

# Musket & Pike Commentary

## from Footnotes, Moves 18

### By Lawrence P. Duffield

Arnold Hendrick's article in MOVES #16, on Play Balance in *Musket & Pike* was a worthy effort, but it is seriously flawed. The approach of evaluating by a numerical value the usefulness of a certain type unit is basically inadequate. Non-rated factors like Victory Conditions, terrain, enemy forces or special conditions affect the performance of an army as much as the actual composition of forces.

For instance, Mr. Hendrick gives the Green (Imperial) side at White Mountain 230 points, while the Blue (Bohemian) side has only 130. On the face of it, the Imperials can simply run over the Bohemians at will. In fact, the Victory Conditions make it nearly impossible for the Imperial Army to win at all, and completely impossible to win a decisive victory.

Consider: The Blue Army sets up as far from hex 12 as it can. The whole force then begins moving toward hex 7, Musketeers on the rear and flanks. Blue keeps the hill mass between his army and the Green EA. Each turn he fires his PM's at any target in range, at 1.-1 odds, to disperse them. The turn that he enters the ploughed field he commits himself to either moving toward the corner of the board near town #1 or to occupying and fortifying town #6 while a detachment heads for wood 4 and safety.

The only force Green has that can catch up and head off Blue is the 6 He units. These must stay together to be effective, and can only close off 1 exit route. The Green PP units cannot move any faster than the Bohemians, and so cannot catch up until Blue reaches the edge of the board. On Game-Turn 10 Blue forms a "doughnut" with a filling of Bohemian Guards. Green probably cannot blast away the crust with fire alone, and so cannot engage the center unit at all, or at most with only I-I odds, if Blue still has 2 Bohemian Guard units to put in the center.

In spite of Green's relatively huge army, he can, at best, scrape up a marginal victory. A simple comparison of forces is of no use since the most that can be brought to bear against the enemy is the cavalry, a few PM's, which never actually fire. In effect, it is a hundred or so points of Blue against just over sixty Green.

Besides the Victory Conditions, the conditions of the battle itself may cause the value of a unit to vary considerably. In the

Brentford Scenario, the Royalists have a 1.8 to 1 advantage, according to Mr. Hendrick. And, in fact, they can force a win most of the time. But add just 8 points of MP's to the Parliament (Blue) OB, changing the odds to 1.75 to 1, and the balance of the battle shifts dramatically. The Parliament forces can defend from town #6 to the ford, holding enemy dismounted Dragoons or mounted shock units at bay while shooting up any shock cavalry which advance to contact. Then, after the Royalist cavalry has been disrupted by fire, the MP's advance and finish them off while the PM's cover their flanks.

This reversal of advantage is due to the nature of the *M&P* Combat System. The preferred means of killing units is to disrupt with fire, then follow up with shock. A force with only fire units or only shock units is at a serious disadvantage. In the OB for Brentford, the Blue units lack shock, the Green fire. Adding even a small (4 unit) shock force allows Blue to make combined attacks, while Green must make Melee-only attacks. Cavalry mobility, an important segment of Green's apparent point advantage, is nullified by the situation, and lack of fire element. Blue can wait for Green to come to him, then utilize his combat advantage to win.

Even in the initial OB, where Green lacks sufficient MP's to resist the initial Royalist charge, holding a wall of PM's with an MP reserve will allow counterattacks and will probably pull a game out of the fire for Green. The main point to remember, however, is that the play balance in this scenario does not turn on a paltry 8 points. It turns on the overall situation and the capability of the entire force to react to its demands.

A third bone of contention with Mr. Hendrick's analysis lies in his analysis of the value of stacking. Granted "... using 3 high stacking against an army without it can produce victory against an otherwise equal opponent every time." What about an army with 5 to 4 superiority, rather than equality? This occurs when "balanced" forces are selected according to Mr. Hendrick's point system, and one side pays a 20% penalty for stacking. In the Coutras Scenario, the sides are rated at 194 Blue unit points plus a 48 point penalty for stacking (the 252 points given in the article is an addition error). Green has 208, with 2 high stacking, for a

ratio of forces of 1.2 to 1 or thereabouts. However, Blue, with the burden of attack, must advance against a very mobile enemy with very nearly as many pieces as he. This, coupled with the defensive advantage of town #6 and the ploughed field, which enables Green to hold on one flank and advance on the other, means Blue must guard his flanks. Green can take up 18 positions with 2 high stacks, and can await attack, knowing he will be able to use all of them in combat. Blue can hold only 14 positions when stacked to the maximum, and would have only 28 units available for fighting.

As Blue advances on the town, Green, who has set up as far forward as possible, fires all his muskets against some part of the Blue line, at 4-1 or 5-1, hoping to kill a unit or two. The he retreats, forming a crescent covered by his Reiters, which stay out of fire or Heavy Cavalry Charge range, but on the enemy flank, threatening to sweep down, fire pistols at some stack, then close in with pikemen and light cavalry, encircling and destroying whole stacks. Because Blue lacks cavalry, he must refuse both flanks. Green can choose the weakest, then fire at I-I with his muskets, disrupting some stacks, which are charges and surrounded. This technique gives an equal game, or possible even a slight Green advantage, rather than the Blue edge Mr. Hendrick's predicts. In fact, this is my own favorite battle from a play balance standpoint. Played by two experts it is a tense down-to-the-wire battle.

A perceptive reader will note that, even while taking exception to Mr. Hendrick's analysis, I have used his system of point values. Mr. Hendrick has done those of us who enjoy *M&P* a great service, and the object of this commentary is not to denigrate his efforts, but to make players aware of the limits to the point value approach and to suggest other factors to use in analysis of game scenarios.

- Lawrence P. Duffield