
1812, SPI 1972

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1812 – SPI Publications



One of the cool things about *1812: The Campaign of Napoleon in Russia* is that there are two separate games, each with their own maps, counters and rules. One game is presented as a strategic area version, and the other is a tactical hex game, which is the one being reviewed here.

If you are not familiar with *1812*, do not let the word "tactical" mislead you. This is not a company or battalion level game, but of a corps--mostly corps--and division level campaign game that stretches nineteen turns, from late June to December. There are three scenarios: one that begins in late August, close to the date of the Battle of Boridino, one in late October, with the Grande Armee in retreat, and the full campaign game.

Components:

The physical quality of the components will depend on how well the copy you own has aged. Few will be the sets that have the crispness of the copy presented here.

Aesthetically, the original game is a mixture of the pleasing and the standard SPI dullness to which grognards are fully accustomed. The maps use of four colors helps to separate the geographical areas from each other (essential for the supply rules), and present

a pleasing balance that is neither overly plain and far from garish. [Ed.Note: *Is this the earliest effort by SPI with 4 color map? It is 3 years before that is a standard occurrence! – RHG*]

The counters are serviceable and dull, but we are years away from the likes of what OSG has been doing for over a decade, with the likes of capturing the portraits of individual leaders and squeezing them onto tiny counter space.

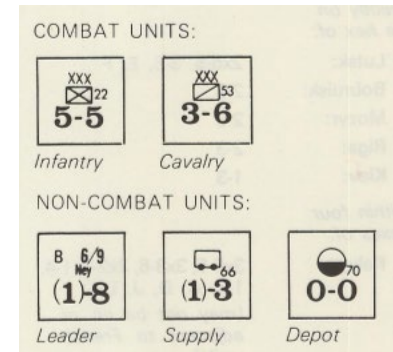
One thing about the OB is that it is totally ahistorical, something the designer mentions in passing. It is fairly annoying to have over "twenty" French and Allied infantry corps in the game, when such was not the case in the historical campaign. This is all for design of effect, and for ease of play--you never have to sort out units according to the ID number on the counter--but it lacks flavor, and even in the early 70's research could have provided an accurate OB. But I supposed the number and design of combat units would have required such massive changes as to make 1812 into a totally different game.

The rule book is classic SPI, and not in a good way, but in a pain in the keister fashion in how it has to unfold to be read on both sides. Though most of the necessary tables and charts are found on the map, the time record and reinforcement chart is only found in the rules, despite the fact that someone at SPI thought to print a separate terrain chart which works to waste space, given how simple the terrain rules are. you are either going to have to flip through the RB to get to the time record and reinforcement chart, or xerox your own copy.

The rules, as a whole, are easy to grasp and implement with the exception of the supply rules, which would have benefited from a longer explanation and the use of examples. There are two examples included, one for movement and one for combat (they are, in fact, combined), but no one thought to have included examples for the most complex, and, given this is Napoleon's invasion of Russia, essential rule, that of supply. This will not keep you from playing the game out of the box, or plastic tray, as the case may be, but you might find yourself questioning the nuts and bolts of supply rule implementation.

An overview of the most essential rules:

- 1) Partial and full *zones of control* (ZOC) are used in this game. Infantry units have a partial ZOC, and cavalry have a full ZOC. When an infantry unit enters an enemy ZOC, it has to stop for the duration of the turn. If a cavalry unit enters a partial ZOC, it may continue moving by spending two movement points for each partial ZOC. If a cavalry unit enters the ZOC of an enemy cavalry unit, its movement is over for the turn. Units that begin a turn in an enemy ZOC may move from it, though infantry cannot move directly from one enemy ZOC to another.
- 2) Combat is fairly straight forward and involves the use of a CRT that has considerable nuance, and that goes beyond the usual 1-1, 2-1, etc found on most CRT's. You can roll on a table that allows, in effect, a 1.4-1.0 combat, for example.



Odds Percentage		COMBAT RESULTS TABLE										
Die Roll	less than 80%	80% thru 99%	100% thru 109%	110% thru 119%	120% thru 139%	140% thru 159%	160% thru 179%	180% thru 199%	200% thru 299%	300% thru 399%	400% or more	Die Roll
1	Ars	Ars	Ars	Ar1 Drs	Dr1	Drs	Drs	Drs	Drs	½ ex	De	1
2	Ars	Ars	Ar1 Drs	Ar1 Drs	Dr2	Drs	Drs	Drs	½ ex	De	De	2
3	Ars	Ars	Ar1 Drs	Dr1	Dr2	Drs	Drs	Drs	De	De	De	3
4	Ars	Ar1 Drs	Dr1	Dr2	Drs	Drs	Drs	½ ex	De	De	De	4
5	Ars	Ar1 Drs	Dr1	Drs	Drs	Drs	Drs	De	De	De	De	5
6	Ae	Ar1 Drs	Dr2	Drs	Drs	Drs	½ ex	De	De	De	De	6

If the defending units are not surrounded by full ZOC's or completely surrounded by enemy units, they have the option to *retreat before combat*. This is a critical, historical, and totally annoying rule. It allows the defender--the Russian, usually for the warm and dry months of the

campaign game--to retreat with a caveat: *The defender must retreat his or her full movement allowance*, head into a friendly fortress, if possible, and end the retreat disrupted, which means the unit cannot move during its next turn, though it can still fight at full strength. To be disrupted two turns in a row is to bring destruction down about the unit in question.

