

Matts La-Tour

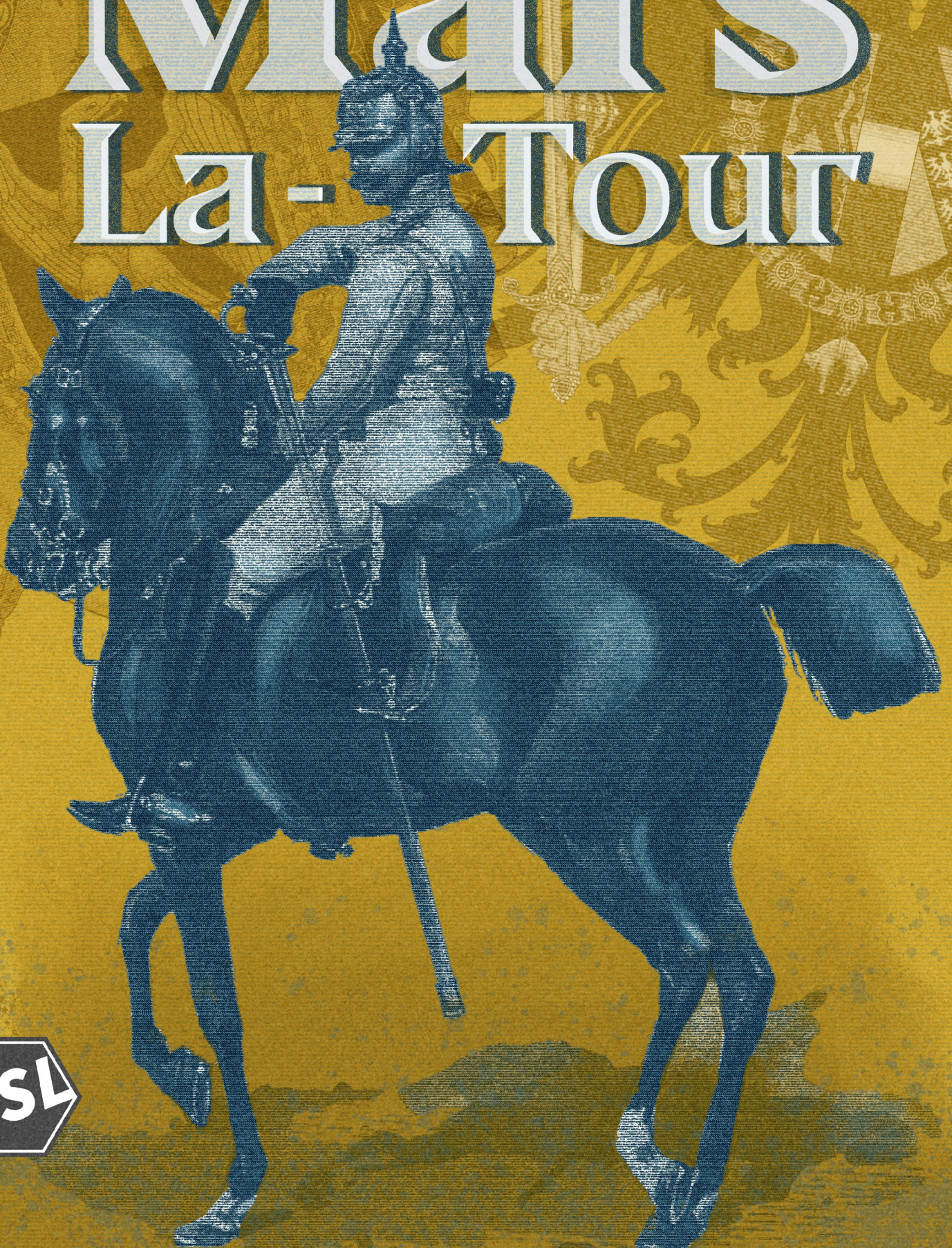


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Mars La Tour
A Game by Ray Weiss
Developed by Matt Ward
Based on Mark Hermann's Gettysburg

1.0 INTRODUCTION

On the 16th of August 1870, the fate of Europe for nearly the next century was decided in a single day at Mars la Tour during the Franco-Prussian war. While little studied in America, Mars la Tour was arguably the most consequential event for the political makeup of Europe since the Allied victory at Waterloo. At the height of the battle, a Prussian force of nearly 80,000 completely manhandled the entire French Army, preventing them from retreating further west towards fortifications, instead bottling the French up against the Belgian frontier at Sedan where the Second Empire would finally be destroyed. *Mars la Tour* is an introductory wargame inspired by Mark Herman's *Gettysburg* which allows players to experience and learn about this pivotal historical engagement.

