



# Dispatches

February  
2017  
Issue No. 91

Really getting into 2017 now.

No doubt you are well into painting  
your second army of 2017.

{That's Irony by the way!}

## *Wars of the Roses—Silvio reports*



Jonathan, Paul and myself were invited by Mark to a Wars of the Roses game using Hail Caesar, the rules have been adjusted slightly for accommodate the early medieval battle. I say it did work well, as gave the real feeling of the struggle the commander of the time had to keep a



straight line of battle, the coherency of the units and make them move or stop at command was a challenge, very well achieved by the twist Mark added to the core rule.



What appeared to be a victory in the centre of the army turned out to be a loss of the line as the victorious units went on pursuing the defeated enemy and then to far away from the general to be rallied into a fighting force they instead went on raiding the baggage train of the enemy, with obvious rape and plunder.

I was lucky to have rolled well on determining the rating of my wing commander that thanks to his acumen and not mine, was able to hold the line and advance steadily in the face of the enemy. Jonathan playing against me was holding well and gave me hard time with his accurate archery shots, in the end I fared better thanks to a lucky dice roll for my artillery piece. Paul unfortunately did not roll well since the outbreak of the hostility and this signed his demise as Marc dominated the whole game against him, still losing coherency in the centre which left us with a dubious victory.



## **Sunday Meetings Dates**

**2017**

**Done 30 Jul**

**Done 20 Aug**

**19 Mar 24 Sep**

**23 Apr 29 Oct**

**21 May 26 Nov**

**18 Jun 17 Dec**

Website address: [www.fwgs.org.uk](http://www.fwgs.org.uk)



Pictures of the starting line of both armies and some very pleasant amenities .

Regards

Silvio

## Napoleonic Tactics—Loz

{ED:-

*Delighted that Loz' work schedule has changed and so he can get back to doing the more important things....like wargaming.*

*Stage 1 was a Napoleonic game at the January Sunday meeting.*

*I suspect Loz decided that Marengo was a good battle for a Sunday meeting. But, as a running gun-fight, the rules needed enhancing to cover some of the very unusual aspects of that battle.*

*In prep for the February meeting, Loz undertook a mammoth job to make changes..*

*This was a long and tricky process so I thought I would share the thinking process. Very interesting developments and something everyone might want to consider.*

*The March Dispatches will contain two News Sheets from the local press immediately after the battle.*

*Here are Loz's emails:}*

### Email 1

Napoleonic battalion sized units did voluntarily move backwards, either under pressure or as an adjustment, and for the most part, successfully.

The two ways they did it were: -

1. **“Each man about faces. Unit moves backwards the required distance. Each man about faces.”** During such a manoeuvre the officers and men would all be in the wrong places, and the companies in reverse order, which would contribute to confusion if anything other than a straight move backwards was ordered. So as a rule I'd say “straight back only”. I think the about turns would be trivial in terms of time. So I'd allow a full move straight back. However, if the unit was not fresh then such a manoeuvre might cause some blokes to not do the second about turn and disappear. So I'd say the unit has to pass a nerve test for each level loss it has (if any) on it. Each fail marks another casualty for the ones who leg it. You might want to say any neighbouring unit in sight of it that has any level losses also rolls a nerve test, but only the one test irrespective of the number of level losses. If it fails, they mark a casualty too. I also think, ironically, that a line would be better able to perform this than a column. A column would run the risk of companies intermingling. You might want a manoeuvre test for each extra base rank above

