

# **My Toy Soldiers & Me**

**Second edition: Revised & updated**

**A personal experience that began in the nineteen-fifties**

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**A personal experience that began in the nineteen-fifties**

**Alejo Dorca**



*To my grandchildren*

*Si vis pacem, para bellum*



## Introduction

I love toy soldiers as a hobby. I have always liked to play with them, but the ways I've played have changed with my age. As an adult, my interest has been as a collector. As the title implies, this book explains my passion for toy soldiers, but it will also describe my frustrations and mistakes along the years.

Since I was very young, I have been a fan of this inoffensive and at the same time greatly entertaining hobby. I assumed that to fully enjoy it, you only needed a lot of imagination and a bit of common sense, or vice versa.

I had a very normal childhood. Like any kid of my generation, I liked to play cops and robbers, pirates from the Caribbean Sea, cowboys and Indians, and similar games. I was much influenced by movies and later by TV series, as these kinds of entertainment were readily available in the early '50s. My friends and I had a lot of stories to choose from, and some of us also liked to read adventure books. Playing with toy soldiers was also a great activity when winter or bad weather forced our games indoors.

I remember with nostalgia how when my brother and I were children, all gifts were used to fill the respective arsenals of our small band. Our granny and a spinster aunt provided the most potentially deadly items. You know what I mean—pistols, rifles, swords, disguises, and the like. With its wonderful eclecticism, our kit could simultaneously include the “singing sword” and the shield with the red horse head from *Prince Valiant*, a couple of Old West pistols, *Zorro's* rapier, and any other kind of weapon. If it were summer and the weapons could shoot water, so much the better. But the best of the pistols were the metal ones that burned red strips of small gunpowder charges, with an awful noise and a gratifyingly realistic smell. What today is called reenactment was our daily pastime.

But if reenactment was a collective game, my passion for toy soldiers started as a solo one. I loved to play with my soldiers on the floor. First my granddad showed me how to parade them. This was fun for a while because many of them were in marching poses. Afterwards I started





to build fortifications with cork blocks (not actually intended for that purpose, I guess), and wooden western forts and castles (some of them using plastic building blocks I still have today, mind!) provided additional suitable scenery. From then on I simply played games with the soldiers, still on the floor of the nursery room—how lucky I was to have a room for myself to play!

I was not to stay on the floor forever. The next evolution of play came along with boxed games that included rules and dice. *Great Battles of the World*, they were called, and I played against my school friends. *Metauro*, *Little Bighorn*, and *El Alamein* were the best. My little brother, ten years younger than I, joined me in applying those rules to existing “other periods,” mainly Napoleonic, in a sort of free kriegspiel over the dining room table (which was quite long).

Following a long interval that included puberty, sports, military service, and marriage, I was seduced by Airfix armies, Minifigs 25 mm lead soldiers, and so on. Then came serious collecting in 54 mm and adventures in other scales, mainly 6 mm, and finally, in what is probably the future of my wargaming, customized Playmobil figures. Simply take this introduction as a short resume showing the evolution of my involvement with toy soldiers since 1952.

I was reading about centuries gone by at an early age, as I had the luck to have a lot of history books at home. The idea of recreating history on a tabletop has always been around, and it still amuses me today. The best way to define what I do is probably to call myself a builder of armies.

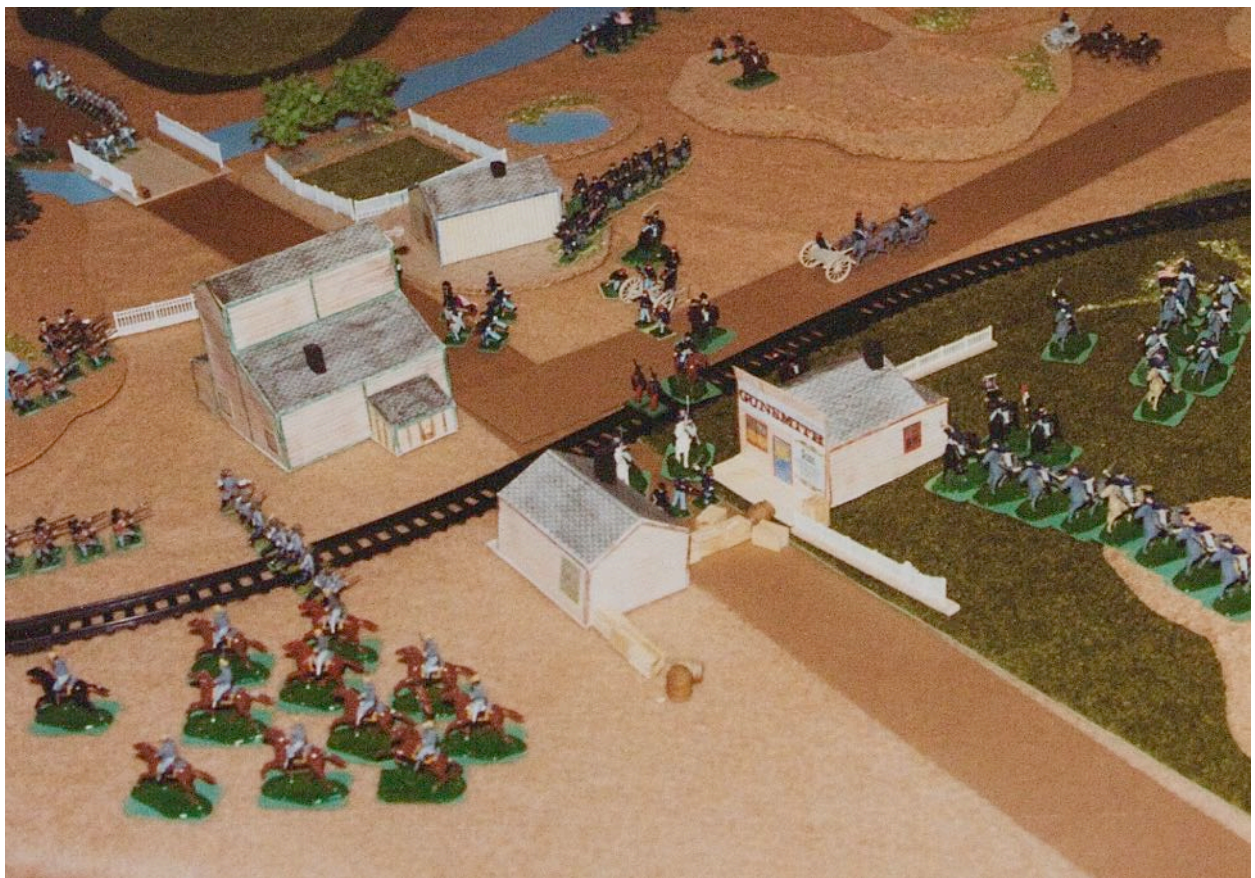
I have always been fascinated by the history of mankind, and there, of course, you always find wars. And who fights wars? The real war is the job of soldiers. But wargaming has nothing to do with real war, and the only way to get access to the command of fictitious soldiers is physically, using miniature models like toy soldiers, or virtually, playing computer games.

I really enjoyed battling my younger brother with Napoleonic 54 mm rubber or plastic miniatures, duking it out in surreal conflicts to the last man on the dining room table. Looking back, my brother and I had much more fun when we did not know about concepts like morale, nationality, troop types, and the rest of the factors or variables included in more modern wargame rules.

I guess I can rightly be considered an old-school wargamer. With the introduction of modern wargames, I believe we lost forever those magnificent last stands by a single soldier, or those charges of cavalry against artillery batteries.

As my brother has quite truthfully said, this little book is a geeky exercise in self-justification. Before I'm accused of being a warmonger or any other similar aberration, let's analyse with clarity what exactly this kind of hobby encompasses. It is an addiction to military miniature toy soldiers, and it involves collecting the stuff, painting and converting the figures, and occasionally even fighting some wargames with them.

First of all, I acknowledge that in my case, this is an activity firmly rooted in the study of history, essentially focused on the world's most famous battles and military campaigns. A priori, I think it's intellectually sane. Reading about history is an activity that's culturally understood and generally approved, and many books on history, both fiction and nonfiction, are rightfully



considered classics.

In the second place, looking mainly at the brighter side of this hobby, we must consider the pure gaming aspect. If we focus on the game component, we will see that wargames are made up of miniature toy soldiers and official game rules. We adults simply enjoy playing with toy soldiers in a more sophisticated and convoluted way.

The key word of the whole thing, of course, is competition. The use of miniature toy soldiers in a competitive way is relevant for this book, but we all know that the ultimate competition is real war in the real world.

Third, I must add that there is also a very important artistic approach to the hobby. It includes all aspects of modelling—sculpting, manual work, DIY, art techniques, painting, varnishing, airbrushing, spraying, working with clay, converting measurements to a certain scale, and even landscaping in miniature. Those aesthetic activities increase the hobbyist's visual pleasure and personal satisfaction. Some even stop at the diorama creation and become military modellers. The very best of them are highly skilled artists, and their productions are displayed in museums and at expositions.

Probably the last factor is the collecting habit. At the end of our involvement with the hobby, we have indulged in collecting miniature toy soldiers, whether that was our initial purpose or not.

There are members of the hobby who do not play games with their miniature armies, especially those who are extraordinarily good painters and prefer a matte finish. They usually ascribe to the purest form of military modelling.

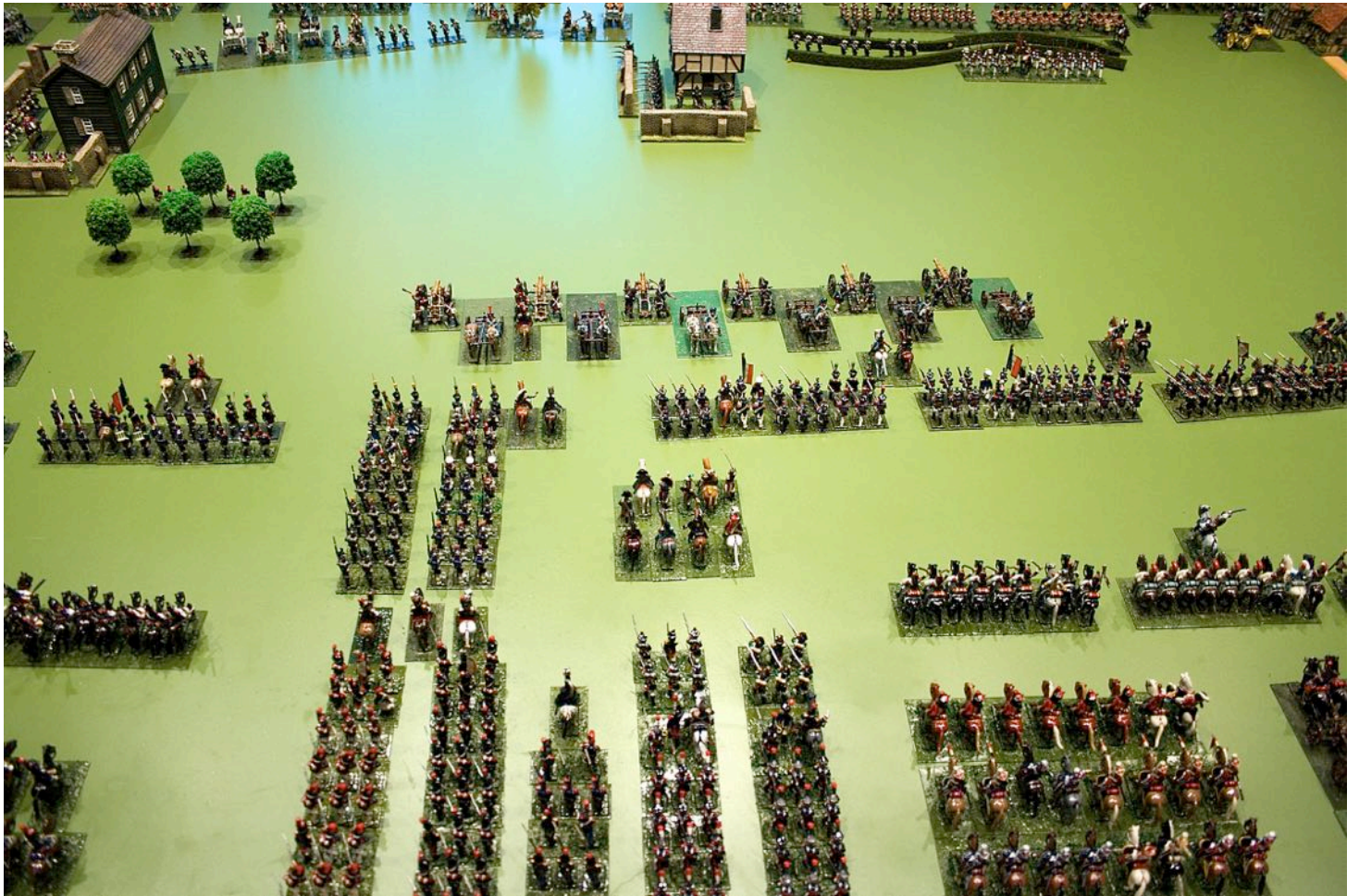
The same can usually be said of those who collect toy soldiers in the 54 mm scale. Whether they collect older or vintage models or newer, more recent brands, many of them have no playing in their minds at all.

Some of the buyers of wargame figures would be very surprised if I said to them that they are military modellers in a big way. It is true that they do it in a smaller scale, but they also do it in great quantities and are building a collection.

Military modellers do not even think about wargaming with their figures. They dedicate their time and effort to building dioramas, or they simply display their pieces in cabinets. They normally go for the bigger scales, mainly 54 mm and larger, in which details are more easily appreciated and worked artistically to achieve the full potential of the available information and documentation.

The great quality of today's smaller-scale miniatures in design and proportion makes it possible for the pure "wargame" figures to cross into the military modelling field, moving the frontier scale of modelling steadily downwards in size.

All in all, collecting and arranging miniature soldiers is a gratifying hobby from a cultural point of view. War is the subject of many books, comics, movies, and video games. "Playing war," whether in highly official, competitive public games or in solo ventures, is socially acceptable. It's artistically challenging to paint your own figures, like the majority of wargamers or modellers and some collectors do. And finally, it has a strong potential of becoming a collecting passion.



In later chapters you will read about the usual megalomania of the wargamer, or the “if I only had one more battalion” syndrome.

It is to your great advantage to be able to read books in their original language, even if some are grossly nationalistic in approach. One of the most sobering exercises is to read about Waterloo in English and in French (sadly, my German is too poor by far). In some English-language books, the crucial intervention of the Prussians is so downplayed that you feel they were passersby or spectators. Be grateful if they mention the Dutch and Belgian or Hanoverian contingents at all. But to be fair, if you read French books about Waterloo, some barely stop short of calling it a French victory. Read the works (translated to English) by Dr. Peter Hofschröder, and you will understand what the Germans think about it.

Let me say at this point that I have always been a fan of action novels, especially if they're military related, and their film adaptations. I love original films in the genre too. *Beau Geste* (the Gary Cooper version by William Wellman), *The Four Feathers* (the 1939 Korda brothers version), and *The Horse Soldiers*, by the master John Ford, are my top three favourite films.

I personally think that playing wargames on the tabletop works better once enough time has passed and you can separate it from the horrific side of real war. Anything up to but not including the second Boer War is enough for me. But I understand those wargamers who do play more recent periods, like World War II, because my brother is one of them.

We will detail this in the following chapters, but let's say that in my opinion, the four basic pillars of the hobby are:

**Culture.** This is understood in its more ample sense as the sum of knowledge about a particular period or in general, depending on the source (comic strips, books, movies, video games, or websites). In my case, evidently, culture is mainly related to military campaigns and battles, whether these are based on real facts or are purely fictional.

**Gaming.** The playing side is always present as an end but also as a mean. Maybe it's better said like this: you play in such different ways that perhaps “gaming” or “entertainment” is in a wide sense also included in the other points.

**Aesthetics.** This is the result of any human activity, be it manual or semi-industrial, that transforms, modifies, sculpts, paints, or creates something new or concrete using basic elements.

**Collecting.** A miniature toy soldier does not make a collection by itself, but a dozen of them, depending on rarity, period, quality, size, composition, painting style, manufacturer, or other factors, could represent a small collection, and



even a valuable one. Not all collections are so known because they contain thousands of items.

I think that every one of us in his approach to the hobby is a polynomial percentage addition of those four factors, and what is more, they will change with time and won't remain fixed for long periods. Some of them may be involved in only one or two of these things. There are collectors who never play, wargamers who have not painted a figure in their lives, experts in military history who do not even think for a second about buying toy soldiers, and finally professional painters of figures who do it for others and do not wargame or collect themselves.







## I

### History as the First Step

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, access to information has grown exponentially and is ready available to anyone with a mild interest. Surely this has helped the hobby a lot.

We have all been exposed to history since our school days, and soldiers and wars are a big, spectacular chunk of it—dramatic, exciting, and adventurous, but also terrible. So when we are children, we tend to pursue models of conduct or behaviours to imitate. And from where do we draw inspiration? Some of us surely are influenced by the great feats of history and their main actors.

In our youth, it is easy to empathize with legendary characters like Achilles, Leonidas, Alexander, Hannibal, Scipio, and King Arthur. But there are also the anonymous heroes—the French Foreign Legionnaire, the Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman, the lonesome cowboy, and the musketeer. There are plenty of examples in real or fictional tales of people worth trying to imitate.

You will certainly notice with experience that it is very difficult to ascertain if war is a period of disturbance in between long years of peace, or, on the contrary, peace is just a resting time between wars. Be that as it may, paradoxically enough, the least boring pages of history (for those inclined towards studying it) are dedicated to the great variety of the multiple and periodic war chapters of mankind.

You will learn that tribes, nations, and states have long solved their differences of opinion about land ownership, hunting and fishing rights, mining, women's abduction, herding limits, water rights, religion (including interpretations of the same religion), and similar conflicts of interest in a violent manner—war. Those differences in opinion were and still are solved using the weapons at hand. Humanity has used sticks and stones, swords and lances, bows and arrows. It has fought on foot or mounted on animals. It has used battleships and navies to control of

the seas. It has developed rifles, machine guns, grenades, tanks, aeroplanes, mustard gas and other chemical weapons, long-distance bombing, and intercontinental missiles with nuclear warheads. It remains to be seen if we will be mad enough to battle in outer space.

That tendency to be violent is documented mainly but not exclusively in history books. Religious texts describe it too, as a matter of fact, and just as in history books, conflicts are sometimes downplayed, sometimes emphasized, and, in the great majority of cases, unashamedly manipulated by the winners.

At first this learning pastime is merely a passion for war history in general. But in due time, you will likely come to specialize in one, two, or more discrete periods. This interest is absorbing enough in itself, and the majority of readers will stop there and then and become just that—history buffs.

For those of us who go on to reenact conflicts on tabletops, however, whether those conflicts are ancient or imaginary, or we simply enjoy collecting toy soldiers, the ability to suspend reality and obviate the more disagreeable aspects of our favourite periods is essential. Having the capacity to separate the real-world facts from your imaginary context is crucial if you are to have fun with it.

The dreams of many classic science-fiction writers have become a reality. Today the works of writers like Jules Verne, H.G. Wells, and R.L. Stevenson are considered true literary classics. And the accelerated spiral of progress has converted their greatest nightmares into third-page small-type news.

One day you might conclude that in those big piles of historical wars, there is one (or maybe more) that interests you in particular. Maybe you feel empathy for a particular general, king, or emperor, and understand his or her strategic and tactical dilemmas. You sympathize with the tragic decisions he had to make with very little information at hand, enduring treason and disloyalty, until he brilliantly led the army or his forces to victory—or, in the worst case, to final, magnificent, Homeric defeat!

A great number of theorists and practical wargamers are obsessed with showing what they would have done better under the circumstances. There is even a very well-known joke about the general who turned victory into defeat, “snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.” From the moment you started asking yourself *What if?*, you are, in following your imagination, a potential wargamer.

We have talked about your love for history books, your growing curiosity for military campaigns and their real protagonists, and how a certain period has become your pet subject. What’s the next step? Obviously it’s to go deeper into detail. You will need to find that rare, possibly out-of-print book about your subject. Maybe you read a too-short article and need to know more. Does a monographic study exist? Or maybe a historical novel? There are some very good ones around. Is there a good film about it? This is all quite possible, especially if you have chosen one of the more popular historical periods.

Little by little, getting more and better information becomes a kind of gentle mania or

obsession. Have you checked the Internet? Google? Wikipedia? Do it, please; it will help you immensely and is usually a rewarding experience. What sort of new information do you find? Are the sources too biased? Does more than one author deal with the subject? Do you have the chance to get the version from both sides? Certainly you are in for great surprises in that field, ones that are even quite culturally brutal sometimes. Maybe there are materials translated into your native language—or maybe you are already a polyglot, or have the knack of learning languages quickly. Don't forget to try your local public library. Maybe someone in your family can be a resource for books.

Have you friends with the same interests? That would be very lucky indeed, but even if you don't, you will make cyberfriends via online forums easily enough.

Gosh! The more deeply you go into it, the more images you find, and many of them are in full colour—oil paintings, watercolours, sketches, drawings, panoramas, maps, and the like. In a very moderate span of time, you will be an expert on the uniforms (if they existed in your favourite period), arms, and weapons of the time.

If you choose to recreate this period in a three-dimensional way, you will buy toy soldiers. If two-dimensional is enough for you, or the scale of your dreams is too big strategically, you will quickly join the hex-and-counter fraternity, a group of wargamers who prefer to do their reenactments on a game board.

And if you ever see that battle or campaign in miniature before you, and you experiment with your particular (or peculiar) theories about it, you might go to the extreme of trying different approaches to see if you would have done better or worse, if the result would have been different if you had been in command. By now you are already another “armchair general,” because you would have attacked or defended differently, or even retreated or tried a flanking movement. The real fun is that, certainly enough, your toy soldiers will follow you!

Here starts the true primal choosing and election process.

**Video games.** They are not the subject of this book, but some of them are very good. I have personally tried *Age of Empires* and *North and South* and had real fun with them. The first time I tried *Bull Run*, I marched my brigade to oblivion, meaning I took the wrong direction and spent about half an hour walking my men straight away from the battle. Younger generations will go for video games without a second thought, at least initially; maybe the endless options of a tabletop wargame will attract them later on.

**Board games.** When it comes to wargames, the board game category usually means cardboard counters over a hexagonal grid. I mention them even though they do not always use toy soldiers because they are very popular and have their own legion of followers. Many of these are really very good and challenging games. They are also useful for the toy soldier wargamer who plays a campaign, because somehow they are ideal to set a frame previously to a tabletop battle, even if there are other ways to fix that approach that are

faster and simpler.

**Elemental wargames with a grid board and figures.** This is the missing link between pure wargame and board games, though it's sometimes too quickly condemned as childish. I do still proudly possess two of my first ones, *Metauro* and *Little Bighorn*, and once or twice a year, we enjoy a quick and simple game with them. My *El-Alamein* game of the same brand got lost somehow, probably because it was never so playable as the other two. And remember, I hate both twentieth-century world wars!

**The pure wargame.** This is played with lead or plastic toy soldiers. It's played on really big arenas, with or without a grid between them. The latter case usually includes scenery that will instantly remind you of model railways, with or without trains. This implies the use of a metric ruler and probably a patient judge or referee.

As you will have already guessed, this book deals mainly with the last category, but not exclusively. The others are mentioned here and there with due respect. After all, a person's hobbies could include many things, from bird-watching to train-watching to radio-control modelling, and have you ever seen those nice ships on a pond? Whatever, really. We must respect everyone's particular hobbies. To each its own pleasure.

In case your love of history does move you to recreate on a tabletop with miniature toy soldiers a famous battle represented at least by a couple of armies and the terrain they march through, you will become a member of an international fraternity: the wargamers.

Whether the battles are historical or fantasy does not matter, as all are fantasy to some degree. I must confess that once, I indulged in buying a Games Workshop Bretonnian army, lured merely by the look of them! Nowadays they're in the ranks of my brother's fantasy armies.

Let's all be humble and never ridicule the periods loved by other members of the big wargame collective, even if fans are centuries apart. Your thing might be ancients, while another might love sci-fi starships armed with proton guns. So be it.

I should explain that I use the term "tabletop" because I prefer tables to floors when it comes to wargaming. Using the floor, apart from harming your knees from a certain age onwards, invariably produces the undesirable effect of walking on part of your setup, to your considerable regret.

So, then, we can establish the first postulate of the wargamer:

**Be respectful of other people's hobbies and the periods other wargamers choose. You do not really know if one day you will end up indulging in them too!**

The excess of information accumulated will bring small problems to the fore, and you will

have to make radical decisions. For example, you might be disgusted to realize that in the Austerlitz period (1805), the French line infantry did not use the same headgear as in Waterloo (1815); infantry at Waterloo wore a shako instead of a bicorn. What that does imply? Mainly that if you use the lovingly painted minis of the French Imperial Army of the North (1815), which some manufacturers have produced for that late period of the Napoleonic Wars, in a recreation of the Battle of the Three Emperors (1805), as Austerlitz is known, you run the risk that someone will loudly comment on the anachronism. It's doubtful, but the possibility is there, and you know it. Real geeks will have the minis with the correct headgear for both battles. In fact, the British infantry shako used at Waterloo, named the "Belgian shako," and the one used in the peninsula (Portugal and Spain campaigns), named the "stovepipe shako," were also of different design. The same happens with the cavalry headgear of the many nations involved in the Napoleonic Wars. After all, the time span of these wars is about twenty years, and military fashion also changes. The same occurs with the organization of the battalions, the number of companies, and the number of men in them, in all the participants' nations.

It is also useful to mention here that even if you can get most of what you need in the correct scale from your favourite manufacturer—something quite difficult but not impossible—you will soon learn that not all the figures you want or need are now or ever were produced by that manufacturer. That means you will have to adapt the soldiers yourself. Sometimes that only means using a different paint colour, or moving to smaller scales like 10 or 6 mm. But one day you will have to learn how to make conversions. Are things getting too complicated? Do not be afraid; it is a simple natural evolution inside the hobby, and it's not so hard to do. Everybody finally does it and is usually very proud of the results.

Let's mention the second wargamer's postulate:

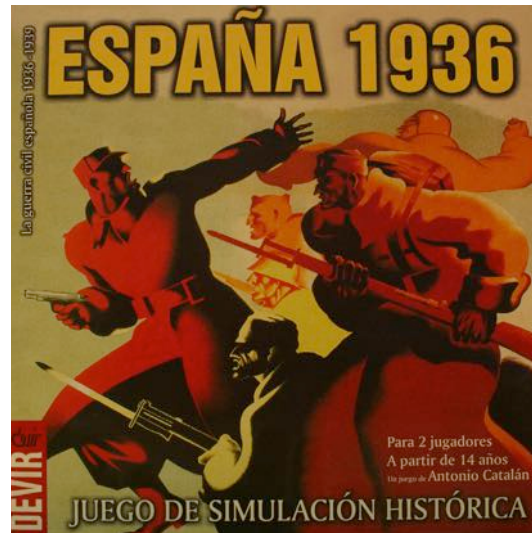
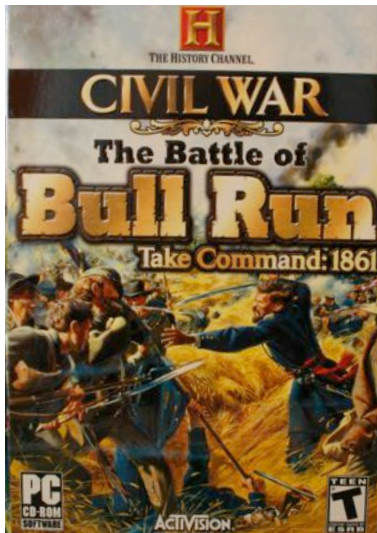
**For different reasons, you will have to compromise between historical accuracy and its formal representation on the tabletop.**

Even so, the aesthetic result will be quite gratifying, the game itself won't be affected in the least, and your historical reality on the tabletop will still be, to a high degree, very satisfactory.

Another collateral damage that is impossible to avoid and is direct result of the previously mentioned accumulated knowledge is that you will soon be able to detect a high number of mistakes of all kinds in historical movies and novels. Who really cares if the colour of the trousers worn by the Seventeenth Lancers at Balaclava in 1854 was not cherry red? Who, that is, apart from those of us in the wargame hobby?

To end this chapter, I'll just say that your particular "thing," if it ever happens, will be a direct or indirect consequence of being exposed to history. Some of you will be intrigued by it, and consequently, alternative "what if" scenarios will develop. But not everyone develops an interest in tabletop wargaming, of course. On the contrary, the vast majority of people simply acknowledge the past as it is told (by the victors) more or less truthfully in history books and then concentrate on the next future. Some of those might join the ranks of sci-fi fans or fantasy geeks.

As my personal experience goes, though, it all starts with a deep passion for history.









## II

### Basic Influences

Who in their childhood did not read adventure books? Or at least get his hands on an epic comic, or see a swashbuckling movie or war film? And then, after the experience, went to the toy box, whatever the size of it, and recreated the story with little or no care about matching exactly uniforms, weapons or other details in general?

Oh, boy! Those were the days. Entertainment was first, and the grown-up wargamer's search for perfection and precision—sometimes a bit sick—was in our distant future.

