



Review

by Richard G. Simon

RADETZKY'S MARCH

In the words of Austrian Chancellor Klemens von Metternich, “When Paris sneezes, Europe catches a cold.”

In March of 1848, increasingly alienated by the landowners, the bourgeoisie forced the French King, Louis Philippe, to abdicate and the Second French Republic was declared. France sneezed and this time, Europe came down with the flu. Revolution against the old orders broke out all across the continent. Particularly hard hit was the polyglot Austrian Empire, which suffered revolt, in one form or another, from each of the various ethnic groups within, the most serious of which, from the Austrian point of view, being in Hungary and Italy. The former took eighteen months to quell and was a considerable drain on the Austrian resources. The latter is of more concern to us here.

Led by an insurrection in Milan, revolution broke out all over Italy against the established forces, primarily Austria, the Papacy, and the Kingdom of Two Sicilies. Primus inter pares among the revolutionary forces was the Kingdom of Sardinia (“Sardinia”), under the messianic and enigmatic Carlo Alberti, who saw the revolution-

ary outbreaks as a chance at Italian unification (Risorgimento) under the House of Savoy. Taking advantage of an “invitation” from Milan, Carlo Alberti declared war on Austria on March 23, 1848 and the First Risorgimento was on. This was not a long-shot gamble. The army of Sardinia was, by far, the best army of the Italian states and the only one capable of inflicting a major defeat on the Austrian army. Better, they would be



supported by military forces (of various capabilities) from rest of the Peninsula and would also be operating in areas where the populace could be expected to be friendly and supportive.

The Austrian Army, one of the largest in Europe, while comparatively professional, possessed a number of problems. Aside from systemic issues (language, caliber of conscripts, etc.), much of the Austrian Army was dispersed in garrisons throughout northern Italy, many of whom were besieged. Communications, internal and with Vienna, were cut, making supply, command, and reinforcement impossible. As a result, almost 25% of the 70,000 man Italian garrison was lost via surrender, de-

sertion, or was simply cut off. Worse was that the Austrian command was uncertain as to just how serious the situation was. However, the Austrians did have one advantage – one that would prove decisive. Their commander was one Josef Radetzky, an 81-year old combat veteran with experience going back to the Napoleonic Wars. Radetzky kept his head, refused to yield to panic, and fell back gradually, collecting information and scattered units as he went. By the first week of April, 1848, he had stopped the rout and was encased in one of the strongest defensive positions in Europe – the Quadrilateral, a series of fortifications in Lombardy-Veneta in Northern Italy. This was the high water mark of the insurrection.

By the end of April, Austrians reinforcements screened Venice and began to arrive at the main army. Simultaneously, the Pope essentially withdrew from the conflict; while the extant papal troops remained, no further Papal troops would be forthcoming. By the third week of May, diverted by unrest at home, the Sicilian troops were withdrawn as well. The Piedmontese were essentially on their own (save for one division of Papal troops). For a while, this appeared to be sufficient as the Piedmontese continued their advance as most of Lombardy was cleared. But the Austrians proved resilient, launched a counter-offensive and on July 24, 1848, met the Italians and defeated them at the first Battle of Custoza followed by a further victory at Volta. The Piedmontese army was sufficiently disorganized that Carlo Alberti requested an armistice. Not liking the terms, the struggle continued but the Piedmontese situation got ever worse. Finally, Carlo Alberti acquiesced and on August 9, an armistice was signed. But that’s all it was; the war would eventually resume.

Although advised from all over Europe that their position was hopeless, the Italians were determined to continue the struggle. Carlo Alberti acknowledged that he was out of his depth and selected Wojciech Chrzanowski, a Polish professional, to lead the Italian armies. This was to prove a less-than-fortunate choice as Chrzanowski was not particularly popular and was unable to undo the systematic Piedmontese weaknesses. Meanwhile, Radetzky was able to collect and improve his forces and when the Piedmontese canceled the armistice, the Austrians were ready. What resulted was the so-called Campaign of a Hundred Hours. This is where *Radetzky's March* begins.



Essentially a Kickstarter project, one has to admire designer Sergio Schiavi’s optimism. The Risorgimento, first or otherwise,



Casale

Motta Visconti

Bereguardo

S. Vittore

Camboldo

Borgo S. Siro

Radetzky

Tromello

Zerbolò

is not a topic that readily leaps to mind (outside of Italy), even when considering non-traditional gaming topics (As a side note, this is exactly the type of game that gets my attention) so going the Kickstarter route in such an instance was not without its risks. Apparently, a White Knight appeared to pick up any slack, the game soon reached its goals and was published under the banner of **Di Simula Publications**.

