

HOLY ROLLERS

 or THE UNORTHODOX USE OF ORTHODOX PRIESTS AT SHEVARDINO, 1812. By Barry Hilton

Regular contributor Barry Hilton, along with his gaming group, have decided on a slightly different way to commemorate the upcoming 200th anniversary of the Battle of Borodino, and he is discovering some interesting information along the way.

A VISION

Adding something unusual can be the spur that makes completing a project a little easier. We are of course now in the age of 'Borodino 200' anniversary preparations for those who intend to mark the big one with something spectacular. Doing it all from scratch is really a bit over-facing unless you have totally cornered the market on Asian bargain basement painters for the next two years. As a result, some friends and I decided doing it in stages was best and less soul destroying. Serried blue and green ranks are impressive, but can get a bit monotonous. Colour is not something the Napoleonic era lacks, but in this case I am talking in the metaphorical and not the literal sense.

The lesser known battle on 5 September at Shevardino was, we thought, a very good place to start our 1812 Overture. The Battle of Shevardino in itself was

no mean affair, with upwards of two French Corps pitted against elements of several Russian divisions. It cannot rightly be classed as a French victory, nor as a Russian one. The French I Corps, commanded by Davout, hammered away on the front door of a typically stoic Russian defence for an afternoon and evening. Finally, after several thousand men had been pointlessly maimed or killed, the Russians withdrew in good order under cover of night towards their lines along the Semenovskoye stream. The very men who defended Shevardino's tiny redoubt on the 5th were to be found doing it all again at the so-called Bagration Fleches two days later with equally grim resolve. Calibrated against anything else, Shevardino was a significant battle. Compared with the Armageddon of 7 September it barely merits a mention in most books about the campaign. So Shevardino provides the context for the extra little bit of colour I mentioned earlier.

Having begun to read more about Borodino I was intrigued by the references to the 'Black Virgin of Smolensk', an icon paraded before the Russian army prior to the battle. It apparently awoke in the doughty Russian peasantry a profound, perhaps crusading zeal to rid their holy Motherland of the barbarous invaders from the west. Strong parallels with the spirit of the Great Patriotic War against the Nazis come to mind, with religious ideals replacing political ones. This pious frenzy caused them, in many cases, to die where they stood without yielding an inch of ground. The French had literally to knock them over to get through. This may go some way towards explaining the intensely high casualty rates at the battle. The icon was paraded before the army, prayers offered up and a kind of 'mass' hysteria - or perhaps hysteria through Mass - created amongst the entire Russian Army.



Above: Two battalions of the 49th Jager await the onslaught of the 13th Leger (which never came!)

The view from the northwest, with the redoubt in the distance.

DIVINE INSPIRATION

My idea was to simulate the impact of this on the table top in a way that went beyond simply saying the men had seen a vision of God and so they fought better! I wanted to create some unusual items to represent the effect in the game and provide something to look at.

I searched around to find models of Russian Orthodox priests and came up with several lovely little pieces. The Assault Group (TAG) produce a formidable, biblically-bearded brother in full 'blessing' mode. Foundry have a mad father preaching fire and brimstone, with crucifix and staff in hand. I found an old Essex mediaeval pilgrim in cowl and robes and made a cross for him to pray to. Finally I took another of the excellent TAG models, painted him in his tropical 'whites' and added two salty looking Cossack looters from Eureka's Suvarov Russian range to make an eye catching vignette of the icon itself. The plan was to then liberally sprinkle these holy assets throughout the Russian ranks in order to provide some morale-boosting, spiritual ecstasy!

THE POWER OF PRAYER: RUSSIAN RE-ASSURANCE

There are references available citing the encouragement provided by Russian priests both at Shevardino and at Borodino. So, for those of you twitching nervously as you anticipate some kind of fantasy role play element creeping in to Napoleonic gaming, relax!

Not every Russian brigade in the scenario was gifted a priest, but those which did possess one within brigade command distance were afforded a +2 modifier on

their Resolve check results. The holy icon itself had an 18" radius effect (similar to that of an Army Commander). We were, not surprisingly, using *Republic to Empire* for our Shevardino game and this meant that the Russian troops were going to be very difficult to shift with the "+2" negating almost everything but the most punitive minus modifiers on Resolve checks.

