

MOVES SPECIAL SECTION  
OPERATIONAL ANALYSIS:

# WAGRAM: The Battle and the Game

by Irad B. Hardy

*Wagram happens to be a game that Mr. Hardy has played a number of times against your Esteemed Editor—ask him about my Immortal Cavalry unit, should you meet. I think it's a truly keen game. Mr. Hardy thinks it's keen, too. Witness:*

The campaign of 1809 which culminated in the battle of Wagram (5-6 July 1809) was the last that Napoleon won. It began on 9 April 1809 with a "surprise" Austrian offensive into French-Allied Bavaria, and an advance which quickly turned into a month-long Austrian retreat ending with the French capture of Vienna and possession of the west bank of the Danube while the Austrian main army, defeated but intact, camped on the east bank opposite Vienna. By all prior conventional standards of warfare the French, possessing the capitol and half of the Hapsburg domain, had the war won, but the Austrian Emperor refused to ask for peace, and the sizeable Austrian army prevented the French occupation of Hungary and Bohemia.

The longer they could stand, the greater chance they would have of an eventual better peace because, while Napoleon's attention and resources were fixed on the Danube plain, the rest of his empire was beset with a rising tide of troubles. Sparked by the Austrian example, anti-French agitation was brewing in Germany. Prussia, dormant since its humiliation at Jena three years before, was beginning to rearm and secretly negotiate with the Austrians. Russia, a supposed French ally, was proving to be a fence sitter and no friend, while Spain was still unpacified and a growing cancer. Behind all these clouds lay England ready with generous subsidies to finance anybody who would fight Napoleon. Unless Bonaparte did something to alter the situation he could only grow weaker *vis a vis* the Austrians.

Determined to smash the main Austrian army before these threats materialized, he attempted to cross to the east bank and attack the Austrian army before it had recovered from its retreat. This brought about the bloody battle of Aspern-Esseling on May 22. Napoleon miscalculated both the strength and resolve of the Austrians and, when the flooding Danube carried away his bridges after he had only gotten half his army across, he was soundly defeated and lucky to retreat to Lobau Island (midway between the two banks) with the balance of his army.

This repulse really put the 'fat in the fire.' Open rebellion flared in parts of Germany and Italy. Discontent manifested itself even in France. And to top it all the Pope was emboldened to excommunicate Napoleon for his occupation of the Papal states. Most impor-

tantly, it ended any chance of reasonable negotiations with the Austrians. He now would have to crush them quickly and dictate his peace or get out of Austria, dispersing his army to hold down Germany and Italy. The latter alternative was really no choice at all because the Prussians and Russians would only be encouraged by this evidence of weakness and gather like sharks at the scent of blood.

To smash the Austrian main army under the Archduke Charles, Napoleon first had to establish his army on the east bank of the Danube. (Once he got across the river the Austrians would have to fight him, if for no other reason than they were running out of country to retreat to.) His preparations for crossing were methodical and thorough. Feints and deception masked the moment and point of his actual crossing for which, for logistical and strategic reasons, he again chose the site opposite Lobau Island.

Finally, on July 5th, Napoleon launched the operation. Under cover of heavy siege batteries, bridges were laid between Lobau and the mainland. Surprisingly to Napoleon there was little resistance to the actual crossing. The Austrian army, deceived to some extent by the French feints, had withdrawn from its riverside fortifications opposite Lobau deploying on the heights behind the river plain. There was another, perhaps subconscious reason why the Austrians did not engage at the water's edge. They were determined to utterly defeat the French, planning to draw the entire French army onto their naturally strong ridge defenses, repulse them and then maneuver to cut them off from their bridges. If they fought Napoleon at the water's edge they might succeed too well in stopping his advance before it really started. Such an event would not be the defeat they now sought to inflict.

The game *Wagram* opens with the situation as it was at approximately noon on 5 July 1809. Columns of French are debouching out from the bridges of Lobau with the last echelons yet to cross. On the heights above the plain sit the mass of Austrian units while from the west other Austrian formations are hurrying to the field. They will arrive in several hours (Game-Turn three). One Player is now in Napoleon's boots the other in the Archduke Charles'. Both commanders have picked this spot for the decisive battle of the war. The question now is how to fight it and win it.