I fondly remember the excellent pages from that classic *Boy's Own Adventure* saga by P.C. Wren about the Geste brothers—Beau Geste, Good Gestes, Beau Sabreur, Beau Ideal, and Spanish Maine. When I was young, Wren was one of my favourite writers, along with R.L. Stevenson, Jack London, Zane Grey, Kenneth Roberts, Oliver Curwood, Jules Verne, Rafael Sabatini, Emilio Salgari, H. Rider Haggard, and all the rest. This is just to let you know that I have a very wide taste in literature, ranging from Leo Tolstoy to Sven Hassel and anything in between. P.C. Wren also wrote a French Foreign Legion book titled *Soldiers of Misfortune*, in which he describes in full and glorious detail what are usually known as “games in the attic.” The siege of Khartoum and the expedition to save the life of General Gordon is the leitmotiv of a game played on the floor with more or less appropriate toy soldier figures, the fact that among the troops of the Madhi there was a contingent of Old West Indians was not considered incongruous at all, and the qualification “irregular” was used in an ample sense.

I know every generation has its own particular heroes and soundtracks, but let me mention briefly some of mine, together with the films I've seen and enjoyed since the '50s, just to show that their powerful influences are still there.

The books I enjoyed in my youth had a great influence on me. The above-mentioned *Beau Geste* made me a compulsive buyer of French Foreign Legion-related movies, books, and toy

soldiers of any scale or material. Another favourite was an abridged version of J. Fennimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. Anecdotally, the new film adaptation is much more exciting and less philosophical than the original book. It's a marvellous thing when the movie is better than the novel. Another example of this case is *The Duellists*, by Ridley Scott. Note that the original novel is based on absolutely incredible true fact. Some of my other favourites were *Sandokan*, by Emilio Salgari; Dumas's *The Three Musketeers* and their sequels; and a children's biography of Stonewall Jackson, my favourite "Reb" general.

In my games I always sided with the Union, thanks to John Ford and John Wayne; I saw the movie *The Horse Soldiers* many times in my youth. I had free entrance to the ground-floor cinema in my block of flats, and every afternoon after school, I went in and watched movies (when interesting) until suppertime.

Those who did not read those kinds of adventure books or see those kinds of motion pictures lost a golden opportunity. Nothing can be done about it now except to read the books or see the films as an adult, but believe me, it is never too late.

Even harder is not to have been exposed to epic comics like *Prince Valiant*, *Tim Tyler's Luck*, *The Phantom*, *Lieutenant Blueberry*, *McCoy*, *Corto Maltés*, *Sauvage* or *Flash Gordon*. Alex Raymond, Hal Foster, and Giraud/Moebius are still my favourite authors/artists in that field.

There are many adventure books still published today. For example, there are the sagas about El Capitán Alatriste, Sharpe, Hornblower, Aubrey/Maturin, and a handful of minor characters, as in British pulp military fiction. These have never lost the public's interest. What about the recent success of films like *Gladiator*, *Master and Commander*, or *300*? And it would also be very unjust not to mention the sheer number of military-themed video games.

Then you have the true film classics in black and white, the real old masters of adventure like *Captain Blood*, *The Sea Hawk*, *Lives of a Bengal Lancer*, *They Died with Their Boots On*, *Fort Apache*, *Zorro*, and the champion of adaptations, *The Three Musketeers*. Add to the lot *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Drum*, *The Plainsman*, *Gunga Din*, *Stagecoach*, *Rio Grande*—just about any old black-and-white war or adventure film, really.

Of course, then come the full Technicolor films: *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*, *North West Mounted Police*, *The Vikings*, *El Cid*, *Braveheart*, *Cromwell*, *Alatriste*, *Poltava*, *Barry Lyndon*, *The Crossing*, *The Patriot*, *The Duellists*, *Captain Horatio Hornblower*, *War and Peace*, *Waterloo*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, *Gods and Generals*, *Gettysburg*, *Zulu Dawn*, *Zulu*, *Khartoum*, *The Four Feathers*, *Breaker Morant*, *Fifty-Five Days in Peking*, and *March or Die*.

More recently, epics seem to have become TV series. *Son of the Morning Star* is probably the best ever recreation of the Little Bighorn campaign and battle.

I do not mention films about the two world wars, Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, Iraq, or Afghanistan, mainly because these events are simply too fresh and are already well known to most of you.

Now, if like me you have been influenced by many of these, you are ready for the next logical step: playing at it in the form of wargame, reenactment, military modelling, collecting, board games, or video games, whatever way you choose. Probably at what age and how we play are a synthesis of what separates the kid or preadolescent from the adult who has not lost his gaming

roots.

One of my favourite periods is (or was, for more than thirty years) the Napoleonic Wars, and the colourful uniforms were one of the main reasons, though not the only one. I loved the idea of less-accurate weapons, and the generals leading from the front.

I can wargame (or play board games) with a more modern feel because my little brother is a WWII freak, but they are the exception to the rule. For wargame purposes, I do not own any post-1900 soldier figures.

Actually, the wargame has been strongly supported by the comparative luxury of specialized magazines, and if some of the oldest have stopped publication nowadays, I can recommend to you *Wargames Illustrated*, *Vae Victis*, *Dadi e Piombo*, and even the Spanish *Wargames: Soldados y Estrategia* (which also has an English edition) and *Desperta Ferro*.

The oldest magazine in the market is *Military Modelling*. It is very useful when you need detailed information on a subject, but it's mainly aimed at the diorama-oriented military modeller. It's normally very serious, "down to the last detail" stuff, but of course we wargamers also profit from it.

Fans of the traditional toy soldier (54 mm) have in *Toy Soldier and Model Figure* perhaps the best magazine for their own approach to the hobby. The frontiers of interest between those magazines and aficionados in their respective fields of interest are actually much more intermingled, and this tendency increases every day.

For decades, England's Osprey Military Books has published materials about wars, campaigns, uniforms, vehicles (ships, tanks, and aeroplanes), and more. Tell me about a wargamer or military modeller who has not got an Osprey book—he would be the exception to the rule. In some aspects the books are quite basic. They contain republished or condensed information, usually with excellent colour drawings, like those of the late Angus McBride. From these publications you can jump to more exhaustive and complete books once you're really hooked. They are very good quality for money and undoubtedly the place to start. For those among you who are really nostalgic, let me mention the Almark and Blandford books, which are even earlier and consequently dear to my heart for nostalgic reasons.

As it happens, you can also read the true classics of literature if you're interested enough to get the feel of a particular era. Authors like Homer, Polybius, Livy, Arrian, Thucydides, Julius Caesar, Von Clausewitz, T.E. Lawrence, or Winston Churchill, and compilations of philosophy like the Bushido or the works of Sun-Tzu, reveal their historical eras in all their splendour.

Another search we pursue is the "fountains." Very recently I bought a book of short stories published by *The Saturday Evening Post*, because included in them was the original short story "Command," by James Warner Bellah. It was the basis of the script for the John Ford movie *She Wore a Yellow Ribbon*. Since then I also discovered a compilation of James Warner Bellah's American cavalry tales, and of course I got it and read it nonstop cover to cover.

This permanent search is always in the back of your mind, and when the opportunity arises, you try to get new materials ASAP, as when I got Harold Sinclair's novel *The Horse Soldiers* and its sequel, *The Cavalryman*. This passion for books related to the hobby and era remains present

all your life, I guess.

I think that there are modern authors whose works would be considered classics in their own time. I can heartily recommend Shelby Foote, Bruce Catton, Byron Farwell, David Chandler, Douglas Porch, Alessandro Barbero, and many more historians, but also the likes of Bernard Cornwell, C.S. Forester, Adrian Goldsworthy, Tom Clancy, Arturo Perez-Reverte, Santiago Posteguillo and the rest of the masters of the historical fiction genre.

Quite recently, the French editors of *Histoire and Collections* have been producing a series of very good reference works about military uniforms of the first French empire, with versions in French and English. The Imperial Guard alone is presented in no fewer than five compact books; these books are absolutely indispensable for the Napoleonic wargamer who paints his own figures. They even have produced two volumes about the American Civil War, the first they've ever done, that are also quite to the point.

Let me mention also that the Lucien Rousselot's *planches* are finally available in the form of a lavish book. It was about time! Napoleonic fans should be happy at last.

In a little book like this one, it would be hard to mention all the excellent history books and novels I can recommend. So be sensible and surf a bit online at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, FNAC, Wikipedia, or similar sites, and you will have at hand tons of information. All of them offer links to what you want to know. Even doing a Google search or two should do the trick

Like good journalists do, make sure you check your information against several sources, as there are some funny people who enjoy practical jokes, like the person who added an "N Company" to the Wikipedia entry for the Battle of the Little Bighorn (no need to look for it, I deleted it myself!). Once all this is said, we can move on to a more detailed approach to the subject of this book.

Just a word about wargame conventions like Salute in London, which is probably the best known in Europe. There you will see extraordinary samples of craftsmanship, with pictures of some of it published in wargame magazines. I recall a fragment of the D-Day beaches or the action known as Pegasus Bridge. All wargamers must attend a big convention at least once in their lives. It is a unique experience for those lucky enough to do it, just for the sake of seeing what other wargamers are doing, and what a well-organized club can do.

By now we have already established that you do not have valid excuses for not gathering basic or detailed information.





### III

#### Wargames and the Question *What If?*

As we have already mentioned the Internet, let's see what Wikipedia says about wargaming and miniature wargaming. Here is what appeared the day I consulted the site; keep in mind that Wikipedia is always changing, so this entry might have changed since.

*Miniature wargaming is a form of wargaming, which incorporates miniature figures, miniature armor and modeled terrain as the main components of play. Like other types of wargames, they can be generally considered to be a type of simulation game, generally about tactical combat, as opposed to computer and board wargames which have greater variety in scale.*

*While such games could also be played with counters on a table with colored paper to denote terrain types, the visual attractiveness and tactile satisfaction of painted miniatures moving around on a table with model trees, hills and other scenery has such an alluring power to convince many wargamers to prefer model/miniature games over the cheaper and easier board-and-chits alternatives.*

*One of the main reasons for playing miniature wargames, in both these respects, is because it offers players more freedom of play and a more aesthetically pleasing tactical element over traditional games or computer games. Additionally, many hobbyists enjoy the challenge of painting miniatures and constructing scenery. In many ways, miniature wargaming may be seen as combining many of the aesthetics of tabletop train modelling with an open strategy game predominantly, though not exclusively, with a military theme. There is also a large social component to wargames as very often games are played with several participants on a side.*

*There are any numbers of sets of miniature wargaming rules, some of which are available without charge on the Internet. Scenarios may depict actual historical situations and battles, or they may be hypothetical “what if?” situations. There are also fantasy and science fiction games with attendant wizards, spacecraft and other genres. Rules also vary in the scale they depict: one figure to one soldier is the most common for fantasy and some historical rules, but many historical systems presume that one figure represents hundreds or even thousands of men.*

*A wargame is a game that simulates or represents a military operation. Wargaming is the hobby dedicated to the play of such games...the general consensus is that they are not only games about conflict or warfare, but that they must realistically simulate war to some degree. Depending on the style and scale of the game, such factors as flanking, supply, line of sight, terrain, and morale may be considered.*

Collecting miniature soldiers has had its ups and downs, but it has always been there in modern times, and it has been affordable since at least the early twentieth century.

One of the pleasures of wargaming is exploring the possible variants of a known military action, the “what if.” Let’s use the very well known Battle of the Little Bighorn (also called Custer’s Last Stand and Custer’s Massacre), fought on Sunday, June 25, 1876. Lieutenant Colonel (brevet General American Civil War) George Armstrong Custer was at the head of the Seventh Cavalry Regiment (for once serving with all its companies together), approaching the biggest concentration of Plains Indians of any day and at any place during the so-called “Indian Wars.”

Nearly 140 years later, there are a great many facts still unknown about the Battle of the Little Bighorn (or the Greasy Grass, to use the Native American name for it), a thing that in view of the small number of troops and natives involved makes it an ideal example to illustrate the argument. (Incidentally, I also do have a hex-and-counter board game of it, a present from my brother.)

What was Custer’s original plan? Is there still someone around who thinks Custer had no plan at all and was merely reacting to situations as they developed? I personally feel that those who think that were rewarded three years later at Major Reno’s court martial verdict. And I agree with those who believe that there was enough whitewash to paint Chicago.

The army used Custer as a scapegoat and decided that everything was his fault. Ironically, that gave him an immortal place in history. Today wargamers can decide on a previous plan and try different alternatives.

What if Major Reno had not panicked and retired too soon, had run away or “charged to the rear”? And what if Captain Benteen had galloped to the rescue



instead of procrastinating, as Pennington's book *Custer Vindicated* suggests?

And what if Benteen had followed Custer's tracks instead of halting to help major Reno? Is "Benteen, come on, big village, be quick. Bring packs" a peremptory order from his commander or not?

And what if Custer, once he saw the size of the villages, and if he had not been wounded (who really knows the details?) while trying to cross at Medicine Tail Coulee or later on, but sooner than everybody has assumed, had retired on his supports? Like Reno in fact tried to do, but with less panic?

And what if Custer had kept the three wings of the Seventh in supporting distance? Or what if he had only divided the regiment in two parts instead of three (not counting the "fourth" compulsory subdivision, i.e., the mule train and escort)?

Would things have been different if he had not refused the three extra cavalry companies of another regiment and also the Gatling guns offered to him?

As you can see, even a small, well-known military action can be analysed and played in many practical ways and generate many different scenarios.

Nowadays there are excellent ranges of miniatures in 25/28 mm produced by Wargames Foundry and Old Glory, and by Minifigs or Peter Pig in 15 mm. I also like the even smaller scales, like the 6 mm Baccus American Civil War, quite easy to paint as the Seventh.

As to my personal experience with that military action, first I bought the 15 mm figures by Minifigs and then sent them to my painting service. I was not very good at painting the smaller scales back then, though today I am slowly getting much better at it. Then a new range of 28 mm by Wargames Foundry appeared on the market, which led me to the automatic decision to sell the painted and based 15 mm (without having played a single game with them, mind), and the substitution in my collection for the latter.

From Old Glory I got only Indians. To have more variety and colour, I guess, I collected Plains Indians from all the possible manufacturers I knew of in 25/28 mm—Dixon, Britannia Miniatures, and those already mentioned—and also figures in 25 mm from Tradition of London.

Today I still have the Dixon 25 mm minis and the Playmobil 75 mm, ready to play. Baccus 6 mm will probably soon be painted, as I have bought them too.

The use of 75 mm seems contradictory, but it is not. Post-1985 Playmobil figures, and, especially for my taste, sets like number 3811, are really practical for small-action skirmishes, and they have a flexibility that lead toy soldiers do not. I can mount and dismount them at will, make them fire, sit wounded, and lie dead, all really great possibilities for adult play. This works especially well if you convert the figures, meaning you learn to disassemble them and exchange parts, using ad hoc resin hats by Malone or stickers by Bendala.

Keep in mind that the Geobra Group started production of the Playmobil figures in 1974, and at first their toys were very childish in design, as children were their target market. But after 1985 and especially nowadays, their use in wargames has grown exponentially because the design is so much better. Before you involve yourself further, I can recommend that you buy the book *Playmobil Collector (1974–2009)*, by Axel Hennel, and the subsequent catalogues. See chapter XVIII.

If we reenact on the tabletop a big battle like Waterloo, it is the same but greater and more complex, and you have more tactical alternatives—that is if you have many figures and stands, of course. Forget about using Playmobil figures for this if you are not part of a large club of fans.

Will the Prussians arrive on time to save the Allied army commanded by Lord Wellington, doing their brave stand? What if it is Marshall Grouchy who arrives on the field of battle instead of the Prussians? What if Marshall Ney had not misused the French cavalry in such unsupported way? What if...? What if...? What if...?

In fact, the Battle of Waterloo and the Battle of Gettysburg are probably the most recreated battles on tabletops round the world, and you can bet anything that the French Imperial army is the number-one-selling collection of wargame figures ever. The vast majority of wargamers are tempted by the period, making the Napoleonic Wars the bread and butter of manufacturers. Nearly everybody I know has or had a Napoleonic French army in some scale and in some number, whether it's just a single corps or full-strength armies. Simply ask or look around inside the collective. I think I am truly not mistaken in saying so. It is very easy to understand why. Just think about it: the first French empire (it's better if I use the term Napoleonic Wars starting with the French Revolution, say 1789 to 1815) gives you twenty years of more or less continual warfare all around what was then and is still today called Europe.

You will have plenty of the more colourful uniforms ever seen to choose from, and a good balance among the three classic arms: infantry, cavalry, and artillery. The possession of a Napoleonic army (even if it's not French) nearly guarantees a 100 percent chance of having the chance to wargame with it, and the scenarios and possibilities, campaign after campaign, battle after battle, will be immense in scope. You will never play the same game twice, and it is really astounding the amount of playability and variability offered to the wargamer, even if you use the same old set of rules all your life.

I am sure that you will try a lot of those rules, though. Tell me what tabletop game offers the same kind of fun. Or let's say this is our own particular kind of fun, never playing the same game twice.

Talking about scenarios, it would do you good to read the works of well-known authors in this particular field, including Donald Featherstone, Peter Young, Charles Grant, Bruce Quarrie, Phil Barker, Charles Stewart Grant (son of Charles Grant), and Stuart Asquith, just to mention some modern texts that explain the basic mechanisms for generating scenarios to play, including how to create the fog of war on the tabletop.

You see—and do forgive the implicit pun—one of the benefits/inconveniencies of any game is the visual perspective of seeing all the battleground from the air, as if the armchair generals were

placed in a balloon and telephonically connected to HQ (not to say telepathically connected). There are easy ways to hamper this instant action-reaction chain of orders, and any good set of rules will make you stick to your own devised plan, with heavy penalties based on the principle that order + counterorder = disorder.

In my tiny circle of wargamers, automatically reacting to the enemy's movements is known as Bolshoi Ballet syndrome. Of course, the idea of not allowing commanders of the armies to be present in the wargame room has already been tried in many variants.

The books mentioned below are very useful for beginning wargaming, especially at first, when you may have a limited number of units, want to use the scenarios to try a new set of rules, create or modify and adjust home rules, or start playing solo.

Here is a shortlist of classics and basic works.

- Little Wars*, by H.G. Wells
- Charge! Or How to Play Wargames*, by Peter Young
- How to Play War Games in Miniature*, by Joseph Morschauser
- War Games*, by Donald F. Featherstone
- Skirmish Wargaming*, by Donald F. Featherstone
- The War Game*, by Charles Grant
- The War Game*, by Peter Young (1972)
- Wargames*, by David Nash (1974)
- Napoleonic War Game*, by Charles Grant
- Napoleon's Campaigns in Miniature: A Wargamers' Guide to the Napoleonic Wars 1796–1815*, by Bruce Quarrie (1977)
- Wargames Scenarios* (A Wargames Research Group Publication), by Charles Stewart Grant
- Programmed Wargames Scenarios* (A Wargames Research Group Publication), by Charles Stewart Grant
- Scenarios for All Ages*, by C.S. Grant and S.A. Asquith (1996)
- Military Modelling Guide to Solo Wargaming*, by Stuart Asquith (1988)
- The Wargaming Compendium*, by Henry Hyde (2013)
- Tin Soldiers in Action*, by Rüdiger Hofrichter & Klaus Hofrichter (2016)
- Collecting Toy Soldiers*, by James Opie (1992)

In practice, the general ideas or nuclei behind the modern wargame are exposed in those books, from old-school wargaming to today's tabletop encounters.

Making your own set of rules, usually by taking ideas from here and there, is also an important part of the hobby in its own right, and it really is very entertaining as a pursuit. It also avoids some of the rigidity of many of the commercial games, which I do not denigrate in the least, but sometimes our own favourite ideas need to be reflected in the rules of our own games.

Here you will find a very simple guide of how to go from basic to complicated rules. I will use the ancient period, as it is simpler. Then imagine producing your own set of rules for the very popular Second Punic War: the Carthaginian Empire versus the Roman Republic.

**First Step.** We use infantry, cavalry, and elephants as class troops (in the first example). Cavalry has a bonus of +1 and elephants a bonus of +2. All combat is in melee; you only kill with a 6 or more. Each side throws a regular six-sided dice to solve combats. It makes for a fast and furious game. The main objective may be killing the enemy's general, or perhaps capturing the standard (the first thing that happens), so as to avoid an unrealistic battle to the last man.

**Second Step.** You limit the proportion of troops per army. One elephant might be equal in value to four infantrymen, and a cavalryman is equal in value to two infantrymen. Cavalry can only be 10 percent of the total of the troops, elephants only 5 percent. That is a limitation on the troops you can field. At this stage you can also introduce classes among the infantry—say two basic types, elite and basic. You can introduce bonus points when they are in melee against each other.

**Third Step.** You introduce “saving throws” to make the game last longer. Imagine one of your troops has been hit (that is, your opponent has thrown a 6 or more, and your figure could be removed from play). You then throw a die, and if you get a 6, the attack has been “parried successfully,” no harm done! A 4 or 5 means a retreat of a case in a grid. A 1, 2, or 3 do not save it and it is removed from play. Use these or similar well-tried mechanisms.

**Fourth Step.** You introduce missile fire. At a distance you throw pilum (only the Romans, and only once), or shoot arrows, also at a distance, and with a limited number of archers (or slingers, for that matter). You also give a +1 to Gauls when charging to contact for the first time (*élan*), and so on, whatever you wish.

**Fifth Step.** You introduce “morale.” Define a set of circumstances of play and apply positive points or negative points to them. Above or below the predetermined results, either the troops rout or, if overconfident, charge compulsively. All this must happen without any kind of interference from the sometimes astounded/shocked players.

You will also have to be precise in how fast and far every class of troops can move. Maybe a charge move gets extra distance, or you have to take a morale test before a charge. It's whatever you fancy; really it is up to you.

Let's stop here. If instead of ancients a more modern period is tried, the scheme would basically be the same, but you would have to add musketry fire, bayonet charges, cavalry (heavy and light), artillery fire (and its different ranges and ammo), and whatnot.

As I have said, designing a set of home rules is part of the fun of the hobby. These rules will probably be amended by you several times to suit your particular taste as battles come along and present different unforeseen resolution problems.

As time goes by, you will even learn to establish particular rules for a special game scenario or battle (the exception instead of the rule). Say the game is set in the retreat from Russia in 1812. French infantry might get -2, Cossacks +2, and factors like that. Usually these are called specific rules for a scenario.

I guess this chapter is sufficiently self-explanatory. There is more in the next ones, but simply be kind and remember that not everybody who buys and paints miniature toy soldiers wargames with them. And on the other side are wargamers who do not own a single miniature toy soldier.

Among those who have indulged in wargaming, the percentage of time actually spent gaming on a tabletop is very low compared with the total time dedicated to the hobby as a whole. We spend a lot of time thinking about it, reading books, organizing and building armies, searching manufacturers, comparing scale benefits, painting figures, basing them, pondering which terrain we are going to use, and so on.





## IV

### Wargames with Figures: A Brief Historical Introduction

Whatever your passion is—lead toy soldiers, wargame figures, plastic soldiers, scenery, books, magazines, reenactment activities, or a visit to a convention like Salute—we need a bit of perspective. The Wikipedia definition of wargaming is right but incomplete from a historical point of view.

Who among you has not seen those terra-cotta Chinese warriors? I can imagine more than one megalomaniac wargamer dreaming of having an army in 1:1 scale, with soldiers as big as the human person and as many as you need. Well, as you all know, a Chinese emperor/king/big wallah did just that some centuries ago.

Luckily enough, this pastime has the laic benediction of being considered the universal heritage of the world. But can you imagine the comments of that emperor's wife and mother-in-law? "You ordered more terra-cotta warriors? Don't you have enough of them? Look how the garden is full of those things! You do not know where to put them! Why don't you do something useful for a change?" Life can be difficult for collectors.

As it is, we can say without fear of being sorely mistaken that men have simulated conflicts in miniature many centuries before modern times, using miniature figurines or not. Strategy games as the Chinese *wei-hai* or the Indian *chaturanga* (and ancient form of chess) are proof enough. Of course, *wei-hai* and chess are still played today and are infinitely more popular than the wargame with miniature soldiers of any kind.

As this is only a brief introduction, let's make a big jump in time and mention king's chess, which in 1664 was played with sixty different kinds of pieces representing the different military classes, and which could be moved in fourteen different ways. In the eighteenth century, silver-plated soldiers were used to teach the young Louis XIV (the future king of France) the basic movements of the royal troops.

Let's take another jump in time to the compulsory mention of the direct ancestors of the Prussian kriegspiel (literally, "war game") of the general staff. In the year 1780, a master of pages devised a game over a grid with 1,666 squares, on which, maybe for the first time in the modern era, counters represented more than one individual. Infantry, cavalry, and supporting arms manoeuvred over five types of terrain. This is in practice the direct ancestor of our game.

Reading posts on Internet forums like Age of Eagles ([ageofeagles.com](http://ageofeagles.com)) and the Napoleonic Fire and Fury will show you that debate over rules and their interpretations would merit its own book.

By 1811 Von Reisswitz had done away with the grid, assuming, quite candidly, that the players would always be gentlemen. Quickly the necessity of the referee was adopted as a result. Markers or blocks represented the units, and their movements were ruled by realistic norms over a three-dimensional miniature field of battle.

The same man modified the rules of the game and introduced the dice to simulate luck or a factor of unpredictability. In 1824 the game was officially approved by the Prussian military establishment, and its use was expanded to all units of the army as a device to train for real war, the cost being financed by the military itself.

Around 1870 the evolution of the wargame parted into two main categories: a basic one, more rigid and useful for the training of young officers; and the less rigid or free kriegspiel, used for the training of the staff and superior officers. The main difference between them was a much more flexible use of the rules for the latter, and that a more important arbitrage system was used to moderate the game in all aspects through mathematical tables related to proven facts.

From Prussia the game was exported to Germany, then to Turkey (by Von Moltke), then Europe, and afterwards to North America. Around 1914 the wargame was accepted in the United States as part of the training of the officer corps. From there the military wargame quickly introduced applied maths, then computers, informational models, and whatnot.

The military war game, as opposed to the "social" wargame, has nothing to do with this book, even if some wargamers have a passion about this kind of branch. We wish them luck, and we will keep far from the true complexities of today's modern times and virtual real war.

Now that we've made it clear that the military use of the wargame only interests us in a historical sense, and the modern use of it is not at all the subject of this book, let us concentrate on its eminently popular game side.

Wargaming gained popularity beginning in the 1960s. But it is mainly in the late '60s/early '70s, with the launch of the very cheap 20 mm plastic Airfix series of mass-produced little soldiers, that the hobby became affordable enough to boom. This is essentially because at last someone produced a full range of minis with only four different kinds of boxes: Union infantry in dark blue plastic; Confederate infantry in light grey plastic; American Civil War artillery in light brown plastic (usable for both sides); and American cavalry in dark blue plastic (also usable for both sides). A little painting ability enabled you to wargame a classic period.

As you have guessed, I fell for it, and so, of course, did my little brother. I still have pictures of our first serious wargame, fought with so many precautions that it was a draw for lack of



initiative.

As the world was not yet perfect, there was no superglue (Cyanoacrylate) at the time, and our riders had a sad and very annoying tendency to become unglued from their horses. This experience was matched in sadness only by the loss of paint (through peeling) over a not-too-rigid base; real modelling experts of the time used banana oil to harden the plastic. But strangely enough, with all these problems, I remember those days very fondly.

The aforementioned first serious wargame was fought on an architect's drawing table (in those times we did not yet use computers), on a tea-coloured blanket thrown over some piles of books, using some cardboard buildings, rivers, and roads. Since then we have never looked back.

I discovered lead toy wargame figures not much later. What was wrong with plastic soldiers? To be sure, nothing at all; I was rightly proud of my plastic armies up till then. But the rigid surface of the lead minis and the possibility of buying figures singly was a real change for the better, even if the cost was higher.

Once upon a time, in the popular tourist city of Barcelona, at the corner of Muntaner and Avenida Diagonal streets, there existed a bookshop by the name of *Librería Francesa*. One day, to my everlasting surprise, I found in it a magazine called *Battle for Wargamers*. I bought only about half a dozen before it stopped publication.

On the full-colour cover of the very first one I bought, apart from an image of the typical tabletop with wargame figures, was a picture of a bald, bearded gentleman probably twenty years older than I. He looked quite serious and was brandishing an extensible metal metric tape. With a bit of experience, I came to understand that he was probably involved in a discussion about the range of his guns.

This small revelation was fundamental in a moment of self-doubt about being too old to play with toy soldiers. Not that I had a lot of prejudices, but I was somehow worried, because no one I knew shared this hobby. And my kind-hearted circle of friends insisted that it was a foolish thing to do at my age. These were the same friends who did not find Subbuteo stupid at all; we played that endlessly at night, on the floor on all fours.

Then and there started to think that if a bald, middle-aged, bearded man could be a wargamer in public, couldn't I be one in private?

The distinction between private and public is important, because I purposefully avoided staging a public wargame. When asked, I always said no, thank you, just for logistical and practical reasons, and I am glad I did. I am sorry in a way, because maybe that would have helped in propagating the hobby, but the truth is I did not care at all and was probably right.

This book is maybe an exercise in self-satisfaction. But if some of you profit from my experiences and avoid making the most obvious mistakes I committed in my lifelong journey, so much the better for you. And always keep in mind that even after more than sixty years in this hobby, I still do heavily blunder sometimes.



## V

### **Miniature Scales and the Suppression of Reality**

Wargame figures are of different scales and material. The more popular nowadays are the ever-present lead (in various scales and quite different alloys); the recent new hard plastic (like those from Perry Minatures and Victrix); or pewter and even aluminium. Plastic is cheaper but usually has a less extensive catalogue, as there are greater variety and more possibilities in lead for nearly any period of the wargame. Gone are the days of soft plastic and the lack of paint adherence, and the chemical products needed to rigidify the figures. Nowadays wargamers do mix hard plastic and lead in their armies, the same way Games Workshop did with their fantasy gear years ago. It only needed the entrepreneurs to design and make the figures available.

