

FORMATION TACTICS

by Frederick Georgian

This article is part of a continuing series on tactics. Although reading the previous articles is not necessary to comprehend this article, the reader may find *Basic Tactics* in *MOVES 22* helpful as background material. The concepts presented are general enough to be applicable to most SPI games.

The purpose of this article is to introduce the new wargamer to the concept of the battle formation. Often a Player may be able to execute a well-planned attack at a specific location, yet, in general, may find that his situation isn't that favorable, or that he has trouble maintaining a steady offense. One cause may be the lack of an adequate battle formation. The battle formation allows a gamer to defend his units as well as attack his opponent's units.

The following format is used: First, the entire battle formation is presented and the *purpose* of each of its parts is discussed. Second, the specific *type* of game units which are best suited for each part of the battle formation are outlined. The final section shows how the battle formation as a whole can be *combined* for two basic attacks.

Figure 1 shows the anatomy of a battle formation. There are four distinct parts. First, there is the *front line*, formed by infantry units (3-4 and 2-4). A front line is a means of separating your units from the enemy. It does not have to be a strictly straight line. What is important is that the Zones of Control of the

units in the front line either overlap or are adjacent. In Figure 1, the front line is continuous because the infantry units have Zones of Control overlapping. The other possibility is a broken front line (as shown in Figure 2). In this case, the hex so labelled is free of Zones of Control. The inherent danger of a broken front is that the break can be forced by enemy units. To divide and conquer is a sure path to victory as will be shown in the last part of this article; hence, it is advisable to maintain a continuous front line at all times. Also in Figure 1, the front line is divided into thirds. The enemy's right flank lies directly in front of your left flank.

All units other than the front line infantry units in Figure 1 are considered reserve units. Players often overlook the need for a reserve force, and feel that all units would be doing the most good in the front line, where combat occurs. But such a player may have trouble explaining why his units are outflanked, or why his position is quickly divided as soon as his front line breaks.

It is usually difficult to anticipate the exact location or manner of an enemy attack; hence, a sufficient force must be withheld in reserve to counter an unexpected enemy attack. Likewise, favorable situations often develop due to mistakes by an enemy commander; a large reserve force can be advantageously used to exploit such a mistake. The reserves are thus generally the

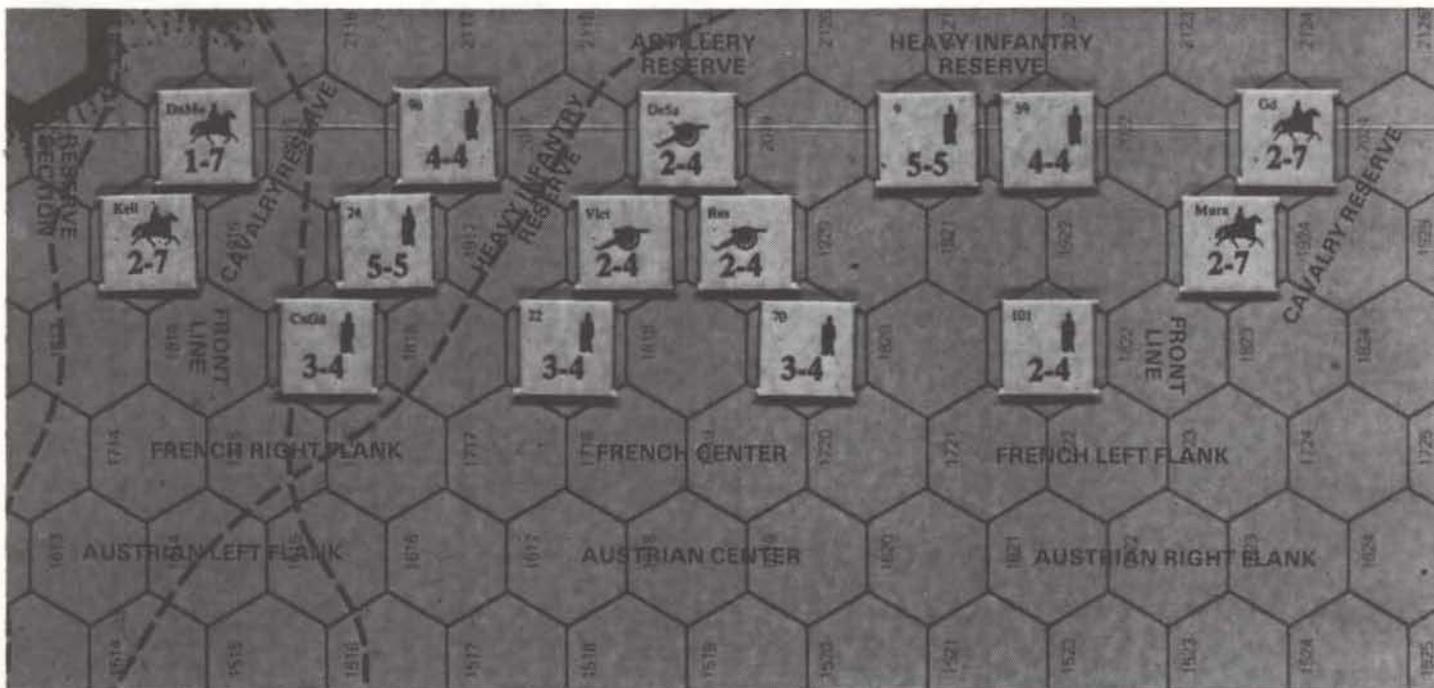
strongest or fastest units that a commander has at his disposal. The reserves are best positioned behind the front line, not pinned by enemy units. Mobility is essential in meeting the varying stresses and needs of a Player's position.