THE POWER OF EXPERIENCE: FRENCH ÉLAN

French brigades in the Grande Armée were numerically strong and often made up from a large number of battalions of the same regiment. As the French army of 1812 was perhaps the finest they ever fielded in terms of numbers, experience, leadership talent and troop quality, the ratings given to it were also very high. About 10% of the battalions were graded as Recruits, 30% were graded as Veterans and a number were given the Elite suffix. The remainder carried the Drilled rating. Only one brigade was rated Sluggish (the lowest brigade ability) and several were rated Intuitive (the top ability rating). This latter characteristic dictates the number of MPs (movement points) needed to make your brigade do what you have ordered it to. This made the French stronger in number, better in base quality of morale, superior in manoeuvrability and excellently led. Boy, were they going to need it!

We allowed the players to 'roll up' their Brigade Quality ratings on the morning of the game. This element of unpredictability goes a long way in adding spice to the scenario.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The French had pursued the Russian Army almost literally to the gates of Moscow without managing to bring it to battle in any decisive way. It was clearly time to get it over with as the Russians massed for a final stand about 120km west of the city near the village of Borodino. A few kilometres west of the village, and the main Russian defensive positions, a small redoubt was constructed near another hamlet called Shevardino. On why exactly it was built in this location sources vary. The bluntest assessment I have read stated that it was in fact a pointless mistake but, having built it, the Russians felt compelled to defend it! Although a nice, simple story in the "military blunders" vein, I think it slightly suspect. It must have possessed some value and General Yermolov, the Chief of Staff of the 1st Western Army saw its defence as a necessary evil in order to prevent the French from disrupting the main deployment of the Russian Army further east around Borodino. Russian forces under the command of General Gorchakov were thus tasked with the defence of the redoubt and its environs. The Battle of Shevardino involved the manoeuvre of the equivalent of two French Corps. The Russians would have committed, by the battle's climax, 15-20,000 troops. This scenario is not a refight of Shevardino in its entirety but centres on the section of the battle around the redoubt and the village featuring the French 5th Division against the Russian 27th Division.



Above: Mixed fortunes.. some of the 61er de Ligne advance whilst a battalion has been forced into retreat and brigade staff try to rally them.

Scenario: The Battle of Shevardino

THE SCENARIO

Shevardino is a manageable sized big battle. It can be broken down into smaller chunks but, taken as a whole, a table 12' x 8' gives a good all day game for four players per side with 28mm toys. Divide the battle into two wings and each can be done on an 8 x 6 feet table playing long ways. The maps show the whole and the parts from which you can make a choice about set up. If you choose to do only half then I recommend the southern half containing the redoubt. Events peripheral to this area involving Poniatowski's Poles to the south and other French Corps to the north are simulated via events and reinforcements. This keeps the game manageable.

OBJECTIVES

The French had three objectives:

- Capture the Shevardino redoubt
- Control the exit road behind the redoubt
- Take Shevardino village

Russian objectives were very simply to hold all of these. Any result in between was adjudicated by the umpires

COMMANDERS

This is quite a large game and so we allowed the French to have Davout as their commander despite the fact that it was essentially a divisional attack. The difference in practical terms was that Davout added +8 Manoeuvre points (MPs) per turn, being rated as Gifted and of Army Commander level. If we had placed Compans in charge even if rated as Gifted he would have added only +2 as he is of Divisional Commander level. Gorchakov was rated Skilful, adding +4 MPs. The Russians hardly needed excessive quantities of MPs except when moving reinforcements quickly to hotspots. Their static defence was low cost to maintain in terms of MPs. Placing Divisional Commander models is still important, as without them brigade orders cannot be changed. They also provide a Resolve bonus when attached to units checking.

DEPLOYMENT

The accompanying maps show the deployment for both armies. The redoubt was garrisoned by two 12-pounder guns and their crews and, of course, a priest! These guns were detached from the 12-pounder battery. As this occurred before the game began no penalties for 'split battery fire' were made and both sub-units could choose different targets. 'The Black Virgin of Smolensk/ Holy Headquarters' was positioned about 10" to the rear of the front line on the south table.