This rule is annoying because Napoleon cannot trap the Russians and bring them to bay unless he risks his units in a double or triple force march. However, the Russian forces cannot retreat for ever, as their world ends just east of Moscow, north of St. Petersburg and south of Kiev. At some point, the hunted must turn and make a stand, and this is a matter of good timing combined with reinforcements, and French loses to attrition.

3) Stacking plays greater importance in 1812 than it does in many other games because players are not allowed to stack units except for a combat, in which case it is mandatory to stack together, or if you have retreated into a fortress. You can attempt to surround a unit, but the attack will come from only one hex. To unstack a set of units cost one extra movement point for each unit leaving the stack, and in the vast reaches of Russia, movement points are the most precious thing next to supply. If you do not move far enough, fast enough, you will die, either in advance or retreat. The best ways to utilize stacks--when and where to make one for combat--is one of those nuances that needs further play.

4) The leadership rules favour the French, as they have both a greater quantity of leaders, and a far better quality of leaders; but things are not as bright at they first appear. Leaders have an attack/defense benefit, with Napoleon at a colossal 25/25, and Davout at a measly 13/16 (questionable, in my view, but I am biased in favour of the Iron Marshall). However, a leader's attack/defense benefit can never be greater than the number of strength points stacked with it. You will get those large stacks for attacks, but how often will this happen for defense unless your opponent has been forced to retreat into a fortress, where his total sp's are doubled (but the leadership bonus is added separately without the doubling effect)?

There are enough French and Allied leaders to ensure that most of your stacks have a leader, but the Russian side will have to be more selective as to who goes where. Overall, the Russians are at a decided disadvantage here, and if it were not for the supply and attrition rules, they would be swept from the field, as they are out numbered in total strength points, leaders, and leadership ratings.



PROCEDURE:

Before each Movement Phase, the phasing Player determines his losses due to Attrition. The phasing Player rolls the die once on his Attrition Table, and then removes the unit types and sizes specified from the map.

FRENCH ATTRITION TABLE

<u>die roll</u>	<u>result</u>
1	no effect
2,3	one cavalry corps eliminated
4,5	one infantry corps eliminated
6	one infantry and one cavalry corps eliminated

RUSSIAN ATTRITION TABLE

<u>die roll</u>	<u>result</u>
1,2,3,4	no effect
5	one cavalry corps eliminated
6	one infantry corps eliminated

5) Attrition sees both sides rolling a six-sided die at the beginning of their movement phase. On a roll of 2-5, the French will lose either a cavalry unit or an infantry unit, with the opponent selecting the stack from which the lost unit is lost. Roll a 6 and the French loses one of each. The Russians only worry if a 5 or 6 is rolled. Therefore, the design engineers the gradual, but steady, depletion of the French and Allied forces through the course of the game.

6) The supply rules could have been explained in more detail, and examples provided, as I mentioned earlier. Each **area** begins the campaign game in one of three states; *undepleted*, *50% depleted*, or *100% depleted*. The number of units that can be supplied in an *undepleted* or *50% depleted* area--obviously, a 100% depleted area is worthless--depends on the number of corps sized units, the time of year, and the presence of a precious supply unit.

The French begin the game with four supply units, and the Russians two. These units are the slowest in the game with a movement factor of three; force march them and you risk losing them. The presence of a supply unit in an area that is not 100% deleted allows the owner to keep a certain number of units fed (it depends on the time of the year) forever. In the warmer months, the number of units is six, in the winter three. This is clearly a design for effect rule, as it is difficult to imagine six corps sized units living off the land indefinitely because of the presence of a supply unit.

In practice, things are never that simple. If an enemy unit enters the area, the supply unit no longer counts--I wish the designer had explained why--and now all units are at risk, friendly and enemy, if the total number exceeds the area's capacity to support them.

The supply rules do not favour the home team, and having half the number of supply units presents the Russian side with less opportunities to have larger numbers of units in select areas. If the Russian side duplicates the historical scorched earth policy, he or she is presented with the same challenges as the French side when the Russian winter begins to force the French back. The Russian will be moving from 100% depleted areas that cannot feed his or her own army, making the pursuit of the French more difficult, and winter alone will not foil a crafty French player; the Russian must pursue, must attack, and must take back the victory point hexes that are the fortress towns.