Historically Napoleon would win if he could inflict sizeable losses on the Austrians (more than he lost doing it) and drive them from the heights overlooking the river plain. The Russbach Heights in particular were of great

significance. If the French held both the plain and the heights after the battle they would be in a position they could exploit against Austrians retreating north or east. Essentially French possession of the Russbach Heights would irrevocably split the remaining Austrian armies and make any Austrian resistance after the coming battle futile. The Austrians could win by giving as good as they got in casualties and by holding the high ground, thereby preserving future freedom of maneuver.

In the game, the winner is the Player with the most Victory Points at the end of the game. These Victory Points are awarded to a Player for eliminating Enemy units and for seizing key terrain.

Let us examine the situations of both Players. The rules require the French Player to score at least seventy-five points (regardless of the number scored by the Austrian Player) or he loses the game. This requirement means that the French Player cannot sit where he is, and there are only two ways that he can score points. He can kill Austrian units (one Victory Point for each Austrian Combat Strength Point); he can get one Victory Point for every French Combat Strength Point he has on the Russbach Heights at the end of the game. Since there are a lot of Austrians between his units and the Russbach Heights, with an attack on the Russbach Heights the French Player can kill two birds with one stone.

The Austrian Player has a somewhat different situation. His army is marginally inferior to the French army in total combat strength and number of units and it is more dispersed at the start. (He does not get the use of a significant number of units until turn three.) Just like the French Player he receives Victory Points for eliminating enemy units. He does not receive points for units on the Russbach Heights except indirectly. After all, if the Austrians do not hold the heights with strong forces, soon all the French will be sitting there. (It's like a goal line stand in football—you don't get points for stopping the other team from scoring.)

The Austrian Player does get points, lots of them, if he can get any of his units into the villages of Aspern, Esseling or Gross Enzersdorf. (These towns dominate the approaches to the bridges which are the French line of retreat and communication.)

The Austrian Player can also win the game if the French Player doesn't force a battle; he does not have to score a minimum number of points in order to win. Let us now briefly analyze the environment or terrain in which the battle will take place.

[continued on page 18]



[continued from page 16]

Terrain affects a unit's ability to move and to fight enemy units. Most of the area on the map is clear terrain—it was fairly flat without much restrictive vegetation. A unit could move at a normal cross-country rate of speed, and an attacker or defender would not gain or lose any particular edge in fighting in it. Running all over the map is a road network. Naturally units moving along roads can move much faster than units moving off roads. Next in prevalence are the scattered farm villages and market towns which dot the fertile river plain. These were rather solid frame and stone homes, barns and public buildings. Troops occupying these towns would gain considerable cover from enemy fire and could use them as strongpoints. Then there are the ridge lines. These are delineated on the map by the slope markings. When a unit tries to move up-slope it will move slower than if it were moving on the level clear terrain, and troops on the higher ground receive protection if attacked from below. Next are the forests which grow along the stream in front of the Russbach Heights. These were fairly dense thickets of alders and other swamp trees. It was practically impossible to move units through this growth quickly. And any protection a unit could gain from hostile fire in its cover would be canceled by the problems of controlling the unit's return fire. Finally there is the stream itself which was not deep but had steep sides and a difficult bottom. It would be impossible for cavalry or artillery to cross this obstacle except at a bridge. Infantry could, but slowly (the men would be less likely to break a leg than would horses), and they would be 'sitting ducks' for any defenders on the other side. Now imposed over all this terrain is a hexagonal grid. Every piece must always be in one hexagon or another. When a Player moves a unit it must move hex by hex. A Player can usually only attack an enemy unit with one of his units which is in a hex next to the enemy unit.

Every unit is given a Movement Allowance, which is a quantification in Movement Points of that unit's ability to move in one Game-Turn. An infantry unit has a Movement Allowance of four Movement Points and in this game it expends one point each time it moves into a clear terrain hex. Thus a Player could move an infantry unit four clear terrain hexes in one turn. If he moved it into a forest hex he would have to expend two Movement Points and thus, in the game as in the battle, the ability of a commander to maneuver his forces depends to a large extent on the terrain he moves those forces through.

