

A FRENCH REVOLUTIONARY WARS CAMPAIGN

SAVE MANTUA

Rather overshadowed by the Napoleonic Wars, the French Revolutionary Wars (1792–1800) have a lot to offer wargamers. Initially designed to defend France, and then to export revolution, the hastily levied French armies employed innovative tactics against the professional forces from the rest of Europe. Unsuccessful commanders might find they had an appointment with Madam Guillotine!

By Nicholas Stock

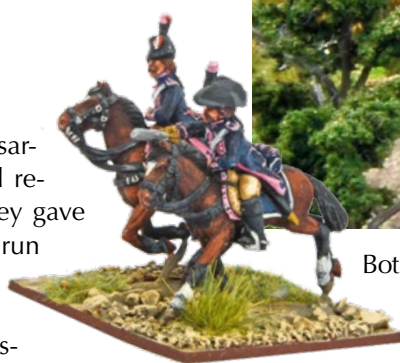
In early 1796, Napoleon Bonaparte led a ragged corps into Italy, overran Piedmont, and bottled up the Austrians in the formidable stronghold of Mantua. Austrian efforts to raise the siege provide the setting for a small campaign and offer wargamers the interesting prospect of taking on Napoleon before he was Emperor.

The Austrians made four attempts to relieve Mantua between July 1796 and January 1797. Several closely fought battles followed before Napoleon's decisive victory at Rivoli in January. Mantua finally capitulated in February 1797. Vienna was now directly threatened, and the Habsburgs sued for peace, bringing about the collapse of the First Coalition. Success massively boosted Napoleon's personal reputation. During the campaign, many future marshals emerged into the limelight – Massena, Augereau, and Berthier among them.

Napoleon's adversaries are not so well remembered, but they gave the French a closer run than later myth might admit. Although the Austrians are often portrayed as plodding, the French were defeated in the field more than once, forced to abandon a siege twice, and lost most of their siege train. Napoleon's desperate assault across the bridge at Arcole makes great art but may not have been the act of a man completely confident of victory.

SETTING UP A CAMPAIGN

What follows is a guide to refighting these actions as a wargames campaign. The siege of Mantua provides a 'ticking clock' for the campaign. As supplies dwindle, the garrison will consider terms, which will eventually end the campaign.



Both sides start with 4 Campaign units – referred to as "divisions". Each represents a large

French division, an Austrian column, or several smaller divisions operating together under a single commander. Divide each division into three or four brigades. Keep a list of the units in each division and brigade.

Divisions should start the campaign roughly equivalent in fighting power, although they do not need to be identical. The attacking Austrians should have a small edge in numbers or points, 10% should be enough. Historically, armies were primarily infantry. Cavalry was sparse on both sides, and French cavalry was notoriously poor. French artillery was superior to Austrian.

Use whatever tabletop miniatures and rules you wish. This will affect the units making up a division. For example, with *Lasalle*, units will be infantry battalions, cavalry regiments, and artillery batteries. However, with *Sharp Practice*, a "division" might represent a scouting party or piquet and units will be groups of 6-10 figures. You just need to be able to translate from your campaign divisions to the table-top units.

Etching depicting Austrian commander Count van Wurmser liberating the fortress at Mantua from the French on 29 July, 1796.

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ta Valley to Vicenza, south along the Adige toward Verona, or west of Lake Garda to Brescia (which also threatens French communications). Coordination across multiple routes proved (and will prove) difficult.



Map areas can hold a single division. Areas connected by roads are adjacent. Each area has a predominant terrain type, which may help guide choices when fighting there. “Mantua” is a fortress held by Austria, which cannot be entered, though battles can occur at “the Works” immediately outside. “Austria” and “Lombardy” can hold any number of friendly divisions and cannot be entered by the enemy.

The campaign

At the start of the campaign or following Austrian demoralization, each side secretly assigns its divisions to friendly areas. The campaign proceeds in turns, each reflecting a few days of actual activity. Each turn:

1. Write orders for each division to **hold** in place or **march** to an adjacent area. The French assign Napoleon to one division.
2. Announce orders. Determine if aggression, confusion, resupply, or force marching apply in that order:
 - a. **Aggression** – Divisions cannot bypass an enemy in the same area. A division may withdraw from a contested area using the road through

The Austrians await the French charge at charge into Arcola. Miniatures belong to Colin Ashton.

A simple method for tracking attrition is recommended. Units start the campaign at *full strength*. As a result of battle, or campaign events, units may become *reduced* or may be *lost*. Reduced units have suffered casualties but are still effective. Interpret as appropriate for your tabletop rules. For example, units might deploy with one stand less or one casualty marked. Lost units have been scattered, captured, or destroyed, and play no further part in the campaign – strike them from your roster!

certainly adjust this, allowing 2 divisions to occupy a single map area, for example.



