

Polishing Eylau

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At the end of 1999, I considered Eylau my most successful new game purchase of that year. Today, that's still true. I have played the main battle no less than eight times by now and the first day several times as well, which shows the outstanding interest generated by the game, for in general, Napoleonics are not my main interest. The elegance of the system that brought out the differences between the combat arms with a set of combat routines and modifiers that was trivial to remember, the incorporation of leadership and morale, the ability to represent gradual attrition as well as sudden disintegration, the effectiveness of judicious counterattacks for the defender, and the ability, despite turns representing a whole hour, to show the constant seesaw of fights for the villages on the battlefield, simply caught my imagination. That said, with experience comes also the appreciation of those points that keep a great game from historical perfection. Usually this process would be applied to more detailed games, but this is one case where an abstract game is worth it, and so I'll spend most of this piece on the fine print. (Readers who want another general review should jump to the last paragraph.) In all, there were three aspects I noted (none of which would have become apparent if I hadn't played it so much): Balance, Losses, and Davout.

Concerning balance, I have never experienced an outright Russian victory, although I have had one or two draws; the other games were French victories. In two cases where the Russians had very bad luck with activations in the morning, they were so shredded by 1pm that playing on made no sense (in one of these cases. Now, in this battle, that most authors and even the designers (judging from the comments on the battle sheets) considered at best a draw, where according to most estimates the French suffered 50% higher losses than the Russians, suddenly the Russian achievement is made into a Russian burden as the French need to achieve less than half the losses the Russians need to inflict to get a Marginal Victory. Why?? The description of the battle correctly notes that Napoleon wanted to destroy the Russians but failed. Yes, the French had much higher losses but almost a quarter of that was the catastrophe suffered by VII Corps, something which the cautious gamer will not repeat and which shouldn't be required from a Russian player. My recommendation is to shift the French victory levels down by one; if that is not sufficient shift the Russians up by one. However, the loss imbalance was the reason why the Square houserule (listed below) came into being, and I noticed a number of other factors pertaining to this imbalance while I was looking at Davout.

For what really caught my fancy was when I noticed the difficulty in bringing about one of the two climactic events of the battle (the other being Murat's Grand Charge, which is certainly there). Unlike Borodino which it arguably resembles a bit in execution, Eylau was not intended as a frontal slugfest, but as a classical envelopment, supposed to cut Bennigsen off from his lines of communication. Davout's drive from the flank managed to reach Kutschitten in the Russian rear, cutting the Russians off from their strategic retreat route. In that moment of crisis, the Prussians under Lestocq arrived, marched across the field from left to right, and drove back Davout's worn divisions to reestablish the earlier defense line. In my playings I turned out to be conspicuously unsuccessful in getting Davout to Kutschitten (despite trying it specifically I only managed it once), while otherwise the battle rarely went worse for the French than historical and Augereau seemed to end up in Anklappen in the center fairly often.

Last fall I started exchanging emails on Eylau with Volkmar Boese, who pointed out that all units seemed to be inflated in size. After some mails to Avalanche with inconclusive replies I finally noticed that the numbers were the same as in the old rulebooks, in other words, the change in unit scale was simply lost in editing. This is actually good news, since I had been wondering whether losses in the game were too high overall, and it also means that the telescoping worries voiced in the PA review should be gone. Using estimates of the correct numbers, I find that the game produces historical-feeling loss percentages. As an estimate, one can assume the following for line troops: One infantry strength point corresponds to 900-1000 men. One light cavalry SP corresponds to 250-450 men. One heavy cavalry SP corresponds to about 150-220 men. (The numbers are quite a bit lower for the Imperial Guard.)