The next question to be answered is what kind of units are best suited for each part of the battle formation. In general, a Player can divide his army into four types of units: light infantry, heavy infantry, artillery and cavalry. The following comments are meant to serve as guidelines which may help organize a Player's thinking.

The light infantry units are generally weak offensively, but strong defensively, whereas the heavy infantry units are generally strong offensively, but weak defensively. For example, in *Marengo*, on the French side, the infantry units whose Combat Strengths equal "3" and "2," would be classified as light infantry. Those units whose Combat Strengths are equal to "4" and above, would be classified as heavy infantry.

At the start of a game, a Player is advised to scan his units and to separate his infantry units into heavy and light groups. He should then strive to use his light infantry on the front line and to keep the heavy infantry in reserve. As shown in Figure 1, the heavy infantry is placed on either side of the center of his formation. Being somewhat centrally located, the heavy infantry represents a pool

Figure 1.



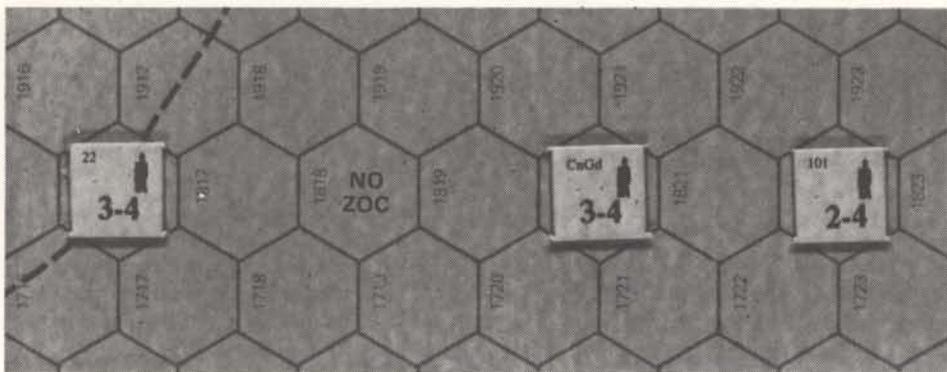


Figure 2.

of strength which may be shifted at will to either the center or the flank.

The third category is artillery. For our purposes, unlike infantry units, the exact type of artillery is not important. What is important is to keep in mind that artillery is intended to help friendly infantry units in combat and is meant to engage enemy units *at a distance*. Consequently, all artillery units should be placed behind the center of the front line. In this manner, a Player has at his disposal a concentrated mass of Attack Strength. Artillery units should never appear on the front line, because of their low Defense Strength, and because they will become pinned. By placing them behind the

front line, the artillery reserve can move from area to area to assist any friendly attack.