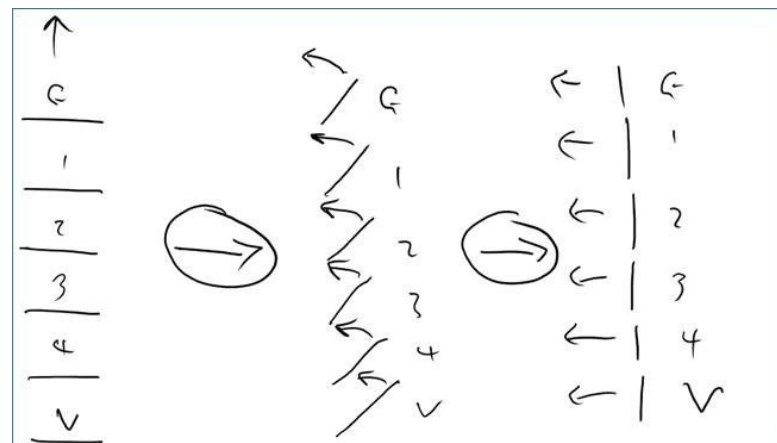
the first. So a line has no manoeuvre test, and columns have 1 test for each extra base rank above the first. Any fail and the unit is disorganized. So a two base deep column with one level loss would have one manoeuvre test (fail equals disorganised) and one nerve test (fail equals one casualty) and any neighbouring unit within in sight has one nerve test if it has any level losses on it (fail equals one casualty).

2. **“Each company about faces. Unit moves backwards. Each company about faces.”** The more “official” manoeuvre. During such a manoeuvre the officers and men would be in the right places. The companies would be in reverse order, but they were trained to work in reverse order when required, so normal manoeuvring could be performed. The about facing of companies would take some time. Some would do it by wheeling each company 180 degrees. Some would do it by countermarching each company's men. I'd say they lose a quarter for each about face. They don't have to do the second about face. Columns would be no worse than lines (closed columns would have to countermarch, there being no space for company wheels) because everyone would be in the right place (albeit the company order reversed, but as said, they were trained in reverse company order). Since this is a more regulation, “official”, manoeuvre, I don't think as many men would be spooked by it. But like all manoeuvres it could lead to disorganisation. So I'd say take a manoeuvre test and a pass is ok and a fail marks a disorganisation.

### Email 2

The non-reformed armies of the Napoleonic era used Fred the Great's drill, albeit not with as much skill. But they did use. Even the post-reform armies still retained their Fred the Great drill and used it as required, including the French from 1792 (although some of the early Sans Culottes were virtually incapable of it, they soon gained the essentials).

The essence of it was the “column of companies at a full interval to / from line” drill.

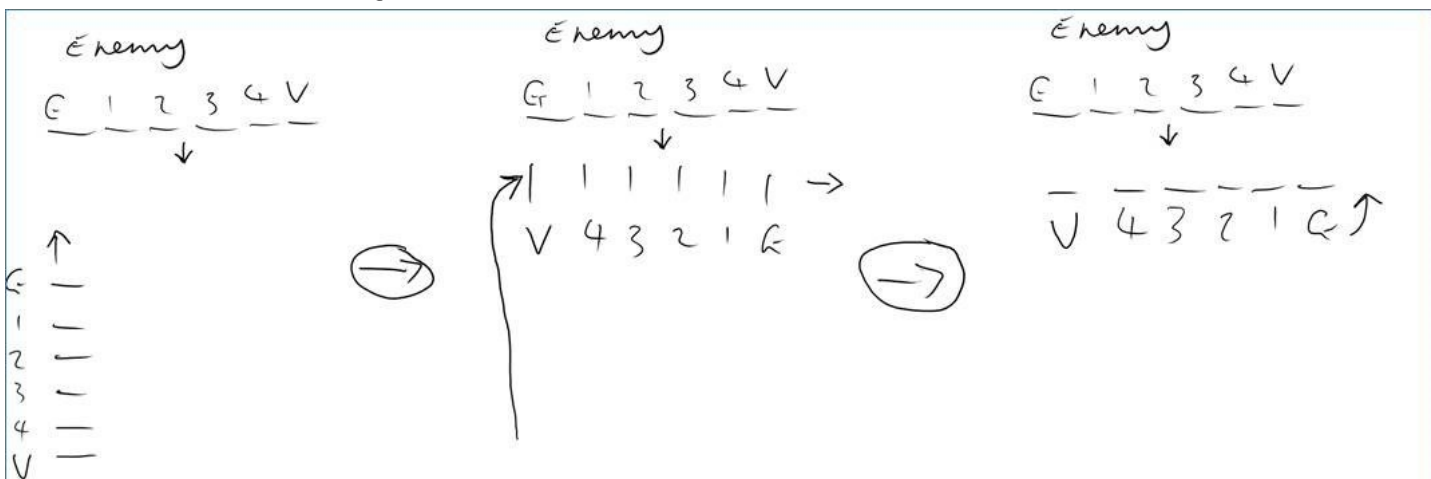


This manoeuvre took no time at all. So, confident of it were even the mediocre Fred the Great trained Napoleonic armies, that they would approach the enemy head on with column of companies at a full interval, turn 90 degrees to the enemy thereby pre-