REINFORCEMENTS

The entry points for reinforcements are marked on the maps. Some reinforcements such as the breakthrough brigade from Poniatowski's Corps and the marauding Cossack bands are not listed, as these were Umpire judged events included on the day and in response to developing situations amongst players. Suitable adjustments can be made if you are running the

REPUBLIC TO EMPIRE

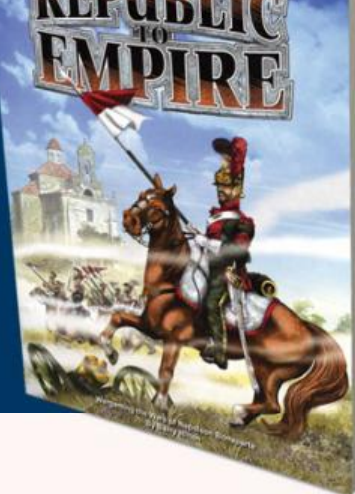
Barry Hilton, author of *Republic to Empire*, has (not surprisingly) used that system for the scenario he presents here. There are a few terms that he uses in the scenario and orders of battle that are common usage within his rules. They are listed here to help you out:

- **MPs - Movement Points**
- **R - Recruits**
- **V - Veterans**

- **D - Drilled**
- **S - Sluggish**
- **I - Intuitive**

You can find more pictures, comments, and discussion in the Fighting Talk Forum on www.leagueofaugsborg.com

Pictures and terrain by Barry Hilton. Troops from the collections of Peter Nicholson, Peter McCarroll, Dave O'Brien, David Imrie, Barry Hilton, and Davout by Bob Thornton.



scenario. The reinforcements should arrive in alphabetical order A-C, W-Z for each team. Neither side should get any reinforcements before Turn 5. Use your own mechanism to determine arrival time.

INFLUENCING THE GAME FROM OFF TABLE

Beyond Davout's right flank Poniatowski's Polish Corps was heavily engaged during the Shevardino fight. This off course was all taking place off table. They can be used as a factor influencing either to French advantage or disadvantage. When we saw that the French attack was faltering in the early

evening we allowed a breakthrough brigade from the Poles to appear through the woods behind the Russian left flank. Cossacks were present in numbers at various points on the field and during the battle. Rather than bring on hordes of Cossacks we dripped in squadrons at intervals on both French flanks. A very powerful brigade comprising five battalions of the veteran 13er Leger stood for half the battle refusing to obey orders and then marched off. Playing around with Russian artillery ammunition, fires in villages and lost couriers all helped grease the wheels and gave the umpire team something to giggle about as the battle unfolded.

SCENARIO AMENDMENTS

Russian guns placed in redoubts or behind breastworks were allowed to refit in situ. Normally the rules compel batteries to limber up and pull out to do this. The period of refit remained the same as written in the rules. The redoubt was classed as a 2B built-up area, Shevardino and Doronino as 2A built-up areas and the 12-pounder Russian battery was in hard cover earthworks, classed as a linear obstacle for assault purposes. The redoubt rating is excessive, but it created a central focus for the scenario and on that basis was justified.



Above: The mighty 13e Leger.. who stood idle for most of the battle and then trotted off unannounced.

ORDERS OF BATTLE AND REINFORCEMENTS

We decided not to use the complete order of battle for both sides, but selected formations which played a significant role on the day or which we felt would add flavour to the game. The main French attacks were delivered by Compa's large, and experienced, 5th Infantry Division. It features heavily in the scenario. The reinforcements have been selected to compliment the flow of the game as opposed to simply recreating the troops theoretically available to each commander on the day. The Russian forces are chiefly formed around the 27th Infantry Division, reinforced with cavalry and grenadiers as the battle wears on. For those players interested in a full order of battle there are several sites where this information can be found.

The reinforcements for both sides are drawn from various formations and balanced to provide a relatively even game. The timing and arrival location of reinforcements is dealt with later. Some formations such as the composite grenadier battalions from the Russian 2nd Combined Division were omitted.