Back in the early 1970s, I had very few options to choose from: the old-style 54 mm, which was very expensive and had few ranges; the well-established lead wargame figures in 25 mm; or the new (back then) 15 mm. Even then, there was a strong difference in measures and style in the same scale. Minifigs and Hinchcliffe, the two foremost manufacturers of 25 mm wargame figures, whether to obtain fidelity from their customers or by sheer destiny, were not compatible at all and did not mix well. Today there is much more ample choice, starting in 2 mm, then going to 6 mm and upwards, but even in lesser scales when you talk about ships and aeroplanes (do not mention interstellar fleets): 9 mm, 10 mm, 12 mm, 15 mm, 18 mm, 20 mm, 25 mm, 28 mm, 30 mm, 40 mm, 54 mm, and even bigger, like the 75 mm third-generation Playmobil figures that have conquered my heart.

Part of the mentioned scales only exists nominally, because the designs of the minis of each manufacturer often have a personal touch. Even in the same scale, they establish incompatible ranges with the rest of manufacturers, trying to avoid the natural tendency of the wargamer to mix and convert. In a way these are in fact marketing ploys. It's a legitimate commercial strategy, but it's confusing for the newcomer to the hobby. It's quite frustrating to pay hard cash to different

manufacturers on a nominal scale only to find out that figures are in fact not compatible or do not look right beside one another. So always beware. Ask for samples and compare before fully committing yourself. After all, many wargamers like to have different minis per stand, but they do it on purpose, not because of lack of awareness.

Many of the names in the hobby were producers who first made wargame miniatures for themselves, then eventually went commercial. In early times these producers simply wanted to finance their own hobby, or were responding to requests from friends.

With practice you will learn that some figures are really quite compatible, such as 25/28 mm American Civil War in the Wargames Foundry and Dixon ranges. It is possible to buy horses from one range and riders from another. A particular manufacturer might excel in artillery pieces, and you can substitute those in other ranges, especially if they're sold singly. It is just a matter of time, patience, experience, and finally customizing, meaning that you will also learn to change heads and arms to make that elusive piece you absolutely need. This is true for lead but is also a normal practice with Playmobil figures.

As a consequence of the liberty of this approach, you will see that nothing is absolutely rigid. There are wargamers who love their units that have no two soldiers alike. Their armies are full of figures with different positions, heads, headgear, colour schemes, and even size. Those individuals love to mix manufacturers because people are not of the same build—some are slender, some taller, etc. On the contrary, there are also those who seek uniformity, who prefer units formed with a basic kind of figure in the same position, repeated up to the last detail of the paint.

This last option at least helps you to quickly identify the distinct units on the tabletop, especially in big games. It is more probably a toy soldier approach, but generals and ADCs provide variety even to the limit of mixing different manufacturers. This practice is necessary when building large armies to avoid excessive repetition of the same command figure, even with different paint jobs. That peculiar aspect is another thing to keep in mind and leads us to formulate another postulate:

**Every wargamer follows a path and is more or less content with it, but liberty of composition trumps compatibility with the rest.**

Once this individuality is understood, you will see that it implies the assumption of a series of logical decisions based mainly on the characteristics of the period you love, the availability of wargame figures, opponents with the same interests as you, the size of the battles of the period, and finally the reference books about uniforms and other paraphernalia you need for accuracy.

If that's not enough, many wargamers who use the same figures will disagree with you about the number of figures per unit or stand—will use different sets of rules, as a matter of fact—and of course will have deeply rooted preferences and prejudices about matte or bright paint and also varnish jobs.

Having mentioned those many diversities in almost everything, I must say that the tendency to be orthodox in approach is always harder or strongest at the beginning. You want to be part

of it, so you buy the most popular set of rules, adopt the most widely used basing system, avoid mixing manufacturers for fear of the derision of your fellow wargamers, try to emulate the painting style of the masters, go for the predominant scale in your chosen period—whatever makes you “in.”

After a bit of time, you will discover the joy of an unorthodox approach. It took me long years to abandon some of the dogmas. Now I use a ratio that pleases me instead of the one in a particularly popular set of rules; I base the minis my way, got rid of the chore of painting the opposition (especially if there is no love lost for them), and always design my own thing no matter what.

You see, it is easier to explain your home rules to a fellow gamer than to try to understand the meaning of a commercial set. So what if I want to build the British Camel Corps without the camels? After all, at Abu Klea and Abu Kru, they were left behind in a zareba. OK, I will get some to transport the wounded inside of the square, but I will paint the Camel Corps on foot. And what is more, I will not paint/buy a single Madhist, Dervish, or Hadendoa. Perish the thought. Not again.

Dice throws and event cards can easily be used instead of a physical enemy. Blank white index cards are very useful.

My next projects will probably be done in 6 mm because it is my actual fancy, not because I cannot change my mind and do it in 15 mm, 28 mm, or even 75 mm Playmobils.

Incidentally, I must mention that winning at all costs is not at all important as the final objective or purpose of an enjoyable wargame. The spectacular array of minis and the use of correct tactics and manoeuvres are gratifying in themselves. On at least my last two or three big wargames, I have preferred to be the umpire and watch the game develop like a film, even if the figures, table, and terrain were all mine.

In present times, “you’ll pay your money and you’ll take your choice” is my motto, and of course I never do anything just because others do. It is best to do what is fun for you, and it is easier than you think.

Another piece of perfectly sound advice: it is always better to adapt any rules for basing systems to your own basing. In fact, my advice is *adapt the rules*. Never change the bases of your armies; it is a tedious work and will be in fashion for only a couple of years. What is more, all recently published rules avoid the problem, saying that as long as the opposing armies are equally or similarly based, they work. See for example Matthew Fletcher’s “Napoleon” (*Wargames Foundry*, June 2009), pages 19 and 212.

I once did rebase part of my armies, and I deeply regretted it. What a loss of time it was. One of the reasons why I love Playmobil figures is the total lack of base. The figures stand in whatever surface you want, meaning that if you use a cloth with a desert print, they are in the desert. Lead toy soldiers or wargame figures, on the other hand, need to have their bases painted or customized. If they are to be in the desert you paint them stands “sand”, like my very first colonial troops, for which later on I painted all bases green grass and then forgot about it (the only way to use multipurpose equipment I had for various periods, be that mules, ammo

wagons, pontoon bridges, etc.).

I do not intend to convert you to the use of those children's(?) toys, but I am glad that at last, with Playmobil figures, I can mount and dismount cavalry without needing to invest the time and money in doing it twice. In lead toy wargame figures, you need to have them in both mounted and unmounted versions, and the orders "dismount" and "mount" mean a replacement of figures on the tabletop (or the use of markers).

I hope the Playmobil designers continue producing figures able to be used in wargames without so many customizing needs; there are a lot of potential wargamers who will use them if rightly done. I guess at least someone in the factory subscribes to that thesis, because the recent ranges of Romans and pirates are really very good material for wargaming, especially some specials and regular soldiers to oppose the pirates. We fans anticipate the novelties of next year's Playmobil catalogue with great expectation, even if only some ranges and a few of the specials are useful for wargaming purposes. The potential market they are losing in the wargame field is quite big, and it makes their production a bit puzzling and incomprehensible. I am always asking myself what the problem is. Is it a case of poor marketing? Or the ever-present German complex of being hit by the anti-war-toys lobby? Whatever it is, I do not think a couple of boxes for the Seven Years' War period will do them any harm. After all, the Roman circus, with its gladiators and beasts (which I personally think goes too far for kids' entertainment) or the pirate sets (which I think are just a bit less truculent), both currently in production, are potentially much crueler periods of history.

I really would enjoy a deep talk about future sets with Playmobil's team of product designers, but I fear that they are not going to read this book at all, or if they do, they will not be bothered by it. Of course, the tendency of wargamers to pester manufacturers with requests is also an established fact. Take a tour of any manufacturer's forum, if they have one. It is an interesting exercise.

Successful ranges have been known to go to the limit of revamping production lines because the earlier casts look crude with time, and because the new lines are better casted as sculpting and moulds improve. Then you end up having marginal wargame armies of a period looking nicer than the main army of that period. A good example is Baccus's 6 mm French Napoleonic, which were reborn in 2013 in the new sculpting style.

After so many years of buying, converting, painting, mixing, and selling parts of my collection, with all the alternatives in between (like sending figures to a professional painting service), my personal experience is inclined to those counsels given in function of your particular situation. Remember that only what *you* think counts in the end. You are likely either a solo wargamer or a club wargamer. Recommendations vary for each group.

1. If you are a solo wargamer and live far from other similar-minded fellows, someday you will probably day attend a big convention about modelling, wargaming, or both. But that would be the exception to your day-to-day involvement with the hobby. If you feel yourself included in this category, you have absolute freedom, but the tasks are

harder and the possibility of mistakes greater.

What scales should you use?

- a) If you are a truly megalomaniac wargamer who loves very big battles and campaigns, go for the smaller scales. Nowadays they have very good castings, and the size and needs of your wargaming surface area will be reduced as a consequence of using the smaller scale, meaning more room to manoeuvre without needing so much physical space.
  - b) If you are interested in games that are more reduced in scope, and playability and time of play are paramount in your agenda, then any scale will do. If you love painting figures down to the last uniform button, probably 25 mm and up would be best. But the amount of detail in some 15 or even 10 mm lets painters do amazing lots of detail even in those scales.
  - c) If you hate painting, then traditional 54 mm prepainted toy soldiers or 75 mm Playmobils are an excellent choice or alternative.
2. If, on the other extreme, you are an amiable fellow with lots of friends who have similar interests, and you live near a club, you might attend wargame evenings on a regular basis. Conventions might be visited or organized on a group basis. Solo wargaming would be the exception to your day-to-day involvement with the hobby. If you feel included in this category, you have fewer temptations (why spend time thinking about a period nobody else is interested in?), your tasks are simpler, and the possibility of mistakes is smaller.

What scales should you use?

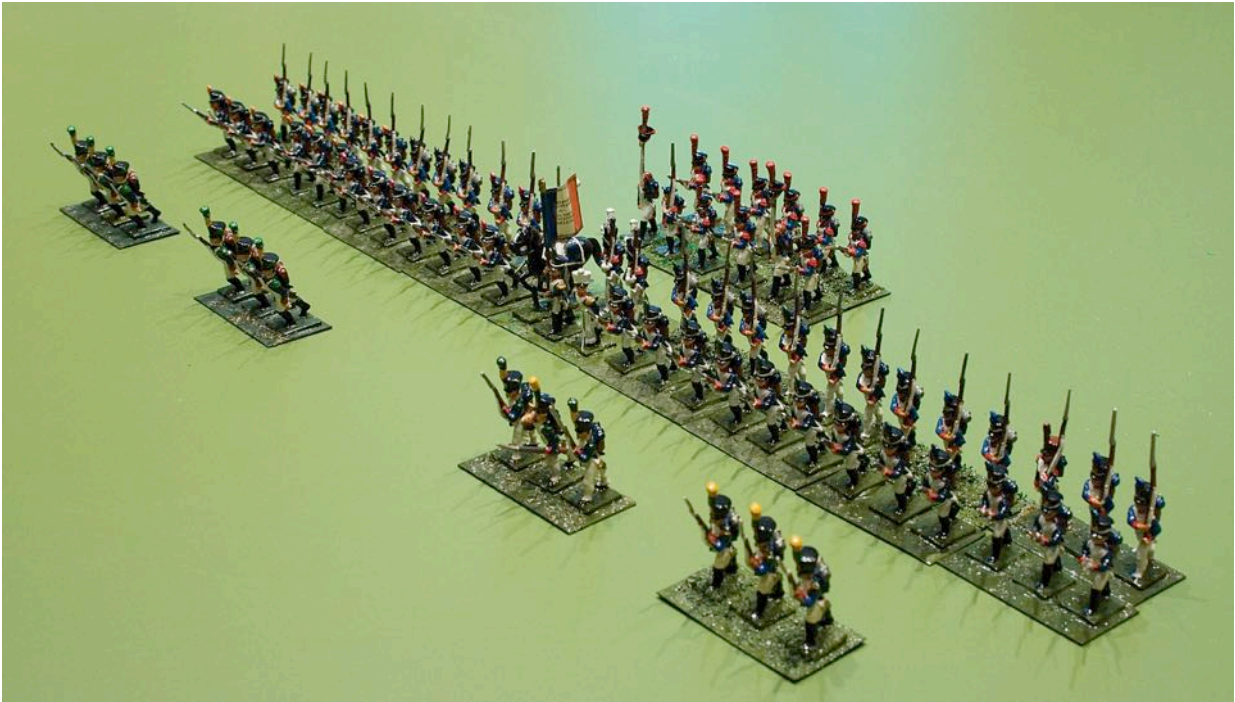
- a) If you are a truly megalomaniac wargamer who loves very big battles and campaigns, you will not be put out by the size of the wargame table/room needed to plan anything. Your choice of scale will likely match the main currents in the club, and you will only need to build maybe a corps (or the equivalent) to play in a period.
- b) If you are interested in games that are more reduced in scope, and playability and time of play are paramount in your agenda, then any scale will do, but you will probably adapt to the club's agenda and scales for those kind of games, maybe with your closer friends or those members with the same interests.
- c) If you hate painting, then traditional 54 mm prepainted toy soldiers or Playmobils (including customized versions for connoisseurs) are an excellent choice or alternative, quite good for you if your club indulges in these. If not, an alternative is to buy prepainted figures in any scale. Most clubs have guys who know how to give you advice on that too.

I guess the majority of those involved with the hobby lie somewhere between these two extreme points, so a balance of what has been said would be good advice for them.









## VI

### Scaling Down, Proportions, and the Concept of Multipurpose Unit

I am now going to introduce a series of basic concepts, because it is better to know them at the beginning of your involvement with the hobby rather than later on. If you are not advised now, then when the megalomania appears—a disease easy to develop, also known as the “if I only had another battalion” syndrome—you will be tempted to waste time and money.

It is logical to accept everybody's taste. After all, the hobby is in itself a form of escape from reality and day-to-day pressures, so you have absolute liberty to do whatever you like. If you want to buy a 1:1 ratio battalion of French Imperial Fusiliers, aka a line battalion, perfect, go ahead. Soon you will have hundreds of minis, between five hundred and seven hundred, more or less, from whatever scale you have chosen. This collection will surely include one company of grenadiers of the line, one of voltigeurs, the four companies of *lignards* (with the four distinctive colours of pom-pom: green, purple, light blue, and orange), probably a *tête de colonne* including a musical corps, some *sappeurs*/pioneers, a standard-bearer, and some officers (a couple of them mounted). To be sure, they would look magnificent in a cabinet with glass doors and perhaps interior/exterior lighting. Your relatives and friends will admire it, and if this is your passion, the result will be fine and quite magnificent.

But what if one day, apart from parading your troops, you consider doing something else with them? Would you be able to wargame with them? If you have a lot of imagination, the enemy is off the table, and you would love to command a battalion, the answer is yes. Lucky you. No more expenses.

But that implies a solo kind of wargame, and a very specific one at that. What about the wargame as a game? This book is not exclusively about wargaming at all, but the possibility is always there. So it's better to always have it in mind, and remember that there are many ways to do it.

As the next step, you can build another battalion for the same period, choosing among the enemies of the French: British, Russian, Austrian, Prussian, Portuguese, Spanish, Brunswick, Swedes, you name it. They will come handy to battle with your own. And what about some cavalry? And artillery? Quickly enough you will learn that the ratio 1:1 is only useful for very small military actions, usually called skirmish games or even role playing if small enough. In my collection, the only example was Camerone, the 1863 French Foreign Legion in Mexico. In fact, any skirmish is probably the rational limit to this approach.

To play medium or big wargames on a 1:1 ratio, if you are using higher-scale minis, you will need lots of hard cash and a really big playing area—I am thinking of a sports arena. Let's face it, nearly everybody in the hobby scales down the units, meaning that a single miniature toy soldier represents several real men of that war or period. The more popular reductions are the ratios 1:10, 1:20, 1:25, 1:33, 1:50, and 1:100.

Here we can clarify some complementary points. Reference books venerated by lots of “old school” wargamers and lovers of the “big battalions” approach, such as Bruce Quarries's *Napoleonic Campaigns in Miniature*, insistently recommend the 1:33 proportion. Well, with this proportion you could fight from brigade up to division or army corps level, at least in 25/28 mm. But you will not be able to recreate really big famous battles, like Wagram, Leipzig, and the like, if you do not use the smaller scales instead.

To share advice derived from hard experience, I suggest that maybe one day you really will have to try 6 mm or less. They are not difficult to paint at all; on the contrary, the process is speed itself. Really good painters can do a fantastic job with them, but even an average painting job is enough if mega games are on your mind.

Of course, I can understand those who love the bigger scales because of the inherent possibility of painting in more detail. This is military modelling, in a way. For, them the obvious solution is “bathtubbing,” meaning having less-proportional units.

The alternative is to go down in scale, but to keep the total number of minis per unit the same, as if the larger figures were their bigger brothers. Because if you go for 6 mm and start building regiments of, say, a hundred figures, you would lose the room for manoeuvre, so some consideration about scaling down the number of minis per unit is also needed within the limits of your aesthetics preferences.

Here is a specific example. If you wished to represent the 77,500 men the French emperor Napoleon put on the field of battle at Waterloo, at a 1:33 scale, you would need 2,348 miniatures. Add the Allied opposition and at least a couple of Prussian corps and you will need five to six thousand minis.

I do not say that this is impossible to achieve, especially if it's done by a club of ten to twenty members. It's better perhaps in 15 mm or an even smaller scale. I saw a Waterloo refight on DVD at the National Army Museum in London that used 15 mm figures. It looked overcrowded with minis, even though it was done on a very big tabletop. There was barely room to manoeuvre at all. So even though I have seen it done, I have doubts about using too-large scales, including 15 mm, for refighting really big battles.

What about you and your friends? Above all, what if you enjoy the larger scales for the sheer

joy of aesthetics? What about the tabletop dimensions? And have you thought about how much time will be consumed with just moving the figures? Even with the acknowledged method of having several of them glued on the same base or stand, you will need to rent a hall, and expect the refight to last at least a couple of days.

In smaller scales—say 15 mm and below—the thing is much more feasible, but the loss of detail on the Napoleonic uniforms with each reduction in size is important. Also, figures tend to be grouped in more minis per stand, reducing flexibility of movement and possible formation changes, which in turn needs that other set of rules. In the end it does not really matter. Remember, it is up to you and your taste. The best advice is simply that is better to figure it out beforehand.

I have been a fan of 25 mm for many long years, though nowadays I'm trying mainly 6 mm. Sometimes I deeply regret not going for 15 mm when I started. But at that time, the 15 mm available were not to my taste, or I wrongly thought that they would be too difficult to paint.

Now let's propose how to play the great battles of history proportionally, or at least to show how I focused the problem.

We will use the battle of Waterloo again, just because it is so well documented. Let's imagine it is our objective to recreate this battle on the tabletop. What we say about it can be used for similar battles.

Before getting into detail, the first necessary decision is to choose the minimal base of calculations, whether it's base 2, 3, 4, or even 5 or 6.

Let me explain. If you use two figure companies, your basic units will be more reduced in numbers of minis than if you choose bigger numbers, like the lovers of the big battalions do. What I am saying is that you need to choose an option that satisfies your aesthetic point of view about the size of the basic unit.

I personally opted for base 3 long ago, meaning three minis per stand and company. You do not have to follow this option at all, but using my organization as the sample, a French battalion/regiment would have twenty-two or twenty-three figures. If I had chosen base 2, it would have around sixteen minis; with base 4, around thirty minis. Base 5 is less common, but it's often seen in American Civil War battles. Base 6 (normally in two lines of three) contains about forty minis.

Just for the sake of comparison, imagine a base 8. In that case, companies of two lines with four figures each would give you a fifty-four-mini battalion. As you can see, the sky is the limit (well, up to 1:1, I guess).

It looks as if this is a very minor detail, but in fact it is not. I have had to repaint figures that were already finished and varnished, with a considerable loss of time and patience, because I did not think about proportion with respect to the elemental mathematics of the matter at hand.

Believe me, especially at the beginning, and if you build your army slowly, the big temptation is to paint a favourite elite unit—maybe the Chasseurs à Cheval de la Garde Impériale, 1805–1815. We have all done it. Would it influence you if I said that the more time you spend in the hobby, the better your painting efforts will get, and that the order in which you paint the

units is important? Why? Simply because you run the risk that the last unit you paint—e.g., an obscure militia unit you needed to paint because it was present in the field and you want to be proportional—will look better when painted than the first elite or fetish unit you painted a long time ago.

It can be even worse. If you start building your army slowly, there is a tendency to think about a limited number of units, time and money both being factors. Then, of course, the proportion of elite, guard, cavalry, etc. will not be correct; you will have bought too many of them.

Let me explain thoroughly. Even having in mind that Imperial Guard units had a tendency to be fielded with numbers near theoretical strength, as they were elite, well cared for, or “pampered” troops, usually having a greater ratio of soldiers present than line units, your elite regiment of Chasseurs à Cheval de la Garde Impériale probably does not have to exceed eight figures. That is if you are using 25/28 mm minis, and that recommendation is exclusively from the fruits of my own experience. If you paint twelve, fourteen, or even sixteen figures, you will soon comprehend that you are in fact increasing proportionally the number of cuirassiers you will have to paint. And not only that, as there were at least three or four infantry soldiers per cavalryman, your lack of global perspective will have now imposed on you a total number of figures you need to acquire and paint that is out of all normal limits. In a few months, you’ll realize that you have redundant Chasseurs à Cheval de la Garde. This is nothing to be ashamed of; I freely admit that, in my time, I did that too. And I’m guessing I’m not the only one.

Back to total numbers. On June 18, 1815, Napoleon fielded around 72,000 men of all arms, and Wellington somewhat fewer, let’s say 67,000 men. No one in his right mind intends to paint 139,000 figures, OK? Not even the famous Siborne diorama has them.

First of all, look at it as an end to achieve proportionality. Imagine that five hundred toy soldiers per side, more or less, is our limit. The reason could be economic factors, tabletop dimensions, wanting to avoid monotony or too much painting time, needing room to manoeuvre, or whatever. The reason is important to you, but it will be irrelevant quite soon. If you do not confront the task alone and you have friends involved—or, in the case of a club, you have the help of other club members—and you decide to go for two thousand to a side, that’s OK, and congratulations. But that last figure is probably too high for one or two wargamers, if you do not go for the smaller-scale miniatures. Remember, we are still talking 25 mm here.

Scaling the 77,500 men of the Armée du Nord down to five hundred miniature soldiers will give us a ratio of one lead toy soldier for every 155 real men in the battlefield. What? Mini battalions of five figures? Of course not. The compromise with the suppression of reality must be extended to the number of battalions, regiments, and/or brigades present in the field.

Once a basic unit has been created, it has to be able to be “recognized” on the tabletop. We will stick to it no matter what, but the total number of basic units must also be scaled down. It does not matter much what we call them; what is really important for the game is that it must be equally useful for fighting small actions and big battles, while keeping the overall proportion of units of the original army organization.

Again, imagine a French battalion/regiment/brigade of twenty-three figures organized in the proposed way: a command stand where we will place officers, flags, musicians, and/or pioneers,

whatever we fancy. Sometimes I used a mounted officer, an eagle-bearer, a foot officer, and a couple of drummers for the French, and a different set of figures for the British because those regiments had two flags.

Whatever you decide is OK, but let's have a command stand for gaming purposes—it is totally necessary in my point of view. I even use a stand with different measurements (5×5 cm) instead of the normal “fighting stands,” which are 5×2.5 cm. You will see the utility of that device later on when I explain what a multipurpose unit is, but it is not the only one. The command stand is not retired from the game until the unit is captured or totally destroyed. You only work the casualties by retiring normal fighting stands, so it is also necessary for your game rules, or at least for mine.

For a French battalion, the nominal six companies are then based in rectangular stands of 5 cm frontage and 2.5 cm depth. I use three miniature soldiers in each stand in a single line—say one stand of line grenadiers, one stand of line voltigeurs, and four stands for the line companies. Many years ago, I decided on this scheme to try to reduce to the minimum the evident disproportion between frontage and depth of the basic unit. Rules that favour miniatures two deep per stand seem to ignore this problem in the search of a different aesthetic approach, but I think they give too much depth to the units. You think about it carefully and make the decision that best suits you. In smaller scales you can have units that are two deep, but that will double the number of figures you have to paint.

If I played Waterloo, my basic unit was a division; if a minor engagement, it was a brigade or a battalion/regiment. If you want to experiment with big battalions in an even smaller military action, just combine two of the basic units. Suppress the use or retire from the game one of the command stands and you will have a French line battalion of  $18 + 18 + 5 = 41$  figures. Using the existing stands in your collection, you play now in base 6 instead of base 3.

Or maybe, for once, try  $18 + 18 + 18 + 18 + 5 = 77$  figures for battalion (base 12). Suddenly the idea of changing from column to line seems much more difficult. A simple look at it will give you a perspective much needed to understand rules penalties and time-consuming changes of formation. This is why you cannot play Leipzig with the same set of rules you use to play Waterloo. Incidentally, this is also why adapted “home rules” are the best for your personal satisfaction.

As you have seen, you do not need to modify the basing of your army to change the ratio of what your basic unit represents in a particular game.

Returning to the field of Waterloo, the first question would be how many infantry, cavalry, and artillery you need. What would be a good proportion? Easy. Use any of the excellent books about it; there are literally hundreds. Maybe one of the best is *Waterloo Companion*, by Mark Adkin. You will quickly learn that the forces present were as follows:

French Army, 1815:

Line Infantry: 81 battalions

Imperial Guard Infantry: 22 battalions

Line Cavalry: 98 squadrons  
Imperial Guard Cavalry: 18.5 squadrons  
Line Artillery: 150 guns  
Imperial Guard Artillery: 96 guns

Some quick thought will show you that for every basic unit of Imperial Guard infantry you field on your tabletop, you will need to field four of line infantry, and for every Imperial Guard gun, you will need two for the line. The proportion of Imperial Guard cavalry is even lower, one squadron to five squadrons of the line. OK? I guess we are advancing on the subject of proportion.

The average battalion present at Waterloo was 520 men; with the ratio 1:155, we would have a battalion of 3.35 figures each. The result is not satisfactory if you look at it that way, but that would have meant fielding all of the present battalions, and we have already said that this is not our intention.

What exactly represents our basic unit of twenty-two or twenty-three figures? Having in mind that we do not want to accumulate more than five hundred minis per side, if we do the calculations, we find that  $23 \times 155 = 3,565$  men, and four basic units will make a total of 14,260 men.

We know that D'Erlon's first corps had 19,800 men in total, all arms included. The corps cavalry was Jacquinet's light cavalry and numbered 1,664 sabres. We divide by 155, and 1,664 is equal to ten or eleven miniature cavalry soldiers. This is the basic unit of cavalry in my organization, as the cavalry had always problems with the supply of horses and riders and usually fielded fewer men per regiment/battalion than the infantry.

Then we turn our attention to the corps artillery. We try two basic units of artillery—say, the guns with their gunners and the limber—with only two horses instead of six (which maybe works better in 25 mm scale) to move it. You can also have ammo wagons. The area on the tabletop covered by those miniatures will represent the rest of the men of the corps. Let's be aware of the fact that the basic artillery unit covers an area equalling that of eighteen toy soldier infantry figures (the equivalent of 2,790 men). So in fact the use of two basic units of artillery, with only ten miniature artillerymen (which, multiplied by 155, would yield only 1,550 real soldiers), occupies the area of 5,580 men. This is quite normal, as they are in "open order" (not such tight formations as the infantry or cavalry). That is why we are flexible in the approach of number of figures to represent that arm.

Summing up:

- 1 Corps Commander + 1 ADC (representing only two real men)
- 2 Subgenerals (for purposes of command and control); they only represent themselves, as in the first point
- 2 ADCs, used for communications and the substitution of fallen generals; they do not add to the totals
- 4 Basic Infantry Units at twenty-three figures each, giving us 14,260 soldiers



- 1 Basic Cavalry Unit (Corps Cavalry) at nine or ten figures each, giving us 1,600 soldiers
- 2 Basic Units of Artillery (in open order); a 50 percent increase in surface means 5,580 men

The total is  $14,260 + 1,600 + 5,580 = 21,440$  (rounded down to 20,000 soldiers). So in terms of proportion, in this particular system, we have reduced the figure of 20,000 soldiers (or the first corps) to only 116 toy soldiers. Remember, we are working those figures with 25 mm in mind.

So, progressing in the field of reality suppression, and with lots of imagination, we have D'Erlon's first French corps, represented by some generals and ADCs, four basic units of infantry, one basic unit of cavalry, and two basic artillery units. Is it less expensive in time and money than what you expected?

The same organization applies to Reille's second corps, also around twenty thousand soldiers. Lobau's Sixth Corps was smaller and had very little artillery; using the same criteria, it scales down to two basic infantry units and no artillery at all. In the course of the game, you may attach to him some light cavalry and probably one horse artillery (line) gun from the cavalry corps, but that is just a playing option.

If we have four line foot artillery units and two line horse artillery units, we already know that we will have two Imperial Guard artillery foot units and only one Imperial Guard horse artillery unit. It keeps to the 2:1 proportion mentioned above, and gives you all the artillery uniforms of the French Armée du Nord to paint (something all wargamers have in mind too!).