sending an open column of companies flank on to the enemy, march across the enemy's front, and then wheel the companies 90 degrees to face.

Like a venetian blind closing.

blank volley. This took the heads off the columns and sent the French reeling back. The Austrians wheeled back into open columns and headed off to follow their orders!



So why have war-

All wargamers "vomit a little bit in their mouths" at this, but it's a myth that this is a poor or dangerous manoeuvre! The open column is under no threat whatsoever. At any moment, it can order the companies to turn, which will be completed long before any enemy battalion further than a company frontage away will reach it.

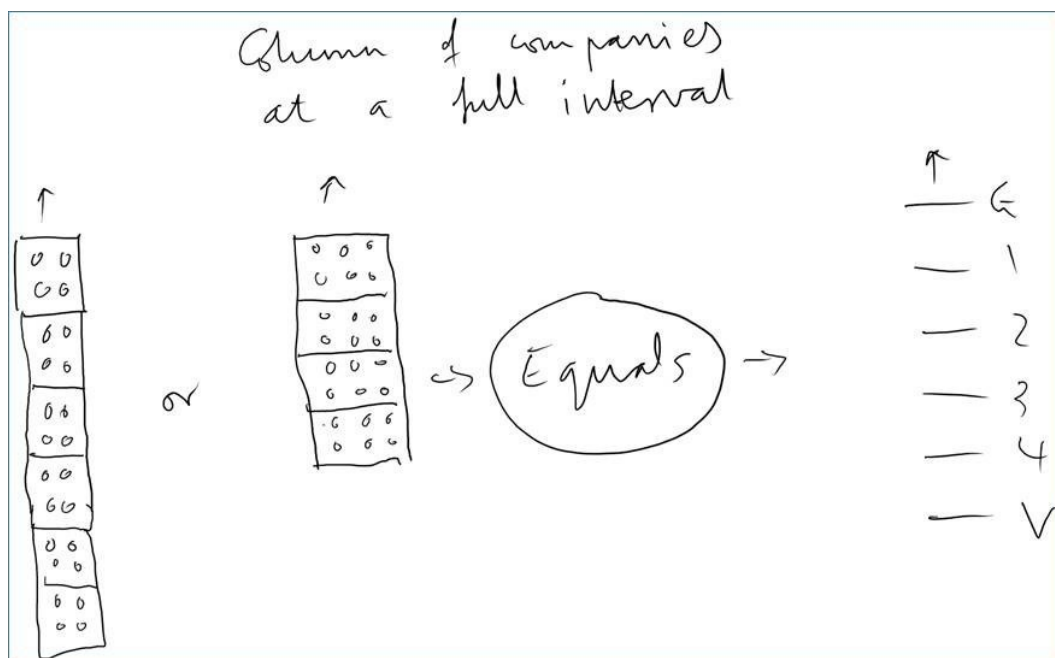
In Nosworthy's book on Napoleonic tactics "The Anatomy of Victory", there is a great account of a British battalion in the Peninsular deliberately advancing across the front of a French battalion in column of attack. Basically, he was saying "Come and have a go if you think you're quick enough!". Knowing the French with their new-fangled attack columns wouldn't be able to resist, the British colonel successfully induced the French column of attack to assault the flank of his column of open companies. At the last moment, the Brit colonel wheeled the companies into line – with the added bonus that none of the men had been tempted to fire too early because they were facing the wrong way - the volley was devastating as the venetian blind closed just as the French got to point blank. Bang. French stopped dead. Brit bayonet charge. French heading for the baseline.

