Table of Contents

Introduction

The Napoleonic period is one of the most studied, researched and played periods in wargaming. It's an era of heroic actions, unique personalities, flamboyant uniforms, big battles and countless small engagements. *Song of Drums and Shakos* takes you to the middle of these unnamed, forgotten by History rear-guard clashes, focussing on the common soldier and giving him the Glory he deserves. To play this game, you will need 3 six-sided dice (d6), a few miniatures in any consistent scale, three measuring sticks (50mm, 80mm and 120mm for 15mm) and a play surface of 60cm x 60cm. You will also need scenic material to represent hills, trees, fences and buildings. You can just use some paper outlines laid out on the battlefield if you do not have well crafted terrain.

Game length

Once you know the rules, a game requires about 45 minutes.

Scale and conventions

SDS recreates the battles of small groups of soldiers in the Napoleonic Era (1796-1815). In this period, French Armies and their enemies were usually organized in Corps of 2-3 Divisions, each made of two or more Brigades. Several Battalions composed a Brigade, and each French Battalion comprised six Companies. SDS focuses on actions of what we'll call a Squad, i.e. a unit of about a dozen men. The authors play with 15mm miniatures mounted on round bases although the game can be easily played with larger scales. The rules are written for two players but it's possible to play with more using a card driven initiative system. Write each player's name on a card, shuffle the cards, and then draw the top card to determine whose turn it is. Once all cards have been drawn and all players have acted, the turn ends, the cards are reshuffled and a new turn begins.

The nominal ground scale with 15mm models is 10mm=1 yard. One model represents one soldier. All distances and ranges are measured with three measurement sticks labeled Short (50mm), Medium (80mm) or Long (120mm). Pre-measuring (checking a range before declaring an attack or a movement) is allowed. Players may measure distances at any time. If you play with 20/25/28mm models, the playing surface should be 90x90cm and measurement sticks should be 75mm, 120mm and 180mm. For 40mm or larger models, the playing surface should be 120x120cm and the measurement sticks should be 100mm, 160mm and 240mm.

Profiles

Every model is described in game terms by a profile. Here is a sample profile:

French Line Infantryman
Points 26   Quality 4+   Combat 2
Weapons: Musket   Special rules: none

Points: this is the cost of the soldier. Better soldiers cost more points.

Quality: this is an overall representation of the soldier's willingness to fight, reaction speed, initiative, drill and morale. It is the minimum number that can be rolled on a die to activate the soldier, so the lower the number, the better. In other words, a model with a Quality of 4+ will activate (act) on the die roll of a 4 or better.

When it is your turn, you nominate a soldier that you are trying to activate. You can roll one, two or three activation dice – you choose how many dice to roll. Every roll that is equal to or better than the model's Quality is a success. Every roll that is lower is a failure. A roll of 1 is always a failure and a roll of 6 is always a success when attempting a Quality roll.

You get to perform one action for every success. **If you roll two or more failures, the turn passes to your opponent (after the soldier acts on its one success, if it had one), who gets to nominate one of his soldiers and try to activate it.** It is generally wise to start acting with the soldiers with the best (lowest) Quality target numbers. Deciding who to activate, and how many dice to roll, will often be important tactical choices.

Combat: this is a measure of how well the soldier fights: the higher the number the better. In hand-to-hand combat, this value is added to the result of a die roll and is compared to the opponent's Combat plus the result of a die roll. In ranged combat, the weapon modifier of the shooting model is also added. Special rules and situational modifiers may influence combat. *For example, it is harder to fire against an enemy crouching behind a hedge. Anyone firing at him will have a -1 Cover modifier, representing the difficulty of hitting an enemy who is only partially visible.*

Weapons: the hand-to-hand weapon and firearm (if any) the model is armed with.

Special rules: this catchall category includes all the extra abilities of a soldier. Every special rule describes something that the soldier can do in addition to its basic profile. Some special rules are detrimental (for example, *Slow* soldiers move less frequently than others) and decrease the soldier's point value.

Basic Rules
For Players of Song of Blades and Heroes

This game is based on the "Song of Blades" rules engine. The activation, Morale and Combat mechanics will be familiar to Players of SBH, while other concepts – designed to give the Napoleonic flavor – will be new. Group moves, for example, are handled slightly differently in SDS. A Leader can give multiple group orders and the group activation can take place between the Leader's actions. A SBH player will have to learn a few new rules but will gain back hours of fun and maybe a new favorite period for wargaming. Starting with a skirmish set lets you start with minimal investment in terms of models, painting time and terrain. The authors are working on an army-level version of these rules for simulating the bigger conflicts of the Napoleonic era.

Choose Nationality and Models

Both players select which side they wish to play (France or Austria, Prussia, Russia, Great Britain) and then "design" their squad, buying soldiers from a roster of profiles for their chosen nationality. Players must agree beforehand who will play the "French" but once this is done, soldiers should be selected secretly. In a standard game, the total point value of all models in each squad must not exceed 400. Experienced players may opt to play with higher point totals.

Determine Attacker and Defender

Both players roll a die adding +1 to the result for each model with the Scout special rule in their Squad. The player with the highest total decides if he wants to attack or defend. Re-roll ties.

Lay out the Terrain

The defender lays out the terrain, setting up the tabletop and adding scenic features according to the following rules and tables or the scenario rules. The defender decides if he will place all features on the table immediately as they are generated or all at once after all of the features are generated. Both methods are legal.

There are several different terrain features that are generated by these tables: area terrain features, linear obstacles, buildings, trees, and so on.