2.0 GLOSSARY

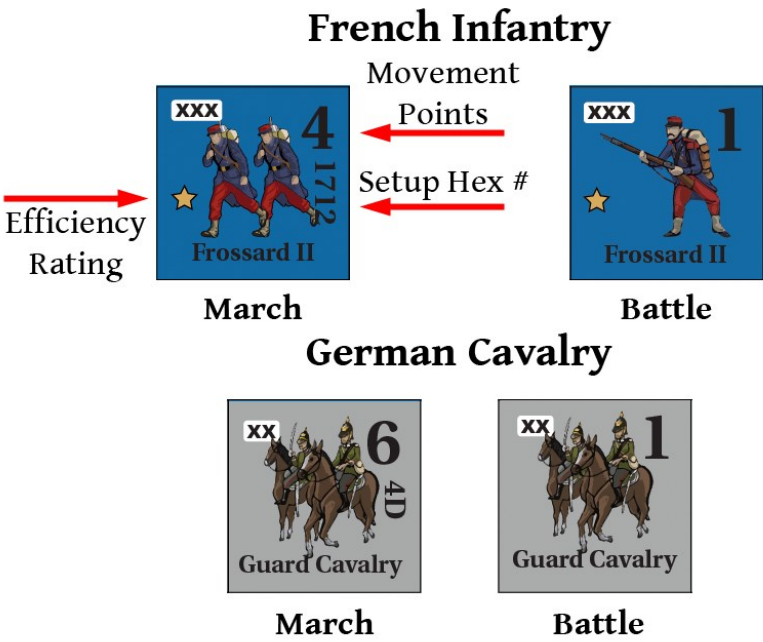
- **AAC:** Advance After Combat – Whenever a defending hex is vacated in combat, the attacking unit must Advance After Combat into the combat hex.
- **AP:** Ammunition Points – Points used for artillery fire in combat.
- **Blown:** A combat result in which the losing unit is placed 2 turns ahead.
- **Cavalry:** Men on horseback who dismount for combat or stay mounted for Death Charges.
- **Enemy:** Units belonging to the opposing player.
- **EZOC:** Enemy Zone of Control – The six hexes surrounding an enemy combat unit.
- **EZOI:** Enemy Zone of Influence – all hexes within 2 hexes of an enemy unit.
- **Friendly:** Units belonging to you.
- **HQ:** Headquarters – Markers which dictate where units may move toward.
- **Infantry:** Men with rifles.
- **ZOC:** Zone of Control – The six hexes surrounding a combat unit.
- **ZOI:** Zone of Influence – All hexes within 2 hexes of a unit.

3.0 IMPORTANT CONCEPTS

The following concepts are essential in order to play Mars la Tour. These concepts will be frequently referred to throughout the rules.

3.1 Units

Mars la tour features 2 main unit types; infantry, cavalry. These units feature a number of Movement Points (MP) and occasionally, a number of stars representing the unit’s Efficiency Rating (ER). The Front side of a unit is called its March Formation side which always has 4 MP for infantry and 6 MP for cavalry. The backside of a unit is called its Battle Formation side and always features just 1 MP for both infantry and cavalry.



3.1.1 Markers

Markers are mnemonic devices that keep track of information in-game. Markers are explicitly not units.

Artillery	Artillery	Artillery	Artillery	Move/Attack
Commit.	Ammo	Commit.	Ammo	Remaining

3.2 Headquarters

Headquarters (HQs) are both the Bazaine and Friedrich Karl markers for both the French and Germans respectively. These markers do not function as traditional units, they instead limit unit movement and determine where Blown units return to the map. *Design Note: Headquarters do not represent the literal presence of a leader, rather the focus of their strategic intent.*



3.3 Artillery

Both players receive Ammo Points (**AP**) which may be spent by either player to receive a +2 to Attack Die Rolls. When both players commit artillery, a mechanic called an Artillery Duel is triggered where both players roll with the higher result getting to add the artillery bonus (German player wins ties). Whenever committing artillery, lower AP by one.

3.4 Attack

An attack is where one player designates a single unit to engage in combat with a single adjacent enemy unit. Dice are rolled and modified with the lower modified Die Roll of the two loses the engagement. Attacks are always voluntary and never mandatory. Cavalry units may only declare attacks against another cavalry units but may defend normally when attacked by infantry or cavalry.