The setting

The campaign map shows part of Northern Italy. The top of the map is dominated by mountains, while the southern half shows the lower lying arable and swampy countryside of the Mincio, Adige, and Chiese valleys. The Austrians will need to approach Mantua using the main routes from the mountainous Tyrol – east via the Bren-

If you have multiple players, each can take command of a single division. Alternatively, one player on each side can act as overall commander (Napoleon or Marshal von Wurmser/Marshal Alvinczi), while others “turn up for the battles”. An umpire is not essential, but if one is available, orders are given to the umpire who resolves moves and announces contested areas.

The campaign is designed to generate games where two division face one another. Both could be weakened by earlier losses and supported by reinforcing brigades. Depending on your collection and enthusiasm for fighting larger or smaller games, you can



French artillery set up and prepare to fire a salvo at the advancing columns of Austrian forces.



which they originally entered. If orders result in enemy divisions marching along the same road, one side moves and the other **remains** in their original area. Both roll a d6, adding 1 if French and a further 1 if that division is led by Napoleon. The winner decides which side moves.

- b. **Confusion** – If more than one friendly division ends up in a single area, the one that started there stays. Otherwise, randomly determine the one that marches. The others do not move.
- c. **Resupply** – If a division **holds** in a not contested area, it may resupply. Roll a die – a 4, 5, or 6 means a single reduced unit is restored to full strength.

- d. **Force March** – A division personally led by Napoleon may attempt to force a march in one additional area. Roll a d6. On a 4, 5, or 6, move to one additional area, but one full strength unit is **reduced**, reflecting stragglers.

3. An area occupied by both sides is contested. Determine if a battle occurs.
4. Fight battles. Defeated divisions retreat, both sides regroup and update rosters.
5. Roll for progress of the siege.
6. Determine if either side has won the campaign or the Austrians have become demoralized. If not, return to step 1 above.

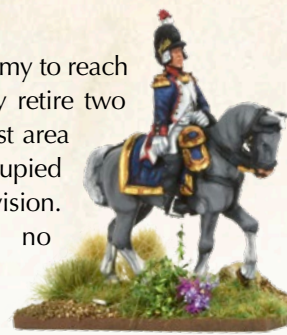
Battles

In a contested area, each side secretly elects to “Attack”, “Stand”, or “Retire”.

- A battle occurs if one side **attacks**, and the other **stands** or **attacks**.
- If a division **retires**, move it one area. A division cannot retire to an area contested or occupied by the enemy or along a route

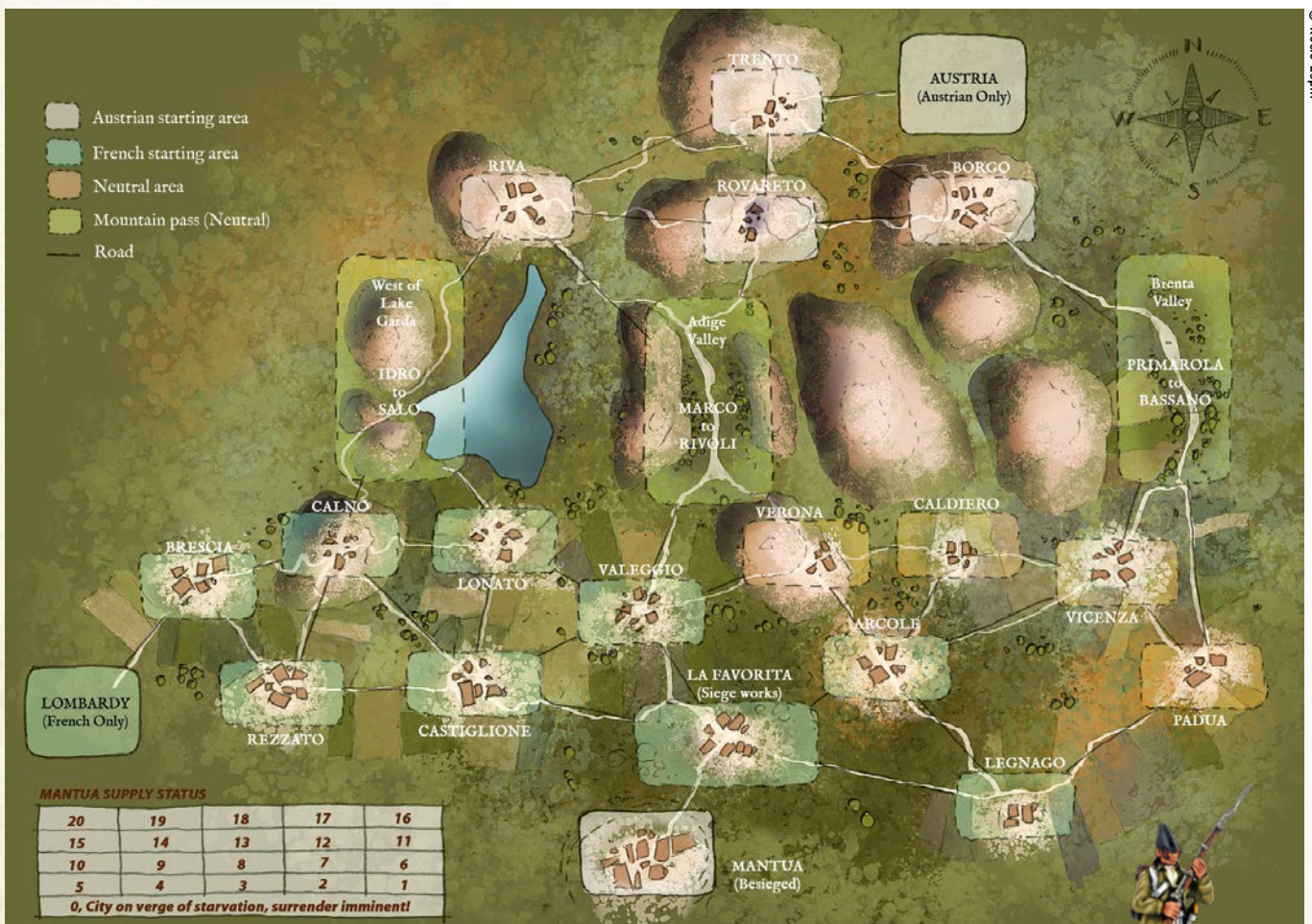
used by the enemy to reach the area. It may retire two spaces if the first area reached is occupied by a friendly division.

