



WINTER QUARTERS 8 by Ned Zuparko

The Zuparko version of Austerlitz in WINTER QUARTERS 7 has had some response. E, E & L's fearless Jean Locht (politely) disagrees with my interpretation. Charlie Tarbox agrees with some of it, yet feels that Austerlitz should not be termed an ambush, but rather a trap sprung by Napoleon on ground and positions he had previously set up. Paddy Griffith sees it as a planned counter-attack on an enemy attack instead of a French attack against a march. I am, however, heartened by both Charlie and Paddy agreeing with my main thesis, namely that the actual structure of the battle was definitely 'attacker/defender' and not an 'encounter' battle. If other readers have further thoughts, feel free to send them in.

This issue's WINTER QUARTERS will look at the structure of a few more Napoleonic battles and will also consider the subject of distance between fighting armies. In a past column I stated that the armies would probably be at least 1,000 yards apart and perhaps be separated by as much as two miles. I'll briefly consider Austerlitz, Eylau, Friedland, Borodino and Waterloo as a non-scientific sample. I'll use as my basic reference Esposito and Eltins, A MILITARY HISTORY AND ATLAS OF THE NAPOLEONIC WARS, since it is a source known and available to many Napoleonic wargamers.

Many wargamers use the depth of their tables as the depth of their battlefields, while others use 'off-board' reserves or staging areas. Often wargamers use a boardgame to campaign with, and must decide how many 'hexes' away an army must be before it is committed to battle. Therefore, it seems appropriate to consider just how far commanders kept their main bodies away from each other during deployment and during a battle. Did the entire army charge the enemy? If most battles were truly of an 'attacker-defender' nature, how far back from the front were defensive reserves? Has a successful local counter-attack likely to rout the original attacking army, or only drive it back to its starting line?

Last time I examined the attacker/defender interpretation of Austerlitz, but I did not examine the distance question much. This was because I felt that the miles separating the two were not indicative of a deployed battlefield, but instead showed a march to a battlefield. However, if we instead look at our maps of Austerlitz as showing the deployed battlefield, we see the outposts about 1,000 - 1,500 yards apart, and the main battle lines about 3,000 yards away from each other. Each side has its rearmost reserves about 3-4,000 yards to the rear of their main battlelines.

To appreciate such distances, remember that one mile is 1,760 yards. If we were to arbitrarily decide that infantry on these battlefields could move, say, at one yard per second (60 yards a minute), we'd see that at the beginning of the battle, a French skirmisher in the outpost line would need 20 minutes to reach a stationary Russian skirmisher in the Allied line. For the Russian main lines on the Pratzen to march against the French main battle line (assuming stationary, defending Frenchmen), 50 minutes would elapse at that rate of march. For the Russian reserve to reach the same point could



mean a march of almost 2 hours, and almost three and a half miles! If a wargamer were using a scale of 1" = 50 yards, a mile would be almost 35", or, very roughly, 3 feet to a mile. This would mean a gap between the main bodies equal to the width of a ping-pong table.

For many wargamers, such distances and times are further and longer than those found in a typical tabletop game. Perhaps Austerlitz is an exception? Let's build a chart that compares those statistics for Eylau, Friedland, Borodino and Waterloo. Distances will be given in yards, using main body battle lines and the furthest reserves as measuring points. "Time" will assume a rate of 60 yards a minute, to show how long it would take for infantry to cross the stated distance. Each battle had a definite attacker and an identifiable defensive line position. At Eylau the armies were closer to each other than at other battles; perhaps due to the snow.

| BATTLE    | BETWEEN<br>ARMIES            | (TIME)               | ATTACKER/DEFENDER | ATTACK/DEFENSE RESERVES           |
|-----------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|
| EYLAU     | 1200 yds                     | (20 min)             | French/Russian    | 800 yd (13 min)/ 650 yd (11 min)  |
| FRIEDLAND | 2400 yds<br>(wings=1200 yds) | (40 min)<br>(20 min) | French/Russian    | 2400 yd (40 min)/3000 yd (50 min) |
| BORODINO  | 1800 yds                     | (30 min)             | French/Russian    | both 800-1000 yds (13-16 min)     |
| WATERLOO  | 1800 yds                     | (30 min)             | French/Allies     | 1500 yd (25 min)/1200 yd (20 min) |

It is important to remember that there was no hard-and-fast rule that Generals followed in keeping their armies apart such as "one will deploy 1,237.45 yards from the enemy line". However, it is logical that certain general principles were followed, and then modified based on the individual battle situation. Also, one should remember that as a battle developed, reserves might be moved closer or committed to battle. For example, at Waterloo, the French reserve had moved closer even before the final Guard commitment.