3.5 Deathride Charge

A Deathride Charge is a special cavalry attack that simulates the suicidal cavalry charges made throughout the Sedan campaign. Deathride Charges may only be made against enemy infantry units in open terrain.

3.6 Friendly & Enemy

Units in the game are either French or German. The player commanding the French side considers French units to be friendly to his side, and German units to be enemies. The reverse applies for the German player.

3.7 Dice

Players use 1 six-sided die to resolve Attacks, Artillery Duels and Deathride Charges. Players may find it quicker to play with 2 six-sided dice, one for each player.

3.8 Open & Defensible Terrain

Open terrain includes all hexes on the board without a Defensible Terrain indicator. Hexes with a Defensible Terrain indicator grant a +2 DRM in combat for the defending unit.

3.9 Zone of Control

All infantry and cavalry units project a Zone of Control (**ZOC**) into the 6 hexes adjacent to the hex they occupy. Whenever a unit enters or begins a Movement Phase inside an Enemy Zone of Control (**EZOC**) it cannot move for the remainder of that Movement Phase and can only leave a Zone of Control due to an attack result or during the Organization Phase.

3.10 Zone of Influence

Whenever a unit moves within 2 hexes of an enemy unit, they must cease movement and is flipped to its Battle Formation side if not already the case.

3.11 Roads

A unit in March Formation whose entire move is on connected road hexes spend 0.5 MP per hex.

3.12 Empty Hex

Take this literally; an empty hex has no units or markers in it, no exceptions.

4.0 SEQUENCE OF PLAY

Each game turn follows this exact sequence:

1. COMMAND PHASE

- a. **HQ Placement:** Starting with the German player, each side first removes and then places their HQ marker on the map. The HQ must be placed in a hex within 3 hexes of a friendly unit which is currently not in an EZOC. If a side has no friendly units on the map, the HQ is placed in an empty hex within three hexes of a French (**B**) or German (**C, D**) Entry Hex. If this is not possible, an HQ may be placed on any empty hex on the map.

An HQ is a **marker** and not a unit. Once placed, players may not move nor interfere with HQ markers until the next HQ Placement Phase. HQs cannot be eliminated and can exist with enemy units in the same hex. *Design note paraphrased from Mark Herman, these HQs do not represent the physical presence of these commanders, but rather their command-intent and focus of operations.*

- b. **Blown Unit Return:** After both players have each placed their HQ on the map, starting with the German player, players may return a maximum of 2 Blown units to the map in any empty hex adjacent to a friendly HQ that is not in an EZOC or EZOI. *Blown units are units which receive Blown results in combat and return to the map 2 turns after the turn in which they were Blown.* Available Blown units above the 2 unit maximum are immediately eliminated. If more than 2 Blown units are available for entry, the opposing player chooses which 2 units come back into play. *Design note paraphrased from Mark Herman; It's generally assumed that the opposing player will pick 2 worst units possible.*
- c. **French Mitrailleur Fire Placement:** Starting on turn 3 (13:30), the French player must place the Mitrailleur Fire marker into any hex in a friendly units ZOC, EZOCs have no impact on the placement of this marker.

d. Organization Phase:

- i. **March Formation:** Each unit that is greater than 2 hexes away from an enemy unit (outside an EZOI,) may be flipped from its Battle Formation side to its March Formation side or remain on its Battle side. This is the only time during a turn where a unit may flip from a Battle Formation side to its March Formation side.
- ii. **Battle Formation:** All units in an EZOC or EZOI remain on its Battle Formation side or is flipped to its Battle Formation side. *Play Note paraphrased from Mark Herman: Once a unit is on its Battle formation side, it remains that way for the remainder of the turn.*
- iii. **Exiting EZOCs:** Starting with the German player and alternating with the French player, each friendly unit in an EZOC may perform a retreat (see the combat result rules for Retreats). Once a player declines to retreat a unit, that player may no longer retreat any remaining units from any EZOCs, while the enemy player may then continue to exit any remaining units of his from EZOCs.

2. MOVEMENT PHASE

Design Note paraphrased by Mark Herman: Unlike most wargames, units can move multiple times and in any sequence until both players pass.