- If both **stand**, no battle occurs.



Set up terrain, deploy, and fight battles using your tabletop rules. The board should reflect the predominant terrain in the area.

One brigade may deploy if the division marched that turn; two if it held. Additional brigades may roll to arrive starting from turn 2, needing a 5 or 6 on turn 2, and a 4+ on subsequent turns. Divisions of one map area from the battlefield may send a single brigade of reinforcements. Starting on turn 4, roll a D6 for arrival. (success on 6 on turn 4, a 5 or 6 on turn 5, and a 4+ on subsequent turns). No brigade may fight in more than one battle per turn. If the battle takes place in a mountain pass, subtract 1 from the die rolls for reinforcements to arrive.



© Rodolfo Espin





French and Austrian infantry clash outside Rivoli. Soon after the Austrian defeat, Mantua surrendered.

If your tabletop rules include victory criteria, use those. Otherwise, an army **may** concede once 10% or more of its units are broken (routed, surrendered, destroyed – as appropriate in your tabletop rules) and **must** concede if 40% or more are broken.

Defeated divisions retreat 1 area. Divisions may not retreat to an area occupied only by the enemy, or from which the enemy marched to reach the battlefield. If there is a friendly division in the first area reached, the division retreats one further area. If retreat is not possible, the division surrenders and is lost.

Reinforcing brigades automatically return to their parent divisions and regroup. Both armies then regroup. Roll a D6 for each unit, except victorious units that suffered no battle losses. Halve the die roll for units in the conceding army, rounding up. Subtract 1 if the unit was broken, routed, or eliminated during the tabletop battle. A result of zero means the unit is lost; on a 1 or 2, the unit is reduced; otherwise, there is no change in unit strength.

After a battle, both sides may pro-

mote one unit from “trained” to “veteran” or “conscript” to “trained” or the equivalent in your rules.

The siege

Mantua was strongly fortified and well-sited. As time dragged on, supplies and enthusiasm inevitably dwindled.

- The Austrians start with 20 supply points.
- At the end of each turn, both sides roll a die. If the French score more than the Austrians, 3 supply points are used. A draw consumes 2 and, if the Austrians win, only 1 is used. Whoever won the most battles that turn adds one to their die roll reflecting the impact on the garrison’s morale.
- If an Austrian division occupies La Favorita, the city is resupplied back to 10 supply points if it currently has fewer than that. No supply points are consumed until the French re-occupy the Works.
- If there are no supply points left, the city is on the verge of starvation! Continue the die rolls every turn. The city surrenders if the French win one more roll.

Austrian morale

Austrian leadership proved fragile. Accordingly, if the French inflict defeats on two different Austrian divisions **south** of the mountain passes without an offsetting Austrian victory, or occupy Trento for two complete turns, the Austrians become demoralized. All divisions from both sides return to friendly starting areas. The French get an extra siege roll representing the time taken to fall back. Reduced units recover to full strength. Replacements arrive for lost units and divisions.



WINNING THE CAMPAIGN

The first side to achieve one of the following victory conditions wins:

The French: Mantua surrenders or the Austrians are demoralized four times.

The Austrians: win by occupying La Favorita (The Siege Works) for three consecutive turns, conclusively lifting the siege, **or** holding Brescia for three consecutive turns, decisively cutting Napoleon’s communications with France.

For a shorter campaign, ignore Austrian morale, and start Mantua with 15 supply points. **WS&S**