Summing up again: We had four foot artillery line guns, two for each big corps. We have added two horse artillery line guns, one for each heavy cavalry corps, and we have then a total of six. That, added to the recommended three for the Imperial Guard, gives a total number of nine guns. You will notice that any attempt to modify this particular proportion will clutter the tabletop with too many guns, outbalancing the ratio in an exaggerated manner. It is plain to see that the next step would be eighteen guns, simply doubling the ratio, with the evident result of outshining the infantry and the cavalry, who would be gunned down to oblivion, at least in 25/28 mm.

You can do the two corps of French heavy cavalry proportionally using the same method. The result would be one or two units of dragoons, only one unit of carabineers, and the rest obviously cuirassiers.

I am going to give you an absolutely free hand with the Imperial Guard. Mine consisted of one unit of twenty-three figures for the Old Guard grenadiers (with extra officers and a *cantinière* for visual pleasure), one unit of twenty-three figures for the Middle Guard (Chasseurs), two units of Young Guard (smaller ones, with fourteen figures each), six minis for the Marines of the Guard, and six minis for the Engineers of the Guard. Complement this with brigade commanders, an overall commander of the Imperial Guard, and the usual ADCs, and there you have it.

The opposition, meaning the British and their allies, is much harder to specify in detail in the scope of this book, but with patience, following the same ratio, it is not a problem at all. After all,

the more freedom, the more fun. Just remember those minis were not *all* elite British units, OK?

I guess this is enough basic information. Do as I've described, or apply similar scaling down to any period or battle of your choosing. It's always better to work it out on paper before buying the toy soldiers or wargame figures. It seems obvious, but you will save a lot of cash if you use pen and paper first. Call the process whatever fancy word you like—"balancing," "stylizing," "equalizing," "bathtubbing"—it does not matter. The only important thing is to keep a minimal or average proportionality between the real units fielded and what you put on the tabletop, avoiding the ever-present temptation of fielding too many elite units. Believe me, it pays to do so.

All this leads to another postulate:

**Always calculate the scale and proportion of the period of choice before buying the wargame figures.**

Is this fun? Not necessarily. Everyone has a personal taste and an ego. In this particular hobby, individuality is king, and I approve of this heartily. So just think about what I've said and go your own way.

For years I enjoyed gaming with historical Orders of Battle (ORBATs), meaning the troops that were actually present that day, but I also had fun with games in which armies were decided by a point system, meaning that you did not know beforehand what the opposition would field on the tabletop. I also appreciated the chess-like approach, where two contending armies fought each other with symmetrical troops.

You see, it is up to you. For a long time now, fights down to "the last man" have been only childhood memories. They are quite heroic, but they're also in a way highly unrealistic. In real life, armies break up and leave the field well before total annihilation. Of course, there are some exceptions to the rule, and a few historical massacres do exist. So if you want to refight Custer's Last Stand (Custer's five companies + HQ, a battalion with a total of 212 men), or even recreate the fate of half the British 24th at the Battle of Isandlwana (five companies of one battalion and another from its sister battalion), go ahead and do it. It is all up to you.

I also respect those wargamers who play a campaign. A campaign is very useful because it generates new battles, meaning that you can use your beautiful toy soldiers in a new way. It presents the commanders with a lot of advance decisions over maps, hexagons and/or grids, and so on. I personally think it is better to join the hex-and-counter fraternity at this point. But if you or your group/club are successful in the approach to campaigning, it is true that the tabletop battles have a relation to a bigger picture and give you a reason and a context for your attitude towards the tabletop: to fight or retreat, to delay or engage the enemy, to expect reinforcements or not.

I am afraid the size of this book does not permit me to explain in detail all the intricacies of the subject. For details, read Tony Bath's opus about setting up a campaign. The introduction of

logistics like supplies, food, weather, ammo, clothing, finances, diplomacy, spies, information, counterintelligence, and the effects of naval blockades and naval combat all probably have a charm for a special kind of wargamer. But in the end, all that paperwork serves only to establish conditions or a prelude for a battle setup.

There are many mechanisms that help simulate all those factors in about thirty minutes so that the generals on the tabletop have tactical and also strategic objectives. I personally prefer this last option. You see, campaigning the hard way reminds me too much of the tasks of my professional life, and if I focus my hobby mainly on periods prior to the end of the nineteenth century, it is primarily to forget my day-to-day routines. So I hope you will understand why I can't think about "counting stores" without shivering.

With some dice or even playing cards, it is easy and fun to devise a little script, including alternatives not known to the players, or at least not fully known. Think about hiding from them the exact time of the arrival of units, where on the tabletop they will make their entry from, in what order, etc. Add a clear definition for the armchair generals of what is expected of them and you can start wargaming sooner, with no detriment to the immediate fun.

Let's use red and blue (the original colours of the kriegspiel counters) so that we can start as soon as possible. This was always my option.

Saving time, space, and money does not prevent you from building exotic units for your armies; in fact, careful planning makes it possible. Say, for example, you want French line dragoons on foot, Polish Cheveau-légers (no lances yet), Gardes d'Honneur for the 1814 campaign, or similar units that you will use quite sporadically but that will undoubtedly grace your collection and enable you to paint something out of the ordinary. That is my own idea of having alternatives in army composition depending on which year of the Napoleonic Wars we are fighting.

What I call "multipurpose units" permit you to build extra command stands by buying only a few more figures and flags, depending on what you are representing for the current tabletop action, and give an alternative use for eighteen figures from an existing painted unit in your collection. Swiss infantry easily turn into Danish troops; minis with white uniforms can easily be made to represent French, Saxons, Westphalians, Spanish, and Austrians. That's not to mention that with a little imagination, those militia units without flags can be used in any army. This is especially true for jaegers and light infantry units, because after all, Britain supplied a lot of the uniforms and gear for many nations fighting in the Napoleonic Wars, and that gave them quite a similar appearance, only sometimes with different colour schemes in the uniforms.

As I have said, the command stands (5×5 cm) permit the use of multipurpose units within a period, but also, and even more interestingly, they allow you to exchange army and period. Thus, my American Civil War (ACW) Zouaves with a French command stand can be used in North Africa as part of the famous Nineteenth Corps, but they also can be used in the Crimean War (1854).

I also have built a regiment that is the epitome of the multipurpose unit, able to be used by early ACW armies (both sides), the English in India, or as a French unit, all by using only pieces and bits from the spares box. Of course, it did mean drilling new heads on redundant figures

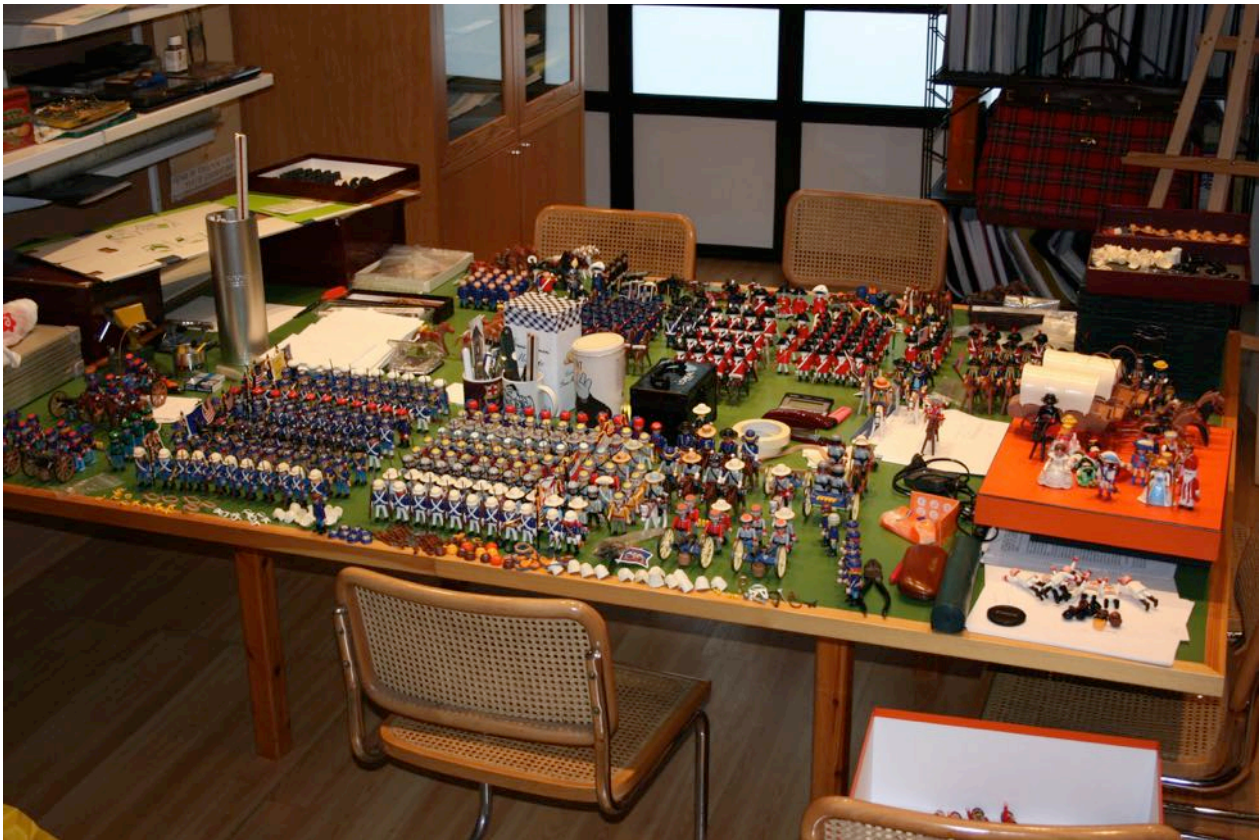
and doing some conversions.

Military modellers who read these pages will forgive the concept of the multipurpose unit altogether, because we know their particular concern in the hobby is getting the maximum authenticity in every detail, even in the smaller scales.

Just keep in mind that all I have said about Waterloo is related to 25/28 mm. After all, I did wargame in that scale for thirty years. Choosing smaller scales can change the number of units and figures per unit dramatically, and can also increase the necessary room to manoeuvre on your existing tabletop. Whatever you fancy, be sure to always have proportion in mind. It really pays to do so.







## VII

### **Playing with Other People or Solo: Wargames and the Tabletop**

With the passing of time, I discovered that a great part of the pleasure of wargaming is in the journey and not the destination, as with so many things in life. I just love the gathering of information, the search for documentation, the analysis of the forces present, the scaling down, the decision about which manufacturer(s) will supply the toy soldiers or wargame figures, the accessories needed, the purchasing of them, the necessary conversions, and the ordering of paint, or sometimes the sending of all or part of the lot to a professional painting company (a fascinating process in its own right). So let's say the "buildup" is very important in itself.

Which rules am I going to use? Home rules, commercial rules, or a mixture? Only at the end of this process does the actual battle take place, the result of a long, entertaining, and deeply satisfying task.

Then you have to decide on how many players per side. I have always played wargames with family, and only occasionally with friends. Nowadays, for the sake of playability, I am much more attracted to fast and furious games that take about sixty minutes, or to playing big games solo. Solo gaming means that you will need a permanent or semipermanent wargame room where the table and figures can remain undisturbed for at least fifteen days. Of course, that means a long holiday period, or a three-day bank holiday at the minimum. As I am getting lazy with age, I fear the really big games are a thing of the past for me.

Maybe this is the right place to mention the kinds of players to avoid at all costs. There are two main categories of them, though singular specimens can have both peculiarities. They are the Winner at All Costs and the equally disgusting Rules Interpreter.

I have nothing against lawyers; my daughter belongs to that particular collective. But having your tabletop converted in a courtroom is something to avoid from the beginning. Those who cheat or bend the rules to get an edge are best never asked to play again. There are enough

loopholes in the sets already, right?

Here is the postulate of legality (which sounds rather pompous, I fear):

**No set of rules can provide a priori solutions for all game situations. You will need either an umpire or fair players capable of achieving consent.**

This leads to the postulate of affinity (amiable spirit):

**Choose your gaming companions with great care.**

All my life I have been rather envious, in a healthy way, of those among you fortunate enough to live in a densely populated area, because it means an increased chance of a wargame club happening to exist within a reasonable travelling distance. That means you can belong to it. The logistical advantages are mainly:

- a) That any wargame project divided by  $x$  members is suddenly possible at short notice.
- b) What's more, it's also affordable. You can try new periods with other members' armies without having to invest time and money in them. You can see if you like the feel of them before you buy.
- c) If the club has a pool of scenery (houses, trees, rivers, hills, bridges, and other paraphernalia), you will be expected to contribute to it, but with much less overall effort and fewer number of pieces than if you were on your own.
- d) Most important of all, you will learn from the mistakes of the other members. They will be quite happy to inform you of the dangers involved with a particular period or scale, and they will give you free tips on how to do it yourself, especially in fundamental aspects like how to transport wargaming figures.

As to this last point, I once did move by car two complete 25 mm Napoleonic peninsular armies (French versus British) to a location two hundred kilometres from home. That was my first and last experience with transporting my wargaming materials. Since then I have avoided the thing like the plague. Flags and bayonets suffer too many accidents in the process.

Really, thinking about it, the wargames I've organized with many players to a side have been very few. It nearly always meant putting in all my time, stuff, and effort alone. I hated to clean up afterwards because games always went up to the maximum time limit. The only exception is my younger brother, who did transport his own figures several times to add them to specific American Civil War or Napoleonic battles, until we both decided we had enough minis in each town to finally make transportation unnecessary.

In any case, it was better to build up the armies and avoid transport forever. Two hundred kilometres was too much! It was not exactly the distance itself, you know; once in the car, it is the same to travel a hundred kilometres as it is to travel two hundred or even three hundred.



The real problem was the protection of the miniatures against harm. Looking back, the chore of wrapping and unwrapping everything was very boring. Another reason for my new love of Playmobil figures is that they weigh much less and do not break at all.

I guess this must be the main reason why a London wargame club with plenty of members organizes Salute.

Another thing to have in mind when making early decisions is that the smaller scales are easier to transport. This reminds me that the first try we ever had in the 15 mm scale was with a very old range of minis by Peter Laing (quite a crude design, but easy to paint and convert), which we used to refight the Crimean War.

So, summing up, the advantages of playing with a bunch of fellow wargamers are mainly social and economic, but it also adds an element of uncertainty to the troops' movements on the tabletop. If you play with more than one wargamer per side, the communications between commander-in-chief and subcommanders are quite a fascinating exercise. If you forbid oral communication (excepting when the minis representing the players are in contact), this means that all orders and counterorders must be written down and sent using an ADC. It is real fun to see how misinterpretation occurs, to see the puzzled faces and how suddenly misinterpretation provokes small chaos in the wargame room. I have been a witness to this as an umpire. One understands very quickly the reason behind the sorry fate of the real Crimean British Light Brigade. Those playing solo games have to improvise devices to reproduce this kind of effect by using dice and cards, or even random previously written incidents.

On the other hand, time is the great ally of the solo wargamer, while it is the enemy of multiplayer games, because someone is always in a hurry to leave. A fixed table in a permanent wargame room permits you to fight a battle over several days without infuriating the family with lunch delays or similar things. And think about alternatives at your leisure: the rented room and the train or bus schedule, with the consequent frenetic looks at the clock, always detract from the overall fun and often provoke irrational actions on the tabletop.

Sometimes, I guess, the discharge of adrenaline that occurs during civilized tabletop games diminishes or helps control the aggressiveness of real life, or at least I like to think so. But I also think that the best wargames are those played in your head in anticipation of the actual game. I don't know why, but things always seem to depart from the initial plan after the first move.



## VIII

### **The Battle: Historical ORBAT, Army Points, and Variations**

A beginner in the hobby usually has the primary intention of recreating or analysing in depth a particular period or battle. Whatever the motives that have produced that particular decision from the start, the options in front of him are more or less divergent or exclude one another. This is so important that we are going to try to clarify the matter a bit.

The new wargamer studies the opposing forces, deployment, strategic and tactical actions, and finally the actual phases or minute-by-minute (hour by hour is more appropriate) accounts of it—who attacked, who defended, and who counterattacked, where and when.

Nearly all wargamers start this way. The normal incentives may be a new or remade version of a movie about a particular battle or period. Perhaps you read a magazine article or book on the matter, probably even more than one. You grow excited at the discovery of information about relevant uniforms and arms. It can be anything that makes you an “expert” on the subject at hand.

One of the recurrent fears of the dedicated wargamer is being anachronistic, fielding on the tabletop units that were nonexistent at the time or simply not present at the battle. Everybody knows that there were no Polish lancers of the Imperial Guard at Austerlitz, and what is more, they did not have lances at their disposal for a long time. Nor did they have lances at their famous uphill charge at Somosierra in Spain in 1808. See what I mean?

Let’s look at what it means to fight a historical battle on the tabletop.

Whatever the reason behind the decision, the moment arrives when you want to buy the toy soldiers, wargame figures, or more classic 54 mm figures. You paint them, get some scaled-down terrain gear and so forth, and finally you are ready to start playing.

We will sum up at the end of the chapter, but have in mind the following alternatives when

planning to fight a battle on the tabletop:

Many wargamers, me included, respect or assume as proper the initial deployment of forces. From there on, all is fiction. I do not know why some people insist in separating the historical wargame from fantasy wargames. After the first movement, all is fantasy. You can call it historical fantasy, but I fear that is an oxymoron.

This kind of wargame is based on two questions: Would I have done better? What if I had tried...? As I have said in the last chapter, from the first movement onwards, or in function of the set of rules used, you are in command. The rest is a game or entertainment, and that is what is all about.

On the other hand, wargamers fed up with playing with the original deployment of troops too many times, or because they think it was a sorry blunder, may one day decide to use a free hand in the initial deployment and move on from there. With the same wargame figures, you can build a completely new, different game. The only historical part remaining is the composition of the armies, but the level of decision has been deeply modified, and thus the fiction begins even earlier on. This fresh approach produces a lot of variability, as no two equal deployments are normally tried. Every start usually has a new variation in it, and no two games are alike. Of course, these are just variations on a theme, but we love to play different games.

The next step is modifying the composition of the army, usually “recruiting by points.” Every kind of troop is assigned a point value, and, using the same units you already have at hand, you can thus field a new army. Again, fiction has started even sooner.

Detailing a bit: each infantryman gets a point value in depending on class—militia, line, elite, guard, etc.; the same with the cavalymen, which are light, medium, or heavy, but also with the same criteria already mentioned (you can have light cavalry elite but also heavy cavalry militia/recruits). Do the same with the artillery in function of the calibre of the piece, the training of the artillerymen, and so on. You can complicate the ratios as much as you like, but do not forget to have a roster ready for the battle. That way you can recruit different armies from the pool of your painted units, say, 1,500 or 3,000 points each. This way of playing, if kept inside realistic proportions to avoid having only elite units present (probably excepting the 1814 Napoleonic campaign in France) or a silly disproportion among the three different arms (infantry, cavalry and artillery), permits you to play without knowing the enemy's

composition beforehand. It's a funny thing to try sometimes because you can find yourself outgunned, or with a lack of sufficient cavalry but with lots of infantry at your disposal. These factors will of course affect tactics, and a new game again results.

The point system is quite popular in official tournaments because in theory, contestants field equally valuable armies. I must say something about it, though: I do not particularly enjoy the idea of a game confronting armies of Normans and Assyrians, and for me, context has its limits. I have always preferred historical context no matter what, but if the members of the ancients society are happy with that, let it be—remember the postulates.

Rarely if ever have battles been fought between two identical forces, figure to figure, horse to horse, and gun to gun. But wargames of that kind are fun. Seriously, symmetry has devotees in some periods and as a way to ensure equal opportunity.

On the contrary, asymmetry is the norm when playing colonial games. There are wargamers happy enough to field an army that is smaller in numbers but superior in technology in order to confront hordes of “savages” (even if the concept of “savage” is sometimes quite relative, in my particular analysis).

It is my personal taste or choice to “better” a historical performance. That does not exclude being defeated in the end, of course, but if you have delayed the advance of the enemy enough, or denied him something he got in the real battle, it is pleasure enough. You can achieve happiness on the tabletop in many more ways than simply “winning.” All that matters is the process. Of course, if at the end of a battle you reverse the course of history and achieve victory where there was only defeat, you will be overjoyed. The longer you are involved in the hobby, the more you realize that the act of playing itself is satisfactory, whatever the final result.

I have already mentioned that the most frequently played battles on tabletops around the world are probably Waterloo and Gettysburg, but put that aside for a moment and look at the other very popular kinds of smaller games. They are quite typical and very popular too because you can play them with many fewer troops. I am of course talking about battles with a precise military objective. They have the tendency to help giving the right orders (with a military sense) to your troops because there is a larger frame or script to refer to. Let me share some examples of particular context:

Defending a bridge, attacking it, or delaying the crossing until it is demolished;

trying to extract your forces before it blows up.

Defending a beachhead or attacking it, maybe with the use of a pontoon bridge you previously had to build or protect.

The convoy, be it of wagons full of impedimenta or of people, with all the possibilities of ambush; different kind of ambushes make for interesting challenges.

The capture of a strategic objective and its defence until the arrival of reinforcements. It is more fun if the participants do not know when or from where the reinforcements will arrive and on which side; you only need a deck of cards to simulate this ruse.

Attack a flank of the enemy or a fortification, or make a dawn attack on an encamped enemy.

A last stand of an outnumbered force.

A cavalry raid into enemy territory.

A confrontation between very different kinds of forces (e.g., cavalry against infantry), perhaps a small or medium “modern” force pitched against a much larger but archaic enemy. Colonial period fans specialize in this.

How to delay the advance of the enemy for a prefixed number of moves, or up to the arrival of night or reinforcements, but ignoring the real strength of the enemy or its place of entry on the tabletop.

Modern periods will include the use of helicopters, support artillery (maybe off the table), tanks, entrenchments, aviation support, etc.

There are at least three or four really helpful books about building your own scenarios, many of them written by Charles Stewart Grant alone or with the cooperation of Stuart Asquith (the solo wargaming authority). They provide a lot of fun, but they are also useful for trying new sets of rules. The best implicit thing is that while you are still painting towards a much larger goal, you can use the already-painted units in the smaller scenarios. Everybody wants to have a go at playing before they’ve finished painting all five hundred figures (to mention a common number). My brother and I have played a lot of these, sometimes because the time of play was limited, maybe only an afternoon. Sometimes it was because we did not have many more figures

that the ones needed for the game. It was an absolutely satisfactory experience, and we can recommend it to all of you without a shadow of a doubt.

I have never played in an official tournament, but I have read a lot about them and seen pictures of the tabletops in wargame magazines. They are beyond the scope of this book.

A final note: like in bridge tournaments, you can always organize competitions in which the participants use the same army in the same scenario, but in practice, the availability of figures and terrain make this a hard thing to do, and quite time consuming if done by turns. It is a kind of approach where the board-game fraternity has an edge over the wargamers. Hex-and-counter games are cheaper and available for things like that. It is easy to organize a convention in which everybody plays the same game without logistic problems. Try reading/playing *Avalon Hill*, *Columbia*, *ASL*, or something similar.

So, to summarize, the four main categories are:

1. Historical deployment
2. Historical forces present with free deployment
3. Variation of the forces present using a point system
4. A game where objectives are known for red and blue

The rest are combinations of the four mentioned in a smaller or greater degree. You can have one side deploying historically and the other “free.” You can have one force with its original historical composition and the opposition built by points. Establish preconditions or objectives to achieve to help you determine afterwards if you can declare a win, draw, or loss.

Everybody’s guess is that Waterloo would have been very different if instead of the Prussians corps arriving it had been Marshall Grouchy. The more you read real history about it, of course, the less you believe in that possibility, but it is very funny in terms of a game alternative—if you are not playing the Duke of Wellington, that is.





## IX

### Figures, Terrain, and Accessories

Today it's possible to find in the market and specialized shops practically any kind of wargame figure or unit, from the most popular periods down to the more basic, as well as the really exotic. This has not always been the case.

One of the recurring nightmares experienced by anyone involved with the hobby or a wargamer worth his name is that the factory, to use a somewhat grandiose description, interrupts production of the range of his interest and lets him down with an incomplete collection. That alone is the principal cause of the existence of tons of unpainted lead toy soldiers, sometimes in their original packages, in the less suspicious places of many homes. It's because we live in fear of that terrible possibility and so tend to buy them all ASAP. Believe it, we all do. Having your favourite figures become discontinued only has to happen to you once, and from that moment on, you overstock. I did it in my time, because the alternative is endless navigation through eBay or the "bring and buy" stand of a wargame convention.

Seriously, I truly recommend that once all-important decisions are made, and purpose and proportion are made clear and stable, you buy in a single bunch the figures you desire. Sometimes you will receive nice discounts as a result, or if this is too expensive the more "near in time" affordable to you.

Big names like Wargames Foundry do retire from production wargame figure ranges from a certain period of time, and you never know when they will come available again. If you are lucky, they will come back into production, but you never really know.

Since I have known them, ownership of Minifigs has changed hands three times. This can mean new relations, management, priorities, and service, and the company may change policy

or delete ranges. Moulds have a certain life span, and sometimes manufacturers need to clear overstock to make room for other ranges. It is not at all commercial caprice but the hard facts of life. It happens, and I have given you solid advice about what to do to avoid it.

The overstock of unpainted lead figures is truly common among wargamers, and it is a natural reaction provoked by the fear of having an incomplete collection. Usually, in my case, the number of figures painted compared to those unpainted at home was highly disproportional (especially in the Napoleonic period). Do not feel ashamed; after all, unpainted figures are relatively cheaper than painted ones.

To my everlasting satisfaction, my stock of unpainted figures one day achieved zero status. Today when I plan to do something new, it usually comes already painted, especially in the larger scales. I do still paint the smaller scales myself, but this has become less and less frequent. In some cases I have even sent the unpainted figures directly to professional painters, along with cumbersome details of what I want done with them. Normally I paint them myself in small batches, however, because the collection is only in need of small additions here and there... or so I thought at the time of writing these words.

At one time my cabinets held more than six thousand 25/28 mm wargame figures, painted, based, varnished, and ready to play. Add to that more than a thousand toy soldiers in 54 mm, with a third of them also able to be used in colonial games with the enemy “off the table.” My latest passion is my ever-growing collection of Playmobil figures from the American Civil War (ACW), French Foreign Legion, Spaniards versus pirates (marvellous ships), Seven Years’ War, American War of Independence, Knights, Vikings, Romans and Carthaginians, British nineteenth-century colonials, and more.

A quick note for those who would search without result for “Carthaginians” in the Playmobil range: you will need to use your imagination and some of the existing Romans, as some of them do well as Carthaginians, aka the Roman tribune with blue cape. The Egyptian range is pretty useful as Numidia’s and Libyan troops. And also of course the Gauls, as they were in fact in the catalogue, and you can get elephants from the zoo set. Add some gladiators converted to Iberians and there you have it. After all, the Roman legionnaires are in fact meant for a later period than the Punic Wars, but who really cares about 100 percent accuracy?

As my collection of books on the subject contains so many mentions of now-defunct manufacturers—time flies and things move on—I will refrain from listing the more popular ones of today because some won’t be available by the time you read about them. I think it is better to suggest to you that to get the latest information on which ranges are available, you should consult wargame magazines, the Internet, Google, a wargame club, or friends already bitten by the wargaming bug.

Remember what has been said about compatibility in the same scale, and that some sculptors’ styles yield figures that are chunkier than others. Always ask for samples first. Compare and choose and buy afterwards.

Before you fall in love with a particular size of wargame figure, keep in mind that if you are going to indulge in different periods, as we all do, then you will also need to choose carefully

all the buildings, rivers, roads, barricades, trees, bridges, pontoons, mule trains, wagons, horses (to dismount cavalry), and many other things if you are to use them in multiple periods. If you do have armies in different scales or sizes, you will need to double up the scenery. So in a way, sticking to a wargame scale is also a money-saving process. It is probably evident, but it's better to spend your money on the figures first, and once your army or armies are completed, then buy accessories. I have always thought it a bit silly to buy some trees and a hill instead of completing the set of wargame figures needed.

So beware. Think twice before sponsoring a predetermined size or range of figures. Do they make all the periods you like? Are they compatible with others? Do they provide scenery? Always think before buying impulsively.

Of course, not everybody buys wargame figures in order to fight battles with them on the tabletop. I should also mention the collector class. Probably nobody is a 100 percent pure wargamer, and that means that among us are those who have collected and painted all the possible versions of, say, the ACW Iron Brigade, Stonewall Brigade, or similar pet subjects from all manufacturers and in all scales.

In reality, we hobbyists are a very eclectic group, and diversity is paramount. Others only buy the toy soldiers to represent their favourite army and do not give a fig for the enemy (I also do that in some periods). When I started, the opposition was always my brother.

Later on, simply consider the enemy "off the table," a very good trick that needs only a bit of tampering with the rules and is especially useful when wargaming in 54 or 75 mm.

As I said at the beginning of the book, the more time you spend in the hobby, the greater the chance that you will indulge in conversions or transformations. Do not be scared at all, for they are quite easy to do. At the beginning this might involve simple colour scheme changes, using the same basic wargame figure to represent quite different regiments. Napoleonic French line infantry with red jackets (instead of blue) could be used for Swiss or Danes, simply using different flags on the command stand. Use green and they will become Italians, meaning the kingdom of Naples; use white and they would be Saxons or Westphalians, or even early French.