Finally, there is the cavalry group. The cavalry contains the fastest units in the army; speed is used to flank an enemy position or unit, or to exploit a breakthrough. Hence, approximately equal numbers of cavalry units should be placed on either flank. From such a position, the cavalry has room to use its speed as a weapon.

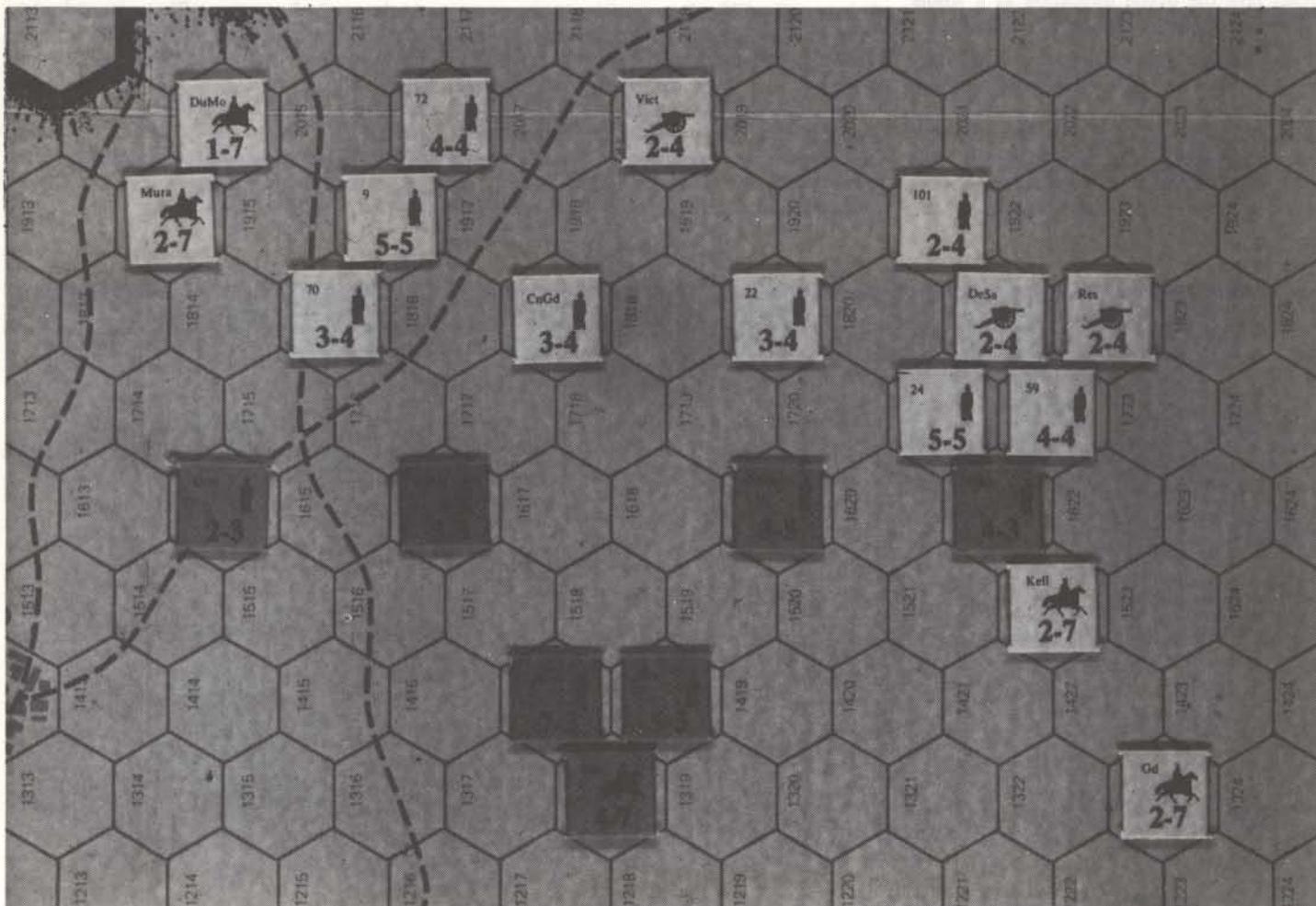
There are two basic avenues of attack from this formation — the flank envelopment and the center assault. Let us look first at the flank envelopment attack. The flank envelopment occurs when you are able to

