

# Thirty Years War Quad

By CHRIS BRAMALL

"An outstanding example of meaningless conflict?" (Wedgewood)

The Thirty Years War (1618 – '48) saw the eclipse of Spain, the dominant world power of the previous century; the meteoric rise of Sweden and the emergence of the France of Louis XIV. It is this vast, turbulent conflict that forms the subject matter of SPI's "Thirty Years War Quad". The quad comprises the four battles of Nordlingen (1634), Rocroi (1643), Lutzen (1632), and Freiburg (1644). Inevitably the components of the individual folios are generally similar. Each one contains about one hundred counters which are coloured in various shades of red and blue, exclusive and standard rules booklets and the three colour maps.

The game system, although essentially a derivation of the N.A.W. system, is rather unusual. The main difference, as becomes apparent from a cursory glance at the Combat Results Table (CRT), is that combat results are expressed predominantly as 'Disruptions'. Disrupted units are inverted (all counters are back printed) thus halving its combat strength reducing its movement allowance to two hexes and preventing it from attacking; any unit that suffers a disruption while already disrupted is eliminated. During the disruption removal phase, however, a unit can regain normal status provided that it does not begin that phase in an enemy Zone of Control (ZOC), and a 5 or 6 is rolled. This die roll can be favourably modified by the presence of friendly leader units. A number of implications are apparent from this system of combat. The principal one is that elimination is a two stage process achieved by frontal attack and not by encirclement


via ZOC's and advance after combat, the standard method in many games. Accordingly the players should attack disrupted units, if at all possible, to ensure their elimination and prevent them from regaining their full strength.

Artillery plays an important role in the system. Artillery units are static but have an unlimited range and all round facing. They are restricted only by friendly and enemy units and various types of terrain which block lines of sight. Non mathematicians, myself included, will no doubt be glad to hear that algorithms make no appearance; the LOS is easily determined by eye. Successful artillery fire requires good die rolling – as is apparent from the artillery fire table – "successful" meaning disruption of the target unit and being an inverse function of range. Perhaps the most vital requirement for all players is to understand the effects of ZOC's. These are, in conventional gamespeak, fluid and active. However their effect on movement is unusual in that they don't affect it at all. A friendly unit may move directly through any and all enemy ZOC's without any penalty or restriction, the only requirement being that they must attack on ending the movement phase in an enemy ZOC. A moment's reflection on this point gives rise to the following conclusions: that the traditional defence (as outlined admirably by D.I.A. Mack in *Phoenix 21*) of units placed one hex apart is useless. Heaven help the player who adopts such a defensive formation; his opponent will penetrate his line at will, enabling whole groups of units to be encircled and, subsequently, elim-





inated. At all costs, therefore, a solid line must be maintained or, if this proves impossible, cone formations (with retired flanks) should be used instead, this formation normally being used by the attacking player.

Such then are the basic essentials of the quad. As can be seen, the folios hardly merit the title of "simulations" as any student/historian of the period will realise. Artillery, for example, would seem to be far too powerful. Disruption is almost certain at close range which leaves units highly vulnerable to counter-attack, especially in the vicinity of massed batteries. Indeed the artillery units are more reminiscent of those of the Napoleonic period in effectiveness. In fact the artillery of the Thirty Years War was, to say the least, ineffective except as a morale boosting factor. Even the famous Swedish artillery had little real effectiveness for Tilly's cavalry at Breitenfeld was halted by musketry, not by artillery, as C.V. Wedgewood shows. Nor does the system show the interaction between pikemen and musketeers and cavalry and musketeers which proved so vital a factor in the success of the Swedish Army during the early 1630's. Similarly it is rather ludicrous that disrupted units are able to recover their strength as a result of a mere die roll. In that disruption represents a temporary loss in the unit's cohesion (and not 50% casualties) it is not unreasonable that friendly leaders are able to restore them to full effectiveness – but it is surely unreasonable that an isolated friendly unit should 'undisrupt' while in the midst of the enemy thanks to a mere die roll.

Nonetheless this lack of realism (anyone doubting my interpretation may care to read the works mentioned in the bibliography at the end of this article) is a charge that could be levied against almost all the folio games as they have been designed fundamentally as games and not 'simulations' per se. As games the folios more than adequately fulfil the primary requirement of any quad in that the games are supremely playable, dynamic and exciting. However the unusual game system does lead to many tactical errors in play, especially by beginners, and therefore I feel that it will be worthwhile to devote the bulk of this article to the optimal tactics that might be employed in each game.