When you do have a lot of information about the uniforms of a period—for example, the Napoleonic Wars—you will understand that for all their colourful uniforms and special characteristics, there were many similarities at the bottom, and those in 25 mm.

Just imagine the possibilities in the smaller scales! You will quickly learn that Prussian landwehr military miniature figurines can be used to represent Russian *opolchenie*, aka Moscow militia, with green uniforms for the 1812 campaign in general, or Borodino (La Moskowa) in particular, without need of any conversion process.

US Marines in 25 mm from the Old Glory catalogue, originally designed for the Boxer Rebellion (1900), can be painted easily enough to represent the first version of Millán Astray's *Tercio de Extranjeros* (the Spanish Foreign Legion). This was the more "modern" unit in my collection, and it was built like this because nobody at the time produced the figures. For those interested, I know of at least two manufacturers who do the range: Askari ([www.askari-minis.com](http://www.askari-minis.com)) and Rif-Raf ([www.rifrafminiatures.co.uk](http://www.rifrafminiatures.co.uk)).

The subject of existing miniatures, deleted ranges, and those to come is a fascinating study in

itself. Many wargamers, failing to do an exhaustive search, believe that nobody does the obscure range they're looking for.

It's always a nice, happy feeling the day you discover that someone has at last produced the range you were waiting for. Then it is just the matter of getting a catalogue, or, in 99 percent of the cases today, consulting a website. After careful study and organization, you build up a list and make your first order. Then comes the waiting, sometimes for several weeks, during which we find that we need to make a second order because we forgot something in the first one, and after all, why not have also this and that?

Then comes the arrival of the first packet: the anticipation, the critical examination of what you've got, the cleaning of the castings if need be, and last but not least, the painting of a couple of figures to see how they look.

Repeat that process many times, and mix it with reading the right books, watching some movies, and debating and discussing with other aficionados via online forums and you will see that the thing has a life of its own, and you have no time at all to be bored.

The intrusion of other periods in between acts of our main wargaming/collecting period does not count as relief of boredom at all. In fact, it is an impulse or an exhilarating new interest that simply intrudes in your carefully planned next week's tasks.

Just to show you how it is, when I originally wrote this book in Spanish, I was in the middle of the process of painting and adding flock to the bases of my 25 mm Napoleonic Russian army, the last step before spray-varnishing to protect from oxidation. It was a tedious task, delayed many times. Well, I stopped about halfway and proceeded to start another project. For some time I had been thinking of completing a small set of French Foreign Legion in Mexico (Camerone 1863) I had started, with the intention of achieving the 1:1 scale of the action (Mexicans off the table). So I got the extra figures I needed, did some conversions, and painted myself the lot to get la Troisième Compagnie du Premier Régiment Étranger, commanded that day by Capitaine Danjou. They were based, flocked, and varnished before the other half of the Russian army, who stood patiently on the shelves until my new fever passed.

I did finish the Russians, but not without being simultaneously stimulated by other projects in 28 and 54 mm. (You will see that this hobby is seldom a linear process.) The order of the factors does not affect the final satisfaction. This is not a postulate, it is reality itself. So be advised that your interest in a particular period may wax and wane like the moon, but do not despair—this is absolutely normal.

Even sudden changes of scale (quite a radical decision) are usually committed only after serious pondering, and in my collection today I have minis in 75 mm, 54 mm, 25/28 mm, and 6 mm, all for many different reasons and normally because “the future games in my head” have considered them the best option available.





## X

### Hexagons, Grids, or a Metric Ruler?

I have talked extensively about the toy soldiers or wargame figures, their sizes, scales, organization, proportion/reality, and incompatibilities. What about the field of battle? Wargamers tend to dedicate much more time to the armies they have to build than to the terrain where they have to manoeuvre, though there are always some truly spectacular exceptions of very good terrain builders.

If you think about it, it's quite normal. After all, you have a collection of toy soldiers, but rarely do you have a collection of accessories. The word itself shows what they are: a necessary complement, but not "it." They are necessary to play and define certain areas of the field of battle, and they can be even very nice models. Thanks to the model-railway aficionados, we have lots of shops to buy scenery, but while we do collect figures, we do not collect scenery. The more you value your little soldiers, especially if you display them in cabinets, the more your accessories are relegated to boxes in the garage.

The rule sets imply, optimistically enough, a general consensus about the tabletop. Time has fatally proved this is not the case at all, however, and the more official the games are, the more problems seem to arise with the rules. In fact, the ideal referee would be a superhuman jurist with the tact and excellence of a born diplomat.

Having said that, and as a consequence of it, we divide the wargamers into three principal categories, depending on their preferences about the ideal field of battle.

1. The first group is those for whom the scenic tabletop is built as a railway model. For better clarification, without any kind of line or marks of division on it. It is essentially a landscape in miniature, and the detail is up to you. It truly needs a good extensible metric rule and an above-average referee who knows the rules of the game. This kind of

play is based loosely on the Prussian free kriegspiel, and the main complaint or failure is usually in the size of the buildings, because in order for them to look right, with the figures to scale, they usually need to occupy an area about the size of Manhattan. This is a problem inherited from the inexact third dimension of the wargame (here is where you need tons of reality suppression). The only exceptions are skirmish games, 1:1 scale, or role playing.

2. The player who has a background of hex and counter is normally reluctant to abandon this system, so the market provides terrain modules with that shape. There are even preprinted hexagonal mats with any kind of background, even outer space. This lets you move your hexagon-based armies (not strictly necessary) over them according to the same kinds of rules you use on board games. I have nothing against this; to each his own taste. Of course, there is a material advantage, and not a minor one: they can shelve the extensible metric rule and avoid the need for a referee, though this last assertion only works if the set of rules is clear enough and those playing are true friends.
3. Finally, there are those who use a grid, usually squares. It is like moving over a chessboard or in similar games. Some will say it is quite similar to the hexagons, but I disagree a bit. Movements are quite different, and command and control are another thing altogether. It is easy to adapt to it, though; after all, we are already professional reality suppressors. The partisans of the first point (free tabletop scenery) would say that pivotal movements are artificial and changes of front limited. But remember that their world is not perfect either, and any kind of approach that gets rid of the extensible metric rule or similar device has my heartfelt support. You do not know the number of silly discussions that are avoided. With hexagons or a grid, you know with precision if the artillery is in range or not; the same goes for charges, movements, musketry fire, and so on. The stands move three squares, or two or one or whatever, but you can count them. It is finally possible to determine melees (even though they were a rarity in real warfare) with an easy calculation. As you have guessed, I am all for it. But I still play the first version with real friends. Grids are probably also the best way to play solo games lasting several days.

As with everything else in the hobby, it is a matter of gusto, personal experience, or even a function of the period played or the rules used. Try them all, and in the end you will stick to the one you like the most. But keep an open mind. Sometimes you find the best games where you least expect them.

As a satisfied customer, I can vouch for the cloth wargame products made by Melkart. They can be obtained “clean”—i.e., with only a printed background—or with made-to-measure hexagons or squares, again superimposed over the background of your choice: desert, icy steppes, green meadows, or faraway galaxies. They really are fantastic products for wargamers. You can also try Hotz Artworks, a Canadian company that makes mats with a little deeper texture. They are less flexible with their choice of grid dimensions, but they have a great international post service.

As funny trivia, I will add that on the Hotz website, you can find the crazy adventures of



Larry Leadhead. To really appreciate that comic strip, you need to have a self-deprecating sense of humour, what is normally known as the ability to laugh at and with yourself. Larry is the epitome of all of us. Nonwargamers will probably not have a clue where the fun is or what is he talking about in such an acid way. Truly recommended!





## XI

### **Rule Sets and Gamesmanship—Where’s the Fun?**

It’s inevitable: there is always a dark side or a dangerous reef under the clear water, and the moment has come to talk about the rules.

The period is not relevant. Whatever game you play, regardless of the support and scale, you will need rules to define what you can and cannot do and what will be the result of your actions. You will need at least one rule set, but you will probably end up trying a lot of them.

Some of them are quite good; some I have doubts about. There are quite simple ones, and there are the overcomplicated kind, which require a real nerd approach to be happy with them.

The real test for the majority of rule sets is when the dice fall and you hit the proverbial “one pip,” usually at a critical moment, be that when trying a decisive morale throw, firing your main artillery battery, or testing your musketry defensive factor. It does not matter at all. Your jaw will drop several inches, and seconds later you will probably be tempted to start arguing about the supposed wisdom of that set of rules—rules that, up to that moment, you have used without any complaint at all. When rules let you down, and you think that some point of them is not working properly, then modify them, adapt them, and convert them to what is popularly known as home rules.

I must clarify that in my many years of wargaming, I have collected many sets of rules, mainly but not exclusively dealing with my periods of interest, always searching tips that work here and there—Napoleonic, American Civil War, nearly anything concerning the nineteenth century, and also ancients intermittently. I have always had problems with them, and this is why I can recommend that not treating them as gospel is a benefit in the short term.

Writing down your own rules is another refreshing side of the hobby, and when problems arise, you have no one to blame but yourself. It is fascinating because you can’t complain at all once the “one pip” falls, with the predictable result that your beloved, carefully researched,

painted-to-the-last-detail Spartans, Iron Brigade, Imperial Old Guard grenadiers, or other elite fetish unit starts a crazy rout to the nearest point of the tabletop borders, not to be seen again in that particular combat. The unit concerned may even go down a couple of notches in your estimation or affective scale. After one experience like that, you will likely amend the home rules again.

I am truly sorry, but I have to mention this: as in any other game, someone wins and someone does not. And you have to learn (and teach others) to lose graciously.

Learning to lose graciously is hard enough, but what is even more important is knowing how to *win* graciously. I personally think that nowadays there is less and less attention given to managing those simple facts of life, and that we do not teach them well to our children and grandchildren. They are basic concepts to be learned when young, and statements like “Only first place wins” and “Second place is first place for losers” do not help to ensure conviviality and a minimum of decorum.

I can understand that young players have difficulties with the idea of competing and losing. Be patient, and remember that facts are more important than words. Lead by example.

Another disgusting behaviour at the tabletop is the condescending winner, the one who smiles as he explains in detail all your tactical mistakes, conveniently forgetting that the lower throw of his dice has been four pips the whole time. He then goes on to counsel you about how a deeper study of the period will improve your performance. This is the person who was introduced to the period by you and still thinks a “culverin” is a little reptile. Those are moments to forget (forgiving and forgetting is even better), especially when the person starts lecturing about his innate military genius and tactical superiority. This is the moment to start rethinking ever having a game with him again.

Bad losers and worse winners, even if they are close friends or family, must be avoided in the future, because if not, they will ruin your hobby forever. Just relegate them to other aspects of normal life, or simply salute them on the street. After all, *you* have good manners, don't you?

The next thing to examine is the appropriate complexity or level of the rules you are going to use. Maybe you will choose to have a master as a referee, as in well-known role-playing systems. We know that skirmish games and 1:1 wargaming adapt very well to that particular structure. It is probably absurd to avoid campaigning because it is complex, and then fall in love with a rule set that contemplates a myriad of factors like: “Have the French eaten at all? If yes, add 2; if not, subtract 2.” “Have the British had their rum ration? If yes, add 3.”

I'm exaggerating a bit, of course, but there are rule sets like this around. The mathematical calculations take over and you pass the time working as a chartered accountant instead of wargaming, with a detriment to fun assured. As usual, I can only admire these rules and then pass on them. Let these players enjoy their math passion; I'll test and go for other rule sets that aren't so fastidious.

Finding the right balance between playability and complexity is something every one of us must do to achieve happiness with our chosen rules, and it is not an easy task. The perfect set of rules for all simply does not exist.

It is frustrating for any wargamer to play using correct historical tactics, for even the most brilliant tactical plan can be turned to ash after an unlucky dice roll. What do you want me to say? Inevitably, this sometimes happens. A good and balanced rule set will help to minimize how often this disaster happens on the tabletop, but it doesn't guarantee it will never happen, got it?

Not all the dice are numbered from one to six. There are what are called average dice, with one 2, two 3s, two 4s, and one 5 on their faces, or some similar configuration; these can be employed to introduce chance factors. Please inform yourself about these. They are all commercially available, and all rule sets specify the correct ones to use.

If a rule set leaves too many things to luck, the game will be unpredictable, but the rule sets that minimize the luck factor too much tend to be too predictable and boring in the end. For old times' sake, I fondly remember a 1970s rule set for the American Civil War—I think it was the one in the Airfix guides series. In it, everything that happened was a direct result of a series of charts. There were no dice at all, the author proclaimed proudly; the number of figures firing, kind of weapon, etc. were enough. A very long polynomial operation ensued every time, with the result that the poor Confederates always lost in the end—after all, they were fewer in number and usually had inferior weapons, especially in the artillery arm. We stopped playing with these rules because they had an excess of determinism.

The final option must be guided by your particular “feel.” I personally prefer rules that favour the use of correct historical tactics and punish the crazy use of wargame armies, especially if used anachronistically, but that is my own taste. I prefer games with a degree of chance or luck thrown in, but not in every move or half move. Not everything must depend on lucky throws of the dice. Equilibrium is what we need, especially in mega games with a lot of figures involved. You can find it amusing—and it really is kind of great—when a figure or stand, helped by lucky throws, fights alone on the tabletop like a superhero, eliminating the enemy in a disproportionate manner. It is fun for sure. It's one of the myths of childhood wargaming that sometimes happens in more serious games, but if you use a proper set of rules, an isolated regiment or brigade will offer stubborn resistance for a while but in the end will be forced to retire (if lucky), surrender, or be eliminated from play, especially if surrounded or outflanked or suffering any other heavy penalty, like being caught in disorder. But if that elusive miracle happens, enjoy it for what it is—the spectacular exception, not the rule.

Statistics show that armies lost cohesion and started retreating in an orderly way (or, if routed, in a disorderly way) mainly depending on the existence of a well-organized pursuit and/or the arrival of the safety provided by night or other circumstances, when experiencing between 30 and 40 percent casualties of the initial global total. And by casualties we count both dead and wounded, keeping in mind that there are usually ten times more wounded than dead. Against your frenetic orders to stand and fight, your wargame army will simply reach the breaking point and dissolve, hopefully to fight another day—that is, unless you have the pleasure of seeing this happening to your enemy. A good set of rules will make this point quite clearly and will not let the armchair generals fight to the last man.

Of course, to represent a particularly bloody battle, you can tamper with the rules to allow for more casualties before the army reaches the breaking point. But that matter was covered when

I explained that you can adapt the rules to your taste. Obviously, never fiddle with them in the middle of a game, though. Better to start a new one afresh after modifications or amendments.

As I have probably already exhausted the arguments about rules, let's mention the more popular sets of rules, as well as some obscure ones worth mentioning. For reasons of space, I will limit myself to detailing only Napoleonic rules, but rule sets exist for all ages of warfare in more or less direct proportion to the popularity of the period.

#### Napoleonic "Classic" Rules:

*Napoleonic Wargaming*, by Charles Grant (1974)

*Rules for the Napoleonic Period*, Tabletop Games (1975)

*Napoleon's Campaigns in Miniature: A Wargamers' Guide to the Napoleonic Wars, 1796-1815*, fourth edition (1992; first edition 1977)

*In the Grand Manner*, by Peter Gilder; designed with 25 mm in mind but easy to adapt to 15 mm or smaller sizes

#### Napoleonic Rule Sets:

*Shako*

*General de Brigade*

*Playable Napoleonic Wargames*, by Barry Edwards (1987)

*From Valmy to Waterloo*

*Napoleon at War* (1989); designed with 15 mm in mind; quite simple, back-of-a-postcard style

*Napoleonic Principles of War* (1997)

*Chasseur*, by Beaton-Kennerley-Gladstone

*Grande Armée*, by Mustafa

*The Big Battalions*, by Monaghan

*In the Name of Glory*, by Marks (1998)

*Port and Cigars*, by Blockley (1999); you need a sense of humour to really enjoy this one!

*De Bonaparte a Napoleon* (in French), by Vae Victis (1999); has three extensions with ORBATs and specific modifiers

*Age of Eagles*, by Wilbur Gray (2005); an adaptation of the brilliant *Fire and Fury* for the American Civil War, designed with 15 mm in mind but easy to adapt to 25 mm or smaller scales. (Note: It is easy to become a member of Age of Eagles via Yahoo, or just log on at [ageofeagles.com](http://ageofeagles.com). The level of discussion of the rules is at times brilliant.)

*Napoleonic General de Division* and *Napoleonic Marechal d'Empire*, by Polemos; both designed specifically for 6 mm

*Napoleon*, by Matthew Fletcher, edited by Wargames Foundry (2009)  
*Napoleonic Wargaming*, by Neil Thomas (2009)

I have learned something from nearly all of these, a bit here and another there, and I must confess I only play with my own home rules in a constant flux of adaptation and modification following my reading and whims. And whatever existing or future rule sets say, *I will never rebase my armies again*. A rule set that insists on that point simply does not interest me at all. As long as your contending armies have the same stand measures, simply adapt the rules to your basing.

And what exactly do the rules regulate? Usually horse-and-musket period rules determine basic things like scale, basing (recommended), terrain, formations allowed, movements allowed and restrictions on them, how to determine casualties caused by artillery, infantry, charges and countercharges, melees and their resolution, morale, and other factors to be added or subtracted to the last concept. Rules may also determine orders and how to change them in the course of the game; how units will react (obey, stand, retreat, or rout); how to try to rally them; the use of generals and ADCs; how to determine the victor, loser, or a draw. In fact, the rules regulate quite a long list of variables and factors that will affect the modus operandi of the miniature figures on the tabletop. They also establish turns that will divide time of battle into periods. The sequence of events will look more or less like this:

Initiative definition (who does what first).

Orders to those units able to react; the rest follow the original plan! Usually there must be a plan; battles without one are highly unrealistic. Plans can include tactical orders for each and every unit or not, like advance, stop, charge, reform, reload, fire, retreat, change front, or change formation.

Artillery fire result, if it exists.

Compulsory movements (or the interruption of them). Some will take a morale check here.

Movements following orders. These can be simultaneous or alternate, or from right to left.

Light infantry fire results (including “skirmishers” and their peculiarities).

Infantry fire results.

Charges (cavalry or infantry).

Melee (or hand-to-hand combat) results.

Morale checks and compulsory movements.

Movement of the rest of the units.

And so on for a minimum of perhaps twelve turns and a maximum of twenty-four moves, if the battle does not finish first. If you reach the time limit without a clear result, usually a point system determines if it is a tactical victory for one side or an overall draw.

Nearly all of the rule sets compromise between historical accuracy and playability to a certain degree. So I will say it again: get one or several, try them on the tabletop, and adapt whatever you do not like. Even then you will be surprised by the excitement and originality of the wargame. For the neophyte, battle stress and adrenaline run free, and time flies past. And that was the original purpose of the hobby, to have lots of fun, remember?

As an example, here are my own home rules for ancient battles with Playmobil figures. These are designed with fast and furious games in mind, but also with speed understood as a bonus, meaning several games can be played successively. This gives both sides opportunities to win some engagements. These rules are very appropriate when teaching games to your grandchildren.

I was first inspired by reading a French book about ancient Greek classical warfare, *Les Grecs et la Guerre V-IV Siècle*, by Michel Debidour (Éditions du Rocher 2002). Not that my Playmobils look absolutely Greek at all; they are from the Romans range (special ref: 4659 for the blue side and the Roman tribune, plus an additional lance from the set ref: 5817, which incidentally means using the extra figure in this duo pack for other purposes, like Carthaginian/Libyan infantry).

But let's say that one side is definitely blue and the other red, and as the Roman tribunes have this classical feel in their panoplies, there is no real harm done. There are hoplon shields (by Malone) and stickers (by Bendala) for converting them more truly into the period, but at first I did not bother.

Whatever my own knowledge was about the citizen phalanx warfare period, this book clarified a lot of it in the following points.

In the first place, I learned that "dry victories" existed, meaning no blood, sweat, or tears. Sometimes one side could not endure the pressure, turned tail, and ran away. Of course, there's no need to even move the figures in this case; you simply score some points for one side, have a laugh, and move on to the next game, modifying your deployment if need be.

Also, and more important, there existed some rules of engagement implicitly respected by



both sides. That is what the author says, at least; as always, I am very sceptical about human nature in matters of war, but I guess these rules are OK for the purposes of this book:

Wars are declared; no surprise attacks or treachery are allowed.

After a battle, the winner must return the corpses of the enemy when asked for them.

Prisoners are neither massacred nor mutilated, but are ransomed or sold.

The pursuit is limited to the area of the field of battle, and only to affirm the victory.

You never extend war to the civilian population.

Battles and combat are limited to the period of good weather (so don't even think about introducing cold-weather elements into the rules).

You do not attack the social system of your enemy (e.g., do not try to produce mutiny in their ranks or something similar).

It is not honourable to use nonhoplite weapons (meaning arrows, slings and stones, etc.).

Some of those points were a direct consequence of the warriors' heavy equipment, and the effect of the summer heat on them (because of the good weather required to fight a battle in Mediterranean Greece).

Let's also mention that every figure has a helmet with a coloured crest (different colours can mean a different quality of training), a shield (round and called a "hoplon" in real life; from its use comes the word "hoplite"), a lance, and a sword. This is the perfect occasion to use those Playmobils, because they can actually handle this gear, and those pieces can be removed too—something that's obviously impossible to do with more traditional lead wargame figures.

So, before stating the simple rules of this game, let's also mention that Playmobil figures can have a beard (which is removable, if using the Playmobil standard helmets) or not; this is useful in advanced games, as it separates the young from the veterans. Even the red or blue cape can have additional meaning. The removable pieces in the game rules are normally limited to lance, shield, sword, and helmet.

### ***INTRODUCTORY RULES***

You have sixteen figures, with no distinction among them; all are the same value. You deploy them in two ranks of eight.

All are armed with helmet, shield, lance, and sword.

Your enemy has the same.

Both sides' objective is winning a highly traditional battle.

We assume both sides charge to contact. (Contact can be assumed to leave an

empty square between the figures to avoid a “tangled lances” effect and “head over heels” result.)

First line melee: opponents throw eight six-sided dice (or a six-sided die eight times) to ascertain either if it is a dry victory or not; for a dry victory, you need to have at least the double of points of your opponent. If a dry victory does not happen, then the result on the dice determines who throws first (i.e., is the attacker). Once this is done, the winner starts by the figure on his right. I prefer that both sides use the same dice to avoid superstition—yes, that has been seen on the wargame table too often. Suspicion about loaded dice is not below or above the many virtues of the wargamers.

### *FIRST TURN*

Attack results (six-sided dice thrown by attacker for each fighting figure):

- 6 Opponent killed. Remove figure from play once turn is finished.
- 5 Opponent heavily wounded. Remove his lance and shield and make the figure sit on the ground.
- 4 Opponent lightly wounded. Remove his lance.
- 3 No harm done to your opponent.
- 2 Your own lance is broken in the attack and is removed from play.
- 1 Your figure has panicked and retires behind his second rank without his lance (which is removed). If there is no one behind him to “protect him,” he throws lance and shield away and retreats two cases/spaces (still facing front).

Defence results (supposed to be simultaneous with the previous):

- 6 Attacker killed. Remove figure from play.
- 5 Opponent heavily wounded. Remove his lance and shield and make the figure sit on the ground.
- 4 Opponent lightly wounded. Remove his lance.
- 3 No harm done to your opponent.
- 2 Your own lance is broken in the defence and is removed from play.
- 1 Your figure has panicked and retires behind his second rank without his lance (which is removed), If there is no one behind him, he throws lance and shield away and retreats two cases/spaces (still facing front).

The worst alternative always prevails on any occasion. The player with the higher score (the winner) decides what that means.

After the first turn, players remove all figures killed. The heavily wounded remain firmly in place and do not feature again in the game other than as an obstacle to movement.

If eight figures in any army are killed or heavily wounded in total, that army surrenders the field of battle and has lost. If both armies are in the same situation, the one with fewer killed wins. If the result is identical, the battle is a draw.

The player who was defending now goes first. All figures can move one case, except diagonally. There are no compulsory movements; figures can choose not to move. Figures who have panicked can't move for the next turn.

A turn is limited to one move each per side.

All figures can fight to either the front or the flank (but only one), and not to the rear.

One figure attacked by two or three opponents (maximum) has only a defence throw and must say against whom he is defending. The other attackers make thrusts against him with the following results:

6+	Opponent killed. Remove figure from play.
5	Figure heavily wounded. Remove his lance and shield and make the figure sit on the ground.
4	Figure lightly wounded. Remove any piece from his panoply.
3, 2, or 1	Results have no effect on attacker or defender.

*SECOND TURN: Modifiers apply.*

Players must throw again to determine who attacks and who defends, also starting from the right of the attacker.

Complete figures (meaning those with all their weapons) have as many points or "pips" of advantage as the difference with his confronting enemy. For example, an undamaged warrior has +1 added to the dice result if his opponent has no lance, +2 if his opponent has neither lance nor shield, and so on.

Defenders without the help of a second-rank companion must deduct 1 point or “pip” from their defensive throws.

Attack results (six-sided die thrown by attacker):

- 6+ Opponent killed. Remove figure from play.
- 5 Opponent heavily wounded. Remove his lance and shield (or two other two pieces of panoply) and make the figure sit on the ground.
- 4 Opponent lightly wounded. Remove his lance or other piece of panoply if he has already lost his lance.
- 3 No harm done to your opponent.
- 2 Your own lance or sword has broken in the attack and is removed from play. Figures without offensive weapons (lance or sword) retire two cases as a compulsory move at the end of the turn. If a figure still has a shield, he can only defend himself.
- 1 Your figure has panicked and retires behind his second rank, without lance or sword (which are removed). If no one is behind him, he throws his lance (or sword) and shield and retreats two cases, now facing to the rear.

Defence results (supposed to be simultaneous with the previous).

- 6 Attacker killed. Remove figure from play.
- 5 Opponent heavily wounded. Remove his lance (or sword) and shield and make the figure sit on the ground.
- 4 Opponent lightly wounded. Remove his lance or sword.
- 3 No harm done to your opponent.
- 2 Your own lance or sword has broken in the defence and is removed from play.
- 1 Your figure has panicked and retires behind his second rank without lance or sword (removed); or if no one behind him throws lance (or sword) and shield and retreats two cases facing to the rear.

After the second turn, players remove all figures killed. The heavily wounded remain firmly in place and do not feature again in the game other than as an obstacle to movement.

If eight figures in any army are killed or heavily wounded in total, that army surrenders the field of battle and has lost. If both armies are in the same situation, the one with more standing figures wins. If the result is identical, the battle is a draw.

The player who was defending now goes first. All figures can move one case, except diagonally. There are no compulsory movements; figures can choose not to move. Figures who have panicked can't move for the next turn.

All figures can fight to either the front or the flank (but only one), and not to the rear.

One figure attacked by two or three opponents (maximum) has only a defence throw and must say against whom he is defending. The other attackers make thrusts against him with the following results:

6+	Opponent killed. Remove figure from play.
5	Figure heavily wounded as in the first turn. Remove his lance (or sword) and shield and make the figure sit on the ground.
4	Figure lightly wounded. Remove any piece from his panoply.
3, 2, or 1	Results again have no effect on attacker or defender.

*THIRD and FOURTH TURN: Modifiers apply as in second turn.*

Players must throw again to determine who attacks and who defends, also starting from the right of the attacker.

Complete figures (meaning those with all their weapons) have as many points or "pips" of advantage as the difference with his confronting enemy. For example, an undamaged warrior has +1 added to the dice result if his opponent has no lance, +2 if opponent has neither lance nor shield, and so on.

Defenders without the help of a second-rank companion must deduct 1 point or "pip" from their defensive throws.

It would be rare for the battle to run for more than three turns, but in any case, the fourth turn is the last. Then the player with the most standing figures is the winner, even if he has had more killed.

#### *ADVANCED RULES*

- a) The same as above, but you can give veterans (figures with beards) +1 from the beginning.
- b) Veterans move only one case, but younger warriors can move one or two

- cases. It is up to the player to decide which is more advantageous.
- c) Players choose deployment of veterans and younger warriors in the front rank or the second, or alternatively in one side or the other (free disposition). Be as precise as you like with this point.
  - d) Armies can deploy with a narrow front (six figures) having extra weight in the push files with more than two ranks. Say +1 for each extra figure translated as a whole to the front-rank fighting figure.
  - e) You can introduce treason (no matter what the author of the book said). After one turn, any of the panicked figures can change sides and attack on the rear on the following turn; then you can face to the rear to repel them. This means having extra figures to do the trick, but a couple of them would be enough; after the second turn, “killed figures” can be used also.
  - f) And so on, whatever you fancy. You can introduce exhaustion, sudden storms, terrain features, standard-bearers with ensigns to be preserved or captured, or musicians to blow trumpet orders. You can even think about what means to have the cape on or off (veteran, elite, recruit). In addition to beards as a distinctive feature, maybe you’ll use the different colours on the helmet crests. As usual, in my opinion there are no limits to imagination—though certainly to good taste, so no killing of heavily wounded allowed.









## XII

### Collecting

As time goes by and the benign addiction persists, you will see that over the years you will accumulate a great number of figures, whether you call them toy soldiers or wargame figures. And what is more, after you have learned how to manage it, the number of unpainted lead (or plastic) figures tends to be zero, or nearly so. You will have finally established a procedure of buying, painting, and displaying that is no longer the impulsive, disordered, anarchic attitude you had in the beginning or at your introduction to the hobby. Congratulations! You are now a collector. Maybe you even display your collection in cabinets. I refuse to write a chapter about interior design dealing with details of that. Sounds and would be like work. Whatever the scale or theme you have arrived at, by the end of your trials, you will find yourself the proud owner of a collection.