Also in Nosworthy's book he describes the first encounter at Austerlitz. I never knew this but it was repulsed! The head of Vandamme's and St Hilaire's columns advanced through the fog, as we know. No artillery or skirmishers preceding, because of the fog. The Austrians were marching through the fog from left to right across the French column heads, unknown to both sides due to the fog. They were in open columns of companies (full interval). Neither saw the other until the last moment. The Austrians closed the venetian blind by turning each company 90 degrees to the right and fired a point-

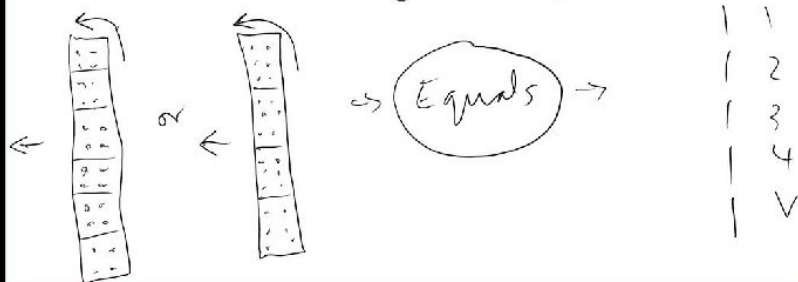
gamers got this myth about "columns of march" as they call them being attacked in flank being "game over" for column? I blame Peter Gilder and an extension of the column vs line myths he perpetrated with his "column of march is a disaster" myth, and, the Marengo attack of the Austrian column in flank and the Waterloo attack of d'Erlon's columns in their flank.

The fatal difference is that the Marengo and Waterloo columns were not at a full interval. *So, the companies could not turn to face the threat.* They were massed i.e. at much less than a full interval: half or a quarter. This tended to happen when the divisions of the columns were wider than a company, e.g. two or more companies. Because in wide divisions of greater than a company the gap is too large to maintain cohesion, so the tendency is to mass i.e. reduce the gap between divisions to less than the frontage of the divisions, e.g. a half, or a quarter. d'Erlon's column divisions were a full battalion in line – 6 companies! Yet the gap between them was not more than a few paces. The Austrian column that Kellerman rode down from its flank at Marengo was of closed intervals of less than the frontage of its divisions too, so it couldn't turn.

Now it turns out that wargames basing is ideally suited to implement rules to reflect this.



Column of companies at full interval to line to the left (or right)



This formation should be allowed to turn to line to the left or right at little of no time cost. Maximum 1cm.

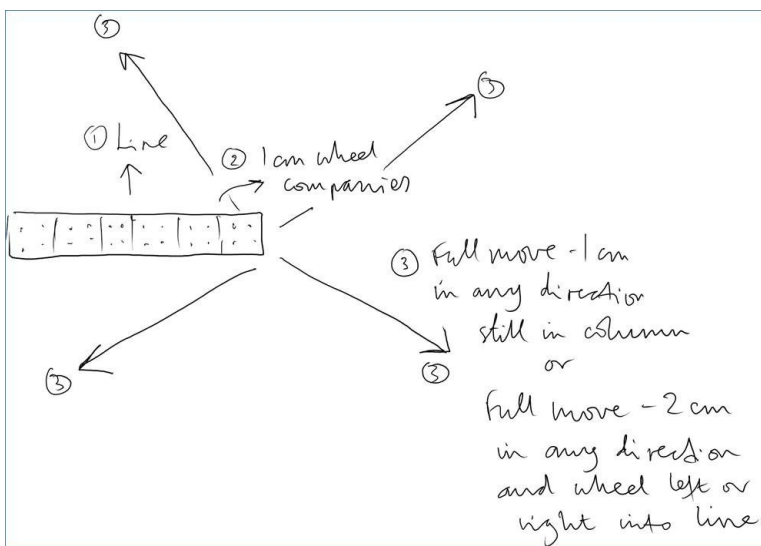
Furthermore, the reverse is true. A battalion in line should be able to turn to the right or left by wheeling its companies in no time. Maximum 1cm. And then move off in any direction using the front company as the column head. Then wheel the companies again to the left or right in no time. Maximum 1cm.