To a certain extent this congruity holds true for combat. Every unit is given a Combat Strength which is a numerical point rating of its firepower (which in that day meant the number of men and guns the unit possessed) and ability to endure casualties. All things considered the larger the unit (in terms of its Strength rating) the better it is on attack or defense ("God is on the side of the biggest battalions".) The Combat Results Table used

## MOVES SPECIAL SECTION

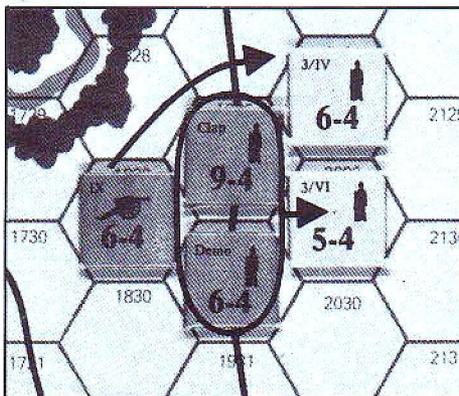
in the Wagram game highlights this dramatically. The higher the ratio of attacker's strength to defender's strength in any given combat, the greater chance the defender will be required to retreat or actually be eliminated, and vice versa.

Let us examine this table and the combat process as it is used in the game. During the Combat Phase the Player must attack all the enemy units his units are adjacent to. (Note in Wagram you may not move a unit which is adjacent to an enemy unit. It is considered pinned by the Zone of Control of the enemy unit which extends into the six hexes surrounding the unit.) The best way to succeed in any attack is to be strongest where your opponent is weakest, but what exactly is enough strength? It is recommended that a Player apply nothing more and nothing less than three to one (3:1) combat odds in an attack.

Though you may argue about the specifics the following is the rationale behind the 3:1 guideline: At odds lower than 3:1 there is a decent chance that the attacking units will be compelled to retreat or worse. At odds higher than 3:1 there is no chance that your attacking units will be compelled to retreat but there is a possibility that an exchange will occur. While this kills the defender it also eliminates at least an equal amount of attacking strength. A Player should never attack at greater than 3:1 unless it is absolutely necessary to insure that the defending unit dies or retreats. At 3:1 the attacker has a five-sixths chance of forcing the defending unit to retreat. It is the knowledge that in a series of 3:1 attacks you will be able almost always to advance an attacking unit into the defending hex that makes for winning tactics.

Let us look at three brief examples of this edge in action: Figure one illustrates the most common form of attack, the frontal assault. The two French infantry divisions attack the Austrian infantry division at 15 to 5 or 3:1, while the French artillery unit *bombards* the other Austrian division. This artillery attack illustrates the diversionary attack. If it did not take place the French 9-4 would have been required to attack the Austrian 6-4. While the 3:1 attack will not eliminate the Austrian unit it will in 5 out of 6 cases cause it to retreat, permitting either of the French units to advance into the vacated hex.

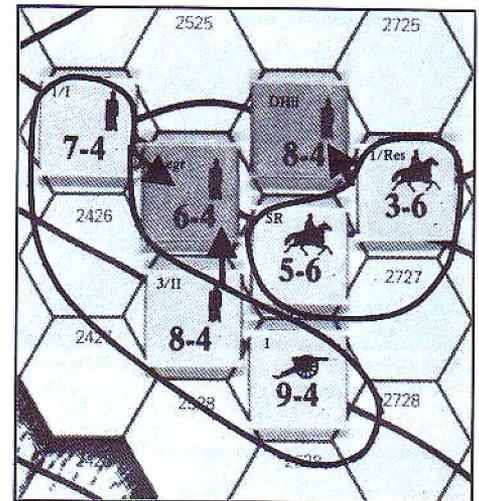
Figure 1



The frontal assault is rather simple; just bring your units adjacent to the opponent's units and attack. The flank attack is no more complex and its function is to eliminate the defending unit by cutting off its retreat. 4:1 odds or better against a unit which cannot retreat will *guarantee* its elimination in all cases. The key point here is that a unit may not retreat into enemy Zones of Control; when the unit retreats it must retreat to a hex which is not *adjacent* to an enemy unit, even if that unit was not involved in the attack in the first place.