THE FRENCH

5th Infantry Division (Compans)
I Army Corps (Davout)

1 Brigade Duppelin

• 5 battalions 25e Leger V,V,D,D,D all Elite (All 24 models) + 2 light guns

2 Brigade Teste

• 5 battalions 57e de Ligne V,V,D,D,R (All 24 models) + 2 light guns

3 Brigade Guyardet

• 5 battalions 61er de Ligne V,D,D,D,R (All 24 models) + 2 light guns

4 Brigade Lonchan

• 5 battalions 111e de Ligne V,D,D,D,R (All 24 models) + 2 light guns

5 • 14e Foot Battery D
3 x 6pdr + 1 x howitzer

6 • 2e Horse Battery D Elite
3 x 6pdr guns

1st Infantry Division (Morand)
I Army Corps (Davout)

7 Brigade Dalton

• 5 battalions 13e Leger V,V,D,D,D all Elite (All 24 models) + 2 light guns

8 • 1er Foot Battery D
3 x 6pdr + 1 x howitzer

- The light guns are captured 3 or 4 pounders taken from the Austrians.

FRENCH REINFORCEMENTS

Brigade Groisne, 2nd Infantry Division
III Army Corps (Ney)

Reinforcement A

• Regiment Joseph Napoleon combined
2 bn regiment D (36 models)
• 48e de Ligne combined
2 bn regiment D (36 models)

Reinforcement B








Composite Light Cavalry Brigade

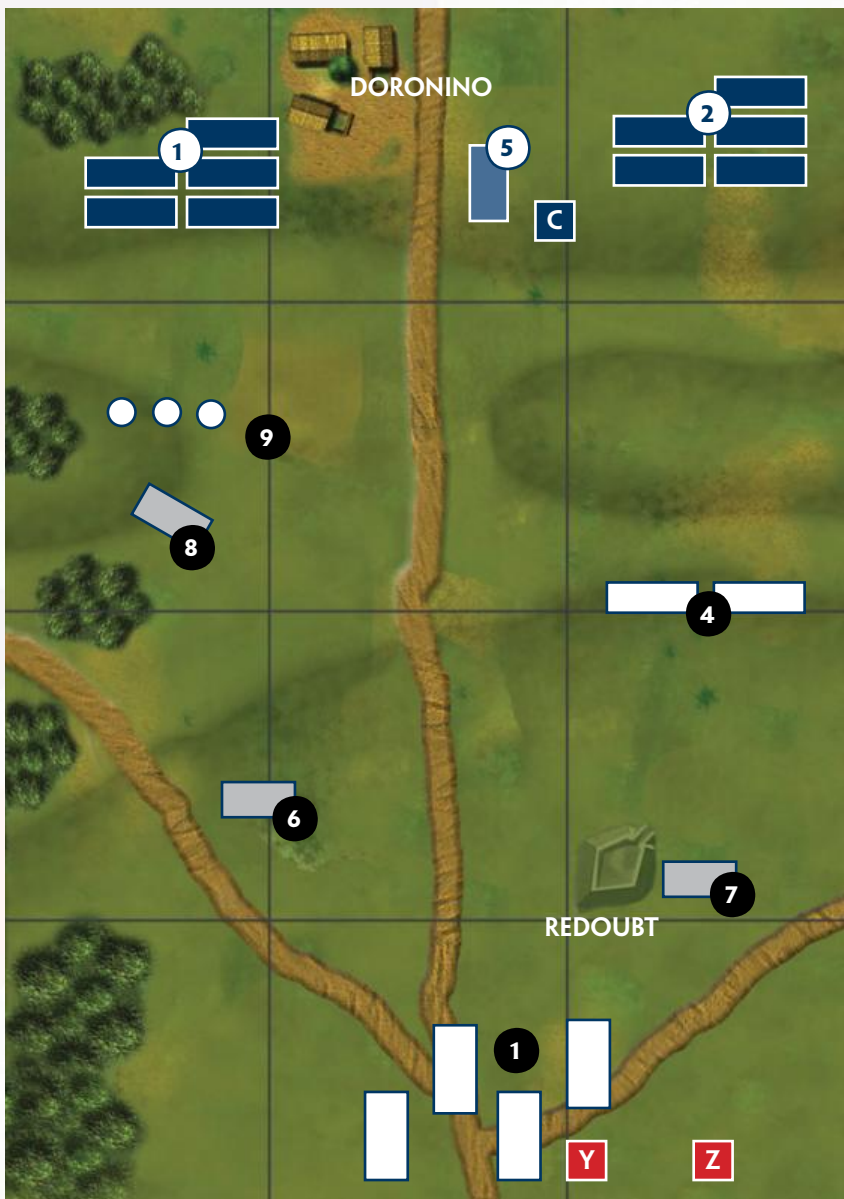
• 11e Hussards V Elite (24 models)
• 6e Lancier D (20 models)
• 4e Chasseurs-a-cheval D (24 models)