And column of companies at a full division should be faster than an attack column. At least 50% faster.

So then with an attack column, or column of double company divisions, we see the wargames basing shows the natural reduction in the gap between the divisions to less than the divisions' frontage

So columns of attack, or columns of divisions (both of which have greater than one company frontage), should not be allowed to turn to their divisions to the right or left and move in the way that lines and columns of single companies can. Rather they must always move from the front, wheeling the front division as required, or change formation.

In essence: -



I think this correct tactical capability of Fred the Great's the linear drill is more realistic and grants the linear doctrine its due.

After all, as Nosworthy reminds us, the British never reformed to the Napoleonic doctrine and used only the above. And kicked ass.

Lines should be able to move from their left or right end, in any direction, in column of companies, at the cost of only 1cm. And turn back into line to the left or right for the cost of only 1cm.

Columns of single companies should be able to turn to the flank with no penalty if charged. If less than 1cm then a manoeuvre test and if failed, then mark as a disorder (as a hat tip of respect to Peter Gilder).

Attack columns or columns of divisions should not be able to do such in place wheels to the left or right. They move from the front division only. Attack columns or columns of divisions should suffer the flank attack penalty as per the rules.

So, when lead by an able commander, with even only averagely drilled troops, linear was a lot more capable than Peter Gilder and his "columns of march", Marengo, and Waterloo bequeathed us.

Discuss!

Cheers

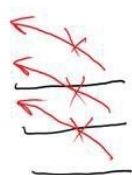
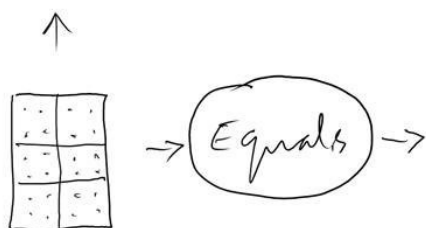
Loz

### Email 3

Another, and arguably the best, example of the vulnerability of wide fronted columns at less than an interval was the second phase of the final assault by the French middle guard at Waterloo. This one is infantry on infantry too, whereas d'Erlon and Marengo were cavalry on infantry, and Austerlitz was in a fog, which could all be argued as extenuating circumstances. But this example is clear cut as to the vulnerability of the wide columns closed to less than an interval of their width.

So, the first three French middle guard battalions have come up one at a time-ish, met the Brit guards and others, and gone back down again, as we know. But this was no-

Column of divisions of two companies at less than a full interval



Can't wheel divisions to the left or right due to not enough frontage.



where near game over. The guards got the credit for defeating the French middle guard but this was a scandalous lie. What happened next was what truly did for the imperials.

Plodding across the valley were 6 battalions of middle guard, one behind the other, in columns of double company divisions, probably with blokes filling in the narrow gaps between the divisions to form makeshift squares that could move. This was due to d'Erlon's earlier experience with the Union and Household Brigades leaving hoof prints all over his men and the imperials not wishing to offer the allies an encore!

Col Colborne of the 52nd Oxfordshire Light watched this formation from his position in the line just behind the ridge – as above. Then, without orders from Wellington, or even his brigade commander, he performed an extraordinarily revealing action in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the Fredrickian vs Napoleonic manoeuvre tactics.

His battalion was 1000 men in double line 4 deep. The French middle guard battalions were 500 men each for a total of 3,000, in double column divisions as described and shown above. So, the 52nd was roughly the same frontage as one of the imperials in line, but formed twice as deep.

He didn't even try to form the 52nd into column of companies. He marched them in line across the battle field, in full view of the French middle guard along the entire route, wheeled, and latched onto the flank of the French column like a limpet.

Private Wheeler described the French column as having no gaps that he could see straight through from the angle as he approached, even between the battalions. So, the French reaction to this was almost nothing. There was certainly nothing they could do by way or turning the companies as a whole to the left. Think of how much time they had to contemplate their options too. If you've ever walked the field it's a good 5-10 minutes to the middle at a bumble on the basis it took

me 20 minutes to get right the way from the 52nd's position to la Belle Alliance (south end of the road in the diagram) the last time I did it in 2015.