Designation		Type
Combat Strength	10-4	Movement Allowance

**Unit Types**

	Infantry Unit		Cavalry Unit
10-3		5-8	
	Artillery Counter		Leader Counter
		1-8	Leadership Value

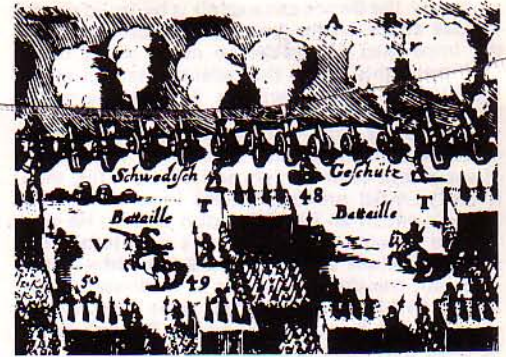
## LUTZEN

Lutzen was the battle between the Swedish army under their King, Gustavus Adolphus, and the Imperialist army commanded by Wallenstein, near the city of Leipzig in Saxony. The two sides were fairly well matched. At the beginning the Swedes had the advantage in numbers (16,000 to 10,000 men) but the arrival of Pappenheim's cavalry soon negated this and, until Gustavus' death, put new hope into his troops. The Imperialist held the upper hand only to be overcome at the end. The game shows the Swedish initial advantage quite well. The Swedish player begins with parity in cavalry (63 points to the Imperialist 67 combat strength points) and a considerable superiority in infantry (127 to 90). Thus the aim of the Swedish player must be to inflict as many losses as possible before the Imperialist reinforcements arrive on game turn 5; on his shoulders therefore falls the

mantle of attacker. The problem that he really must overcome is to bring his superior force into combat. Although his infantry is more mobile than the Imperialists (with four movement factors to three) the incidence of fog, (dependent on die rolls) which halves movement, frequently reduces this advantage to nil. The other problem that he faces is deciding where to attack. The designer's notes advocate two possible strategies the first of which is a direct attack on the Imperialist right. Unfortunately any Swedish player attempting this will almost certainly be defeated; on their extreme right the Imperialists not only have three artillery batteries but are strongly deployed on a hill (defender doubled). An attack on that position is almost certainly doomed to failure — indeed annihilation. The alternative is to attack the Imperialist left and, against an inexperienced opponent, especially if he stands and fights, such a strategy will always succeed. However a clever opponent will make such a course infinitely more difficult by retreating his forces on that wing behind the Flossgraben (defenders doubled behind stream) and by reinforcing them with infantry from his centre.

Against such a defence the Swedish player risks a bloody nose and should resort, in the face of such tactics, to picking off individual Imperialist units by disrupting them and then attacking them with cavalry since cavalry attacking disrupted infantry is doubled in attack. This slowly wears down the inferior Imperialist forces rather than risking a potentially disastrous massed attack. Nonetheless success is far from certain; disruptions are not easy to achieve by artillery fire, principally because fog prevents fire while the range of the targets limits the chance of success. Moreover, if the Swedish player commits his entire force on his right he risks losing his artillery to an attack by the Imperialist right wing cavalry.

It is apparent, therefore, that a Swedish victory is far from easy to achieve against a competent Imperialist player. The defender normally has the advantage, given adequate reserves, in most of the folios and so it will probably prove in "Lutzen". Nevertheless a Swedish victory is not impossible; judicious attack, skilfully placed artillery fire and a little luck will give him a real chance of success. Overall, though, the game is biased in the ratio 60:40 in the Imperialist's favour — prospective Swedish Players beware.



## NORDLINGEN

This battle, fought in 1634, proved to be one of the few major victories for the Imperialists in the war. The joint Spanish-Austrian army under the two Ferdinands defeated repeated assaults by the Swedish army commanded by Horn and Saxe-Weimar. In a sense such a result should have been entirely predictable; that a force outnumbered by some 8,000 men (25%) could attack a solid and well defended position and prevail was unlikely — and so it proved though not until 15 desperate Swedish charges against the Imperialist left had been bloodily repulsed.

In game terms, however, the issue invariably remains in doubt for much of the game: in combat factors the two are well matched. For example the Imperialist cavalry advantage (120 to 80) being balanced by the Swedish superiority in infantry (168 to 140 points) and it is this approximate balance that leads to such a competitive game.