In figure two the Austrian Player is using the 7-4, 8-4 and 9-4 artillery units to attack the French 6-4 at 3:1 odds. In this case he could have attacked at 4:1 but chose to *voluntarily* reduce the odds to 3:1 because he did not want to risk the one-sixth chance of exchange. In this case he will have a five-sixth chance of eliminating the French 6-4 because it cannot retreat: There is no hex it can move to which is not adjacent to a French unit. After he has attacked the 6-4 he will attack the French 8-4 with the two cavalry units (a diversionary attack).

Figure 2



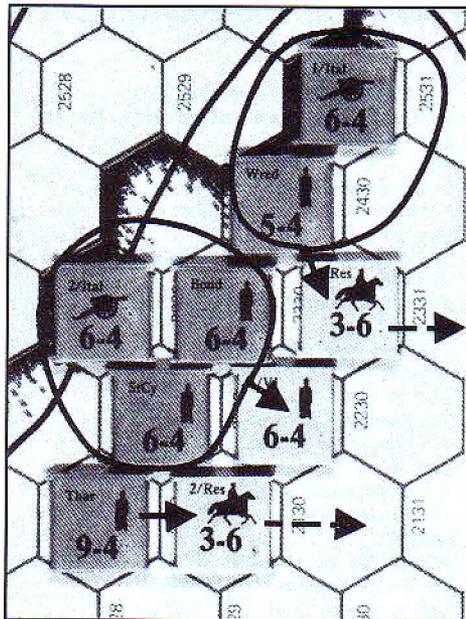
Rarely will a Player let his units be isolated as in the previous example. Instead he groups them into lines so that there is no open flank. In this case a series of frontal assaults on the line are the only possible attacks. But the attacking player by the order in which he imposes these attacks can create a situation which combines to eliminate a defending unit or units.

In figure three we see the French attacking both ends of the Austrian line before they attack the center unit. They can reasonably expect to advance into the position. Then when they attack the center Austrian unit at 3:1 they will have created a flank attack situation at the moment they attack. This illustrates that the attacking Player has a crucial advantage over the defender. The attacker states who attacks whom, assuming there is a choice and more importantly he states the order in which a series of attacks takes place. What this means in a game is that the Player who never attacks when it is his turn will rarely kill more of his opponents men than he loses. Only when you have the initiative can

## MOVES SPECIAL SECTION

you create favorable odds. This is not to say that you should always attack on every turn, but you must be prepared as the game progresses to seize every favorable opportunity to attack.

Figure 3



Let us now return to the Wagram game situation. It is the French Player's turn to move and then attack on the first Game-Turn. On each Game-Turn the French Player is always the first to move and attack; then the Austrian Player can move and attack.

The French Player has several reasonable options open to him. First he can move the Army of Italy and the II Corps directly north and attack as soon as possible across the stream onto the Russbach. The IV Corps and IX Corps would deploy in extended line to protect the west flank while the III Corps protected the east flank with the guard and XI Corps following the attacking spearhead. Considering the distance, he can be attacking around Baumersdorf by Game-Turn 2 or 3 at the latest. The problem with this approach is that it is essentially a frontal assault against the strongest Austrian units in terrain which will benefit the defenders. Unless he has a string of lucky die rolls he will not gain much ground against this line because he will find it almost impossible to get 3:1 attacks. And the Austrian will have plenty of reserves to throw against any units lucky enough to get across the stream.

An alternative line of operations is a major offensive toward the ridges on the Northwest. He can use the II & III Corps to screen the Russbach stream while IV and IX Corps plus the Army of Italy smash the right wing of the Austrian army. This plan has the advantage of engaging the Austrian third turn reinforcements. However it does nothing to compromise the essential Russbach position. And the Austrians are present in the Northwest in some strength. If the French Player is unable to clear them out by nightfall (which comes on the fifth Game-Turn) he will face a long second day of battle.

The third possibility is to attack the lower portion of the Russbach stream with the II and III corps while screening the center and left flanks with the IV, IX and "Italy". This movement has a fair possibility of achieving at least one bridgehead across the Russbach before nightfall. Then on the following day the French would be able to drive on the southeast face of the Russbach heights in an offensive in which they could use their cavalry and artillery. All three alternatives have one *sine qua non*. The operational mobility of the Austrian army must be eliminated. It must not be able to move its forces about to counter the French moves. This requires that the French seize and hold Aderklaa and its vicinity. If they do, Austrian cavalry and artillery will not be able to move east-west, and Austrian infantry would only be able to shift across the Russbach stream slowly. Seizing Aderklaa and dominating the bridge at Wagram effectively cuts the Austrians in half.