move your units around an enemy's flank to attack his front line or reserve units. Generally, the flank envelopment will be a favorable maneuver in one or more of the following circumstances: (1) the enemy Player has his reserves in the center or on the opposite flank which you plan to attack; (2) his flank lies on clear terrain; (3) you have your cavalry units on your flank; (4) both heavy infantry and artillery are nearby to support your attacks; (5) you are able to muster 3:1 odds for your attacks. Figure 3 illustrates the flank envelopment. For each of the following examples, the reader can assume that the French units have started from the battle formation as shown in Figure 1.

In *Figure 3*, the French heavy infantry units (5-5 and 4-4) have advanced to attack the Austrian front line infantry unit (4-3). The French light infantry unit (2-4) has moved aside so that the French artillery units (2-4) can move within bombardment range.

Though the French units have a 3:1 attack on the Austrian infantry unit (4-3), the *coup de grace* is delivered by the French cavalry unit (2-7), which has moved to flank the Austrian infantry unit from retreating, and any result (except a "6") will eliminate the Austrian unit.

Figure 3.



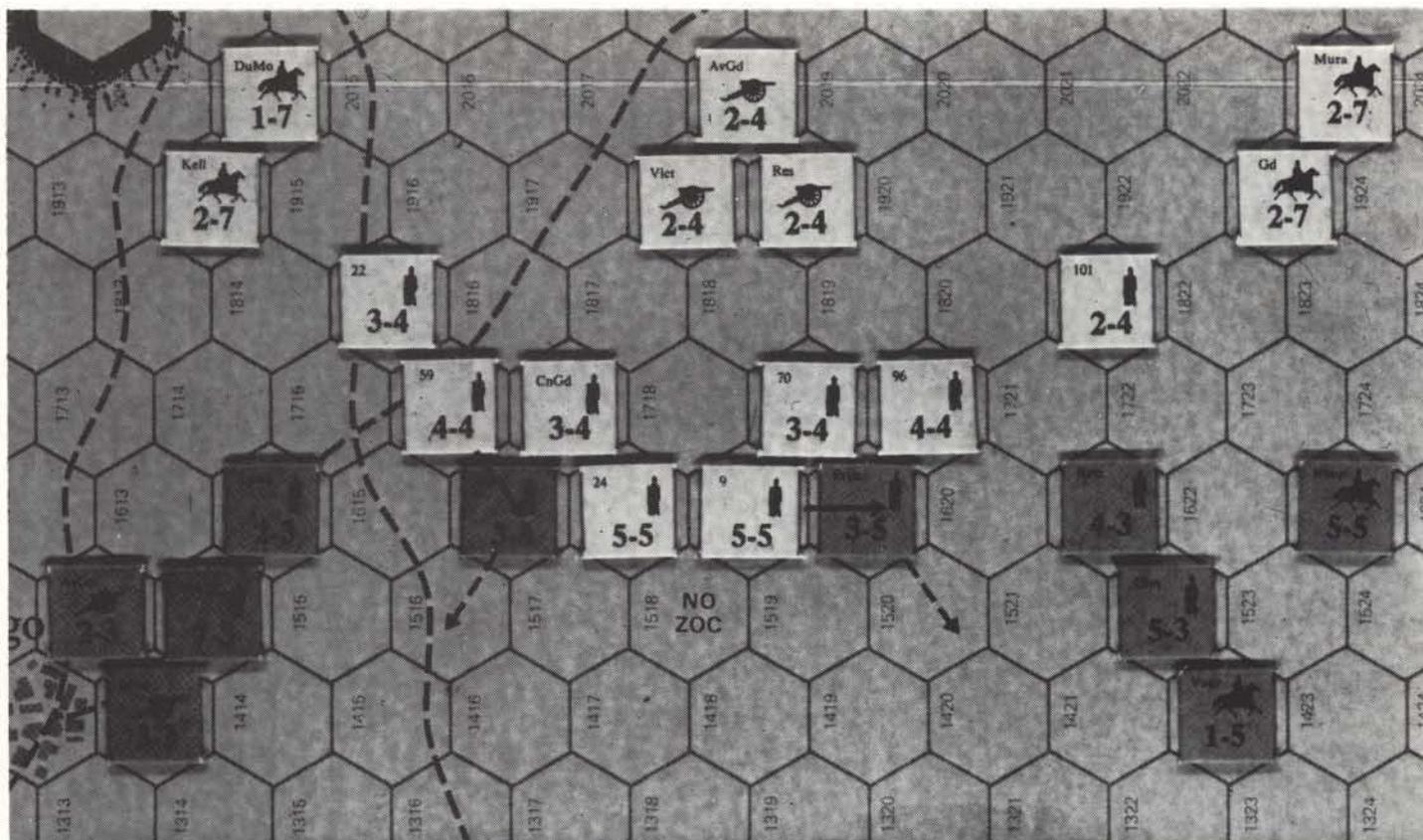


Figure 4.

The other French cavalry unit which is not attacking is important in this overall flank envelopment, because it is performing two functions. First, it provides some defense for the attacking French cavalry unit (otherwise the Austrian cavalry unit could, in its turn, flank the French cavalry unit). In a sense, the non-attacking French cavalry unit is forming a temporary front line. Second, and equally important, the non-attacking French cavalry unit is now in a position to threaten more flanking attacks on other Austrian units. Such threats of more attacks cause the Austrian defense to unravel, or at least force retreats to readjust to the new situation.

The second avenue of attack is the center assault. If done properly, on the following turn more friendly units can be rushed to the center to divide the enemy's position. Generally, the center assault should be executed when the following conditions arise: (1) the enemy has his reserves spread out or on his flanks; (2) the enemy has his center front line in clear terrain; (3) the enemy front line units are spread to the maximum extent; (4) you have heavy infantry and artillery units in the center so that you can muster 4:1 odds for your attacks. *Figure 4* illustrates the center assault.

