry in particular also include intrinsic light regimental artillery. This arrangement gives these formations both fire and shock value. Combat can thus be extremely deadly as it can cause both casualties as well as formation hits. In addition, infantry units have different firing capabilities depending on whether they are firing from their front, flank, or using the potent (once per game turn) salvo fire. Infantry can also adopt the famous *Hedgehog* defense against

# Sweden Fights On: *Musket Pike System Analysis*

enemy cavalry, analogous to the infantry squares of later Napoleonic times.



Artillery units of the period were slow and almost immobile. In game terms

they are best pre-positioned in a strategic location and left there for the entire battle. That said, artillery can be used to great effect to stop frontal assaults. While only

capable of firing once per turn, they have a decent chance to disrupt enemy formations, particularly at close range. This coupled with their capacity for grazing fire, whereby all units within range and along the arc of fire are potentially impacted by a single shot, gives you a hint as to how to best use artillery in the game.

From the outset of the headlong charge, the Imperial Bavarian and Saxon troops were attacking at a disadvantage. The Saxon infantry emerged disordered from the woods and were immediately met with multiple rounds of artillery fire. This stopped the attack on the Swedish center cold. The Right Bavarian Cavalry Wing under General de Werth immediately picked up the slack and moved to engage their Swedish counterparts. At this point however, the Bavarians decided on a slightly different approach. Seeing that the Swedes were deployed in depth on the hilltop to their immediate front, they sent forward just enough cavalry to form a skirmish line in hopes of luring the Swedes to launch an interception/countercharge. The Bavarians decided to use the steep sloping terrain to their advantage as well. Movement in either direction, either up or down across the slope, causes a formation hit so my opponent reasoned that he could gain an advantage if I descended the slope to charge him. Sensing no reason to do so, since I was well ahead in victory points at this point having already destroyed his Left Wing, I declined. Too late I saw his cunning plan. By forming a skirmish line he was effectively masking the remainder of his cavalry force. This permitted him complete freedom of movement with his cavalry behind his skirmish line to mass up for a grand assault on the Swedish center, including the mountain chapel. My opponent attempted a continuation die roll and succeeded. It was now time to trust to *Lady Luck* to bail me out or all my hard work on my right flank would count for naught.

Another characteristic of the *Musket & Pike*

Musket & Pike Battle Series	
<b>This Accursed Civil War</b> Vol. I (Pub. 2002) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Edgehill 1642</li> <li>• First Newbury 1643</li> <li>• Marston Moor 1644</li> <li>• Second Newbury 1644</li> <li>• Naseby 1645</li> <li>• Cheriton 1644 (C3i Mag)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jankau 1645</li> </ul>
<b>Sweden Fights On</b> Vol. II (Pub. 2003) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nördlingen 1634</li> <li>• Wittstock 1636</li> <li>• Second Breitenfeld 1642</li> </ul>	<b>Under the Lily Banners</b> Vol. III (Pub. 2005) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rocroi 1643</li> <li>• Freiburg 1644</li> <li>• Mergentheim 1645</li> <li>• Alerheim 1645</li> <li>• Lens 1648</li> </ul> (Coming next in M&P Series)
<b>Gustav Adolf the Great</b> Battles of - Dirschau 1627, Breitenfeld 1631, Alte Veste 1632, Lutzen 1632	

*Battle System* is the ability of formations that have not yet been activated to attempt to pre-empt the currently active Wing formation. This mechanic is very similar to *trumping* familiar to all players of the Great Battles of History (GBOH) game series. Success cancels all further actions by the currently active Wing while failure can cause a reduction in your own Wing's activations to at most one and possibly even zero for the remainder of the turn.

Fortunately the presence of the Swedish Army Commander, Faltmarskalk Torstensson (with his superior die roll modifier), proved to be the deciding factor. The Swedes gained the initiative and were able to activate their Center Infantry Wing and move sufficient units forward to project a defensive line in front of the mountain chapel. This forward movement also had unintended negative consequences as the presence of Swedish infantry masked my own artillery from being able to fire on the reforming Saxons!

The remaining three turns of the scenario were witness to a seesaw struggle conducted within one hex of the all-important mountain chapel. Both sides conducted desperate charges/countercharges and preemption attempts for control of the surrounding terrain near the chapel. The Imperial high tide was reached on the second to last turn of the game wherein the Saxons gained control of the adjacent hilltop and farm, and were just starting to turn the Swedish right flank. Compounding all this, Swedish morale suffered an almost complete breakdown as a Saxon cannonball nearly tore the head off Faltmarskalk Torstensson. Fortunately for the Swedes, an extremely lucky leader return die roll followed by the sands of time running out on the scenario, ensured for the Swedes a hard fought victory.

Victory is usually determined by the difference in VP totals earned by each side in a scenario. VPs are awarded by causing

casualties, eliminating enemy heavy infantry, cavalry, and leader units or for capturing enemy artillery. Light infantry units do not contribute anything toward victory. In special circumstances, as was the case with this scenario (i.e., the mountain chapel), geographical objectives assume paramount importance over normal victory conditions.

At the end of the scenario the VP total stood at Swedes: +135, Imperials: +40 for a net difference of +95. The Imperial Left Cavalry Wing was virtually destroyed losing 11 out of 13 cavalry units, 1 heavy infantry and their Wing Commander, Feldmarschall Gotz. The Swedes by contrast lost only 3 of 13 cavalry units plus assorted casualty points. This net VP differential was sufficient for a Swedish decisive victory, a net difference of +80 being required per rule. The irony was that irrespective of the VP total difference, if the Imperials could have managed to capture the mountain chapel at the end of any turn they would have won an automatic victory. Historically the battle was a marginal Swedish victory.

**Sweden Fights On** has a lot of value to offer to any wargamer. If Ben Hull has his way with this series (and indications are that he will), there will be multiple volumes to follow from GMT Games. The *Musket & Pike Battle System* is at once elegant in its simplicity and yet has enough intricacies to ensnare and challenge even veteran gamers. Gone are the days of continually sending your troops into combat without the need to rest and reform. The movement and combat restrictions placed upon formations, and the corresponding uncertainty with changing orders, ensures that no two games will play the same. This game system rewards thoughtful planning and the maintenance of a reserve while punishing those who approach the battle with little or no preparation.

I continue to enjoy **This Accursed Civil War**, **Sweden Fights On**, and the latest volume in the series **Under the Lily Banners**. I shall eagerly await future volumes. From its humble beginnings as a desktop published game, the *Musket & Pike Battle System* is now here to stay.