If you collect in the field of 54 mm, it's better to keep the original boxes. The figures' market value grows exponentially if they are kept in the original box. Believe me, it is a proven fact; just ask any auctioneer who sells them.

You will also learn that a collection is seldom a "quiet thing." You will have the tendency to exchange, sell, and buy items to consolidate the part you love most, even if that entails discarding items no longer part of your main interest. With time, you will concentrate on some parts, expanding them or specializing in a theme, or you will change your objective, and that will affect the composition and structure of your collection.

This is the moment to recommend James Opie's books about this particular passion, especially *Collecting Toy Soldiers*. Opie is the acknowledged master in this field and a great specialist in Britains figures, but his knowledge also extends to other legendary manufacturers like Mignot in France and some companies that are a merger of older firms (including Lucotte) and have been on the market for decades. He specializes in the real "old toy soldier," manufactured up to

1973.

Figures produced beginning in the early '70s are considered “new old toy soldiers”; if you're interested in them, you must consult Stuart Asquith's excellent book, which includes an introduction by the above-mentioned James Opie. Those figures and similar ones are highly sought-after collector items nowadays, because have turned themselves into “new classics.” Some of them have even already ceased production like the rightly famous All the Queen's Men, by Derek Cross, or recently Ducal (or Fort-Ducal), by Jack and Thelma Duke, just to mention two of the best. The term “new” becomes obsolete with the inexorable passing of time, I fear.

The 54 mm scale is eminently collectible. It always has been and will probably remain the “classic scale.” See the quality and price they now have attained; I guess that nobody in his right mind would shoot pellets or marbles at them, à la Wells. Still, those toy soldiers in more “active poses” are still useful for playing skirmish wargames and permit you to play with the enemy “off the table,” as I do.

There is a subcategory in 54 mm dedicated to the “military modelling” option, with much more detail and a higher cost. The scale is the same, but figures are intended only for display. Of course, wargamers in this category represent just a small percentage of hobbyists. In my personal case, I never buy the opposition or enemy, I just buy the figures I love. These more detailed figures are also the ones most often displayed in cabinets and seen at auctions.

Curiously enough, as a result of my not building the opposition in 54 mm, I extended that practice to some obscure periods of 25/28 mm and other smaller scales, in which the idea of painting literally hundreds of “natives” was not a feasible option for me. Sometimes I did not buy the opposition simply because I didn't like the enemy's uniforms in some other less “colonial” periods. I must be peculiar in that aspect, because I love Russian Napoleonic and do not like Russian Crimean War troops at all. But the hobby is like that. It is entirely possible to have a game of the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Crimean War without possessing a single Russian wargame figure.

Well, whatever your personal interests, origin, period, or scale, my personal experience confirms that in a reasonable period of time, you will slowly establish an excellent relationship with manufacturers and professional painting services. In my time, hobbyists had to send long letters to manufacturers, but today email has made the wait unnecessary. You may even exchange emails on the same day to clarify things you took for granted that the other party would understand without difficulty.

It is also part of the joy of the hobby to learn how exactly to specify your wants and needs in order to avoid silly or horrid surprises about, say, uniform colours. After all, not every professional painter is an expert in the details of every period. The same goes for specifications on material, size, and final aspect/texture of the bases or stands of the toy soldiers, or where the figures are glued.

A number of unadvertised possibilities are open to you to obtain figures not yet available on the market. They can be quite easy to get if you know the right place. Dorset Soldiers and its charismatic owner, Giles Brown, are a model example. Have a chat with him, because he will adapt to your needs, combining bodies, heads, arms etc., and with the right colour scheme. In a

nutshell, he will provide you with units you cannot find in the open market. Not so many years ago, Giles, using unpainted kits of a basic musician figure (a fife player) by Tradition of London, made me figures of the Royal Danish Guard Band. Tradition never produced these; they only did the fifes and drums.

What is more, for your immense satisfaction, “specials” can be made by manufacturers, and depending on the quantity you need, they might even make you an interesting proposition about making the moulds ad hoc to get those special figures you have long searched for without success. This kind of activity usually happens much later in your hobby involvement; it is a rare thing to ask for specials in the beginning. But it can happen. Normally, people are very shy in even asking about the possibility of getting specials made specifically for you. In time, however, you will come to pester amiably those faraway friends—especially if you buy your soldiers by post—from Spain, France, the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Hong Kong, or Australia, to mention the more popular places.

In my time, using the summer holidays and abusing the patience of my immediate family, I had the pleasure of visiting some toy-soldier factories and wargame-figure facilities. Back then Minifigs (Miniature Figurines) was located in Southampton, and it was a compulsory stop during our holidays because it allowed me to avoid two things: the 30 percent shipping and handling cost, and having bayonets broken in transit. Ah! Those were the happy days. I was younger and “newer,” and fulfilling far-off objectives was, at least, a great dream.

The use of the word “factory” applied to toy soldiers is probably going overboard. Back then, to my surprise, the number of people behind every magazine-advertised “manufacturer” was usually quite small, if not a family affair. In spite of this moderate size, however, they were and are a truly efficient service.

Collecting is a subcategory of the hobby, broken down into further subclasses along the criteria specified by James Opie in his book *Collecting Toy Soldiers*. Here I have added some criteria of my own.

We are not going to discuss the collecting of antique toy soldiers, as Opie has already done this to perfection. The costs are very high, and there are already enough published books on the subject.

To begin with, at least for me, “collecting toy soldiers” is no longer limited to the traditional 54 mm scale. It can sound like heresy, but I think I am right. If things such as pins, champagne corks, cigar bands, and teddy bears are “collectible,” then I guess the 25/28 mm wargame figures have their own right to be included among the best items to collect. The castings are so nice that they look magnificent even if left unpainted. Some of them are especially collectible if they are painted by an expert.

Whatever the scale, the collector’s first option is collecting by manufacturer. He adopts a particular trademark and collects those products, as they are of the same style and quite compatible in design. I consider collecting by scale a variant of this, because, especially in 54 mm and larger scales, there is a compromise of dimensions usually absent in the smaller sizes. Do not forget that the vast majority of collectors display their collections, perhaps in private, and are deeply worried about aesthetics.

The second option is collecting by theme, which is also extremely popular. Here the toy soldiers usually represent the same regiment or unit, sometimes using different manufacturers and also in different scales and sizes. You can also collect by country of origin, but globalization makes this distinction rather vague these days, as you do not always know where exactly the figures are produced. This practice is probably restricted nowadays to the antiques field.

Then there is what is called the universal collection, which means anything you fancy. You can be eclectic about everything—period, size, manufacturer, composition, material, whatever. That kind of collection is more afflicted by sudden changes of direction, nearly always due to a “new focus,” with the consequent sale of parts of it to free up room and sometimes money to buy other things.

Much more unusual are the collections that combine aspects of the former—say, period and manufacturer. The collector concentrates on a certain period of fabrication and a trademark, e.g., Britains, Lucotte, Heyde, Mignot, Zinnfigurinen, or the like.

Collecting by personal connections is another option. Perhaps the collector’s family has strong ties to a particular branch of military service; maybe several members served in the same war or even the same campaign.

Then there is the nostalgia collection, usually based on childhood memories and the search for the toy soldiers you used to possess, or the ones you always wanted to have and did not had the chance to get. This is perhaps the frontier collection between where more typical collecting ends and antique collecting begins.

We can also mention the catalogue collection, in which you intend to complete a collection of all the items produced by a manufacturer. Maybe one item for reference is enough for the usual objective. The cameo collections are probably a variant of those by theme, if centred on a campaign or particular military action. The rarity of the period and figures can make them quite interesting. Usually they mix manufacturers, and in time some of them bring higher prices at auction because of their rarity.

You would be amazed to know the disproportion between the original cost and the prices fetched in some auctions. Figures no longer produced can become highly sought-after items years later. High prices are the exception and not the rule, of course; normally prices are quite stable, evolving with average inflation.

Evidently, there are nearly infinite variants, or at least a lot of them, when collecting by theme. There are those who exclusively collect military bands, cavalry units, or lancers, or particular ceremonials like the Changing the Guard (at Buckingham Palace or Windsor Castle), the Queen’s birthday parade (Trooping the Colour), Queen Victoria’s jubilee, the evening parade of the US Marine Corps in Washington, or units like the French Foreign Legion, various royal household troops, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, famous regiments—really, whatever is one’s fancy.

Apart from the toy soldier branch, the same criteria are applied (if a lot more expensively) to the purely military modelling figures, those minor marvels of sculpted realism. In that field, 54 mm is the smaller scale. Figures can be much larger, though there are excellent manufacturers working in 54 mm, like Andrea or Tradition of London, just to mention a couple. But military

figures also exist in very large sizes and may be made of real silver, porcelain, and china.

To end this chapter, let's mention eBay. It is quite an extraordinary experience to buy and sell there. Sometimes it is the only way to search for a particular discontinued or out-of-production item. You are in for a lot of surprises, though. I recommend the experience, but remember that the last seconds of any auction are the most crucial ones. So if you really want that item, take care that you don't lose it at the last moment. As with everything else, you'll get better at it with practice.

Sometimes items go for prices that are quite high, and sometimes nobody wants what you are selling. This can vary from week to week or month to month, so never despair. Maybe you will find it (or sell it) someday.

Elsewhere in this book, I have mentioned how I sold part of my 54 mm collection due to lack of space. More recently I sold redundant 28 mm wargame figures. At the same time, I was buying through eBay Playmobil items no longer commercially available. The great majority of eBayers (buyers and sellers) are quite amiable and helpful. PayPal is the preferred way of payment, and you can also make long-distance friends.

Among other things I've found on eBay, I finally got the DVD of the film *North West Mounted Police*. And believe it or not, soon after I bought it, it became commercially available. Naturally, to be on the safe side, I bought another copy. This was one of the mythical films from my younger days for which I had searched for years without any luck. I also found a DVD of the miniseries *Son of the Morning Star* (which I already had in VHS, incidentally), for which I had searched for years; I bought it from someone in Australia, also through eBay, because this one is not yet available commercially.

Nowadays I am buying Playmobil "customized figures" (which does not mean I do not also collect the original commercially available products, of course). For figures produced from about 1995 on, there are many available with a very realistic finish.

I have been presented with toy soldiers since I was two years old, if not earlier. I am now in my sixties, so that means more than half a century of continual interest. Many kinds of toy soldiers have come into my life and are no longer there. They have become toys for other children in my family, and they have disappeared from the face of the earth during various "cleaning up house" episodes. But the soldiers were normally considered mine, first and foremost, because I was the eldest.

Since my early twenties, things have been seriously different. My collection is alive and kicking, in constant evolution, and sometimes subject to radical changes. You will read about this in the update/outro of this little book, where I explain my renewed interest in 6 mm, which has arisen from the ashes of time.

My passion for Playmobil toys did not develop in my youth, as the first ones produced in 1974 were very crude and childish, and their target consumers were young children. But then I began having grandchildren, and I got interested in Playmobil on their behalf. As I've discovered, third-generation figures are radically improved, and I grew enthusiastic, mainly for the flexibility they can add to the tabletop. Nowadays I buy Playmobils for myself and for them. I have discovered that American Civil War games can be played in 75 mm, and that with

a little imagination, a single figure can adopt so many positions that the options for playing are absolutely fascinating. Add to this that you can exchange weapons, mount and dismount figures on horses and vehicles, and that they can stand without bases and can therefore be placed on ships, castles, and the like without modification. Boy, what a discovery. I hope my grandchildren enjoy them. I know I do!









### XIII

#### **Painting the Figures, or the Painting-Service Alternative**

As with everything else, there are various options when it comes to painting figures. There are the wargamers who paint their figures themselves, and some of them are very good at it. Others prefer to use professional painting services. A third possibility is those who simply buy the already-painted and -based packs of figures available in the market, be those first- or secondhand.

Remember that even the 54 mm figures can be purchased unpainted in nearly all cases, and that you can buy them painted as small as 6 mm. Search eBay for Turbil Miniatures, for example.

When I started painting seriously, about the middle/end of the 1970s, my style was rather “toy soldier” in approach, and it still is, for reasons of compatibility of the collection. I will gladly admit that those who do paint professionally are much better at it than I, and that I am still surprised at the final result some of my wargame figures have—facial details, shadows and light, etc.—after passing through their hands.

There are also different groups or cultures around the finish of the figures. There are those who prefer a matte finish (including matte varnish) and those, like me, who prefer bright varnish. In the end, all figures look matte, because even brilliant varnish fades with time, and the main reason to apply it is to protect the figures against oxidation and the damage that can be done to the paintwork when they are handled.

If you are not colour blind (the tale about a well-known British wargamer’s green horses is not apocryphal), there will be no problems at all. It is just a question of time, method, patience, and of course mass production.

Many books and even guides included as central supplements in magazines like *Military Modelling* have explained time and again the best and most efficient ways to build or produce units. I agree with the majority of the concepts mentioned in them and will review them briefly in the following points.

The first step, one we all have indulged in, is to hurriedly paint a couple of figures just to see if we are able to do it. As a consequence, we quickly learn what “drying time” means. We are then astonished to see the white crossbelts mixing with the base colour of the tunic/jacket, the white paint having been applied too soon. The figures suddenly look quite surrealistic or artistically impressionistic, to our surprise and indignation. Do not despair at all—we all have been through that. It just happens as Murphy predicted, and I guess Murphy was rather optimistic.

The second step is an immediate consequence of the first. We assess the number of basic colours we need to apply per figure, calculate their respective drying or setting times, and then paint a whole unit using the mass production we all associate with Henry Ford. Some first wash the figures, then prime in a base colour, usually white or black—do not ask me why, but it seems there are also two schools of thought about which one is best for covering the maximal surface. By now, following trial and error, you will have already learned that it is quite better to glue (not superglue) to a provisional balsa-wood base the figures you want to paint in order to avoid touching the wet paint with your fingers. The slightly bigger balsa-wood base permits you to turn the figure (even upside down) without messing with the recently applied paint. The smaller the scale, the more important this factor becomes. In really small scales like 6 mm, everybody uses small strips of balsa wood with the figures glued to them in single file. It is easy to dispense with the balsa wood for 54 mm or larger sizes.

Once the chain of production is established, and depending on the colours you have to apply—you will learn which ones to do at the end because they dry very slowly—you will see that after painting the faces and hands of twenty or so wargame figures, the first one you did has already dried, and you can now, for example, paint the jackets and the rest successively. The longer you wait to superimpose colours or paint adjacent areas, the better.

You will also learn that it is not important to paint the metal base of the figure, for this is time lost if you are going to glue several of them to a single stand. First you glue them on the final base or stand, let the glue dry and fix, and then, depending on your aesthetic preferences or “finish,” you apply the mixture of colour and flock that will bring a glorious end to the chore.

Add the flags. Apply a spray varnish (though there are those who prefer using a brush to varnish), let it dry, and you already have a wargame unit ready to

fight on the tabletop, or some toy soldiers to add to the cabinet.

If you have followed this advice, or similar advice from any other book (there is an excellent one edited by Wargames Foundry) about how to paint more easily, you will soon establish an order of the painting of units to build your army. I have already mentioned that your style and precision will automatically get better with time, so a very wise decision is to start painting line and militia units first, keeping the elite units and those with the more intricate uniforms for the end. It is a hard decision, I know, and temptation is great. I always wanted to paint my cavalry units first.

Now, a good measure to avoid boredom is to alternate arms. First you paint a line infantry unit. Then your second can be an artillery unit, complete with all its elements (gun, limber, horses, artillerymen). Your third choice might be a militia or another line infantry unit, the fourth one maybe a line cavalry unit (but wait to paint the Hussars last, believe me), and so on. From time to time, include in the production chain a general and an ADC just for the fun of it.

To end the topic, the art of painting horses is a subchapter in itself, as is the painting of guns and limbers. My best personal experience—it was evident enough, mind—after many frustrating failures was to buy a book on horses, full of real horse pictures. My results improved radically. Every nation has a particular limber colour and the wooden parts of the guns are painted the same. Here is where the Osprey books are a mine of information, as is looking at master oil paintings of military subjects by artists like Alphonse de Neuville, Detaille, Ernest Meissonier, Cusachs, A. Ferrer-Dalmau, Orlando Norie, Don Troiani, Keith Rocco, and John Paul Strain. You can't go far wrong using them as a reference.

Remember that a very respectable (in wargame terms) army of five hundred figures (with infantry, cavalry, artillery, and complements ad hoc included) is in reality the equivalent of a depleted simple battalion of five hundred men in real life. This is why I repeatedly insist that you must be able to suppress reality and possess at least an average imagination. Of course, without imagination, you would not have read so far, and probably would not be interested in toy soldiers or playing with them at all.

There are also two other subdivisions of painters. Painting is an individual art, but there are those who enjoy painting, and those who simply find it a necessary chore. The second group, once they achieve a certain economic level (saving or limiting expenses in other areas of entertainment helps), will eventually use a professional painting service. In a way it is inevitable. What is more, there will probably come a period in your life when your job takes so much time that you cannot paint the figures yourself, even if you enjoy it. Granted, I have always thought

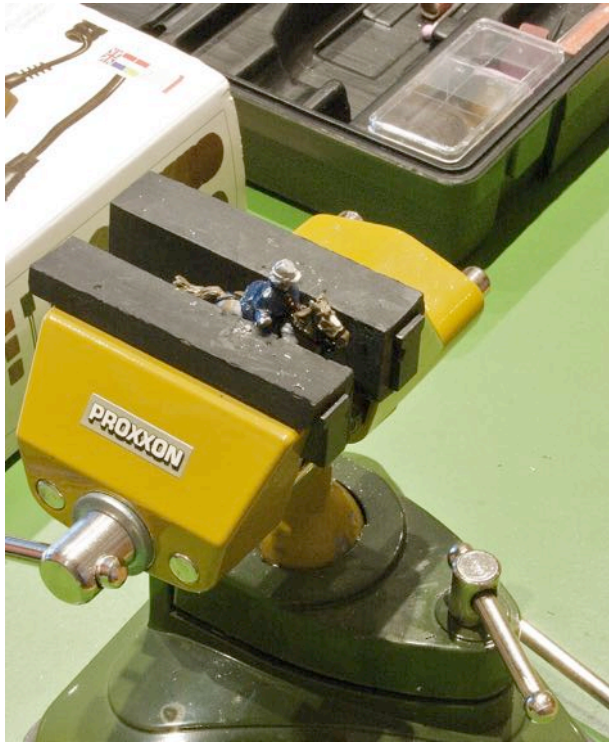
that my favourite minis are the ones I've painted myself. But usually, the older you get, the more your finances improve, and you can indulge yourself a bit after so much work in your real life.

When you are very young, you have time but no money; as you age, the proportion usually inverts itself, until you retire from work and can once again enjoy painting at your leisure.

I have never had the skills or the patience needed to paint as a true "master," and even if I did, the shading and outlining are techniques that I love in military modelling but not in my wargame figures. Nonetheless, some of my figures are painted that way because I sent them to very good painters. The trick is to have all the figures in the same wargame period painted in the same style, and to try not to mix them with the ones you painted yourself.







## XIV

### The Conversions

No other hobby has true limits that are less clear. We have talked about history, historical fiction, movies, comic strips, video games; of the gaming component, the game understood as an intense competition or simply a way to pass a good time among friends; and of the collecting side of it all. In this chapter we are going to look at the more artistic side of the hobby.

Many of you, when starting in the hobby of toy soldiers, military miniatures, modelling, or wargames, will not even think about this. Why think about it at all? Particularly in these times of superabundant, ready-to-play products, it doesn't seem necessary. We have already said that the first conversions are simply variations of painting schemes, once you have a basic army.

Research into a particular period opens doors to more detailed knowledge we did not know would be there. It happens that, even with all its human potential, Napoleonic France had mercenary units in its army (like the red-coated Swiss), or, as its allies, lots of lesser known and colourful troops (La Confederation du Rhine comes to mind). So sometimes, to give a touch of colour here and there (which is aesthetically gratifying), we find the need for fewer "crack" troops (call it a need for militia or second-class units), or, on the contrary, some "elite" troops, which sometimes were not French at all. Or in the end, maybe you just want to avoid having to paint another boring French line regiment (there are a lot of them, after all), so one day you start building something different.

Just imagine you have already painted eight French line infantry regiments. The task is repetitive, and as the ORBATs show, historically exotic units fought for the emperor. Once the information is gathered, it all comes naturally enough.

The manufacturers of wargame figures, especially those who are new to the business, adhere to an easy-to-follow pattern, thinking about marketing in function of the customer's desires. For example, those who start a Napoleonic range always begin with the French Imperial army. After

all, it was France against the world, in more than a certain way. They will begin perhaps with the moulds for the French line infantry: officer, drummer, standard- or eagle-bearer, fusiliers with some alternative positions, and voltigeurs and grenadiers of the line. Quickly enough they will do some Imperial Guard grenadiers, with the famous bearskin/*bonnet à poil* (basically the same figures as before, with different headgear), then some artillery, and finally some cavalry. There we are: the line of products is launched with the implicit or explicit promise of filling the rest of the gaps in the range quite soon.

Those who offer a complete catalogue with a good ratio of quality to price, or who continue launching novelties until the range is completed, can stay in the market forever, like Minifigs, which has perhaps the best and most complete range for the Napoleonic Wars. They did not even use publicity for a long while, because in a way they were the manufacturer to compete with. Nowadays they are still available through Caliver Books.

After all this has been said, not even in such a complete catalogue as the above-mentioned Minifigs (either in 15 or 25 mm) can you find all the possible figures that your mind and heart desire—and, of course, that are completely indispensable to your army. Garrison mixes well with Minifigs but has a smaller range of hard-to-find figures.

Let's say you badly need a Swedish *général de brigade*. It is not there, and the reference does not exist. You could use any officer wearing a bicorn hat and mounted on a horse, and paint it with the appropriate colours. But in this case, you have found a picture in which this particular general uses the typical headgear of the Swedish army, and you want it to look like that.

So what is to be done? Well, you are in for a bit of military modelling. Incidentally, the magazine *Military Modelling* has been around forever, and has survived the dark destiny of other hobby publications. It is good to always keep an eye out for it.

A fascinating adventure starts. There's no problem obtaining a horse; you buy the reference needed and there you are. There is no problem with the body either; get the rider you fancy, having in mind that you will need to substitute the head. Then get the figure (probably an infantry officer) who has the head and headgear you need to transplant. I know conversions seem more expensive because you discard parts, but this is not 100 percent true. Never throw the bits away, but instead build a spares box, which will come handy for other future conversions, maybe sooner than you expect.

The moment has arrived to pay some money for the right tools. You need a miniature drill (a mini Black and Decker), a tool that, with fixed pincers, some cutters, and some common tools, will carry you through the process. There are a very few indispensable items, including, of course, superglue.

To explain the process in a very brief way:

Cut the head you need, perhaps from an infantry officer. If you learn to do this properly and cleanly enough, you will be able to use the body later in other conversion projects. But for now, let's say you discard it. At the beginning, cut slowly, trying not to overcut; if you do, you will need a bit of Milliput putty or Green Stuff modelling compound to repair the damage. Milliput is easy to get,



and Greenstuff is available in any Games Workshop store.

Cut the unwanted head from the cavalry body. As mentioned before, if you achieve a clean cut, keep the head for future conversions. Now you have a body and a head to put together.

Put the body in the adjustable metal vice in a way that permits you to drill a vertical hole as centred as possible, neck downwards. It is not necessary to drill too deeply.

Do the same with the head. This is the most delicate procedure; after all, it is quite small. Drill even less deeply.

Insert a bit of a precut iron clip (paper clip) into the body of the figure, and cut any excess until the head fits perfectly. Then superglue the three parts, head last.

Let the superglue dry. Remove excess or surplus with the cutter knife.

Now you can start painting your new Swedish *général de brigade*. It will be the first in a long line of “pièces uniques.”

Recently enough (2007/2008), the magazine *Wargames Soldados y Estrategia* published a series of related articles showing the step-by-step procedure with very detailed close-up pictures. I heartily recommend them.

I am not going to be a bore and harp on this particular subject, but here is the place to mention the astute manufacturers who have developed ranges that permit easier conversions, casting upper torsos, legs, and heads so that you can design your own figures. These include Dorset soldiers in 54 mm and Redoubt in 25/28 mm (see [redoubtenterprises.com](http://redoubtenterprises.com)). Redoubt's American Civil War (ACW) range provides anything you need, but especially useful are the range of heads: officers with hat or kepi, soft hats, havelocks, Zouave turbans, heads without any kind of headdress, coloured troop heads, and many others. They have helped me over many years to create or modify figures that are or were part of my collection, such as:

Buffalo Soldiers: Ninth and Tenth US Cavalry, on foot and mounted. Wargames Foundry did just three dismounted figures of them; I've never seen one anywhere else in the market.

Officers and soldiers of the French Foreign Legion, to fill the gaps in the existing excellent Redoubt catalogue. You will never get enough conversions

once you've started.

North West Mounted Police, or Royal Canadian Mounted Police, with Stetson (heads from the Britannia range of General Pershing's Mexico intervention) and bodies from colonial British soldiers.

Complementary figures for the Crimean War, with the range by Wargames Foundry, using basic figures from the range but changing arms and heads, and even producing new mounted figures using the cavalry casts from them. I did a division general swinging a sabre using the Raglan figure; after all, you only need one Lord Raglan. Others include Captain Nolan in two mounted versions (one standing at ease, the other charging); a mounted colonel of Highlanders; a mounted colonel of rifles; some mounted officers (and foot officers) from the various regiments of the guards brigade; and Sir Colin Campbell with the Highlander headgear he swore to use for the rest of the war after the action at the river Alma. In fact, the base of the Campbell conversion is a Turk officer with cloak, minus fez (a clean cut). I also have the Sardinian mounted officers who took part in the Charge of the Light Brigade.

My ACW Zouaves with different officers and standards (sometimes also musicians) happily switch continents and fight in the ranks of the Nineteenth Corps d'Afrique (French Colonial Army)...or the Crimean War!

My already-mentioned multipurpose unit with havelock, Redcoats, white summer trousers, and black boots. All of the figures in those conversions come directly from the spares box bits, using redundant bodies from the Crimean range by Wargames Foundry and heads from the Redoubt ACW range.

The bodies of the American Pershing soldiers (see above) were converted into the Premier Régiment Étranger de Cavalerie (using again ACW havelock heads from Redoubt) and redundant Old Glory horses. And so I got another batch of conversions using old discarded parts from the spares box.

The most complicated conversions I ever did were Tim Tyler's Ivory Patrol outfit, both on foot and mounted. The legs were British colonials (Redoubt Natal mounted carabineers), upper body Roman penal Legionnaires from Wargames Foundry (for the short sleeves), specially chosen "Reb" heads from the Redoubt ACW range, and arms, rifles, and pistols from here and there (meaning also bits from the spares box). There was a time when Wargames Foundry sold figures with a choice of arms and weapons, which always meant having a surplus of them. I added neck scarves with Green Stuff and that was

it. Only painting was needed. I remember that I was so tired by the conversions that I sent them to Mili-Art, with detailed instructions on how to paint them. They were somewhat crude conversions, but it was a satisfactory exercise. To my knowledge, they have never been commercially available. I guess that even the 1930s comic strip is also only remembered by a few bunches of very old fools like me.

My three “Banderas” of the Tercio (the three first created) were a simple paintjob conversion using as a base US Marines by Old Glory from the Boxer Rebellion period (1900), but I added a much-converted squadron of lancers using British colonial Minifigs riding Dixon horses. The Old Glory WWI artillery pieces are very useful for other colonial periods too, including the Rif War.

After navigating a bit through the Internet, you discover the websites of obscure manufacturers. This is really fascinating, because some of them do not advertise in wargame magazines or the ubiquitous *Military Modelling*. Those can become the bases of future conversions. After all, with an adequate paint job and a little carving work here and there beforehand (before painting, that is), you can get that figure nobody yet produces today.





## XV

### Museums and Public and Private Collections

The recent inauguration of several museums in Spain dedicated to the toy soldier—L'Iber in Valencia comes to mind—is good news for the fans of the hobby.

A vast collection of military miniatures, among other interesting paraphernalia, including weapons and some excellent paintings by Cusachs, was displayed for many decades in Montjuïc Castle in Barcelona. Back then it was reason enough for a compulsory visit, because it displayed the famous divisional unit in 1:1 scale known jokingly as the only “complete in numbers” division of the Spanish army ever.

Another must-see place for fans of the 54 mm toy soldier is John Tunstill's collection in Umbria, actually at Calzolaro, near Umbertide, just north of Perugia in central Italy.

I can't fail to mention the Forbes Collection, usually displayed in North Africa but recently sold, I read. But the best, most accessible, and most famous exposition/shop in the world has to be the Guards Toy Soldier Centre, managed by MKL and adjacent to the Guards Museum, Birdcage Walk Street, London. There you can find, apart from lots of lead toy soldiers, “Trooping the Colour” (the Queen's birthday parade) and “Changing the Guard,” DVDs, and other Household Cavalry items, like sweatshirts, key rings, and mugs. I went there in April 2014 again! And when you're there, it's worth paying a visit to the National Army Museum. There was a time when you could visit very good toy soldier shops in London Central, like Tradition of London, which is now closed, sadly, but still selling through mail service, and some in the world-famous Burlington Arcade. I think also there also used to be an exposition of lead toy soldiers, including some of Sir Winston Churchill's collection, at Blenheim Palace, but I'm not certain if it's still there; better inform yourself before you go.