Still, the above chart does suggest a few points. If we allow for visibility problems at Eylau, we see that the main lines were developed from the strategic situation into grand tactical battle line formations well outside of artillery range. It is likely this was done not only to keep the main line out of fire, but also to allow time for grand re-deployments (which could be fairly time-consuming) should the enemy suddenly show a new threat, such as a corps approaching against an army's flank. Both time and space would be needed to, say, change front against such a threat.

The distances from the main lines to their own reserves is dependent on such things as terrain and weather, but would also seem to be placed at the far end, or out of, the usual battle ranges used by artillery (if the successful attacking enemy were to bring guns to the original defensive position). It is also likely that commanders considered these distances about right to allow a shattered main line to run, rally and recover without carrying the reserve with them, while keeping the reserve close enough to be able to intervene where needed. It seems logical that routing troops would need to reach an area not under artillery fire to recover.

It is possible for these figures to be in error, perhaps even by several hundreds of yards. However, even if we allow for exaggeration, we are still seeing distances much further than those that appear in typical Napoleonic wargames. 1,800 yards is more than a mile! So even if we were to lessen that distance by three or four hundred yards we would still have a considerable gap between armies. At such a distance a general would have to watch his infantry columns march for 25 minutes before he'd know if their attacks were successful or not!



It is also interesting to note the level of command in operation at these distances. This is where the army commander has changed over his army from the strategic march to the battlefield. It is at this point that he devises his plan of battle (sometimes done the night before the day of the battle itself!). He doesn't wait, as many wargamers often do, until the clash of the main battle lines to think of a plan or react to enemy movements. He must commit his army, now, to a plan intended to last the entire battle, as he foresees it will occur. This is where his corps commanders are given tasks within the plan, and this phase often decides how many 'sectors' the battle will be divided into, either due to terrain or because of the orders given to a commander.

It is also at these distances that the corps commanders arrange the grand tactical formations they will employ to carry out their orders. It is entirely possible that some adjustments will have to be made due to terrain or some enemy action during the approach to the enemy line; but in the main, the corps commanders would not want to do any more of this than they had to after they start off. Furthermore, if they could foresee where changes would be necessary, now would be the time to get his commanders ready to make them. This is because the corps is out of artillery range and far enough away from any possible pre-emptive attacks that might disrupt any formation or directional changes. At these ranges, and during the approach march across the artillery-dominated ground to the enemy lines, the battle is still very much a General's affair. This again is different from many wargames that see many battalions being run back-and-forth across the field reacting to threats every couple of minutes.

These distances seem to show enemy commanders marking their 'turf'. They are close enough for an attacker to reach a defender, yet still far enough away to decline battle if desired. (We often read of Generals' fears that the enemy will not stand, but will retreat in the night.) The armies are far enough apart to allow each side to carefully choose their ground, formations and plan before combat commences, which combines with the strategical situation to produce attacker/defender situations instead of 'encounter battles'.

Furthermore, reserves are placed in such a way that should a defensive line fail, and enough reserves are in hand far enough back, the attacker will win by occupying the defensive position, but would then be presented with a second battlefield perhaps another half-hour away. That reserve position, able to contain a pursuit until night, gives the defeated army a chance to march away and recover. If all went well, it might again be able to take up the fight on suitable terrain several marches down the road. If there were no reserves left, or if they were only a couple of hundred yards away and drawn into the defeat, the attacker will have won the battle by taking the defensive position and controlling the artillery area behind it, and be able to pass over to the pursuit until nightfall.

By the same token, an attacker who is repulsed several times and is bundled back to his starting position is unlikely to see the defenders leave their original positions and move across the artillery ground separating the armies, where they in turn might be torn up. However, even if that should happen, and a massive counterattack were to be successful and reach the attackers' jump-off point (and win the battle), it would be unlikely that it would be able to continue another 1000 yards (the counterattack has already traveled perhaps 1500 yards) against strongly posted reserves. Of course, if the attacker had no reserves, having used them all up in unsuccessful attacks, the battle would be over, and nightfall or a pursuit ready to begin - either way, the counter-attacker wouldn't be likely to reach the enemy's reserve zone during the battle proper.