



Tips and Tactics

for the Major Power Armies

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In most historical scenarios, the players are fixed with a position, armies, and sub-commanders already chosen for them, and on terrain probably not of their choosing. When playing DIY scenarios with the Army Builder, however, it can be great fun to do ahistorical match-ups. The NJMGS, as one of the original playtesting groups for the game, has played just about every possible combination several times over (and some impossible ones, too.) We therefore offer this set of tips and advice for new players, or for players trying to decide which army to “build” for tournament play.

Austria

During the design phase of *Might and Reason* and the subsequent playtesting, I used the Austrians as a sort of “base-line average” in many ways for calculating point values and army balance. Consequently, the Austrian army is the classic straight-B-student: good at everything, excellent at nothing. Of all the national “special rules,” the Austrians’ are arguably the least game-changing: slightly better irregular units and artillery that can better escape an enemy attack.

Nonetheless, the Austrians command an impressive cavalry force and even under a Good commander can field enough to achieve 2:1 superiority over the horsemen of Old Fritz. Only the Turks have more men in the saddle.

An Austrian army should choose a conservative position, anchoring one flank on the table-edge and the other on rough terrain (to be filled with your plentiful irregular foot and horse.) Deploy the infantry in two lines, with the elites in the rear line. Deploy the heavy cavalry (you can buy as many as six or more) on the flank that isn’t anchored on the rough terrain, to prevent enemy horsemen from approaching, and/or to serve as the outside wheel for your own attack. Artillery is generally not worth the cost.

Against a clever and shooty army like the British or Prussians, you will most likely lose your first line. Charge whenever possible; don’t just stand and wait to be shot. Eventually your first line will give way, but unlike the British or Prussians, you have a reserve. Your fresh second line should get into contact as soon as possible with the battered enemy line and finally break their worn-out musketeers.

Against a bigger, slower foe like the Bourbons or Russians, wait for their attack and then use your superior supply of CDs to re-roll combat dice, attack tests, and to manipulate the initiative so that you shoot first when the lines get close.

The Bourbons

The French and Spanish armies are quite similar in their flaws, although they have different strengths. In our club, they almost always appear on the field together, as the French usually have a Spanish allied contingent and vice-versa.

With their cheap units and plentiful points, the Bourbons can field a huge army. Their tolerance for pain is high, which is fortunate because win or lose, this army never ends a battle without looking like Sylvester Stallone at the end of a *Rocky* movie.

The Bourbons will almost always be out-scouted by their enemies, and thus have to deploy first. It is crucial to deploy in a deep, almost box-like formation, preferably with a sort of checkerboard of corps. This is because a speedy enemy like the Prussians, British, or Turks will rush to one side of your vast horde and try to chew it up before your slow-moving sub-commanders can get the rest around. A compact formation, therefore, that allows you to pass behind and beside your Forces, gives you maximum opportunity to react

to this threat. If you have a cavalry Force under an aggressive sub-commander (admittedly not guaranteed, but more likely for the Spaniards), then you can wing him out on a wider arc to threaten the rear of your attacker.

It is all but impossible to attack well with this army, except perhaps against the equally-slow Russians. The French don't mind, as their great strength is recovery. The French advantage of better SP recover is not to be underestimated. It demands a certain conservatism, but it is a very serious advantage. It is a harder pill for the Spanish to swallow, given the advantages they have in attacking, so in that case I recommend keeping the best Spanish horse on a tight leash, "grabbing the lapels" of their sub-commander until you are ready to release them in a great counter-charge.

Britain

The second-smallest army for the SYW, and the only other one with a Great commander, the Anglo-Hanoverians are generally a little more numerous than their Prussian friends, and almost as good at shooting. This is a very solid little army, but its sub-commanders are somewhat slow-minded. Consequently, if you are a conservative player who prefers playing defense, but you want a small, high-performance army, the Brits and their Germanic contingents will be your cup of tea.

The redcoats are never numerous, but can usually afford two lines of infantry, so there is a reserve. The cavalry should stand on the wings of the infantry lines, but if you defend be careful not to let them get pressed against your own lines, thus blocking your fire and ultimately getting them squashed. You may wish to keep your rear line in MF until the last minute, bearing in mind that even an "Inactive" Force can make the change into FF.

Against a horde of Turks, you must adopt a defense reminiscent of the Zulu War: hug the board corner and don't allow a single crack in your formation. The cavalry should be inside the square, to counterattack or plug gaps that result from any eventual Turkish breakthroughs (if you leave your cavalry outside, it'll just be overwhelmed.) Against a large, slow-moving foe like the Bourbons or Russians, you can afford to be more aggressive. Take a page from the Prussian playbook and advance quickly in a tight grouping to one of the enemy's flanks. Get in close but do not use the bayonet: volley them to death before they can bring their numbers to bear.

The Ottomans

In the hands of an aggressive and clever player, this is a formidable army. Many players eschew the Turks because the idea of a horde of poor-quality irregular units holds little appeal. But the Ottoman advantages are potentially devastating. Not only do their numbers give the Turks a very high army morale, but the fact that so many of their units are irregulars means that they can lose men in huge piles without fearing morale collapse. And best of all, they can achieve all this with a "Good" general, thus giving them enough CDs to play all sorts of horrid tricks.

This is not a defensive army. The Ottomans can certainly hold ground; if need be, use the ability of your regulars to dig-in, thus providing a covered and secure position. But use your cavalry to flow like water around the enemy horsemen. Your numbers are such that you can land 2:1 frontal attacks, plus flanking bonuses, thus evening the odds against enemy heavies. The speed and ability to move through rough terrain means that slower enemies will stare in mortification as you pass around their flanks or overrun their artillery.