Those changes of location and “on” and “off” dates of visit are frustrating, so it's always better to confirm beforehand. After all, a trip is expensive enough itself without indulging in deviations

from the planned route to see nothing and gain a lot of frustration as a consequence.

The same can be said about the magnificently restored Siborne diorama of the Battle of Waterloo. I saw it myself at Dover Castle but do not know if it is permanently displayed there or if it is an itinerant exposition.

The magazine *Toy Soldier*, heartily recommended for fans of the 54 mm scale, regularly advertises fairs, conventions, expositions, and the like.

I still have among my treasured relevant data a central supplement from the monthly magazine *Military Modelling* (October 1981) with the ambitious title "Regimental Museums." It has only four pages, but it is a mine of information about places to visit in the United Kingdom.

Of course, there are many among you who would like to walk the original fields of battle. Actually, there are a lot of travel organizations, many of whom advertise in the leading hobby magazines, that propose trips to places like the Peninsula (Spain) battlefields and of course Waterloo (Belgium).

In the United States, a number of preserved areas, usually called national parks or by a similar name, have preserved American Civil War battlefields like Gettysburg. I would like to visit the Little Bighorn battlefield, among other places. In Washington I would be delighted to see in person the famous evening parade, which has gone on since 1958. At least I have the DVD, edited in 2001, of when the bicentenary of the US Marine Corps took place. I'd also love to be able to see any West Point graduation ceremony.

If you ever go to Paris, Les Invalides is the place to go. Napoleon is buried there, as you probably know, and it also contains the Musée de l'Armée Française. The last time I visited Paris, there was an old toy soldier shop under the ancient porticos of the Petit Palais that was full of antique ranges.

Finding out when military parades are being held is easy. In Madrid, for example, every first Wednesday of the month is an open day to see the changing of the royal guard. You can also see the one by the Royal Danish Guard in Copenhagen, and probably also in Oslo. Consulting websites is the best method, apart from contacting your local travel agency, and YouTube is full of videos about military parades, especially Russian, Chinese, and North Korean military shows of power.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police musical ride goes on tour often enough, and it may be possible to see it sometime quite near where you live. I got the DVD from the shop that sells memorabilia.

For those among us who prefer to wear a USMC T-shirt instead of a designer logo, there are a lot of websites that sell memorabilia by mail. They also sell books and lots of other things, like mugs, key rings, and the like.

I doubted whether I should include this particular chapter, because it is probably related more to reenactment than to the toy soldier subject. But these hobbies often go hand in hand, so why not? At least it gives you the opportunity to have a look for yourself at the real thing and see how big the horses of the Household Cavalry really are, in truly 1:1 scale.







## XVI

### **Megalomania Has Its Necessary Limits**

Deep inside, all wargamers and collectors are afflicted by megalomania; knowing to what degree is just a matter of a ten-minute conversation. The ambition to command an army without any kind of previous qualification in the majority of cases is surely enough proof of that.

If you have not followed the advice given in this book about scale and proportion, or you have read it too late, your initiation into the hobby was probably to quickly buy a unit of grenadiers of the emperor's Imperial Old Guard, maybe a Polish lancers cavalry unit of the same organization; paint them hurriedly; and, in the lucky case that a nearby wargame club existed, bring them to the club, only to discover that all the other members already have those figures, and, having followed the same path as you, actually have a surplus of them. Look at any bring-and-buy stand in a convention you will probably attend later on and you will see what I mean.

Evidently enough, your wargame figures will not find their place in any game at the club, the only exception being that *rara avis*, the extraordinarily good painter whose figures outshine those at the club. I hope you are one of them, but I guess this will be a very small percentage of readers.

There are some contradictions in the hobby, and what is more, some of us have our own personal contradictions too, and we live happily with them. All manufacturers of wargame figures and toy soldiers have in their catalogues the grenadiers of the Imperial Old Guard. They know us; they know how we think. They foresee that this will be our very first buy.

I must confess that the first lot of Minifigs I ever bought was from a small London shop behind Victoria Station (Gillingham Street), with dubious surroundings, like a secondhand clothing shop next door. The future of a retailer shop dealing in wargame figures was not exactly

bright back in the '70s. Nobody knew Games Workshop would be a future emporium in those days. And after all, everybody buys by post now. That commercial venture closed after a couple of years and was probably useful for novices like me who were not able to buy by catalogue (because I did not know one existed at all) using mail order. Well, those were my early days in the hobby, and I desperately needed a well-informed clerk because I knew next to nothing about lead wargame figures.

With nostalgia, I remember that after buying the units (which I will detail for you a little farther on) from the Napoleonic French Imperial army and their British and allied enemies present in the field of battle at Waterloo 1815, I thought I finally had them all! In the meantime the clerk and his colleagues were celebrating the sale of those dubious and neglected stocks nobody had ever wanted until the rookie (me) had come in, and were surely anticipating the nearby pub's happy hour. You need to be a real novice to buy eighteen Imperial Guard Marines marching musket at the shoulder. (After a much-needed command-flag conversion, they went on to serve as militia in the Prussian army 1815.)

If memory does not fail me, and I think it does not, my very first batch of lead toy soldiers or 25 mm lead wargame figures was as follows:

### **French Army:**

Napoleon (1 wargame figure).

Unit one: Grenadiers of the Imperial Old Guard "firing," with officer, drummers, and standard-bearer (22 figures).

Unit two: Marines of the Imperial Guard marching with musket at the slope (already mentioned)

Unit three: Line fusiliers, with trousers (no voltigeurs or grenadiers of the line were included). They were very useful for wargames in the Peninsula 1808–1814, but I learned this many years later.

Unit four: Voltigeurs. You can combine companies of line voltigeurs from different battalions, as with grenadiers of the line for a specific task as Maréchal Oudinot used to, but that is not the point; that unit simply did not exist. Years later (perhaps on my fourth reorganization/addition of troops) they were dispersed so to give each one of my French line regiments a proper light company of voltigeurs (and of course one of grenadiers).

Unit five: Chasseurs à Cheval de la Garde Imperiale. Mounted on horses from the line Chasseurs à Cheval, as the right horses were not in stock. So, in a hurry, I bought the next best thing. I was a bit ashamed of them later, but I could never unglue them. They were always much admired for their "campaign look" (as if I had done it on purpose). A particularly helpful clerk he was. He said they looked quite the same.

Unit six: Cuirassiers. Mounted on heavy-cavalry Prussian horses. "They are all alike," said my friend the clerk (wise words, I thought back then). Years

later I was able to transfer those horses to the Prussian army, where they had to be and naturally belonged all the time. Not that there was a single Prussian cuirassier at Waterloo, mind.

Unit seven: Foot artillery battery of the line. Foot artillerymen.

Unit eight: Horse artillery battery. Dismounted horse gunners.

### **British Army:**

(I didn't know yet about the King's German Legion (KGL) Hanoverians or Nassauers, or Dutch and Belgian allies.)

Wellington (1 wargame figure).

Unit one: Guardsmen with bearskin, like at Buckingham Palace, you know? Today converted and dispersed among several units and different Napoleonic armies. One mystery cast from the Minifigs catalogue (22 figures, like their counterparts on the French side).

Unit two: 95th Rifles. And no, the first volume of Richard Sharpe's adventures had not been published yet. Or maybe I bought a unit of British light infantry, I do not exactly remember. Whichever it was, when I bought a second batch of figures from the catalogue (as soon as I got home), one or the other was also bought quickly enough.

Unit three: British line infantry (without flank companies, because I did not know what those were).

Unit four: Highlanders with kilt. The first ever wargame figures I painted myself, the 92nd, or Gordon's Highlanders. Trying to paint tartan on your first try was imprudent, but they stood the test of time quite well.

Unit five: Line dragoons—Scot's Greys, of course! Twelve of them, at least three figures too many. Nowadays those redundant figures have been converted and serve in another Napoleonic army.

Unit six: British Hussars (with the red shako).

Unit seven: Foot artillery battery of the line. Foot artillerymen.

Unit eight: Horse artillery battery. Dismounted horse gunners.

I hope you have smiled a bit at these blatant mistakes, the fruit of my ignorance and lack of documentation. It is true that the figures have been repainted and regrouped, have had stand changes (the wargamer's nightmare), and have changed armies (nationality) and mounts, but there they were for years, some of them with their original paintwork. They hold a fond place in my heart, like the veteran troops they were. With more than thirty years in their stands, they have been through hell several times, I guess...

These were not the last wargame figures I ever bought. As I have advanced, I've learned that I was a true optimist. To my surprise, I learned a lot of interesting and amazing things, such as the

fact that there was never a Napoleonic army with 50 percent Imperial Guard units (excepting 1814). What was more, I had not a single French fusilier of the line in my army. That was a very big organizational mistake, and even now I do not know how it happened.

My second order was the much-needed Minifigs catalogue. As it happened, that was the right thing to do. And after a hurried documentation of the period, I started buying to correct my horrific impulsive first buy.

From then on things got slowly into shape, with patience and successive orders via the postal service. In the end the composition and proportion were right enough, and I proudly had the French Imperial army present at Waterloo, along with the British and allied opposition.

What has been said leads us to another postulate:

**Before buying any figure, consult (or buy) relevant books on the subject.  
This is the first step to getting a minimally proportioned force.**

To end in an optimistic mood, let's say that even absolutely immeasurable and inappropriate projects (those that are much too big at inception), like refighting Gettysburg with Fire and Fury in 25 mm, were achieved in their day. They looked quite impossible, but all was finally there, with a good set of rules and all the necessary troops. Then I had the brilliant idea that it would be better to start at Bull Run (First Manassas) and follow up with the rest of the major battles. Megalomania? Probably!

Then fate struck! During a very long summer afternoon, my two sons confronted each other (with me as a referee) in that classic Battle of Bull Run (First Manassas) on the tabletop. To cut a long story short, the Union army swept the Confederates from the table in a total victory, ending the war there and then. The well-planned series of engagements (my only intent being to build a rational campaign) fell apart completely, and Gettysburg simply did not occur after that. My younger son threw such a long series of fives and sixes, and my older son so many ones and twos, that at a point they started alternating dice. My eldest son nearly abandoned the hobby for the rest of his life. I do not think I will ever see such an unbalanced refight. The main problem was that it provoked a dislike for that particular war, and the collection of American Civil War (ACW) wargame figures was finally split. One part of it is still in the hands of my brother, because we both had painted the figures and, well, they are nostalgic. The rest were sold through a shop in Barcelona.

Years later, I could not resist the temptation to buy the Michigan Brigade (Custer's Wolverines) because Wargames Foundry and Redoubt did a magnificent job with castings for the period. That led me into buying some supporting infantry and artillery; I got both sides again, but in a smaller proportion. East Cavalry Field and Brandy Station were in my mind. (They are always on my mind.)

Would you be surprised if I told you confidentially that I am seriously considering megalomaniacal projects with Baccus 6 mm today? Or using plastic counters with 6 mm flags glued on top? If I indulge in this, it would be my fifth or sixth building up (with different scale or figures) of ACW armies. If this is not being an optimist, I do not know what is. Maybe it is

true that I am an obsessive army builder.

Finally, let's mention what I consider the most common sickness of the wargamer—the “if I only had another battalion” syndrome. It is at the root of the very large armies built by wargamers, who are always thinking about a second or third chance in the game. If you do wargame with small armies or play skirmish games, you usually get a final result (like in chess). Those affected by the syndrome prefer not to have a final conclusive result, or to have a muddled one thanks to the sheer size of the game. They can have a routed right wing, but it seems their left is making progress, and they still have a reserve, you know? I was one of these for quite a long time. Now I have seen the light. Avoid painting too many hundreds of minis (and the money and work involved), excepting those among you who really enjoy it and even collect the things. Otherwise you might try using that sorry excuse: “The more numbers I have, the less my opponent notices that it is my generalship, or even bad luck, that is responsible for my poor outcomes.”

It is really much more fun to have a game with a result and, if you're on the losing side, to try again next week. So please, never use the “if I only had another battalion” excuse as an argument after a tabletop encounter. Do not even think about it, and do not consider building another couple of army corps per side without careful consideration.

Real megaprojects are best accomplished within a group or club. If you try to do them solo, you will be exposed to frustration. Not that I didn't indulge in them for years—years of orthodox thinking and obstinate conduct.





## XVII

### Summing Up: To Avoid Mistakes

We are getting near the end of the book, and we have surely opened a number of roads to explore. It is time to sum up and integrate a bit what has been said.

**First, be respectful of other people's hobbies and the periods other wargamers choose. You do not really know if one day you will end up indulging in them too!**

It is really not bad advice, and it will prevent a lot of irrelevant discussions about what is "best," as if that were not totally subjective. In our miniature world, this is really absurd. Do not waste time on arguments of this kind.

**Second, for different reasons, you will have to compromise between historical accuracy and its formal representation on the tabletop.**

I think that if you have read so far, it is crystal clear that you will need a great capacity to think abstractly and to stylize. Getting the things to look exactly right is probably very difficult, so do this according to your personal taste. Imagination is sorely needed to achieve a final satisfactory result.

You will choose between playing solo and having 100 percent control over what you do, and playing games with family and friends who are probably just gamers. If by chance some of them also paint and build armies, you are extremely lucky. The usual kind of partners will comment happily enough about your painting style without ever having tried to paint minis themselves.

Or they will roll the dice without knowing the period at all. Probably they will demand to know why the wargame figures are not all doing what they wish every second, disregarding the importance of rules and referee.

Do not worry, and be patient. These are probably your followers on the field of battle. If you really want to play in a group—and sometimes it is real fun—just get on with it. They probably go with you to the bowling alley or basketball court, or play golf or tennis, or watch football matches with you, or even have poker nights...

**Third, every wargamer follows a path and is more or less content with it, but liberty of composition trumps compatibility with the rest.**

Sounds evident, but it is not at first. Learn quickly that every wargamer starting at the same point will evolve specifically, like a very singular Darwinian species. And we are all very strong willed. It is really astounding how people submitted to the same environment and influences evolve to conclusions and approaches that differ and diverge dramatically, but this is how it is.

**Fourth, always calculate the scale and proportion of the period of choice before buying the wargame figures.**

It sounds logical enough, but you will be amazed to discover how we all make sorry mistakes, especially at the beginning. Temptations are great, and you won't be the first to do things in great disorder or without perspective. The option of not buying and painting wargame figures we do not really like and "putting them off the table," simulating their effects with dice rolls or something similar, is sometimes understood too late to avoid both disagreeable and mainly tiresome work and a somewhat silly economic cost.

In the name of the first postulate, I have absolutely nothing against those wargamers who indulge in, say, painting a Zulu impi (or similar "native forces" for the colonial period, like the Dervish armies at Omdurman). Scaling down twenty-five thousand Zulu warriors anxious to dip in blood their assegais—just to be able to get married, you know—is now out of the question for me. But do read about the Zulus, for they are quite interesting. I painted more than a hundred 25 mm Zulus myself, and the Madhi's dervishes army. I did find the task a chore and pure monotony, and you will need to paint at least twenty-five Zulus for every Redcoat. Think seriously about it before buying them.

The same postulate applies to the existing commercial ranges of figures, even in the same nominal scale. Always buy samples, and analyse them before the final bulk is ordered. That way you will be sure about compatibility and catalogue blanks or voids. There is nothing like handling the real thing before making a final commitment.

Of course, an asymmetrical period, especially a colonial one, is the worst of all if your sympathies lie with the outnumbered troops, and you inflict on yourself the absurd chore of painting those quantities of figures that will cost you a lot of cash.



**Fifth, no set of rules can provide a priori solutions for all game situations. You will need either an umpire or fair players capable of achieving consent.**

Playing solo is not an option to disdain, even if it implies a certain self-critical quality. By playing with and among other people, you will quickly appreciate the need for an impartial referee, and even a bad referee is better than none at all. There are really good sets of rules; you will choose which suits you best. But the “perfect” set of rules probably does not exist for any period.

**Sixth, choose your gaming companions with great care.**

In your gaming life, you will be surprised to find that, as an enemy on the other side of the tabletop or even as an ally on the same side, people who are apparently very normal can mutate once the game starts, like some pedestrians do once they get behind the wheel of a car. The Jekyll-and-Hyde syndrome exists as surely as does Murphy’s Law.

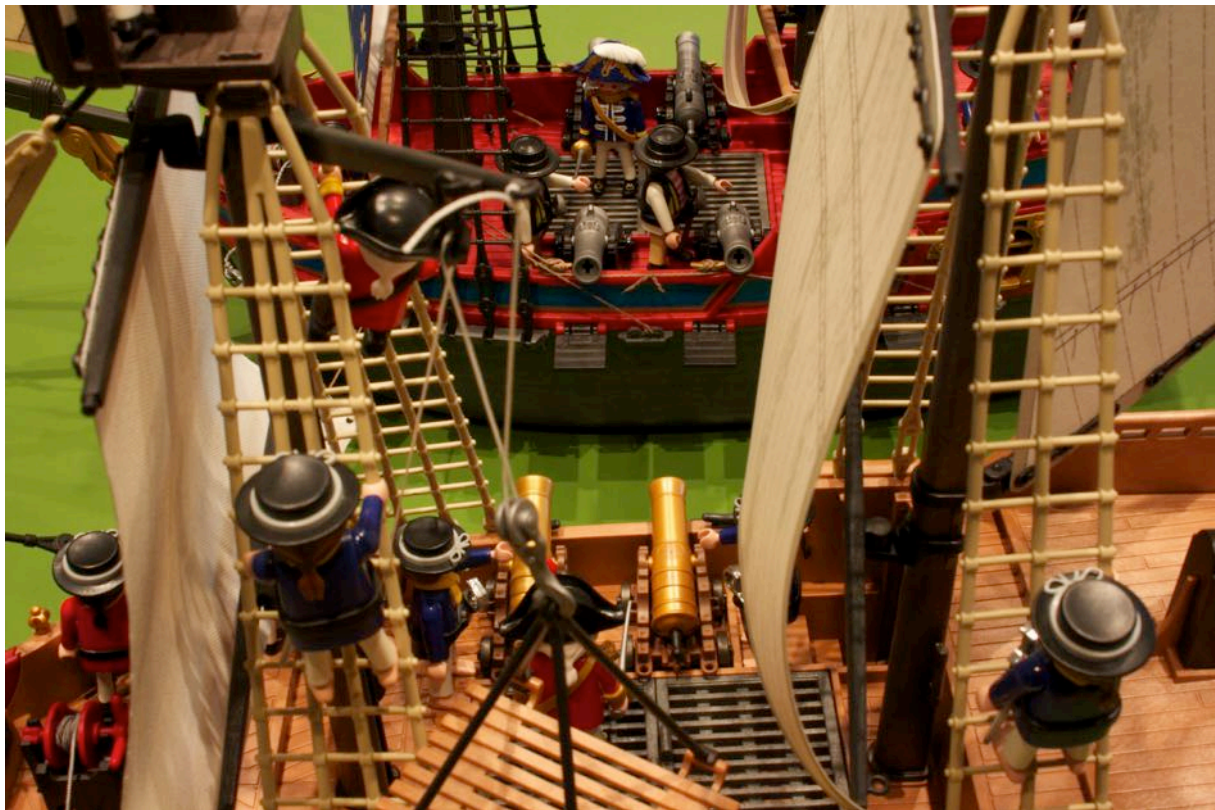
Only after trial and error, and if you’re lucky, will you find a bunch of like-minded companions. If you get them on the first try, congratulations! You are the exception to the rule.

**Seventh, before buying any figure, consult (or buy) relevant books on the subject. This is the first step to getting a minimally proportioned force.**

This is closely related to the fourth postulate, but I placed it at the end purposefully because it is the hardest to follow by far. Because once bitten by the bug, sure enough, you will be in a hurry to buy figures. Try to be calm and cool. Your friends can help to restrain you—if they know what you are talking about; I am afraid they will not. If it helps you for me to say so, it will save you a lot of time and money. And if you do still make some mistakes, as we all do, they will be minor and easy to mend, compared with a gung-ho attitude coupled with misinformation. Information is sometimes contradictory, so be patient and consult online forums or visit your local library again and again.

It is probably the best counsel of the lot: document yourself, and learn about the hobby. It does not much matter in what scale, which manufacturer is your favourite, or your style of painting; not even the period of choice itself matters much. Even fantasy games have rules and context, and I say this with all my sympathy.

Always have in mind that money saved is money earned.



## XVIII

### Playmobil

I think that Playmobil toy soldiers deserve their own chapter. I started buying them around 2006, if not before. First I bought them through eBay because the sets I was interested in were out of production, discontinued, or not available in toyshops. I had my grandchildren in mind (three boys at the time of finishing the second English edition) and that was that.

Having been a fan of the American Civil War (ACW) all my life, I decided to build Playmobil armies for them because, as with Airfix decades before, the figures existed. Slowly but surely I got infantry, cavalry, and artillery for both sides. It seemed a good idea at the time because it was the only “complete” set from Playmobil to wargame with.

To say it mildly, I was not an expert on the items produced. But as things went on, I got in touch with sellers who stocked customized figures. Curiously enough, I did not understand at first how they did it. Where, I wondered, did they get those generals and Zouaves?

Persistent as I am, I also bought Romans and Carthaginians to refight the Second Punic War. There I was already meddling a bit with the ranges, because they never manufactured a single Carthaginian.

Then suddenly I started to look at Playmobil figures in detail. With time and subsequent evolution, those crude toys from 1974 were slowly becoming less and less childish in design. I have to confess that I always got some of the oldest clicks (aka Playmobil figures) when buying mixed lots through eBay. Comparing them attentively, and having in mind that I am a curious person by nature, I detected wargaming potential for adults.

To confirm this, the French magazine *Vae Victis*, a wargame magazine *sans reproche*, published an article about wargaming with these toys. I was nonplussed. Then I discovered YouTube videos showing famous military campaigns using the Playmobil figures, and one thing led to another. I had already contacted some sellers who also did conversions, but what is more,

I started buying from them directly, outside of eBay.

My first experiences were through Franz Ewald, a German seller of Playmobils who gave me counsel and searched for the discontinued catalogue items I could not find in Andorra. Then Laurent Lafont ([laurentlafont33@hotmail.fr](mailto:laurentlafont33@hotmail.fr)) and Dominique Junca in France also helped me build my ever-growing collection. And finally one day I discovered the eBay shop of Albert Bastardes ([itacajazz@gmail.com](mailto:itacajazz@gmail.com)), someone who for once was close by, only 185 km away in Barcelona, a city I visit maybe once a month. I asked to meet him, and we shared experiences over a coffee. That was a giant step in my progression in that rare (for me) field of 75 mm.

Have in mind that at the beginning, I didn't realize you could disassemble the figures and rebuild them with different parts so as to make the soldiers you really wanted. At first Albert did it for me. Without him my French Foreign Legion, Buffalo Soldiers, and British Camel Corps (trying again to rescue Gordon at Khartoum) would not have been possible at all, and I have to thank him for that.

I must say that nearly all of the guys I have mentioned are Napoleonic fanatics, but I was vaccinated against that particular period because of my thirty years' involvement with it in 25 mm lead.

Things were quickly moving in parallel, and then I met Malone and Bendala from Spain online. I have never met them in person, but we have exchanged a lot of emails discussing things.

By the way, Javier Jimenez (Malone) is by far the best maker of resin headgear and weapons for Playmobils in the industry. I'd better give you some data about him. His email is [javier.jim@telefonica.net](mailto:javier.jim@telefonica.net). To see images of many of his series of Napoleonic customs, visit him on Facebook ([facebook.com/playmalone](https://facebook.com/playmalone)) or at his eBay shop ([stores.ebay.co.uk/Playmalone?\\_rdc=1](https://stores.ebay.co.uk/Playmalone?_rdc=1)). He jokes that if you click on a new hat, it automatically becomes another person/figure (and I guess he is right on the mark!).

Javier Bendala Castillo ([jbc@otaisa.es](mailto:jbc@otaisa.es); [www.playstickers.creatuforo.com](http://www.playstickers.creatuforo.com); [www.ebay.co.uk/usr/bendalator](http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/bendalator)) has made stickers commercially since 2009. His stickers are really wonderful and user-friendly to say the least—you only need a heat source as a hair dryer to apply them perfectly. I never thought I would convert a cowboy into a Royal North Surrey British colonial soldier (*The Four Feathers* fictional British regiment Omdurman 1898). In fact, it wasn't one cowboy/bandit but fifty-six of them. But I am going too fast. This is one of my last adventures in the field, and a lot of other things happened first.

Let's say that nowadays my collection of "Playmos" consists of the following periods: ancient Greek warfare; the Thirty Years' War (Spanish Old Tercios), also useful for the English Civil War and pirates period; the Three Musketeers; ACW cavalry; the Little Bighorn campaign; North West Mounted Police; western gunfighters; Zulu War; British Camel Corps; Highlanders at Tel el Kebir; French Foreign Legion; Royal North Surrey—Omdurman; British 66th line at Maiwand; British guards for Changing the Guard or Trooping the Colour, or to be used at the Battle of the Alma; and last but not least, the fictional mid-eighteenth-century armies of "the Grand Duchy of Vlaufosk" and "the Bermil-Lion Electorate" (infantry, cavalry, artillery, and navy).

What is more, by interchanging parts and headgear with the same figures, I can increase the regiments of my fictional countries but also use them as the Crimean Charge of the Light

Brigade, or as ACW infantry and artillery to go with the existing cavalry. And I have finally done Tim Tyler's Ivory Patrol, and some pilots and motorists. In fact, I now have the same collection in Playmobils that I used to have in 25 mm lead wargame figures. As you can see, I always have the same periods of interest (barring the overindulged Napoleonic one). It must also be said that, with a very quick and simple change of hats and flags, some of the units can be used to represent Rome versus Carthage (I sold the first collection I got because I was not satisfied with the look of the Carthaginian army), the colonial northwest frontier warfare, and even the American War of Independence.

Of course, the more detail you give the figures, the less interchangeable they are. But this is not always the case. For example, a simple change of hat and the Seventeenth Lancers goes from 1854 (Crimea) to 1876 (Zulu War).

The pirate ships change a lot with the right set of sails or even name of the ship. Bendala does stickers with ship's names but not a single sail; for that you'd better try Bastel Valotte's website and eBay shop ([stores.ebay.co.uk/bastelvalotte](http://stores.ebay.co.uk/bastelvalotte)). He's a really nice person whose real name is H. Fischer. In the same shop you will also find sets of flags and pectorals, and a lot of stickers for Playmobil houses.

What more can I say of use? In my experience, and quite following the same path I have recommended with wargame figures:

1. Get the information first. The book *Playmobil Collector 1974–2009* is a must-have, even if the pictures are very small. Then get the catalogues for your country up to 2014, or the present year.
2. Before buying figures ready-made, learn how to disassemble them. YouTube is full of guidance. In my case I use the kitchen cloth/kitchen scissors method to pull the head away. The head is a kind of plug that holds the whole together. After removing it, the rest is very easy to get apart and put together again. That and a careful study of what stickers are available will let you plan ahead.
3. There are a lot of figures that do not need conversion but would be nicely complemented by adding on existing pieces of Playmobil gear or add-on stickers.
4. I have to mention it because it pays to say so: as always, the world of fans divides into purists, who only use Playmobil-manufactured parts, and the rest, who use stickers and resin accessories, and even erase original Playmobil lettering from the original items using silver polish cotton, or similar products.
5. Sooner than later you will realize that is better to have a pool of interchangeable parts. For example, you do not need horses for every single cavalry figure, especially if you do different periods. Simply get them from the pool of resources every time. Do the same with wagons, mule trains, trees, rocks, weapons, etc.
6. You will have a spares box soon enough. Keep those parts; you never know when something will be useful again.
7. If there is something you will have as a surplus, it is hats. Simply by changing hats, a figure can go from one period to another, or represent another unit altogether.
8. To my knowledge, the only existing set of rules is the one by Marco Snijder

(Sawyersplaymobil@gmail.com) called *Three-Inch Glory*, an eighteenth-century wargame from Playmobil. I have tampered with it to make it my own, as usual. But I guess it exists still in PDF format, and you can get that quite easily.

I am quite sure that a book about wargaming with Playmos would be fun to write, and would sell even fewer copies than the present one! After all, this is a minority interest to say the least.

Of course, either you like Playmos or you do not. But this is not the point. This chapter is here only because it took me a lot of time to realize Playmobil figures' wargaming potential, how to do conversions, the fact that they are highly collectible, and that I have fun with them. Curiously enough, at Playmobil conventions they also specialize in very big dioramas; search YouTube and find out about them. And one last thing: they are "big," but they weigh very little and are nearly indestructible. This makes armies very easy to transport without breaking things in the process.

This year, world-famous London shop Hamleys (Regent Street) reissued the famous Royal Guard Special (ref: 4577) after an agreement with Geobra. That surely will let you think about Playmobil with due respect.

Another thing I do with my Playmobils is "zoom in." I guess that is not an original idea, but let me explain it nevertheless. Imagine that you have built up the Seventh Cavalry for the Little Bighorn campaign. It is better if you get all twelve companies, etc.; that way you will have the opportunity to employ new tactics and so on, but once an action of one or several companies is played, you can increase the number of soldiers by using those from other companies not present in that particular place (excluding many officers and sergeants). That makes the removal of casualties less drastic and the feel of a partial vignette much better. A perfect example is the last stand itself.

I won't deny that you can do this with lead wargame figures too, but the stands are usually from different units and are not so easily "mixable." I just thought it would be a good idea to end the chapter by letting you know about this.