- a. Beginning with the German player, each player alternates moving 1 unit. Each time a unit moves, it may spend up to all the MP listed on the unit itself. Units move from hex to adjacent hex, and all hexes cost 1 MP in order to enter. Pieces may spend less MP than is listed on their counter or none at all but can never exceed their listed Movement Allowance. Units in March Formation which move entirely along connected road hexes pay 0.5 MP per hex of movement they enter. Units cannot mix normal movement with road movement together.
- b. The first time a unit moves into an EZOI, the unit must cease movement and if the unit is in March Formation, it immediately switches to Battle Formation. Units in March Formation that begin movement in an EZOI whose first hex of movement is not an EZOI, stay in March Formation, otherwise they flip to Battle Formation and cease movement. Units in March Formation in an EZOC immediately flip to Battle Formation. In all circumstances, units in an EZOC must be in or immediately flip into Battle Formation. Units in an EZOC may not move any further during the Movement Phase **except** for Prussian units, who may move a maximum of one time after moving into an EZOC.

- c. A unit which begins its movement outside of its HQ's Range must move immediately toward their HQ until they are within its range, and thereafter may not again move outside the HQ's range. Nothing happens if a friendly or enemy unit or marker enters a hex with an HQ.
Play Note quoted from Mark Herman, "Closer means less distance, not the same length."
- d. Pieces which are off map but available this turn (printed on the March Formation side of a counter) enter the map during the Movement Phase by paying for movement into the first map edge hex they enter. If multiple units are able to enter the map at once, the units with a lower ER must enter the map first.

If for any reason, an enemy unit occupies an entry hex, the enemy unit must immediately execute a retreat exactly if it had lost an attack. Units that also enter this turn from that location which cannot not enter the map for any reason are kept off map until there is a hex for them to enter on this or a later turn. Units may not shift to another entry hex and must enter from their indicated location. Players may not voluntarily hold units off map if it is possible for the unit to enter the map. *Important:* Moves must first be used to have reinforcements enter the map before any units on the map are moved.

Player's Note paraphrased by Mark Herman: Players love to try and interdict enemy reinforcements on the map edges. Simply expressed, you can't, and the rules are expressly designed as such. Any loopholes you think of are incorrect. In addition, you must always have all reinforcements enter the map on their turn of entry if possible, and again, any attempts to do something else are illegal moves.

- e. Every time a chance to move a player's unit occurs, players **MUST** move a unit or pass. After passing, that player may no longer move any pieces for the remainder of the movement Phase.
Reminder: HQs can never move but are removed and replaced each Command Phase.
- f. Once one player has passed, the other player rolls a die and adds 1 for each friendly unit that is **not** in an EZOC or yet to enter the map. The modified result is the maximum number of times that player may move a unit and then must pass, ending the Movement Phase (a mnemonic marker for use on the artillery track is provided in the counter mix.) Any reinforcements that have yet to enter the map must now enter the map before any other units on map may move.

3. ATTACK PHASE

Design note paraphrased from Mark Herman: Unlike most wargames, player's units can attack and be

attacked multiple times and in any sequence until the unit is removed from the map or is no longer in an EZOC, or a player passes.

After all movement has ended, starting with the German player, each side may voluntarily designate one unit that is in an EZOC to attack. The player declaring the attack is the attacker and the opposing player is the defender. Each attack features only one unit attacking one other adjacent unit that is in its ZOC. Cavalry units can only declare attacks against other cavalry units (exception, see 3.4.1), but they always defend from an attack regardless of its source.

- a. **Artillery Support Declaration:** After an attack is announced, each player takes their Artillery Support Marker and secretly sets it on its Artillery Support or No Support side. Players then simultaneously reveal their choices to one another. Players cannot choose to add Artillery Support if they have 0 Ammo Points on the Artillery Support Track (use the French and German AP markers to keep track).
- b. **Artillery Support Resolution:** If only one player chooses to commit Artillery Support, that player adds 2 to their attack die roll and reduce their available Ammo Points by 1.
- c. **Artillery Duels:** If both players choose to commit Artillery Support, they each reduce their available AP by 1 and each roll a die. The player with the higher result adds 2 to their attack roll. The German player wins on ties *Design Note from Ray: This is a change made to reflect the superior range and quality of German Artillery comparatively to the French artillery which had numerous issues with ammunition and relatively short range.*
- d. **Bad Ammunition:** Whenever either player rolls a 6 during an Artillery Duel, the opposite player (or both players if they each roll sixes), reduces their AP total by an additional point. If the AP total is already at 0 there is no additional effect.
- e. **Attack Resolution:** Each player rolls 1 die and adds any of the DRM listed in #4 of the Attack Procedure Summary below. The player with the higher modified die total wins the attack, ties are stalemates. Subtract the lower modified result from the higher modified result and determine the result based on the differential.