What can the Austrian Player do? First he must maintain his position behind the Russbach stream. If he lets a sizeable French force establish itself between Wagram and Markgraf Neusiedl he will be in real trouble. He must contest French occupation of Aderklaa, fighting to keep the approach to the Wagram bridge open. Failure to accomplish this will see his army split and vulnerable to defeat in detail (Since the French can seize Aderklaa on the opening move he must be prepared to counterattack on his first turn). Finally he should attack the French left wing when at all possible in hopes that a series of good die rolls will create a hole through which he can rush a unit to Aspern, Esseling etc. Except for the Aderklaa area and any French penetration across the Russbach stream in the center, he should refrain from becoming decisively engaged, maintaining a defense on alternate hexes and trading space for time.

By the middle of the second day (Game-Turns 10 or 11) the French must be in a position to drive on the Russbach heights in strength. Unless they have been lucky or skillful enough to have taken the town of Wagram, this means they must be across the lower stream in possession of the towns of Markgrafs Neusiedl and Sussenbrunn. This operational necessity is another reason for advancing with the right wing on the first day.

There is a possibility that the Austrians will receive reinforcements during the early part of the second day, along the east edge of the map. The French must provide against this event by either sealing off the east edge with units or creating a reserve of 3 or 4 cavalry units to engage and delay the units when they arrive.



# A Glossary of German Military Terms

The Germans, aggressive little devils that they are, have played a prominent role in the history of warfare. Because of this, the reader may find a number of German words and phrases popping up in English text. The following is a glossary of some of the more common ones:

- Abteilung.** Battalion.
- Abwehr.** The German intelligence organization.
- Adler.** Eagle
- Ausführung.** Model or variant.
- Blitzkrieg.** Lightning war (combined arms tactics).
- deutsche.** German (adj.)
- Einheit.** Unity.
- Eisenbahntruppen.** Railway repair troops.
- Fahne.** Flag.
- Fallschirmjäger.** Paratrooper.
- Gebirgstruppe.** Mountain infantry.
- Geschwader.** Air Wing.
- Gruppe.** Group
- Heer.** The Army.
- Jäger.** Hunter; in reference to units, an elite light infantryman.
- Jagdpanzer.** Hunting tank, i.e., tank destroyer.
- Kampf.** Combat or struggle.
- Kampfgruppe.** Battle group.
- Keil und Kessel.** Wedge and trap (or pocket).
- Krieg.** War.
- Kriegsmarine.** German Navy.
- leicht.** Light (weight)
- Luftwaffe.** The German Air Force.
- mittler.** medium (weight).
- Nebelwerfer.** Multiple rocket launcher.
- Nord.** North.
- Ost.** East.
- Panzer.** Armor.
- Panzerjäger.** Self-propelled anti-tank gun.
- Panzerfaust.** Anti-tank rocket launcher.
- Panzergrenadier.** Mechanized infantry.
- Pferd.** Horse.
- Schlacht.** Battle.
- Schutzstaffel.** Security force (the SS).
- schwer.** Heavy (weight).
- Schwerpunkt.** The focal point of attack.
- Soldat.** Soldier.
- Staffel.** Squadron.
- Stosstruppe.** Assault trooper.
- Sturmgeschütz.** Assault-gun vehicle.
- Sud.** South.
- Tag.** Day.
- Unternehmen.** Undertaking, i.e., operation.
- Unterseeboot.** Submarine (U-boat).
- Volksgranadier.** Soldier in special, low-quality, late-war formation (hastily trained, poorly equipped divisions).
- Waffen SS.** The fighting branch of the SS.
- Wagen.** Vehicle or wagon.
- Wehrmacht.** The WWII German Armed Forces.
- Zug.** Train (as in supply train).

**PRONOUNCIATION:** I can't turn the readers into Berlitz graduates in a few lines, but the following may aid your pronunciation slightly. Pronounce "W" as "V"; "V" as "F"; "J" as "Y". Pronounce "A" as "Ah" except when it has an **umlaut** (¨) over it. Pronounce "Z" as "ts".