I then noticed that Napoleon used Augereau and St Hilaire to distract the Russians so they could not reinforce the left wing before Davout pushed it back. I had attacked with Davout right away (after all, he was the hero) and was careful not to send St Hilaire and Augereau into danger (after all, they were the weaklings). That resulted in Davout being attrited and Augereau, as described above, taking over after the Russians had been

weakened by Murat and Davout's attacks. In several of our games the French simply attacked on a broad front. Why did they (ahistorically) do that? Because historically Davout was supposed to cut the Russian retreat route by coming round the flank (and did that, briefly), something which could not be done by merely crushing the center, but this is not covered by the game's victory conditions. However even after I changed these to reward Davout's attack he didn't quite make it.

Terrain plays a small part. The Eylau rules do make woods an advantage for the defender, making the terrain before Kutschitten (woods, then rise, then town) the hardest in the game. The first two games made woods a slight disadvantage and I chose to use their terrain effects to help Davout a bit.

The real key seems to lie elsewhere though. Davout's arrival times largely seem to coincide with the times used by most games, and Chandler's are similar.

Then I found an article by Greg Gorsuch which shows a different picture, based not on Bennigsen's official report to the Czar (which mentions the 9:00 time), but cites Prussian reports of the battle, recent Russian articles, and the reports of the French Marshals. All of which agree that Friant's division took Serpallen by daybreak (sunrise was at 7:20). Davout did not have far to march. Although not quite on the battlefield, his vanguard took the village of Molwitten, which is not marked on the map but would be in area 0124 or 0125, before daybreak. With that, Davout is given enough time and all of the problem goes away. I consider it a rare and pleasant surprise to have a game tell me that "you can't do that in that time" and then actually finding out that sources tell me the game may be right.

At that time, having resolved Davout's part to my satisfaction, I noticed that there was one more problem with the rendezvous at Kutschitten. Lestocq wouldn't make it either. (He had not been needed there so I hadn't noticed.)

First, Lestocq generally ran into Soult who was in all the areas in front of Schmoditten, blocking the way. Now, all the maps I've seen in Chandler or elsewhere (including all the Eylau game setups I've seen, whether 3W, GDW, or Talonsoft) suggest that the Russian right wing started further to the front, up close to the river. Again, this even makes more sense in game terms since all of that area is swamp and therefore protected from charge, assault, and bombardment as well or better than the line given by the current setup). It also makes Russian counterattacks against Soult more effective (remember this is a game system that rewards counterattacks). By that time I had started looking at the OOB's in earnest and it turns out that Soult appears to have a few steps too many, too. Second, and more puzzling, Lestocq couldn't move fast enough. By 4pm (or 4:30 according to others), Lestocq was assaulting the French in Kutschitten, having all the troops in the 2nd and 3rd Division present, as well.

Let's assume Lestocq arrives as far east as possible with Diericke's division, in the woods east of Althof (area 003). He marches east through area 004 (1 MP), Schmoditten (2x2 MP), and area 015 (1 MP). That means he arrives in front of Kutschitten, able to assault, at 6pm. This does not work. Now, the arrival time of his main force is reasonably consistent with arrival in Althof at 1pm (Gorsuch), 2pm (Digby-Smith), and 3pm (Chandler). The problem lies elsewhere. He takes *two hours* to cross through the village (or town) of Schmoditten since village terrain (+1 MP) is not negated by the trails running through it. Sorry, this makes no sense. Looking closer, roads and trails negate the effects of swamps (+1) but not those of villages (+1) or woods (+1). Why is it harder to march on roads in woods than in a swamp? Because people are more willing to step behind a tree to take a smoke? Examining the original series rules, we find that villages had no movement cost at all, whereas the effects of towns, marsh, and woods were all negated by movement along roads and trails (in both version of course you have to be not adjacent to the enemy as troops couldn't safely move in road columns otherwise). I therefore suggest simply reinstating that rule. Voila, Lestocq arrives in front of Kutschitten at 4pm (although without the time to spare to stack his artillery; so it goes). This feat was repeated by the Schlieffen battalion which made up the rearguard in Althof, was attacked by Ney at 7:00pm, and rejoined the rest of the Prussians by 9:00pm in the woods south of Kutschitten. I do not understand why the road effects were taken out of the game; they certainly do not increase the complexity. Perhaps it was simply an oversight in the terrain effects chart.