Reinforcement C

Wathiez Heavy Cavalry Brigade

• 5e Cuirassier V Elite (24 models)
• 8e Cuirassier D Elite (24 models)

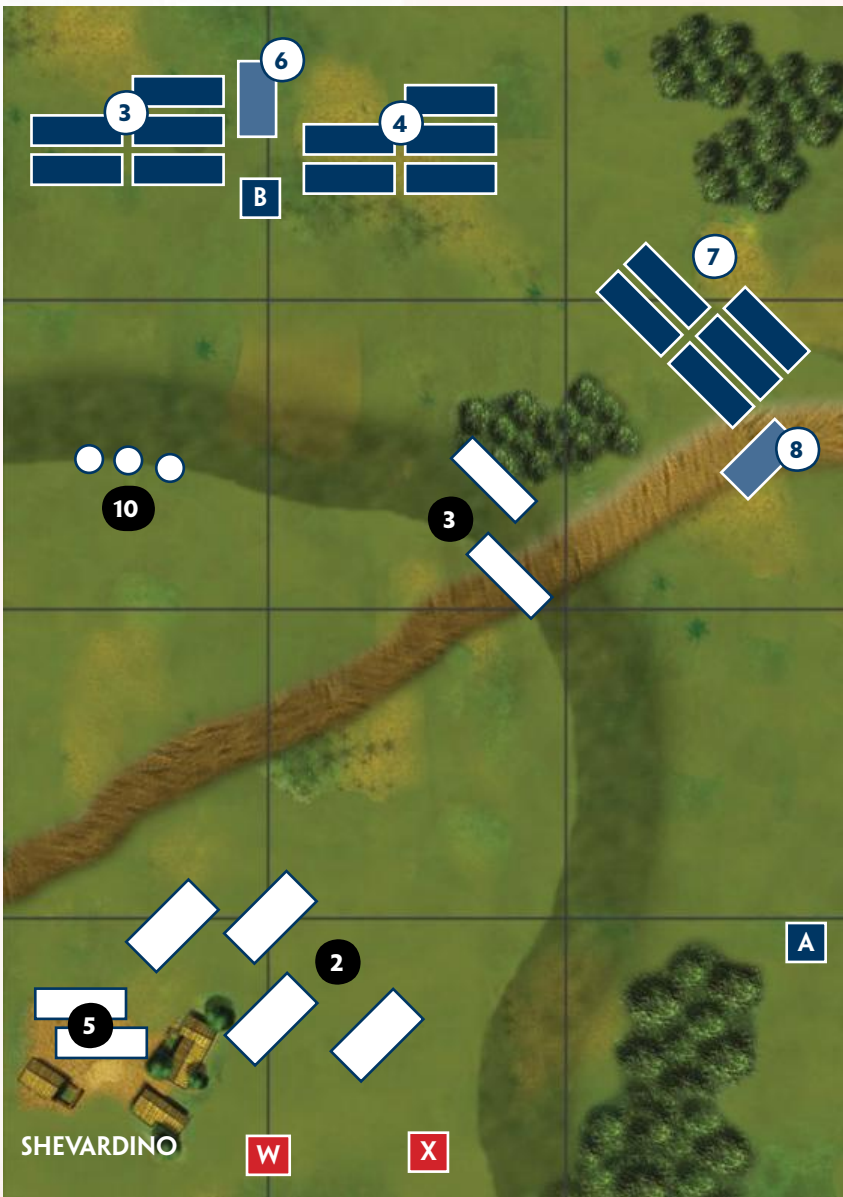
-  • French Battalion
-  • French Artillery Battery
-  • Russian Battalion
-  • Russian Artillery Battery
-  • Russian Jager Battalion
-  • Cossack and Jager piquets
-   • French and Russian entry points for reinforcements



SOUTH TABLE



Above: Power of Prayer.. Gorchakov Mass-es his troops!