As far as strategy is concerned the Swede is cast in the role of attacker — principally because the initial tripling of his infantry combat strength requires him to make the most of this all too transitory advantage. Thus the Swedish player invariably will — indeed must — launch an attack on the Imperialist left wing on the Albuch, a hill which dominates that area of the battlefield, while adopting a defensive posture with his left and centre based around the village of Klein Erdlingen. The strategy for the remainder of the game centres upon the success of the initial Swedish attack. If

### [4.1] SEQUENCE OUTLINE

The Game-Turn is divided into a First Player-Turn and a Second Player-Turn. The Player whose Player-Turn is currently in progress is termed the Phasing Player. The activity which may take place during each Phase is outlined below:

#### 1. FIRST PLAYER-TURN

**A. Disruption Removal Phase:** The Phasing Player attempts to "undisrupt" all eligible Friendly units in accordance with the Disruption Rules (see Section 9.0). During this Phase, neither Player may move his pieces.

**B. Artillery Fire Phase:** The Phasing Player fires any Friendly Artillery in accordance with the Artillery Rules (see Section 5.0). Neither Player may move his pieces during this Phase.

**C. Movement Phase:** The Phasing Player may move all, some or none of his units and Leader counters as he desires, within the limits and restrictions of the Movement Rules and any relevant Exclusive Rules of the game. The Phasing Player may bring Reinforcements onto the map as allowed by his Reinforcement Schedule, within the restrictions of any Reinforcement Rules. The non-Phasing Player's units and Leader counters may not be moved.

**D. Combat Phase:** The Phasing Player uses his units and Leader counters to attack the non-Phasing Player's units in accordance with the rules of Combat. During this Phase, no movement whatsoever is allowed.

#### 2. SECOND PLAYER-TURN

The Second Player now becomes the Phasing Player and Phases A through D are repeated.

### [8.6] COMBAT RESULTS TABLE

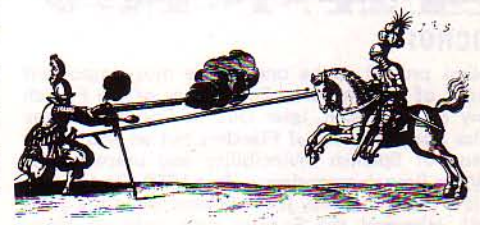
Die Roll	Probability Ratio (Odds)										Die Roll
	Attacker's Strength to Defender's Strength										
	1-5	1-4	1-3	1-2	1-1	2-1	3-1	4-1	5-1	6-1	
1	Ad	•	•	Dx	Dd	Dd	Dd	De	De	De	1
2	Ad	Ad	•	•	Dx	Dd	Dd	Dd	De	De	2
3	Ae	Ad	Ad	•	•	Dx	Dd	Dd	Dd	De	3
4	Ae	Ad	Ad	Dx	•	•	Dx	Dd	Dd	Dd	4
5	Ae	Ae	Ad	Ad	Dx	•	•	Dx	Dd	Dd	5
6	Ae	Ae	Ae	Ad	Ad	Dx	•	•	Dx	Dd	6

Attacks executed at Odds greater than "6-1" are treated as "6-1;" attacks at Odds lower than "1-5" are treated as "1-5."

### [5.1] ARTILLERY FIRE TABLE

Die Roll	Range in Hexes				Die Roll
	Artillery counter to Target				
	1	2	3-5	6+	
1	Dd	Dd	Dd	Dd	1
2	Dd	Dd	Dd	•	2
3	Dd	Dd	•	•	3
4	Dd	•	•	•	4
5	•	•	•	•	5
6	•	•	•	•	6

Ad = Attacker disrupted  
Dd = Defender disrupted  
Ae = Attacker eliminated  
Dx = Disruption exchange  
De = Defender eliminated  
• = no effect