Lestocq's strength is also off. Some sources give him 9000 men; Lestocq himself gave the number as 5584 (none of his three "divisions" contained more than three battalions). The game pays lip service to this in the historical notes but gives the Prussians more strength points than Ney (who had about 14,000). Given the numbers in the game, one would wonder why Lestocq ran away from Ney.

Examining the setups also showed a number of other discrepancies. On the Russian side, Somov's division (currently on the rise 060, a great target for French opening bombardments unless reinforced) was withdrawn to a reserve position behind the line just before fire was opened.

I also wondered about the reserve artillery rule. On average half a gun will be released per turn, that means Bennigsen will have one gun that's never been used left on average at nightfall if the HQ is activated every turn! In fact in every battle I have had several left by the time the Russian HQ is overrun or the game is ended. Come on, this isn't Borodino.

Interestingly enough, the other discrepancies mostly involve the French side and correcting them might help balance out that the French always suffered fewer losses in our games. Most of the information below was pointed out to me by Volkmar Boese who also guided me to the right sources.

First, the French have a separate counter for the 18th Line regiment, but this was part of Legrand's division (IV/3). Therefore if that regiment is on the map, the division should be reduced accordingly. Next, Leval's division (IV/2) gets two counters because of its size. Now, it is true that it consisted of 3 brigades, but they were not particularly elite or large, one of them only contained 2 battalions. In fact some OOB's I have seen award it no more troops than St Hilaire gets. While this may be extreme it should be reduced by a couple of steps.

The organization of the French cavalry in the game is quite peculiar. We have the huge "Cavalry Reserve" formation of Murat, plus the "Independent" divisions of Klein, Grouchy, Milhaud, and d'Hautpol. But from the descriptions I have seen, which fit the other games I own, those four divisions *were* the Cavalry Reserve, and it was their 18 regiments (yes, they have 18 counters here, it fits) together that rode the Grand Charge. Where, then, do the other units come from? Well, except for the horse artillery batteries, they carry the designations of the units organic to each French Corps. So the game has swapped the reserve and non-reserve cavalry units. The historical cavalry reserve is now called "Independent" and can be assigned to other formations at will. (Sounds suspiciously like what a "reserve" would be formed for, doesn't it?) The only corps that has retained its historical organic cavalry is Davout's. None of the narratives mention the organic cavalry being with their respective corps. Gorsuch's view is that Lasalle was actually with Ney and the light cavalry on the left was the collected light cavalry from IV, VI, and VII Corps. It should be noted that these assignments do make sense if one assumes that Napoleon expected Ney to arrive much sooner and the cavalry was supposed to provide the link. (In fact it is possible that the VI Corps cavalry was sent ahead by Ney for this purpose.)

The main effect of re-establishing these assignments is that it's now harder for the French to protect their light cavalry (required for the victory conditions apparently to simulate French pursuit capability). Also their absence means that the French have a hard time obtaining a combined arms modifier and it becomes easier to understand how Russian charges contributed to the crushing of VII Corps. While Murat is busy charging with the "real" reserve; it's no longer possible to distribute dragoons for the combined arms modifier and use the light cav for the massed charge (with some dragoons on the side for soaking off step losses).

I make no claim that all these OOB changes are necessarily "more right" than the original (OOB discussions are unresolvable in my opinion), just that they conform more closely to the works I have read (much more closely...) and to the passages pointed out to me by Volkmar in the French and German sources.

Finally, the game does not do what most other Napoleonic games do, recognize the wisdom of Napoleon's caution in employing the Guard. (The earlier EotE **Borodino** did; but here we again have Napoleon in hostile terrain in an inhospitable country, so I think the same conditions apply.) The victory conditions only count losses, and the Guard counts as any other unit. So one very sensible strategy is to attack everywhere and if the other French corps are crushed, simply send the Guard into the center, lawnmower-type, to catch remaining Russians at whatever cost to the Guard. Or, in fact, send the Guard in first since it doesn't have to accept the slowdown of being stacked with artillery to get the +1 modifier. Napoleon didn't think like that and a game dealing with him shouldn't make the player think like that.