So, all the imperials could do was fire the handfuls of men filling the gaps in their square-like formation and skirmishers. Being who they were, and that, even this was effective. A hundred or so light infantrymen dropped as a result, so, 10% casualties. But, try to imagine what the effect would have been if the columns were at a half or full interval, or even better, in single company columns as well, as per Fred

the Great's linear tactics, instead of massed with negligible interval. 18 companies could have turned to face if the French columns had been at a half interval i.e. one company interval. If the columns had been at a full interval 36 companies. Ouch.

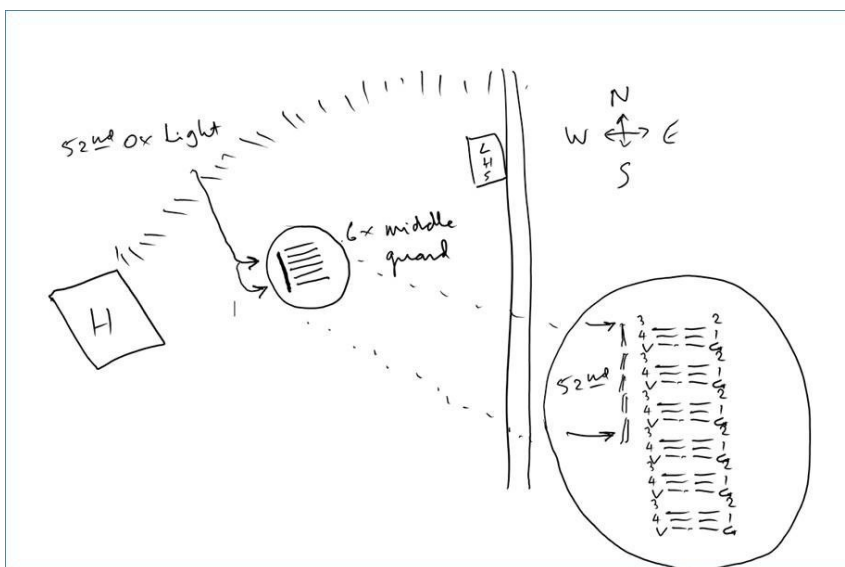
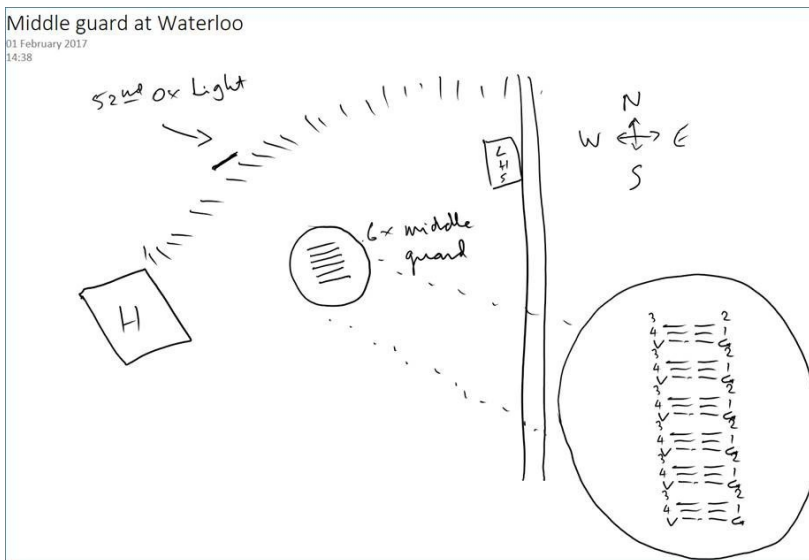
And if the columns had been in single columns of companies at a full interval, then some battalions could have left the formation to march past the flanks of the 52nd, wheel companies venetian blind style, and fire into them.

History might even have been different on account of this critical turning point action.