The French player is allowed to build depots, which can move (only) with supply units, or can be left behind in an area where a limited number of units, corps or division, it does not matter, can be supplied. This rule where a division eats as much as a corps is an irksome inconsistency in light of all the other supply rules tied to corps sized units. The French can chose to 100% deplete an area in order to build a depot unit, which the wise French will want to garrison, lest it be lost--wasted--to a marauding band of Cossacks. When and where to build depots, when to bring them along or leave them behind, takes repeated plays in order to decide.

I forgot to mention that unsupplied units must roll for survival at the end of the supply phase. During the warmer turns, units die on the roll of a 4-6; on winter turns, units succumb on the roll of a 3-6.

7) Both sides can double or triple force march their units; but it comes at a risk. Roll a six and your corps sized unit is gone, replaced by a smaller, and weaker, divisional unit. You are not allowed to freely break down--as far as I can tell, unless I missed it in the rules--a corps sized unit into two divisional sized units. If you could, it would be handy for garrisons and for easing the supply demands. Going back to forced marches, both sides need to decide the best moments to take the risk and attempt an early 19th century blitz movement. But be careful, as even leaders can be lost in a forced march.

Some observations on the play of the game:

Overall, I like how the game plays. The Russian side can make it so that the French and Allied forces have to make a run for Moscow, and perhaps Kiev. The St. Petersburg option can be taken out of the game quickly, perhaps too quickly, because the areas leading closest to St. Petersburg are huge obstacles to cross once they are depleted. The French can take a supply unit with a depot, but it takes much time at regular movement; still, it is something worth a try.

The French will not make it to Moscow before winter, unless the Russian side plays poorly, without the use of forced marching. And there is nothing quite like the feeling of being one or two areas away from the Kremlin, only to have to begin the trek back. If enough forces and supply is committed, Kiev is within reach; but watch the Russian reinforcement ability which allows unit to enter the south edge of the map, still on the Russian side of the border, but now behind French lines.

FORCED MARCH TABLES												
DOUBLE FORCED MARCH TABLE					TRIPLED FORCED MARCH TABLE							
1st Die Roll	1st Die Roll Results:	2nd Die Roll					1st Die Roll	1st Die Roll Results:	2nd Die Roll			
1,2	•	1,2	3	4	5	6	1,2	•	1,2	3	4	5,6
3	Op →	•	•	•	d	e	3	Op →	•	•	d	e
4	Op →	•	•	d	d	e	4	Op →	•	d	d	e
5	Op →	•	d	d	e	e	5,6	e	<i>2nd Die Roll Results</i>			
6	e	<i>2nd Die Roll Results</i>										



This is a game that demands much movement and maneuver, with much retreating before combat. If some key Russian units chose to run away, and then put up a cavalry screen to shield the disrupted units, the French player must consider a force march to get at them and make them fight, because they cannot run away a second time.

How does it play as History?

Well, we do not have a lot to go on by way of comparison, do we? Kevin Zucker's Highway to the Kremlin, which I played years ago, and will get out again, is, as you might expect, considerably more sophisticated, and with much better graphics and components; but I think the map size needs to be doubled, and with the benefit of historical hindsight, it might, just might, be possible to keep the French fed and still in Moscow come winter. The Kutusov game by GMT suffers because its heritage includes that dreadful predecessor.

In a certain sense, my lingering dissatisfaction with the scarcity of Napoleonic Russian campaign games mirrors my dissatisfaction with the plethora of history books on the campaign. Nafziger's research in the 80's displays his typical thoroughness, but his prose is so wooden that you have to keep it away from open flames (he's improved over the years, much like David Glantz, he also began wooden). Alan Palmer's work is trash, like all of his "history" books, and best saved for the bathroom. Richard Reihn is similar to Nafziger. Adam Zamoyski wants to be the Anthony Breevor of his genre (as in Breevor's Stalingrad) by focusing on the gory and hoary parts of the campaign; his narrative flow is essentially compelling until you search for a more nuanced understanding of people and planning and events; these are wanting. Dominic Lieven wants to give us retro Soviet history, and a plug for a distant ancestor as well, by telling us how the Russians were all geniuses and that everything unfolded according a brilliant grand master plan. Michael Adams looks impressive on the surface until you realize that he has no endnotes, cites no sources, and has no proper bibliography. He's from the "just take my word for it" school of history. Perhaps our only hope lies in the recent works of Alexander Mikaberidze, whose language abilities allow him to bring in essential and valuable Russian sources, but who tries to play it fair; but his three books dealing with three key aspects of the Russian campaign are not a substitute for a look at the entire campaign, from start to finish.

To return--at least--to 1812, my gut gaming feeling is that this is a good introduction to the logistical, operational, and fighting challenges presented in the Russian campaign. Extended plays will leave you with a sense of satisfaction, but a hunger for more as well.

Conclusion:

This is a good game, worthy of a reprint, with better graphics, better rules, and more optional rules. Its looks cannot hold up to the games of today, but it has, for me, a cool retro feel. As a teen, I owned it, only to lose it in the Great Basement Flood that took many a game with it. I was happy to find a copy some time back at a reasonable price. I look forward to revisiting the strategic area game.