Eylau Variants

The following is the set of variant rules for the *The Battle* scenario of Eylau, although the Woods and Roads/Trails terrain effects as well as the Imperial Guard rule should hold for any scenario.

The cavalry rule: The infantry defenders in an area being charged dice against their morale (i.e., highest long division morale in hex; if no long division then most numerous - in steps - other infantry morale, no leader or artillery modifiers). If they roll equal or less they have formed square and the number of die rolls for the attacking cavalry is halved (round up).

Trail and road movement: This negates villages, town, woods, and marsh. (Not rises.) Note that trail and road movement is only applicable when not next to the enemy. *These alterations should also apply to the Friedland and Borodino refits.*

Woods: All units in woods are reduced when attacking or defending; units outside woods are reduced when attacking into woods. French: -25%, Russians -50%. *These are the rules from John Mundie's Friedland refit; a battle which had for all intents and purposes the same troops as Eylau.*

Kutschitten (optional): Treat as an ordinary village, not a town.

Game length: The game starts with the 7:00 turn. On that turn only Davout's units can move on the French side. Davout is automatically activated first. On the Russian side, only the Left wing can move (and only if Ostermann-Tolstoi rolls successfully for initiative).

French setup.

IV Corps.

Area 075: Remove the 18th Line Rgt (it is part of IV/3).

III Corps.

Area 123: III/2 (Friant), III Corps Artillery 1, III Corps Cavalry 1,2, Leader Davout

Area 124: III/1 (Morand), III Corps Artillery 3

8:00 AM Reinforcements: Area 125: III/3 (Gudin), III Corps Artillery 2,4.

Prussian setup: Of the infantry, only the 1st and 2nd Division enter, the 2nd Division reduced by 1 step. The Stutterheim fusiliers and 3rd Div can be split off at the cost of 1 step per step removed from either of these. *This represents the strength of 9000 troops given to Lestocq by many sources such as Chandler.*

Russian Setup.

Right wing: The right wing should set up in areas 000, 030, 029, and 028 instead of 044, 031, 018, 019. Set up Platov and the Cossacks in 064 together with Galitsen.

Center: The 4th (Somow's) division and Docturov should set up in area 044. The 14th (Kamenskoi's) division should set up in area 064.

Left Wing: The Left Wing Cossack units should set up in Serpallen. *I do not know what forces were there, but Serpallen as the cornerstone of the Russian position was not empty; Chandler's map shows cavalry there. Alternatively put 2 of the Jaeger units plus 2 Cossacks into Serpallen and the other 2 Cossacks into 104; they certainly were in that vicinity since Friant made contact with them first.*

Russian Reserve Dieroll: Add 2 to the artillery release dieroll as soon as a French unit has come adjacent to the Russian HQ.

Victory conditions:

LOC: Any Russian division that cannot trace a line of communications offboard through one of areas 008 or 009 at the end of the game without tracing through an area occupied by or adjacent to French troops is considered lost for VP purposes. (The first two areas away from the unit can be traced cross country, the rest must be along roads.)

The Guard: Each Imperial Guard Long Infantry step lost *on the attack* counts double for victory purposes. Also, from the first time the Guard infantry retreats after combat (whether as attacker or defender) onwards, the morale of all French units is reduced by 1 for combat, rally, and recovery purposes for the rest of the battle.

Setup For OOB Purists, including the real Prussians

These changes are in addition to the previous section.

French Guard: Remove Leader Lefebvre. Bessieres commands the whole Guard. If the French player wants to activate the infantry and cavalry separately, Napoleon has to assign an ADC to the Guard infantry. *Lefebvre is listed as Guard commander at Eylau by Digby-Smith; however "Anatomy of Glory" points out that he was assigned to command X Corps on January 23rd, after Perrin alias Victor was captured by enemy cavalry. Kevin Zucker's 1807 has it right. Note also that Reille and Savary were elsewhere at this time, and Rapp was still recovering from serious wounds suffered in late December; best consider the ADC's to be anonymous colonels and lower Rapp's tactical rating to 1.*

IV Corps:

IV/2/1: Set up with strength 5. It gets a +1 to morale since these are not battle losses.