I guess these below are the most useful sets for wargames purposes:

**Year 1974:** 3251; 3261; 3262.  
**Year 1975:** 3332.  
**Year 1976:** 3243; 3244; 3251; 3270; 3337; 3406; 3420; 3421; 3422; 3423; 3424; 3425; 3426; 3427; 3428.  
**Year 1977:** 3291; 3379; 3380; 3409; 34429; 3430; 3431; 3440; 3441; 3442; 3443; 3444; 3445; 3446; 3447; 3448; 3450.  
**Year 1978:** 3387; 3388.  
**Year 1979:** 3607; 3608.  
**Year 1979/1980:** 3265.  
**Year 1980/1981:** 3291; 3419; 3586; 3657.  
**Year 1981/1982:** 3548; 3549.  
**Year 1982/1983:** 3550.

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**Year 2014:** 5240; 5479; 5480; 5293; 5408; 5409; 5413.

My favourite ebay sellers links:

[http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/hannibal-lektor?\\_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754](http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/hannibal-lektor?_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754)

[http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/playmoingstore?\\_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754](http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/playmoingstore?_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754)  
[http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/playmalone?\\_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754](http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/playmalone?_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754)  
[http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/bendalator?\\_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754](http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/bendalator?_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754)  
[http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/wwwplaymovilpartscom?\\_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754](http://www.ebay.co.uk/usr/wwwplaymovilpartscom?_trksid=p2053788.m1543.l2754)  
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## XIX

### Conclusion

I hope that the extremely individualistic character of this hobby has been made clear. I am pretty sure that you do not agree with me about a lot of the things discussed in this book, and that your opinions are different. Well, perfect again. Go on! Move forward with your own particular ideas about the hobby and how to proceed with it. After all, having ideas and imagination is what this is all about. What is more, my only desire for you is a complete freedom to decide how you achieve it.

It makes me happy to think that you have read these lines with a critical eye. If you have found something of interest or profitable to you, even tangentially, I am already satisfied.

In fact, there is a universal postulate that blends all of what has been said and reflects the spirit of this little book:

**Enjoy whatever you do, and be your own guide. Learn from others with more experience, copy whatever you like, adapt to your taste, convert to your needs, transform and work your own ideas to the last, but overall, have fun with it, because any hobby is about having fun from beginning to end.**

Maybe you will learn to avoid some of my worst sorry mistakes, and maybe something you have read or seen has been useful. The best virtue of the hobby is its independence. That is why there has never been a universally approved set of rules.

Maybe it's quite an anarchic hobby. I agree. But that liberty is the source of the fun. It does not matter at all what your objective(s) is/are. Is your fascination or fetish idea to refight Napoleon's

campaigns in a different way? Do you think you would have done better than Hannibal or Scipio? Do you want to refight famous historical battles? Or on the contrary, is your thing role-playing or skirmishing on a 1:1 basis? Do you think you need a very big wargame table in your own wargame room, or do you play with your sons or grandchildren on the floor (knee aches and all, as you already know)? Do you want to build a collection of toy soldiers? Is your passion to model and paint to a very high artistic degree just a few model soldiers in a diorama? Whatever it is, just make it happen.

Let's finish this chapter in a happy mood. We do not need to have complexes of any kind; what we do is all right, and as long you are satisfied with it and get a minimal enjoyable return for the time invested, it is OK.

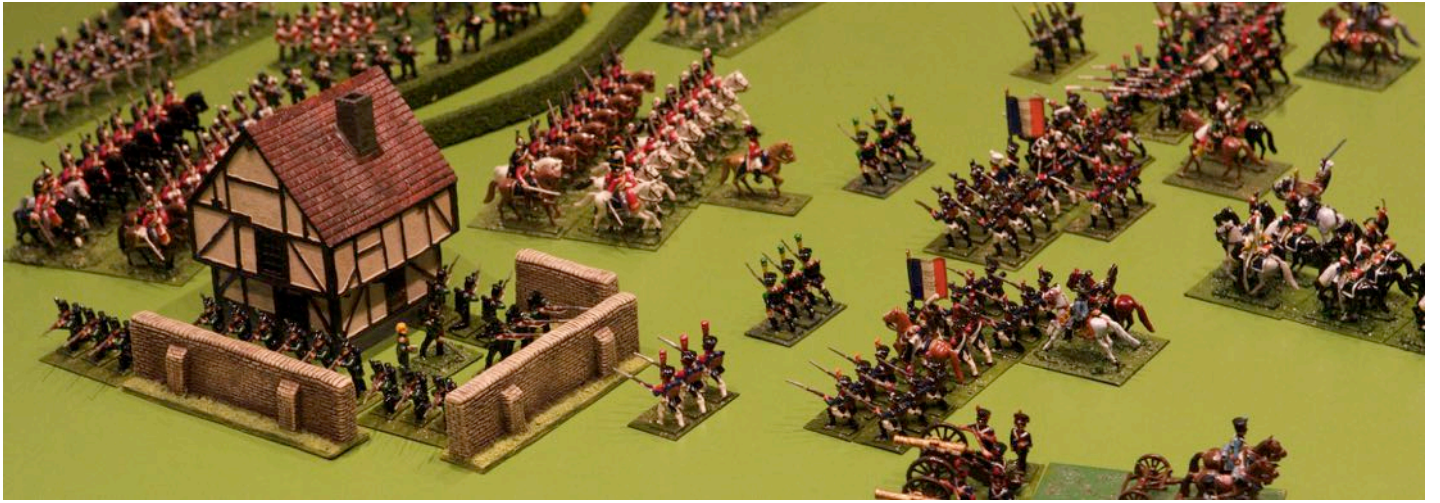
Personally, I got it all wrong several times. I bought wargame figures impulsively, without any sense of proportion. I bought from several manufacturers at the same time, getting assorted minis that were too incompatible in size for my taste. I used the wrong colours when painting uniforms because I lacked accurate information. I did not wait long enough to paint the next colour and had to repaint again. I used varnish too soon and got silver and gold all over the figures (those paints take the longest to dry). I superglued my fingers together, and bits and pieces got stuck to them. Units I loved and was proud of (old toy soldiers and even some wargame figures) got lead disease and ended up with lead rot, meaning it was the garbage bin for them. Some I had to buy again and do it all over—a sad process, I assure you, and a loss of precious time. I got nagging doubts in the middle of a project about the scale and size of an army. Nearly always, new interests interfered with old ones, delaying their proper conclusion, sometimes by a lot of years. I have played wargames with guys I would not have bought a secondhand car from. I have provoked bitter family discussions about the use of the dining table until too late because I had to finish the game. Do I really need to say more?

The main thing is that I had lots of fun doing it all.

As it happens, if I have had the pluck to write this book, it was to try to help others avoid many of the frustrations that timely advice would have spared me in my time. It is also a way to communicate with my grandchildren when I am not there, if they ever get bitten by the bug.

The hobby is inoffensive and a great pastime. Probably some people in the collective are nuts, but that happens in all fields of life. Like a lot of my fellow wargamers, I consider myself a pacifist at heart. That does not mean I would not fight to defend home and family if need be, do not misunderstand me, but there are always limits.

What else can you ask for? Oh, yes—let the dice roll in my favour! We all wish that...





### **Update to the Second English Edition (Outro)**

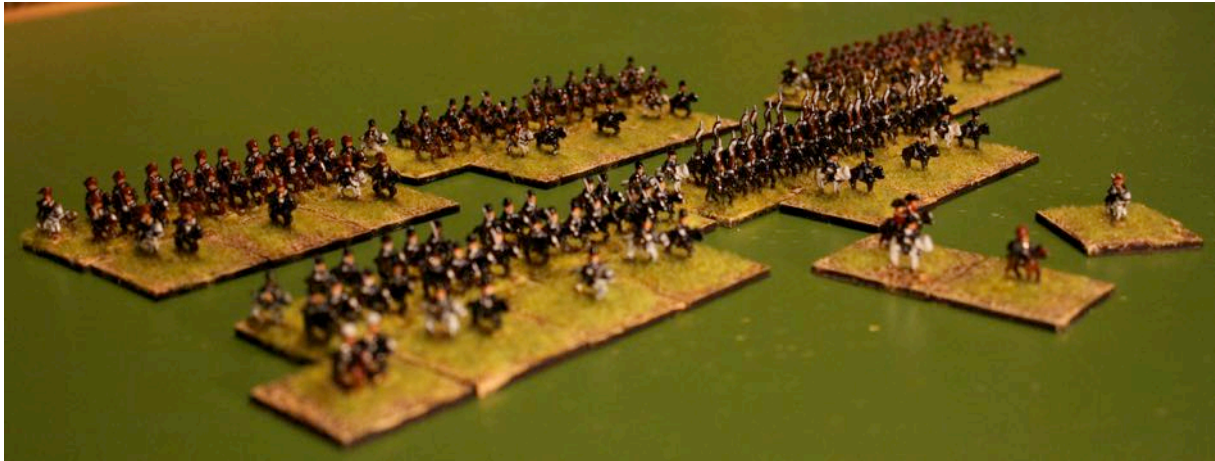
As it has been many years since the publication of the first Spanish edition, I think it would be useful for the reader if I explain what has happened in the meantime. So I am going to describe the changes in my collections over the last years (exchanges, sales, purchases, new interests, etc.). In fact, this outro will fulfil the purpose of showing how things are always moving, and that the happiness and fun of the hobby is probably in the day-to-day activity and not at the end of our projects, as I thought in my early days.

As it is, and especially from a certain age onwards, the “it is done” syndrome is present. At least this is what I thought around the month of August in 2008: at last I have finished my collections and pet projects, and I have written a guide about it. It’s a kind of self-help book for beginners, or “toy soldiers for dummies,” as those books are generally titled nowadays. I thought it was a fitting end, but as usual, time has proved it was not the end at all...

To begin at the beginning, it happened that we had to do some minor building work at home. It was a minor interior renovation revolving around the creation of a new room segregated from the too-large living room space. But it involved, as collateral damage, the elimination of one of the cabinets where some of my 54 mm toy soldiers were displayed.

Then and there I choose to reorganize the collection, specialize in some periods, and decide which items fell outside of the main interests. I divided them into manageable lots, took pictures of them, and placed them on eBay. All sold quite fast. In detail, let’s say that the more modern part of my 54 mm collection, with matte finish, was the first to go.

After that I concentrated on keeping the main lines of my collection, and I finished selling the items unrelated to it. This included all the figures by Soldat, Miniaturas Palou, All the Queen’s Men, some from Dorset, some from Tradition of London, and the mounted bands of Life Guards (red tunic) and the Blues and Royals (blue tunic) from Ducal.





I only kept the amalgamated mounted band in “state uniform” as worn in the Trooping the Colour ceremony. Then, to my surprise and consternation, I discovered that I sold with the duplicate bands both directors of music, and I had to buy them again to complete the set. Well, they were only two figures I sold by mistake and were still in production at the time, so no harm was done.

A similar thing happened with a mounted French Foreign Legion (FFL) officer, but in that case, it was not a mistake—I sold one with the marching soldiers and the band, then bought another in a more “active” stance, together with some FFL rifles and packs, which I used to arm my buglers and experiment to see if the look of some figures would improve with the packs, even if that meant drilling some holes in them. A second order (in fact, several consecutive small orders) did square the ranks of the FFL collection, and two specials were done by Giles to complement the set of artillerymen.

Thus there only remained in the 54 mm collection four subjects: Trooping the Colour (or the Queen’s birthday parade); British colonial troops 1876–1882; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), including both mounted figures, as per the musical ride, and dismounted figures; and last but not least, the pre-WWI French Foreign Legion, aka Beau Geste uniform.

It was not simply a matter of selling some parts. At the same time I consolidated the remaining subjects, and after the sale I bought the necessary complements to even them up.

I also converted the lancers from both Life Guards and Blues and Royals into troopers with swords (I bought the new spare swords at the same time I bought the directors of music again), withholding the lances (which I kept as spares for the RCMP), carving out the redundant part of the lancers’ sheathed swords, and doing a small paint job to finish them properly.

The lancers were bought in their day when I was suffering from the “complete syndrome” of a would-be collector, meaning I wanted to have all the Ducal figures from those regiments, like the red- and blue-uniformed mounted bands I purchased and then sold, as I’ve mentioned before.

At the same time, I did double the number of lancers in the RCMP musical ride, using the spare lances of the Household Cavalry to reduce cost. I also ordered some specials from Jack Duke, who obliged in doing the officer in command of the musical ride (with sword), a bugler, and two sergeants (all mounted), which I finished up by painting extra details.

I think the old officer of the RCMP has appeared in the Ducal catalogue since I ordered one of them as a special a long time ago. I also changed the swinging arms of my marching (on foot) RCMP constables for arms with a Winchester at the slope, as in the Colour Party. I like them better that way.

The additions to the British colonial set were more diverse, with some mounted colonels, regimental sergeant major, and Colour Bearers of the Gordon Highlanders from Ducal, as well as a Seventeenth Lancers standard-bearer. There is also a pair of newly issued Tradition of London British colonials, an officer and a bugler bought in kit form, which I completely assembled and painted myself.

At the same time, I also pursued a frantic search for four extra boxes of the discontinued Royal West Kent 1882. Finally one box came from California, two from Glasgow, and one from

the London Tradition Shop itself, having been returned unsold from the Paris shop.

I actually bought another mounted officer of the Indian army range to use as an ADC, and Giles Brown from Dorset Soldiers furnished four pioneers' arms to convert four redundant (in my organization) soldiers with rifle.

Now my Royal West Kent Regiment set is finally complete.

Of course, renewing contact with Giles motivated the addition of some more FFL 54 mm figures to my collection, and some mounted and dismounted characters, one officer of Spahis (Henri de Beaujolais?), and "the Red Cavalier" I already had in 28 mm. I also secured a long-needed French general officer to command the lot.

Finally I bought some Steadfast Soldiers (actually R P World Models)—thirty figures in all—to have gunners in action stations for my artillery pieces; the infantry to complete my "British Square" in 54 mm; some 24th foot soldiers, which I also use to role-play or skirmish on a 1:1 basis, including three Victoria Cross characters: Lieutenant Chard (R.E.), Lieutenant Bromhead (24th), and Colour Sergeant Bourne (24th).

An unusual anecdote worth sharing is the incident with one parcel, the last from R P World Models. First it got lost (with an absolutely correct address, so no fault of theirs or mine). After that, at some place in its travels, it was opened by a thief and some figures went missing. To make a long story short, after lots of emails and telephone calls between the parties involved, when the package finally got to me, I claimed insurance rights, including pictures of the parcel and its contents. I was completely resupplied by R P World Models to my entire satisfaction. The service provided was a tribute to the honesty of Robert Prati, who was quite excellent all during the period of anguish. In the meanwhile I used the enforced time of waiting to paint yellow stripes on the kilts of the Gordons in my collection (Tel el Kebir 1882), a task I had postponed time and again due to laziness.

From then on the 54 mm lead toy soldier collection has remained quiet and stable. I guess all this shows how collections are dynamic and have a tendency to move with time. Collecting, at least for me, is not just a matter of accumulating items, even if some people really do have that approach and never sell or swap anything at all.

At the same time, my 25/28 mm wargame collection was going through interesting and troubled times. This just goes to show that not all projects come to a normal end, and some get really confused.

I first saw an advertisement of minis in a wargame magazine, showing excellent casts. Of course, the next thing was to visit their website and buy some sample figures. The manufacturer was TAG (The Assault Group), which has a very nice modern range in 28 mm—and that compliment comes from an established old-school wargamer like me who usually never thinks about anything post-1900!

My original intention was to buy figures and convert them to represent the FFL airborne/paratroopers (aka paras) from the second REP and use them in the *La Légion saute sur Kolwezi* wargame or scenario. The idea came after reading a couple of history books and seeing the French film about it on DVD. I consulted my reference books about uniforms and weapons and

thought the thing feasible—quite wrongly, as it resulted a big fiasco, as you will see.

In the first place, a great handicap appeared with the paras' berets. You see, British paras and French paras wear them in opposite directions. Then the conversions were not easy at all, and the weapons were too modern for the period.

After some frustrating attempts, I decided to use American Vietnam-era minis with helmet (also from TAG). Then, after organizing the minis into rifle companies, command group, heavy weapons, etc., the results (including some resin Jeeps) were far from satisfactory.

I began to search the Internet for someone doing the right stuff but got no results. At the same time, I started to think, due to the high quality of the minis, why not use them for Vietnam after all? So the Kolwezi project was finally shelved.

Then I started to read about a strange war that, in my youth, was heavily intermingled with pop music, flower power, 1967's "Summer of Love," and daily TV news. I dutifully read through the books *Fields of Fire*, *Chickenhawk*, and the series *Six Silent Men*, and of course all of Osprey's Vietnam-related books. I thought the time elapsed since the actual war was enough to get perspective. I also saw again on DVD classic Vietnam War films like *Full Metal Jacket*, *Hamburger Hill*, *Apocalypse Now*, *We Were Soldiers*, *Tigerland*, and *Platoon*.

To not be tiresome in excess, what had begun as a French military hostage-rescue operation that lasted a week or two in Africa was becoming an obsession with a strange American intervention in Southeast Asia.

First I bought one helicopter (Corgi) and then several more (Franklin). Later on I found plastic stands to make them "fly" over the tabletop. Then I started buying through eBay Patton tanks (Corgi), armoured troop carriers, Jeeps, trucks (all of them long deleted from Corgi's catalogue), and even a Phantom fighter jet (Franklin).

Of course, during and afterwards, I searched Internet forums and discovered the different possibilities for organizing my minis. I looked into forums like those for TAG's Up Country and the more exhaustive Vietnam Fields of Fire Reloaded. They were very useful in helping me devise various schemes for organizing them into different units.

I bought the ones I needed from TAG, converted (lightly and easily) some of them, etc. It took time and was interesting in itself, because by exchanging just a few figures from my pool, it was possible to field on the tabletop, with about a hundred minis, many real units of the period: American line infantry, US Marine Corps, air cavalry, and mechanized units. In the process I even swapped items with other forum members, and I had real fun until all was ready to roll.

When all the parcels had arrived (some from the United States, like the Franklin choppers) and the moment came to start painting the minis or send them to a professional painter...I do not know what happened. Maybe I had an excess of information to digest, or the growing personal opinion that the period was too modern for me, or that a light-infantry guerrilla war in a particularly unfriendly jungle was not what I had in mind in the first place. Whatever it was, while I was thinking about what to do with them, out of the blue I received an email offer for 20 percent off from Wargames Foundry. That led me to buy some Rebel cavalry I badly needed to refight Brandy Station (American Civil War 1863). There and then, the 'Nam project stopped abruptly in its tracks. In short, I sold my collection of items through eBay. I then reorganized



my Civil War cavalry brigades, painted some, sent the others to my usual painting service...and there you have it: Kolwezi → Vietnam → American Civil War.

It was not that simple, of course; I had to convert some figures (changing heads, as usual) to get the dismounted cavalry Rebs that did not exist in their original range. I bought Civil War limbers from Dixon, some flags from Redoubt Enterprises, and also did some minor painting to convert some redundant already-painted Union gunners into Confederate ones. And the lot, dutifully varnished, went on display in my cabinets.

Is that all? Not by half. Now a large scale had grasped my attention, and I began to buy some Playmobils through eBay for my grandsons.

I started with the British Royal Guard special, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police special, American Civil War (ACW) cavalry, musketeers, crusaders, pirates, Redcoats, etc. Of course, at the same time, I was buying the new lines of Romans and pirate ships. Playmobils are much less expensive when new, and they are available through toyshops.

Slowly but surely I investigated the ranges with more care, and I ended up so involved that I was finally buying customized parts. It all started with some Zouaves for the American Civil War, I recall.

So actually, I was mainly going up and down in scale. The passion for Playmobil items grew and grew, with the flexibility they gave me foremost in my decision. Forget about having soldiers mounted and dismounted for the same unit; forget about multipurpose units (exchanging command stands). Nowadays I simply clip on the right flag and other parts and move on, with the benefit of it being a reversible, clean, and quick process.

But going down in scale was quite a different matter. I have always found the big Napoleonic and ACW battles challenging, but I did not especially like the smaller lead toy soldier wargame figures (15 mm and downwards) available in the 1970s. Then one day I bought some Baccus 6 mm wargame flags (Napoleonic and ACW), and, influenced by the Plemos rules, I decided to try to downgrade the perspective a bit more and use plastic counters (which are cheap and easy to carry, thus enabling me at last to play with my brother again) as “brigade stands”...oh, boy! At last I can do Leipzig or Wagram on a normal wargame table, with all the units on the top (not that I have reinvented the board game; I do not claim that at all), and at last with room to manoeuvre. I can transport a very big Russian Napoleonic army in my pocket. Painting them in 25 mm and reading lots of books on uniforms and battles and campaigns have helped me to visualize them simply using a cheap coloured plastic counter with a flag glued on top.

Finally, I have recently sold important parts (by now practically all of them) of my collection of 25/28 mm wargame figures through eBay. Nowadays I think the vast majority of my old Minifigs live and fight in Switzerland, and the rest of them around the world. They have had a second lease on wargame life and the better for them.

Now, before I leave you, next on my projects agenda is the need to write and modify the rules for Playmos (75 mm) after play testing, and of course to do the same with my new approach to the nineteenth century and the other periods I love. The coloured plastic counters are also used

as colonials, ancients, and whatnot.

I did not stop there. Intrigued by the excellent pictures of the painted Baccus 6 mm in the Polemos rules and in wargame magazines (mainly *Battlegames*), and of course on their own website, I started buying 6 mm minis. I ordered some proxies (after a few email exchanges with Peter Berry) to do the Charge of the Light Brigade. They do not have a proper Crimean range, but in that scale, conversions are speed itself and merely a matter of painting them right. I actually painted them myself and used the Baccus basing system kit with very good results—a nice surprise because I was always nervous about managing dry-brushing properly.

The new idea on my mind was to have a role-playing game that could lead to the Charge of the Light Brigade as it happened or by providing alternatives, even charging to the right target, as Lord Raglan intended. It is just a matter of percentage in the rules applied (my own) and looking at the result each time. You can have Lord Raglan word the fourth order clearly (a small percentage); General Airey write it clearly (or not); Lord Lucan and Captain Nolan get things right verbally; have Lord Cardigan killed by the shot that actually killed Captain Nolan; and Captain Nolan making a threes right with the brigade and charging the captured redoubts as intended. You can also have the Russian infantry there, forming squares and repulsing the Light Brigade, or panicking and running away, leaving the captured British guns behind. In the most improbable of sequences, Captain Nolan will get a Victoria Cross for saving the day. (If this is not historical fantasy, tell me what is).

Next in line in the 6 mm projects is Grierson's Raid (ACW), a game in seventeen turns, one for each day of the actual raid. I have to check how easy it is to convert some figures in that scale (the Crimean ones were easy enough) to get the minis of the movie characters (not historical, of course).

Today I have the figures, the conversions are done, but the project is still on standby, with not a single figure painted yet.

In the meantime I also had a go at 10 mm. I must say, Pendraken's sculpting is very nice. In fact, there is so much detail that after successfully painting minis in 6 mm, I found 10 mm too big. So I decided to send them to my brother and see what happens. Maybe he will try them after all.

As you can see, I seem to go back to the Little Bighorn, the French Foreign Legion, ACW cavalry raids, and the Crimean War's Battle of Balaclava, in whatever form and scale, time and time again. But strategy and tactics, and also role-playing, keep coming back in new(?) projects. (Actually, they are probably not new at all, just focused differently).

I then started to have serious doubts about the American Civil War as a good period for introducing my grandsons to wargaming (brother against brother?). So I decided to sell the Playmos collection for that period and concentrate on softer "fictional tricorne periods." Now mysterious countries like the Grand Duchy of Vlaufosk and the Bermil-Lion Electorate will take the relay on the wargame table with their armies (infantry, cavalry, and artillery) and navies... ah! Those magnificent Playmobil ships will come to the fore again.

I must say that the eighteenth century is probably the easiest period to mess with, thanks to

the existing commercial figures by Playmobil. I indulged with a little exchange of bits and pieces to fulfil my aesthetic needs, swapping heads, hair, torsos, legs, hats, perruques, arms, cuffs, etc.

I am currently wondering why everything seems to be a new job every time. In fact, I am doing my pet periods again and again and again in different manners. So there you have it in a nutshell: I seem to go in circles somehow, but I still have the time of my life while doing so.

I still hope you like this book. Maybe because it is really sincere; I can assure you that there is not a single lie in it. I had a lot of fun writing and producing it; I had fun with it even when trying to get the pictures right—not an easy task, I assure you. All in all, special-interest books are in reality an exercise in self-satisfaction. So just do not take what I say too seriously. All of it is true, but I am the one who really loves what I've written, as it seems to have become a kind of memoir of my lead/plastic/rubber/aluminium toy soldiers.

I truly wish you will have as much fun in the hobby as I myself did and guess I still do.

Second English edition: Alejo Dorca, Andorra la Vella, 2016







## Acknowledgements and Final Note

In the first place, I have to mention my maternal granddad, the person who initiated me in the hobby when I was very young. We did a lot of military parades with toy soldiers on the floor. Not until I became a granddad myself have I really come to appreciate the time and patience he dedicated to me.

My parents gave me toy soldiers as presents because I asked for them, but not exclusively. A lot of presents were building blocks, construction games, watercolours, Prismalo (Caran d'Ache) coloured pencils, and books.

My first toy soldiers were made of India rubber (caoutchouc) and manufactured in Spain by Reamsa. After that I had hard plastic French soldiers, French Quiralu in aluminium, and even a set of very nice French-made WWI metal guns. The jewel of my early collection was a magnificent set of British lead toy soldiers (Britains, in fact, the largest set ever made of Coldstreamers Changing the Guard, a really big red box with two levels of trays).

Later I got seriously involved in the wargame field, and I have to thank all my close family who approved my suggestion that instead of presenting me with ties and aftershave as gifts, they give me money for soldiers. I have always hated surprise gifts because they are usually so wide of the mark.

Collecting 54 mm came later on and was my own thing.

My brother merits special mention. He has always been my best enemy on the tabletop field of battle. My sons took the relay but are very busy today; maybe when my grandsons are a little older, they will take an interest. They will probably close my particular cycle if enough of my lifespan remains.

This book wouldn't have seen the light at all without the full cooperation of my eldest son, a master in science, computers, and telecommunications (and anything with a plug in it) and

a great expert in anything to do with electronics, computers, and photography. If he had not told me how to proceed, you would never have read this. His advice about tripods, focus, and photography in general were a must-have, and silly pictures are only my own fault.

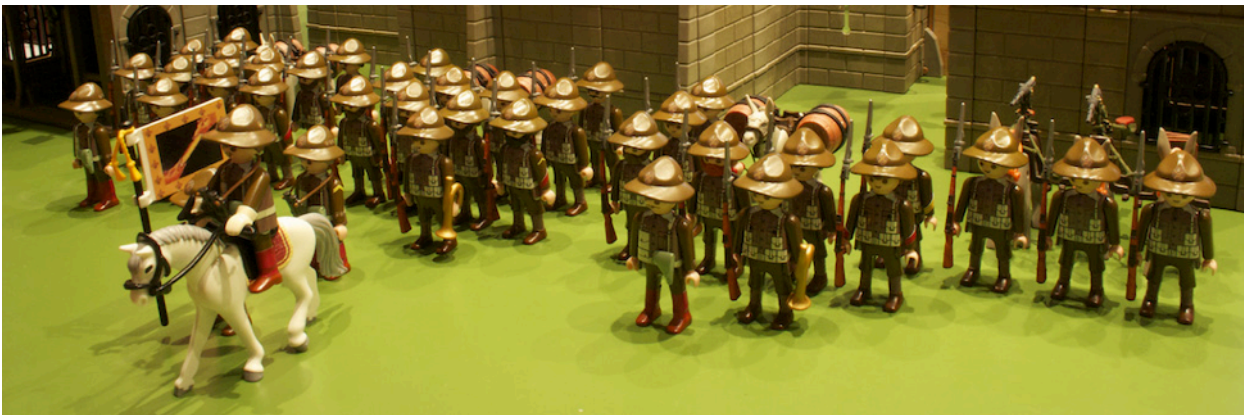
A lot of thanks to my only daughter, who, even if not at all interested in the hobby (though she does say “they are nice” from time to time), made the considerable effort of trying to read the manuscript critically and quickly told me to edit it properly (confirming the gentle advice of my eldest son). There and then forward came Elizabeth Polen from the copyediting service in createspace and put matters right so to make the manuscript “readable”!

And last but not least, thanks to my beloved wife, who has been there at all times, supporting me and never uttering a single word of criticism. On the contrary, she always supports me in all my hobby wanderings. A long and happy marriage is perhaps a strange thing nowadays, but I am glad to have one! That is having tremendous luck in life.

I think that the last words of the text need to clarify that entertainment with imaginary wargames on a tabletop is one thing, but real wars are quite a different thing. I have always admired the common foot soldier of any country, tribe, or nationality, those who in history textbooks have been callously called “cannon fodder”—and I do include in this concept absolutely all of them.

And I absolutely agree with the Duke of Wellington’s words after Waterloo: “Next to a battle lost, the saddest thing is a battle won.”

This is the reason why I love toy soldiers: they never die.



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- AL Military Modelling: Andrea Miniatures 54 mm
- AR Collecting: All the Queen’s Men, Tradition of London + Customs, Dorset Soldiers, Fort Ducal
- M Cartago Army adapted from PLAYMOBIL
- BL Different scales & manufacturers
- BR Napoleonic army: Miniature figurines 25 mm

### **Back Cover**

- C Customized PLAYMOBILS