NORTH TABLE

THE RUSSIANS

*27th Infantry Division (Neverovsky),
VIII Corps (Borozdin),*

2nd Army of the West (Prince Bagration)

2 1st Brigade

- 2 battalions Odessa Regiment D,R (each 24 models)
- 2 battalions Vilna Regiment D,R (each 24 models)
- Priest or religious group

2 2nd Brigade

- 2 battalions Tarnopol Regiment D,R (each 24 models)
- 2 battalions Simbirsk Regiment D,R (each 24 models)
- Priest or religious group

3rd Brigade

- 3 • 2 battalions 49th Jager Regiment D,R Elite (each 24 models)
- 4 • 2 battalions 50th Jager Regiment D,R Elite (each 24 models)

*Detached from 3rd Brigade, 12th
Division, VII Corps (Vasilchikov)*

- 5 • 2 battalions 6th Jager Regiment D,R Elite (each 24 models)
- 6 • 6pdr Battery D,
5 x 6pdr + 1 howitzer
- 7 • 12pdr Battery D,
5 x 12pdr + 1 howitzer
- 8 • Horse Artillery battery D Elite,
3 x 6pdr
- 9 • Cossack skirmishers (Regular)
D (12 models, 6 with rifles)
- 10 • Cossack skirmishers (Irregular)
R (12 models)

RUSSIAN REINFORCEMENTS

Reinforcement W

Composite Heavy Cavalry Brigade

- Military Order Cuirassiers V Elite (24 models)
- Kiev Dragoons D (24 models)
- New Russia Dragoons D (24 models)

Reinforcement X

1st Brigade 2nd Gren Division

- 2 battalions Moscow Grenadiers V,D Elite (each 24 models)
- 2 battalions Kiev Grenadiers V,D Elite (each 24 models)
- Priest or religious group

Reinforcement Y

2nd Brigade 2nd Gren Division

- 2 battalions Astrakhan Grenadiers V,D Elite (each 24 models)
- 2 battalions Fanagoria Grenadiers V,D Elite (each 24 models)

Reinforcement Z

Composite Light Cavalry Brigade

- Aktyrsk Hussars D Elite (18 models)
- Litovski Uhlans D (24 models)

The Re-fight of Shevardino

There were four players on the French team and three on the Russian. One of the French players was Davout, in addition to commanding troops in the battle. One Russian took control of the southern table containing the redoubt, another controlled the northern table containing the village of Shevardino. The third took floating commands of reinforcements and event driven arrivals. *Republic to Empire* game turns simulate 20 minutes of battle time. The battle began at 1600 hours, approximately, so a maximum of 16 turns was permitted to achieve the objectives before darkness fell. This was eminently within the capability of the rules and covered a full day's gaming. Three of the six players had never played before so the first three turns were a little slower while they got the hang of the mechanics.

URNS 1-4

The French team decided to attack without hesitation. On both tables the enemy was very close. Russian Jager, Cossacks and Horse artillery were within effective range. The French were gifted Initiative on Turn 1 and promptly set

about removing the forward obstacles to progress. The terrain was rolling, with the main Russian positions on higher ground to the east. The brigades facing the redoubt could see the slope to their front, atop which stood the little redoubt flanked by guns behind earthworks. Beyond that crest line nothing was visible. Facing Shevardino itself nothing but some advanced parties of jagers in two small woods could be seen. 'Toggy' Bob Thornton was Davout, but also had command of Teste's 57 de Ligne (Le Terrible.) He moved up the slope against the 50th Jager and the 12-pounders beyond, taking heavy casualties as he drove into the enemy. David Imrie, in command of Duppelin's 25e Leger, looped round toward the Utitsa Wood, coming at the redoubt from the southwest. He immediately ran into a skirmishing screen of cossacks and horse artillery. Simon Breen (with the 61er de Ligne) and Tam Nish (111e de Ligne) quickly cleared a skirmishing battalion of the 6th Jager to their front and advanced briskly up the slope towards Shevardino.