IV/2/2: Set up with strength 4. Also +1 to morale.

IV/3: Set up with strength 5. The 18th Regiment is not on the map [it is part of IV/3]. If desired the player can bring it on the map at the price of removing 2 steps from IV/3. 18th Regiment losses do count for VP purposes!

French Cavalry Setup

Cav Reserve (except Cav Reserve 10,11) and Tmp Lt Cav 5,9: Set up instead of Tmp Lt Cav. All Cav Reserve units are part of IV Corps. Tmp Lt Cav 5,9 is part of the Cavalry Reserve (out of command initially).

Cav Res 10,11: Set up as originally specified.

Tmp Lt Cav (except Tmp Lt Cav 5,9): With Lasalle. Enter with Ney.

20th/26th Dragoons: Enter with Ney. *The units conveniently already carry the green color bar of VI Corps.*

1st,2nd,3rd Dragoons, 1st Cuirassiers: These do not start the game unassigned; instead they start under Murat's command. *Which is how most players tend to assign most of them on the first turn anyway.*

Prussian setup: The only infantry unit Lestocq receives is the 2nd Division. The 1st Div, 3rd Div, and Stutterheim fusiliers can be split off from it at the cost of 1 step per step removed. Cavalry and artillery arrive normally. Remove leader Prittwitz. *(He was busy leading part of Ney's troops astray.)*

Trying it out

I played the game once with the altered right wing and center setup (but without Davout's early arrival and weaker IV Corps). The effects were surprising. Somov's division no longer provided a good target in the center, both St Hilaire and Augereau's divisions had to come out to do any damage and were pretty much chewed up by the Russian center. Tutchkov, in front of the stream instead of back on the hill, was able to react instantly to any advance by Soult and deliver unpleasant counterattacks that left Soult much the worse for wear. Granted that Bennigsen generally got to activate most of his army on the 9 and 10am turns, this was only the second time that the initial turns left the Russians with significantly lower losses than the French before 11am. Davout did make it to Kutschitten but not into it before Lestocq arrived.

I then played another game with all setup changes except for a less radical setup of the cavalry (this was before we found out Lasalle was not there so the French had more cavalry in left and center). Most importantly I used Davout's early arrival. Serpallen fell by the historical time, also this was the first game where it made sense to use Davout's historical avenue of approach early in the game - have Gudin swing around the woods in the east and attack on a broad front. Very encouraging! The game was also helped by historical weather - constant squalls in the center of the board (although no Augereau-type disaster happened) while Davout was not held up. Davout did indeed manage to get up on the plateau in front of Kutschitten, was once driven back by a well-done cavalry charge, climbed back up and after virtually annihilating the Left Wing, assaulted Kutschitten and took it. The Prussians then arrived and retook it, looking a bit weak initially but then severely mauling Davout's weakened corps in the process and driving it back to the woods together with a small counterattack by the Russian center that took Anklappen while taking few losses themselves. Overall this worked out very naturally without much "bending".

The only issue that arose was the status of Kutschitten. As it is rated as a town, retreat is always optional, and one step loss is absorbed for the defender. When I played it that way I found that the place will fall only under the most extreme assault and if no reserves can be gathered anywhere. Its advantages naturally make it into a "last redoubt" for the Russians which it doesn't seem to have been; on the contrary.

I don't know where the Kutschitten rule comes from but from the accounts I've read apparently a weakened Friant's division captured Kutschitten on the fly, and on the counterstroke it was carried by the Prussians in a single assault. The Prussian accounts mention that the French tried to make a stand in front of the village, were pushed back, and tried to make another stand at the rear of the village, where they were taken in the rear by the Prussian cavalry and cut down. This is doubly ironic since Kutschitten has all around front facing in the game.