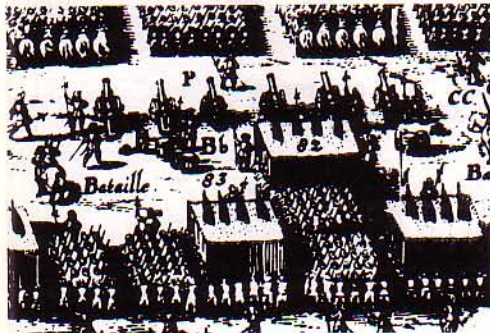


successful the Swede can exploit it by launching an oblique attack on the Imperialist centre. Normally the Imperialist will re-deploy many of his forces to prevent this, using the defensive terrain to the full. Should this happen the Swedish player has two options. He can either reinforce the horns of tacking forces from the left or he can exploit the movement of Imperialist reserves by launching a direct attack with his left and centre. This, then, is the essential problem for the Imperialist player in the event of an initial Swedish success. He must transfer enough reserves from his right to halt any Swedish oblique attack on the Schonfeld — yet he must not transfer so many as to facilitate a direct attack on his (now extended) right wing. Having stabilised his front by halting the Swedish attack he must now counter-attack as the Swedish attack will have given that player a lead in victory points, these being awarded solely on the elimination of combat units.

The best place to launch it is probably against the Swedish left since his right is relatively strong due to the nature of the terrain. The line should be softened initially by artillery fire and then attacked. Provided his artillery fire is reasonably accurate and concentrated and he seeks to attack only a limited section of the line such an attack stands a fair chance of success. The determining factor will be the success, or otherwise, of the Imperialist artillery. It should be noted that its effectiveness can be minimised by screening the Swedish infantry with cavalry, instead of leaving it in the front line, as well as canalising the Imperialist attack towards the Swedish artillery if possible. Moreover if the Imperialist has not transferred adequate forces to his left wing an oblique attack by the Swedish right will probably be successful.

In the event of a Swedish initial offensive failure, i.e. if they suffer heavy losses, as it is almost impossible to deny the Swede possession of the Albuch, the Imperialist has the option of counter-attacking the Swedish right wing. Once again he must, if committed to such an attack, ensure that his right is not denuded of troops. If this counter-attack is successful then the Imperialist will almost certainly be victorious.

The key to success in "Nordlingen" is undoubtedly balance. Both players must ensure that their defensive wing is strong enough to deal with any possible attack, but not so strong as to prevent the attacking wing from being successful. This balance is far from easy to achieve and will vary from game to game. The major determinant being the degree of the initial Swedish success. Should both players achieve a tolerably correct balance an exciting finish will almost certainly result and the outcome will rest upon tactical skill and luck. If played correctly "Nordlingen" is probably the best balanced game in the quad. Indeed it is one of the most exciting of all of the folio games SPI has produced, not the least because luck is less important and skill more so. Accordingly, given this balance, I am unable to recommend a player to take a specific side and although I normally prefer to play the Imperialist this has nothing to do with the balance of the game.



## ROCROI

Rocroi proved to be one of the most important battles of the century. The victory of the French army of d'Enghien, later Duc de Conde, over the Melas Spanish army of Flanders put an end to the legend of Spanish invincibility and prepared the way for French ascendancy after 1660. On the face of it a French victory looks impossible in the game itself. However the Spanish have only six fewer cavalry combat factors (78 to 84) and a massive

advantage in infantry (225 to 156) as well as an additional battery of Artillery. Appearances are, however, deceptive. The French have more and better leaders and their infantry is more mobile with three movement factors to the Spaniard's two. Moreover the lack of Spanish mobility makes them vulnerable to the French cavalry. So, how do they win?

The answer is by attacking judiciously. It is not immediately obvious that the French player should be the attacker. However there are two reasons for such a role. Firstly they were required to do so because d'Enghien was attempting to relieve the Spanish siege of Rocroi and secondly the French have only one advantage, mobility, which they lose by standing on the defensive. The best French plan is to attack, initially at least, in three separate groups and to move into combat as rapidly as possible. The right hand group should be the strongest, consisting of the majority of the French infantry and most of their right wing of cavalry; the centre of some 3-4 cavalry units and the left of the remaining infantry, about six units, and cavalry. The French player should try to destroy the Spanish left with his reinforced right hand group. Against an inexperienced player he should accomplish this with ease and this will enable him to subsequently attack the Spanish centre obliquely.