Again, the French units started from the battle formation shown in *Figure 1*. In *Figure 4*, both heavy and light infantry units have advanced to attack the front line Austrian units (3-3 and 3-5). Each attack is a 4:1. In both cases, the combat result was a "Dr" (Defender Retreat) and arrows show the results of the French attacks. The Austrian

front line has been broken; the hex so labelled is not covered by an Austrian Zone of Control. If the Austrians do not remedy the situation by the following turn, the French units will pour through the gap to divide the Austrian position.

Although artillery units are not used in this specific example, they are at hand and, if desired by the Player, their Combat Strength could be applied to the attacks to increase the combat odds. Another point is the complete absence of French cavalry units. There are two reasons: there is usually not much space for maneuver in the center, and they usually have no opportunity to flank an enemy unit. Furthermore, the Movement Allowances of the infantry units are usually more than sufficient to reach any area in the center; speed of units is not required for the center assault. Sometimes an enemy Player reacts to a center assault by using a flank envelopment attack. Hence, the cavalry units may be needed on the flanks to help bolster its defense and to elongate the front line so that the enemy units cannot flank the front line units.

One last point about the center assault. Greater combat odds are needed than for the flank envelopment. The reason for this is that it is important to retreat or to eliminate the enemy center as rapidly as possible. In the center assault, it is preferable to have 6:1 attacks, despite the possible "Ex" (Exchange) results. Look at *Figure 4* and visualize the situation if the Austrian light infantry (3-3 and 3-5) were

eliminated, or exchanged for the French light infantry units (3-4 and 3-4). Clearly, the Austrian center is shattered and recovering from such a blow would be very trying. If the Austrian units could not be pushed back or eliminated rapidly, then the Austrian reserve units would gain sufficient time to recover, contain, and possibly push back the French threat.

It is important to know the function and limitations of each unit, the necessity of a reserve force and the power of a combined arms attack. The guidelines are presented to help begin thought along proper paths. A Player may alter the cut-off point between "light" and "heavy" infantry to suit his needs. The gamer is advised to experiment and to try various battle formations. At first, you may lose a couple of games, but gradually you will be able to devise your battle formation to suit your plans and ideas.