Does it make sense to make Kutschitten an ordinary village? One test does not really tell us about it. I suspect it though and have added this as an optional rule. Either way though I was pleasantly surprised at the way in which the game allowed recapturing the historical course of the battle given similar strategic decisions once the alterations were in place. However, completely different strategies are possible, and after spending so much time focused on Davout, I will be delighted to try other strategies - lead with Augereau, lead with Soult, use the Guard, and see what happens. There is a lot of play left in this game.

The last comment applies to losses. When using Brien Miller's 60% casualties - 40% stragglers rule for step losses, the losses for the game seem to be very reasonable, typically lying in the 15-25,000 range. The only thing I still wonder about is that so far it was almost always the Russians who lost more (men if not Long Infantry steps), which contradicts most historical estimates. Why was that so? It could be due to our/my style of play, the game map (the massive Russian battery in the center is set up so it can't fire on the hill directly in front - odd), or my personal inability when playing the Russians to get my reserve artillery released or to get my troops to form square in sufficiently many cases even after I gave them a houserule to do it. However my suspicion is that giving the French too much cavalry allowed them to gain the combined arms modifier too often.

The new setup which has swept the French corps (except for Davout and Ney) free of cavalry which is not mentioned in the chronicles anyway should help correct that.

Two more optional rules (while we're in the mood)

Overall Commander range. The Overall commander's command range can only be traced to areas the leader has a LOS to. I call this the "put your leaders on hills" rule; the idea is based on a remark by William Terdoslavich. I like it because it makes Army leader and HQ advantages complementary. (Using the RAW, the HQ suffers due to wind and Chief of Staff absence; the leader only suffers moderately in terms of range; given that Napoleon's range is as large as his HQ's, larger in a squall, that leaves the HQ near irrelevant. Historically, the HQ is where the couriers appear from elsewhere. While the leader is in the field on his own he should rely on what he can see.)

Nastier squalls. A variant for the Chaos Gamers. The weather rule, in general, works quite well and can bring the battle to a dead stop in some areas due to blocked fields of fire. However, something on the order of what happened to Augereau won't happen here, where an attack that was going forward suddenly ran into a squall and got hopelessly lost. So to experience the actual situation, I suggest this: Don't roll for the squalls at the beginning of the turn. Whenever a player activates formations, he designates at the start of the movement phase which units he will move, *then* rolls for squalls for the leaders involved in the activation, and executes the squall effects for those units caught in squalls. (If you find yourself stacking your corps commanders away from their units, admit to yourself that you're a Jomini adherent and stop using the variant.)

Finishing Remarks

To sum it up, let me remark again that the fact I came up with all of the points above actually shows **Eylau's** strongest advantage; I have never had such fun with a Napoleonic game. If the system were not wonderfully fast, basically sound, the battle tense and enormously enjoyable, I'd never have racked up so many playthroughs. The ability to project a believable picture of Napoleonic combined with swift, decisive, and interactive play is what makes this game system stand out. In comparison its only direct contender (as opposed to many regimental or near-regimental games with several times the playing time) is the 1970s vintage Napoleon at War system with its traditional attack-at-3:1 and ZOC-off-to-kill approach (gag), and there is no question which system is more fun, has more action, and feels more like Napoleonic combat. I own or have played most of the Eylau games out there (the only non-exotic exception is the La Bataille game which is too large for my preferences), and among those I know, this is by far the best, and in fact the only one which is good enough that debating OOB issues does not feel like a waste of time. I hope for many more games in the series, and I do hope that Avalanche will eventually publish a set of advanced rules that officially re-establish some of the few needed omissions, such as the road and trail effects. And to all who played the original **Friedland** and **Borodino** in this series and disliked their long lists of modifiers and relative ponderousness, I can only say: the new rules are a completely different beast. Buy **Eylau**, download the free rules refits for the old games, and you will have twice the game *again* than what you bought originally.

Thanks to Allan Mountford for providing historical details and numbers.

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