URNS 5-8

Having progressed more than 24" from their start lines in the first two turns (using Exploitation), things got a lot tougher for the French as they hit the first crest line. In the north Paul McLauchlin had moved his brigade forward and a series of bayonet charges and counter charges began between the Tarnopol and Simbirsk Regiments and the 61er de Ligne. Shouts of "Urrah!" were punctuated by volleys of "Vive!" as it went one way, then the other. Tam had moved the 111e along the bottom of the northern slope between Shevardino and the 49th Jager. The 49th did not dare to move as to their front stood the entire 13e Leger with their Division's artillery. Curiously, the French could not understand why the unallocated 13e would not advance. Something to do with umpire snakiness I think! During this period large bands of mounted Cossacks appeared on both tables. One panicked the 3er Bn, 111e and cut them down, whilst another chased Marechal Davout around Doronino for a while until being seen off by French reinforcements. That got Toggy swearing a bit!



Above: Expert handling.. the seasoned Mr Imrie in 'Ordre mixte' with the 26e Leger brushes aside the Cossack picquets.



Above: The final attack.. 3e bn 26e Leger charge the Shevardino redoubt, but fail to take it.

TURNS 9-12

The 25e Leger made good progress. David knows the rules well and made great efforts to keep his brigade together and moving forward. The morale bonuses associated with this aggressive play whilst on Attack orders allowed him to sustain quite heavily casualties whilst making good progress. Le Terrible were making heavy weather of the slope and the cornfields, but the pressure exerted was forcing the Russians back on their earthworks and the redoubt. On the north table Russian cuirassiers and dragoons played havoc with the advance of the 111e. Squares were formed and the French attack stalled, despite the arrival of reinforcements from Ney's 2nd Division on the extreme right of the Russian position. The Moscow and Kiev Grenadiers neutralized this threat as they marched on directly to the front of Regiment Joseph Napoleon. The mighty 13e Leger turned around and marched off during Turn 9, leaving the French team rather slack-jawed. Alas they were required elsewhere and consequently five battalions of crack infantry were removed from the table without firing a shot!

Just as the French seemed to be losing heart, lots of cavalry arrived to cheer them up. Light cavalry on the north table, cuirassiers on the south. It was time to charge... again!

TURNS 13-16

By Turn 13 the French were getting a bit defeatist! The Russian defence, the slope, the fields and those 'f***** priests!' had conspired to thwart speed and aggression. They girded their loins for a final push. A breakthrough Polish brigade had appeared behind the Russian left, causing Jim 'Gorchakov' Wallace to treat us all to some of his Border badinage. This lifted the sagging élan of les Françaises.

David threw in three battalions of the 25e in successive bayonet charges, but each was repulsed by the tiny garrison of the redoubt. Toggy even chucked in the 5e Cuirassiers who, in a prequel to 7 September and the Raevsky Redoubt, were repulsed by mallet and ramrod swinging Russian gunners. French honour was saved when, on the final roll of the dice on the final turn, a battalion of Simon's 61er de Ligne took Shevardino village from Paul's gallant 6th Jager. I think the French were more surprised that something had gone right than pleased at the achievement!

WINNERS AND LOSERS

This scenario is all about bayonets and sabres. Casualties were heavy. The redoubt did not change hands several

times as in reality but was stoutly held by the Russians till darkness. Only one objective was achieved by the French and that right late! The religious element inspired the Russian players, who developed a confidence bordering on smug! The French got royally naffed off with the amount of pounding required to get the enemy to relinquish even a copse or a fence line and so I deemed the scenario a success as it mirrored the hugely difficult job the French had on the day.

THE FOLLOW ON...

Having cleared all that away on Saturday evening, whilst watching a movie on the big screen, we spent all of Sunday fighting over the Bagration Fleches on a 12' x 6' table, but that is another story.



Above: Davout surveys his attack (just before being chased by a squadron of Cossacks)!