But instead, what happened was: The 52nd fired the front two ranks. Then the third and fourth ranks passed through them, and fired too – smart arse light infantry Bobs! A bayonet charge was hardly required, but did in fact ensue. The whole effing lot of the French column legged it – not just the 3 or 4 battalions in the front that the 52nd had enfiladed, but the rest who had just watched their comrades get clobbered in front of them.

Now why did this get covered up? That the 52nd actually won it and the guards were secondary?

Well, apparently, the Duke of Boot was none too pleased that he couldn't claim to have given the order for the master stroke that did for the French, because Colborne acted without orders. The Duke was next to the Guards at the time, having ordered and encouraged



them when the first 3 imperials came up. So, it made far more sense for his reputation and posterity that his being with and managing the Guards was made into the fake critical point of the battle of Waterloo. It was a critical point, but it wasn't **the** critical one. He was nowhere near **the** critical point when it happened, and didn't order any action into it to swing it. The Guards were out of ammo, the rest of the line was at breaking point, and he saw the six French middle guard battalions coming right at him. And at **the** critical moment, he had no answer. He was found wanting. Couldn't think of a reaction. Defeat stared him in the face. Colborne saved him.

Some silly old bint hit the nail on the head at a dinner party sometime after the battle, when she said to the Duke: "I hear you were rather surprised at your victory at Waterloo?" or similar.

Ooohh! Ouch! You bee-atch! Cheers,

Loz

P.S. Main source is this terrific book:

<https://wordery.com/the-lie-at-the-heart-of-waterloo-nigel-sale-9780750959629?currency=GBP>rck=WjdYd1BIYXI0RnpmcHhMWWNUb0Y1WGhVeTBJeHRieGphMXdwSjltbkNGSi84eW9Nb0I5NSvTytRUUhoWFdWbks1bk05cmhzT3FaUi9DN0o2eEtCVFE9PQ&gclid=CPWwgvCg79ECFaW37QodqOsNRw>

{Ed—I waited until now to send out this Issue of *Dispatches* so we could see how it went.

Tom Writes:}

## Marengo—Tom

17 Pluviôse IX

Dear fellow Comrades and most excellent members of the revolution,

I, Claude Victor-Perrin am writing to you today to inform you of the performance of the French army under my command today at the Battle of Marengo.

The night before our glorious commander Napoleon was given advice by an Austrian spy and, Toli who was clearly no friend of the revolution and shall be executed shortly after this letter has been written. Using this Traitorous advice, Napoleon ordered my Corps and two Brigades of Cavalry from Murat's cavalry reserve to

hold the town of Marengo. The next day, an entire Austrian battle group was sighted heading straight at my men. Forced to make the decision on whether to retreat or hold Marengo, I chose to retreat to Parodi with most of my force leaving behind the 42<sup>nd</sup> and 101<sup>st</sup> infantry Brigades under Gardanne to hold the bridge over the Bormida giving my soldiers the time needed to withdraw. Me and Duvignau prepared our men and retreated to the town of Parodi and its surrounding hills to greet the Austrians in a more favourable position.

At first the Austrian army ignored Gardanne seeing his troops as nothing but a diversion from the main battle, choosing instead to advance over the Bormida and towards the Brave soldiers of Lannes' Corps. Lannes's men at first held remarkably well against the entire left flank of the Austrians under Batorkez who had three divisions under his command against Lannes' one. The battle on the left was seemingly in the Austrians favour until Kellerman broke off from my retreating column to aid Lannes.

When Kellerman and his dragoons reached the Batorkez's line he decided bravely with no hesitation (might I add) to charge into an Austrian square. Now one would expect the square to stand and hold or at least get into melee with the Kellerman however the force with which this charge was delivered and the disorganised nature of the men caused them to rout upon seeing Kellerman's dragoons, this then caused a ripple effect resulting in this one charge routing two Austrian line infantry units and a Dragoon unit and even killing Bartokez himself. This undoubtedly was the driving force behind the destruction and mass rout of Batorkez's Left wing. Only minutes after Kellerman's glorious charge, Lannes ordered his troops to fix bayonets and charge the remaining Austrian lines. Lannes' infantry was already close to breaking from the sheer fire that had been laid upon them in the past hour that even though this charge shattered Bartokez's units it also caused enough casualties to force Lannes' entire Division to collapse and rout back to St Juliano. After his charge Kellerman found himself



The Club meets in Elles Hall, Farnborough every Friday night. Hostilities commence 19:00, doors open before to allow set-up

Why not send it your own pieces about the games you found interesting. Liven it up with digital pictures! Other articles also welcome.