The Ottomans are the only army that is actually dependent upon its light and irregular forces as a part of its battle-plan. Consequently, unlike all other armies, rough terrain is your friend. Your fragile but speedy light horse can zip through woods, for instance, completely immune to the professionals on the other side. The same is true with your numerous irregular infantry. They can filter through woods quickly and deny large sections of the map to the enemy regulars, who dare not follow them in. They can even use the rough terrain as a sort of "base" for hit-and-run attacks, thus forcing an enemy to detail units to watch the woods, seldom a profitable use of those valuable regular infantry.

Consider also that you can deploy so many irregular cavalry that there is virtually no way for an enemy to score a Decisive Victory against you, no matter how badly he chews up your infantry, because you can always cover your retreat. Meanwhile, your victory will almost always be Decisive, for the same reason.

Prussia

The smallest and deadliest of all the armies, the Prussians are an attacker's dream. They are a mean little killing machine, but a *little* machine indeed. (Barry Katz has more irregular cavalry – just irregular cavalry – in his Ottoman army than I have *units* in my entire Prussian army.) It is rare that the Prussians will have an army morale higher than 5, which means of course: You have no margin for error. You cannot afford to lose units, period. You have no reserves. You will be outnumbered anywhere from 3:2 to 3:1 by your enemies. This army is like a Porsche 911: expensive as hell and relatively fragile, but man, can it move!

To play the Prussians well, you need to know the rules well. This is because your advantages come from your plentiful supply of CDs for an army of only 3-4 Forces. Keep the army very compact, all sub-commander's within Fritz's reach, and you will always have extra dice for Force activation, for combat re-rolls, for Initiative manipulation, for re-rolling recovery attempts, and so on. These are all multipliers: you can keep your men in motion almost every pulse, and thus out-pace your opponents.

Against all enemies except the Turks, the Prussians have one tactic, which is essentially Frederick's own preferred approach. Rush at once in a very compact formation to one extreme of your enemy's line. *Do not* attack in the center or sit around waiting to be attacked. Your cavalry can screen your infantry columns until you get very close to contact. Then all in one pulse, about-face your cavalry and move it through your columns to the rear. The infantry swings into line in the same motion and now you are ready to unleash your high-powered volleys. It is crucial to engineer your approach to ensure that you shoot first, and at close range. If necessary, re-roll dice to "lose" the initiative and thus build up the penalty marker in your favor, to ensure that you have it when you need it.

Do not use the bayonet, unless the enemy is down to 1 SP. Charging only evens the odds, while musketry duels keep the advantage completely in your hands. (This is especially true against the sturdy Russians. Shoot them down; never close to contact.)

Against the Ottomans, you will have to take a page from the British strategy tips: deploy as if fighting the Zulus, hugging the board-edge in a little squarish formation. The Turks will not dare approach too close to your infantry, since one well-placed Prussian volley is enough to dispatch a unit of Turks. Unfortunately this means a drawn game, but let's see how frustrated the Sultan gets after a while, and perhaps he will make a mistake.

Russia

The Russians are like a brick wall with cannons sticking out. They can deploy more artillery than all other armies, and relatively cheaply. These can be formed as a single Force, which creates a literal "dead-zone" and thus dictates the enemy approach, or they can be dispersed among your Forces to help soften up attackers as they approach. (The latter is especially useful for forcing enemies to deploy from columns earlier.)

Unfortunately, a combination of factors results in the Russians being a bit of a one-trick pony: they are a defender's army. Their sub-commanders are too slow-minded, their artillery is bulky and largely stationary, and they have sent all their cavalry off to the Crimea, meaning that they are inadequately provided with horsemen. Moreover, their most important advantage – the stubbornness of their infantry – mandates a defensive approach.

Very well. Defend in depth, with a reserve of your best infantry units kept in columns in the rear, with the sub-commander perhaps having his lapels in the hands of the general (because otherwise the sleepy Russians generals can't react very quickly to changing circumstances.)

Since your cavalry is inadequate for standing up to a real "horsey" army like the Austrians, you might as well use Cossacks so that you can cover a retreat or pursue a beaten foe. Being so cheap, Cossacks are a no-brainer against smaller enemies. Against the Turks, however, they are a pointless effort, since you will never match their numbers. In that case you might as well purchase good heavy cavalry and teach those Tartars a thing or two. (Luckily, even though your cavalry is not numerous, your heavies are real first-rate troopers.) One final consideration is that against the Turks, you can take the optional army list that evens out your cavalry imbalance substantially. Still, at the end of the day, you are not a mounted army.

In order to play to your strengths on the defense, you may wish to deploy artillery in each Force – particularly if you like your position and intend to stay there for a while. Be sure that the artillery is on the edge of the infantry line in each Force, so that if it's overrun it won't break your chain of command. If you prefer to mass the artillery, then place your cavalry reserve directly behind it. If enemy horse threatens, you can ride through the guns and drive the enemies off, or at least force them to bounce back. If you time it well (i.e., if he attacks while moving first in the pulse), you can even set it up so that the enemy bounces back, and then your cavalry fades back through the guns, leaving the enemy horse wounded, and standing within your artillery fire zone.)

Against the shooty armies (the British and Prussians) you have a real problem, because they will not oblige you by closing with the bayonet. Consequently, you will have to take the fight to them instead, after the first volley. Try not to let that first volley come at close range (otherwise, after the Prussians finish with you, you won't have enough SPs left to pass your attack tests.) Even though you may well lose several units through this method, bear in mind that the British and Prussians have a very low tolerance for pain. And once reduced by 3-4 SPs, the Prussians aren't so fearsome anymore.