

THE FRANCO-PRUSSIAN WAR

by Omar DeWitt

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Lately, with so many titles being published, it is not always easy to notice the really good ones. This is a good one. If for no other reasons than the several unique features of *The Franco-Prussian War*, it is an excellent game and should belong in the library of all serious wargamers.

The French start the game with 11 counters on the mapboard (plus 3 EB—RR units). The 11 counters may include from one to six dummy counters, depending upon the order of battle. The Prussians start the game with 18 counters, one to ten of which may be dummy counters, plus an unlimited number of EB units.

All counters are inverted during set-up and, in the Standard game, remain inverted during play. In the Basic Game, all units are face up, and most of the unique features of the *FPW* are not used. Although it is a good way to become familiar with the mechanics of the game and is therefore useful, it does not have the interest the Standard Game does. I will be concerned mainly with the Standard Game.

Although the idea of dummy counters has been around for some time (Victor Madeja in the *General*, Nov. 1964), the *FPW* is the first game, to my knowledge, that actually incorporates them. "Dummy counters," read the rules, "represent the atrocious intelligence available to both sides during the original campaign." They might be small groups of enemy soldiers, rumors, or a Boy Scout troop. The inverted dummy counters are treated exactly the same way as inverted combat units.

The only way to determine if an enemy counter is a dummy or a combat unit, or to tell the strength of a combat unit (they vary in Combat Strength Points from one to ten), is to attack it. Another unique feature of the game, the Hasty Attack, allows a counter to attack with only part of its total strength, thereby gaining information with possibly lower losses (each unit can take losses one Combat Strength Point at a time).

Dummy counters that are revealed, and therefore eliminated, are returned to play in the following turn by being stacked with any friendly unit(s). The result is that the dummy counters can be quite a potent weapon. Even if a player is certain that a particular counter is a dummy, that counter still exerts a Zone of Control that inhibits movement and cuts supply lines. And if a player is not certain which are dummy counters, which is more likely, the possibility of stronger threats must be met.

At the beginning of the game, not knowing the strength of the inverted combat units is

somewhat of a problem. After combat begins, it is less of a problem; even though the units are inverted after combat, an average Bridge player should be able to keep track of which is which. Although counters can stack together at the end of a turn and disperse the following turn, this rarely happens because the French have too few units to bunch them up, and the Prussians are too busy maneuvering. The dummy counters returning to the game are easy to stack, and so the problem remains, which are combat and which are dummy. With enough dummies returning to play, it takes more than an average Bridge player to keep the possibilities straight. For those who are concerned about it, play balance could be affected by adding dummy counters to the weaker player's side.

Fortification Units pose an interesting problem for the offense. Since these units exert a Zone of Interdiction affecting supply lines, and since the French forts exert this Zone over the northern half of the mapboard, the Prussian has to decide whether to mask these Zones with units or to destroy the Fortification Units, which takes time and Combat Strength Points and therefore Victory Points (five Victory Points are earned for each Combat Strength Point eliminated). The forts cannot be ignored if any penetration beyond Thionville is to be made. If the French are weak in the Thionville area, the Prussian has a desire to push on while the pushing is good; but in the long run he might give himself too much rope. If there are significant French in the area, the tendency is to attack them for the Victory Points (there are no Victory Points for eliminated forts) and the forts remain intact. The problem is an interesting one. On defense, the fortifications offer help, but the question of putting combat units inside or outside or in what combination of both is a good one.

Prussian involvement in the south-east section of the mapboard is almost purely defensive, since there are no Victory Points for penetration to be earned in that direction. However, it is the natural place for French offense: it threatens the Prussian lone supply source, and it is the most obvious area to earn points for penetration into Prussia. Perhaps this area poses a problem that is one of the little beauties of this game. How much should the Prussian spend in this isolated area for defense while the points are to be won halfway across the board? If one French unit in Strasburg at the start of the last Turn has a

good chance of winning 50 points, what kind of a threat would another unit be?

The Victory Points Chart is clear and seems reasonable. However, it does not seem reasonable for all possible combinations of French and Prussian OBs if the Optional Rule is used. For instance, with OB "F" the Prussian gets only 41 Combat Strength Points to start with (as opposed to 72 if the Optional Rule is not used) and gets only 20 more as replacements (against 13). In French OB "M" 75 Combat Strength Points are available immediately (as opposed to 57 if the Optional Rule is not used). If the game is played with these two Orders of Battle, the result in Victory Points should be quite different. I would suggest, therefore, that different Victory Point Charts be used for different combinations of OBs.