3.1 Attack Procedure Summary

1. **Declare Attack:** one unit attacks an adjacent (ZOC) enemy unit.
2. **Artillery Support:** each player secretly uses their Artillery Support marker to declare Artillery Support.

3. **Artillery Duel:** If only one side declares Artillery Support, that side receives a +2 DRM to their Attack Roll. If both players declare support, the side with the higher die roll gains the +2 DRM (German player wins ties).
4. Attacker and Defender each roll a die and add the following modifiers to their die roll:
 - a. **Artillery Support:** +2 DRM
 - b. **Defensible Terrain:** Defender only - +2 DRM
 - c. **Chassepot Fire:** French defenders in clear terrain only - +1 DRM
 - d. **Flank Support:** Attacker only - +1 DRM if there are two or more non-attacking friendly units in the Defender's ZOC.
 - e. **ER:** Each unit adds a DRM equal to the number of stars on their counter (the unit's ER).
5. The higher modified result wins the attack, the lower modified result loses the attack.
6. Ties are a stalemate, no effect.
7. The differential between the winning result and the losing result determines the attack result, see Attack Table.
8. If the defending hex is vacated and the Attacker is **not** in an EZOC, the attacker **MUST** enter the vacated hex.

After an individual attack is concluded, the players continue alternating declaring attacks with units or passing.

3.2 Attack Table

These results correspond to the die roll differential, only the loser experiences these effects:

Zero: Stalemate

+1 to +2: Retreat, if retreat cannot meet all conditions, treat as blown result.

+3 to +4: Blown, on the 5th and 6th turn, treat as Eliminated instead.

+5 or more: Eliminated – Removed from the game.

3.3 Retreats

Units called on to retreat must move 3 hexes away from the winner of an attack. Retreating units may never enter a hex with another friendly or enemy unit (HQ markers are OK). If the second hex entered

during a retreat is a defensible terrain hex, the unit may (not must) cease its retreat. Each hex of a retreat must be further away from the enemy unit. If a retreating unit cannot move further away from the enemy unit and/or cannot avoid entering an EZCOC (the Mitraillease counter counts as a French ZOC), cannot avoid entering a hex with another unit (friendly or enemy), or beyond the range of its HQ, the retreat becomes an immediate blown result instead.

3.4 Advance After Attack

If a defender (never the attacker) vacates its hex due to any attack result and the advancing unit is not in an EZOC of another enemy unit or stacked with the Mitraillease marker, the attacker **must** immediately advance into the vacated hex. A unit which advances into the ZOC of the same or different enemy units can continue attacking in any subsequent attack opportunities, the only condition is that a unit must be in an EZOC and its owner has not passed. *Play Note: German units stacked with the French Mitraillease marker may not advance (French ZOC).*

3.5 Blown

Remove the piece from the map and place it on the game turn track two turns ahead of the current turn. During the last two turns of the game (5 and 6), treat all Blown results as Eliminated.

3.6 Eliminated

Remove the unit from the map for the remainder of the game. Each eliminated unit counts as 1 Victory Point (VP) for your opponent at the end of the game.

3.7 Pass

Once a player chooses to Pass, that player may no longer declare any attacks for the remainder of the Attack Phase, though they still defend against enemy attacks as normal.

3.8 After the first Pass

After one player passes, the opposing player rolls a die. The result equals the maximum number of attacks they can make for the remainder of the Attack Phase

4.0 END PHASE

After both players have passed during an Attack Phase, the current turn is over. If this was turn 6, determine the winner of the game, otherwise advance the turn maker and begin a new turn.

5.0 SPECIAL RULES

The following chapter details special rules mentioned throughout the rules.

5.1 Artillery

At the beginning of the game the Prussian player starts with 14 AP, and the French with 10. This is the total each player has for the remainder of the game. Each time a player commits Artillery Support during an attack, reduce their AP total by 1. During an Artillery Duel, a die result of 6 (even in ties) reduces the opponent's AP total by an additional point. A player with no remaining AP removes their AP marker from the game. Players may never have a negative total of AP.

5.2 Cavalry

Cavalry units can only declare an attack against another cavalry unit, but they can always defend from an attack. Whether attacking or defending, Cavalry units cannot choose to receive Artillery Support, they will always choose No Support.