Comments on and contributions to Dispatches to me on the night or, even better, by email to [cull1tc@aol.com](mailto:cull1tc@aol.com).



facing a fresh unit of Austrian Dragoons which he managed to destroy however the second follow up unit slaughtered Kellers men and killed the Hero Kellerman as well, a dark day for the French army.

Although the Left flank had crumbled on both sides leaving an empty gap for the Austrians to take advantage of, Lannes and Kellerman had stalled the enemy for long enough and caused enough damage to severely halt the Austrian advance. While this was going on, Duvignau and I were moving towards Parodi where we set up position and prepared for the Austrian attack. To give my troops the best chances, I deployed two Brigades in the towns of Parodi and Cassina Grossa, with the rest of the infantry on the surrounding hills to give them a height advantage and placed Duvignau in-between the hills and Villanova. From these hills I could now clearly see the magnificent size of the Austrian army advancing towards me. Instead of thinking about victory, I was hoping that the Austrians treat Officer Prisoners well.

Around noon, the Austrian right flank under Ballinlough along with support from the Divisions of Kaim and Frimont reached Parodi and set up lines and their guns to fire upon my brave troops. Ballinlough underestimated the strength of the two brigades I placed in Parodi and only sent two Grenzer Brigades against them. These Grenzers spent the rest of the battle struggling to get any shots on the Brigade in Parodi while suffering huge losses to my own guns forcing them to shatter and rout. The cavalry under Ballinlough managed to find a gap in my lines and he and one Dragoon slipped by however only shortly after they ran back after hearing of the shattering of their Corps. The other Dragoon under Ballinlough's command managed to hit one of my Line infantry Brigades in the rear which should have been the end of that brigade yet through sheer bravery and determination they turned the tables and routed the Austrian Dragoons breaking Ballinlough's Corps.

While three of my Brigades dealt with Ballinlough, the other three attacked the units of Kaim and Frimont with much success. One line infantry brigade charging head on into an Austrian line battalion, routing it, and with this momentum they carried on into another line with the same result and not only did they severely weaken Kaims forces because of this, they also managed to catch the Corps commander Zach and weaken him, forcing him back to the Austrian camp. While this charge occurred one of my light infantry units let off a last

volley before being slaughtered however this volley caused severe casualties to an Austrian line and wounded the Divisional Commander Kaim. After all of this shooting and heroics my losses started to mount forcing me to make a tactical withdrawal back to St Julian and the oncoming units of Desaix and Napoleon.

Whilst mentioning the units under Gardanne, I failed to mention that he was forced to leave the 42<sup>nd</sup> infantry on the Bridge in a mission that meant certain death however the men accepted this reality and stood bravely to the last man. Gardanne with his remaining Brigade of the 101<sup>st</sup> retreated back to the walls of Marengo where they held bravely for a few hours however just before noon the casualties sustained from the fire of an Austrian Corps and Medium battery forced the troops to vote unanimously in favour of their commander, Gardanne retreating back to Parodi and me. Gardanne galloped swiftly across the open plains avoiding sporadic gunfire however I shall note that he survived the battle, for his men however, we can but hope the Austrians took prisoners.

The battle of Marengo was a bloody contest resulting in thousands of deaths but with the combined skill and planning of both Lannes and I we held the Austrian advance despite all odds allowing for Napoleon and Desaix to arrive and defeat the Austrians before they could reach Saint Julian. For these efforts Napoleon in his infinite wisdom has bestowed the honours of Marshal of France to Lannes, Gardanne and I and a posthumous title to Kellerman. We have also been bestowed the honorary titles of Heroes of France and Saviours of the Revolution.

Signed

*Claude Victor-Perrin*



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