The accompanying table is based on the assumption that a force twice as strong against a given enemy force would earn four times the Victory Points (plus or minus a few points for the time of arrival of the reinforcements). The figures in the table represent the point spread in which a draw would occur. For instance, if OBs A and J were used, a draw would be obtained if the result in Victory Points were anywhere from 101 to 130 inclusive (this is the same as the Victory Point Chart printed in the rules). If OBs D and H were used, a draw would result if the Victory Point total was 36 to 65 inclusive.

Of course, the Victory Point total will usually fall into Marginal, Substantial, or Decisive. The Marginal range would run from 1 through 20 points greater than the higher draw number for the Prussians; French Marginal would run from 1 through 20 points less than the lower draw number. German Substantial Victory would run from 21 through 69 greater than the higher draw number; French Substantial Victory would run from 21 to 40 less than the lower draw number. German Decisive Victory would occur when the Victory Point total was at least 70 points greater than the higher draw number; French Decisive would occur when the Victory Point total was at least 41 points below the lower draw number (These are the same point spreads as in the chart printed in the rules).

For example, assume OBs E and L were used and that the Victory Point total was 89. The higher draw number is 50, so the result is 39 Victory Points above the higher draw number, which means a Prussian Substantial Victory.

VICTORY POINT SPREADS FOR A DRAW WHEN USING OPTIONAL RULE OBS

Prussian OB	French OB					
	G	H	J	K	L	M
A	101-130	96-125	101-130	96-125	111-140	86-115
B	141-170	136-165	141-170	136-165	151-180	126-155
C	101-130	96-125	101-130	96-125	111-140	86-115
D	41-70	36-65	41-70	35-65	51-80	26-55
E	11-40	6-35	11-40	6-35	21-50	-4-25
F	0-30	-5-25	0-30	-5-25	10-40	-15-15

AN EXAMPLE OF A COMPLETE VICTORY POINT CHART WHEN OBS "E" AND "L" ARE USED

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Victory Points	Level of Victory
-20 or less	French Decisive Victory
-19 through 0	French Substantial Victory
1 through 20	French Marginal Victory
21 through 50	Draw; neither player wins
51 through 70	German Marginal Victory
71 through 119	German Substantial Victory
120 or over	German Decisive Victory

Not surprisingly, I have not playtested these 25 different Victory Point Charts, but I think they are a bit more in line with what one can reasonably expect from the opposing forces.

Although one might not suspect it, the six French OBs are unique: no two have the same cities in their set-ups. Therefore, the Prussian player, by spending a little time checking, can determine which OB the French player is using. Actually, this parallels the original conflict, since the Prussians did have much better information about the French than the French had about the Prussians.

One wonders how much this advantage for the astute Prussian would affect the Victory Point total. If it is felt that this information gives the Prussian too much advantage, I would suggest that the cities listed in only one of the OBs (say "J") be used for all French set-ups.

Whenever an EB unit attempts to cross a river hexside for the first time, a die must be rolled to see if the crossing is effected. At first, one might wonder if two EB units were stacked together, would two dice be thrown. However, since any number of Prussian EB units can be brought into play and stacked on any square containing another EB unit, and since any number of die rolls are quite likely to turn up a 1, 2, or 3, it seems obvious that only one die roll is intended.

It is possible for the Prussian to have EB units on both sides of a river hexside (say, one in Metz and one in St. Privat) trying to cross. In this case, I would assume that two die rolls would be allowed.

Yes, *The Franco-Prussian War* can be played by mail. It should be played, however, between two people who know each other well, and who trust each other, because it is possible to cheat. Normal OB sheets (see *MOVES* #5,

"Playing Wargames by Mail" for an explanation of the normal PBM process) cannot be used, since the identity of the units is not divulged. Movement is indicated by writing, for instance, "MM-38 to GG-33."

Combat is a little more complicated when Hasty Attacks are made while trying to discover dummy counters. Contingency moves must often be included: "If L-26 is a Dummy, then move. . . . If L-26 is not a dummy, then move. . . ." This can be a fairly long process in some instances, but the fact that there are so few units in the game does not make the process burdensome.

The official AHKS grid coordinates for the *FPW* are: Place the mapsheet so that west is at the top and letter the rows from top to bottom A through WW. The numbered columns run from SE to NW and begin in the upper lefthand corner. Column "4" runs through hexes numbered 176 and 177. The columns are numbered 1 through 58. Check points are: Langres is M-8, Metz is X-32, and Kaiserslautern is OO-46.

The Franco-Prussian War undoubtedly is not the ultimate wargame, but it is one of the best to come down the pike lately.