However this strategy is easily countered by moving some of the Spanish infantry over to support the threatened left wing. The French can then try to attack the Spanish right — once again this can be frustrated by shifting more infantry in support. This, in fact is the optimal Spanish strategy. From the beginning of the game he should transfer his infantry as rapidly as possible to both wings and should mass his cavalry in the centre. Thus a French attack against either wing can be halted or, at worst, impeded by using the centrally placed cavalry as a mobile reserve. Should the Spanish player adopt these tactics the French player faces a difficult task. Not an impossible one though, for the Spanish player must, because of his lack of mobility, retain a solid line. This leaves him with precious few reserves to counter a large scale French attack. Thus, while two relatively weak groups force the Spanish player to preserve his line, the third French force, with the mass of the army, should be able to achieve local superiority. This alone will not bring success; for a glance at the relative infantry strengths shows that all the Spanish infantry have a combat factor of at least ten while the French are mainly eights and nines. This means that, in most attacks the French will only be able to achieve odds of 1:2 and, in order to have a chance of success he requires at least 1:1. The only way to achieve this is by using artillery fire to disrupt the Spanish units and thus achieve the required odds. French mobility means that the infantry can stand off while the artillery do this work and the Spanish infantry cannot reach them in an attempted pre-emptive attack. This process of attrition should allow the French player to erode the Spanish line and eventually break it.

The Spanish player can do much to minimise the effectiveness of the above tactics. Partial screening of the infantry with the cavalry and use of his own artillery upon massing French attacks will help to frustrate the French intentions for a time. Delay is not victory though, and given the present victory conditions and reasonable luck the French will eventually win. It is my view that these victory conditions should be changed or modified. I give two reasons for doing so. Firstly it would move the pro-French bias in the game back to a better balance and it would better reflect the historical reality. I suggest that the French be required to eliminate 50 combat strength points or lose the game. This forces the French to attack, as Conde was forced to do in order to relieve beleaguered Rocroi and prevents him from, say, eliminating a single Spanish unit and then using his superior mobility to avoid a Spanish counter-attack. Note that this modification should only be used by experienced players since the figure of 50 may be found to be on the high side.

There are a number of points worthy of note. The French, for example, should advance in cone formation and should sacrifice their cavalry to screen the infantry from artillery fire. Better to have cavalry disrupted than the infantry. Don't garrison the French artillery — few Spanish players will be rash enough to break their lines and advance; those

who do so will almost certainly be routed by the French use of superior mobility. French attacks against Spanish artillery are not worth the candle since losses sustained at close range will not be worth the gains. Both players should take great care over positioning leader counters — a leader in the open is a sitting and highly worthwhile target (especially d'Enghien, as the present writer found to his cost in his first game of Rocroi). Leaders only require to have an enemy occupy an adjacent hex and they are eliminated. Therefore, always stack leaders with undisturbed units and, preferably, in the second rank.

In summary it is my belief that Rocroi is the best game of the four. Admittedly it lacks balance but only if the French player is skilful. Indeed an experienced Spaniard will always beat the tyro Frenchman. With the above modification I believe that the problem of balance is removed and yet the game ratings on this one are consistently low. S&T 75 gives it an acceptability rating of 6.2, two points below Lutzen which I think is nothing like as good or as well balanced. I can only believe that ratings of this sort result from superficial examination of the game.

## FREIBURG

This was a battle fought between French and Bavarians in the August of 1644 which ended inconclusively with both sides suffering heavy casualties. It is a game about which I intend to say little. There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly it is a siege game and a relatively boring one at that (as most sieges tend to be). Thus it excites me not at all. The rules are substantially the same as the other — open — battles in the quad, when a new set of siege rules would have been more appropriate. Secondly the game rating is very low and thus I don't feel inclined to waste space and time on it here!

## IN CONCLUSION

This quad, as you may have gathered, is one which I have no hesitation in recommending, with the obvious exception of Freiburg. These are not games for the player who seeks "simulation". He would, no doubt, be appalled at its unrealistic system. Nonetheless it is my opinion that the individual folios are much superior to those of the popular NLB quad which, of course owes much of its popularity to the campaign game. In comparison the Thirty Years Quad is better balanced and more exciting to play while presenting a unique challenge to the wargamer. The rules are easily assimilated and terrain is relatively unimportant enabling both players to devote their time and thought to strategy and tactics instead of rule remembering. In short Thirty Years Quad has no Nato, no nukes and no Nazis but is excellent value all the same for beginner and expert alike.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Whilst the Thirty Years war lacks some of the detailed attention given by British writers to other aspects of the 17th Century (e.g. Louis XIV), the following books are useful. The first two are general histories while Fuller offers detailed coverage of Breitenfeld and Lutzen.

"The Thirty Years War" : C.V. Wedgwood : Jonathan Cape.  
 "Europe in Crisis" : G. Packer : Fontana paperback  
 "The Decisive Battles of the Western World and Their Influence Upon History." : J.F.C. Fuller : edited edition in Paladin paperback.