5.3 French Mitraillease Fire

This marker acts as a French ZOC in the hex that it occupies. It is a marker, not a unit, and has no ZOI. Any German unit which enters the hex this marker occupies must end movement for the remainder of the Movement Phase. The marker remains a French ZOC at all times, even during the Attack Phase. Every Command Phase, the Mitraillease marker is removed from the map and then repositioned back onto the map. German units stacked with the Mitraillease marker cannot advance as they are in a French ZOC.

6.0 VICTORY

The game usually ends at the conclusion of turn 6. However, if the French manage to move at least 4 infantry units off the map edge at the hexes labeled E & F before the end of 6 turns, they automatically win the game with a major victory. Otherwise, the player with the higher VP total wins. Each player receives 1 VP per eliminated enemy unit, the German player wins in the result of a tie. The French (only) earn 1 VP each for each hex of Mars la Tour they hold at the end of the game. The Prussians earn 1 VP if the French fail to exit any units off the board.

7.0 SETUP

Simply use the hex or turn of reinforcement designations on the March side of the counters. Reinforcements enter on the turns and in the hexes indicated on their counter.

8.0 DESIGN COMMENTARY

Anyone who has played Mark Herman's Gettysburg is aware of what a clever game it is, the first time I played it I maybe played about 3 games in a row by myself trying to wrap my head around it. The Zones of Influence and the March/Battle formations are to me the heart of the game, most wargames abstract movement down to a straight average of the amount of space traversable within a given period of time and other assumptions. What makes Gettysburg so clever in my opinion is that instead of having players focus on get good odds attacks, instead has players focusing on maneuver which is precisely what the commanders themselves were concerned with as opposed to bean-counting.

This is not to bash bean-counting, a tried and true staple of wargaming, but I think the focus on maneuver is especially poignant given Gettysburg is meant as an introductory game. While much of the joy of wargaming involves managing risk in the most efficient way you can against a living breathing opponent, the tried and true method of using odds-based Combat Result Tables has always been relatively ubiquitous in wargaming. The direct lack of any odds-based combat calculations further works towards creating immersion as to the actual maneuvers involved.

While I really enjoyed Mark Herman's Gettysburg, I thought the situation was somewhat static with limited replayability. I was interested in exploring Mars la Tour using the same tools because I think the situation lends itself better to many of the ideas being explored in Herman's Gettysburg. This is probably the clearest in regards to how Herman chooses to represent the Confederate units as half-divisions using the reasoning that they were better organized than the union units who are represented as deci-

sions, resulting in a somewhat curious counter mix with the pure number of CSA units outnumbering the union units (which was not the case historically). To me, this approach seems complementary to the battle of Mars la Tour, not to mention the Franco-Prussian war in general.

The differences between the French and combined German forces were considerable. While up to this period the French were considered the premier fighting force in the world, the reality was that the French army hadn't engaged in any modernization since their imperial ancestors, and still relied on the loose operational doctrine of *Système D*, loosely translated into English as "Muddling Through". During the early 19th century, this doctrine gave the French army exceptional operational flexibility over their enemies given their proficiency at foraging for supplies and moving quickly. This allowed the French to rapidly redeploy forces such as in 1805 when the Grand Armée switched on a dime from preparing to invade England to rushing over to Germany to fight Austria.

War by 1870 had changed considerably. Hints of this would become clear in events like the Crimean, Austro-Prussian and American Civil wars, but the increasing advantages of defensive firepower and breech-loading artillery soon overwhelmed whatever Napoleonic reputation the French retained. In terms of operational flexibility, Prussian organizational structure was considerably more sophisticated and explicitly allowed for commanders to take initiative to change operational plans as situations warranted (this philosophy in Prussia was called *Auftragstaktik*, loosely translated into Mission-Tactics). By contrast, the French army by this point was paralyzed by their inability to delegate command to lower level commanders. A perfect example of this is at the start of was at Wissembourg after the French commander was killed early on, a single French division sat fighting multiple Prussian corps for 2 hours and it wasn't until orders were received from Napoleon III that they allowed themselves to retreat, sacrificing many of their most valuable Algerian soldiers in the process.

What I hope to have accomplished with this tribute game is a means to explore other subjects using Mark Herman's basic rules structure proposed in Gettysburg. As of the time of writing this, COVID-19 has forced many people into isolation and quarantine, sparking renewed interest in wargaming/board gaming in general as virtual tabletops gain popularity. Introductory games which deviate from the vintage CRT formula will go a long way towards broadening the hobby during this time where lots of people are stuck at home. I am hoping an easy to reproduce game which could be available through us and print & play mediums could work to bring more people into the hobby in general using subject not typically covered by most wargames.



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