Lest anyone wonder, physically, the game's components are first rate. The full-sized (22" x 34") map covers southwest Lombardy (west of Milan) north of the Po at about a km/hex and is clear, quite functional, and very attractive. There are two sets of counters depicting identical units, one in uniform colors, the other using black icons on blue (Italians) or gray (Austrian), so the players can choose which set to use. Although I personally found the former more attractive, I settled for using the latter since the information stood out more clearly on the icon counters. The counters



themselves represent approximately a regiment for the infantry (and supporting weapons) with cavalry counters representing about two squadrons (The OoB at the end of the Designer's Notes shows that not all formations are represented so some consolidation was apparently done) and show combat strength, movement allowance formation ID (Corps for Austrian, Division for the Italians) as well as a nominal unit ID. Rounding out the components are a full-color, eighteen page rulebook (including rules, scenarios, Designer's Notes, historical article, and an OoB), a Terrain Effects Chart, and Set Up Chart. Everything is printed on thick, glossy paper and is of good quality. All told, the components are professional and first rate.

The basic game system is fairly conventional. There are non-locking, fluid Zones of Control, odds-based combat (with a differential-based cavalry charge mechanism), and a fairly standard trace supply system (five hexes to a road to a sup-

ply source); fairly basic wargaming. Chits are pulled to see which one activates. Okay, fairly standard. But wait! There's more! Each side can utilize a Commander's Chit. Instead of putting individual chits in a cup, players can place the chits – up to three – in the Commander's Space and the Commander's Chit (Radetzky for the Austrian, Chrzanowski for the Italians) in the cup. When the Commander's Chit is selected, the player can activate all the formations in the Commander's space as if they were a single formation, including combat. On top of that, the player can designate one of those formations as a Reserve, which means it can activate after the other (two formations) have done so. But you can only use the Commander's Chit every other turn and the chances of the opposition activating before the chit is picked is increased so you won't use this capacity as much as you might think. There's a further wrinkle to the Command mechanism. There are no Headquarters! Each Formation Command Chit has a Command Range; when the chit is pulled, the player places it anywhere he pleases and any unit of that formation within range of the chit can move and/or fight. (The Chit remains on the board until turn's end) There are also rules for cavalry charges, pontoon bridges, strategic movement, the appearance of Ludwig von Benedek, and so forth packed into the 11 pages of rules. Although brief, the rules are succinct and generated extremely few puzzles; somewhat surprising since English is (apparently) not the Designer's first language and translations can sometimes be iffy. Rounding out the rules section are a Campaign game and five scenarios (which I suspect will mostly be used as learning tools). None of this

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What sets the game apart is the Command System. Each side is divided into formations (Divisions for the Italians, Corps for the Austrians), each represented by a Command Counter, which can only move and fight when that formation is activated. Each turn, players are provided with the number of formations they can activate and they put one chit in the cup for each such formation; during the turn the





is particularly complex nor, for that matter, particularly groundbreaking. But the proof, like a classic cheese-cake recipe, comes in the eating (or in this case, playing).

At first glance, the game mechanisms may seem like a rehash of the *Napoleon's Last Battles* system but actual play reveals a number of subtleties more appropriate to the era. For one thing, ZOCs are fluid. They don't stop opposing units who move into them but they do inflict a one MP penalty. Doesn't sound like much but movement allowances are quite small: line infantry has a Movement Allowance of three and light infantry four. Further, units are prohibited from voluntarily moving out of supply. As a result, many of the tactics in *NLB* won't work here.



Once the forces collide, things happen at a more deliberate pace because attacks take some time to set up. Because of this, defenders can “see it coming” and evade. Of course, the chit pull system makes all of this easier said than done. Here is where the Commander-in-Chief Activation Chit comes in handy since it allows a high degree of coordination. Still, optimizing this is time consuming and the defender can back-step before it can be pulled off.

An initial glance shows the map essentially divided into three main (and one minor) segments, defined by the three main rivers flowing through the area, the Ticino, Agogna, and the Sesia, which essentially flow northwest-southeast (as do virtually all the other rivers as well). The Austrians start with five corps in the southeast corner of the map (between the Ticino and the Agogna), in the city of Pavia, on the east side of the Ticino. The Italians, for the most part, deploy five divisions and a brigade in the north central part of the map around the city of Novara. To put down the revolt, the Austrians must defeat the Italians and in so doing, take Novara and some other smaller cities in the west and southwestern portion of the map. They have a slightly larger army (by about 14%) and a more efficient command system (five formations as opposed to the Italian's seven), which allows them to activate a greater portion of their army each turn. The Italians have the

central position and time.

The Austrian army carries the burden of the attack. While the Italians can be aggressive, given their extremely limited activation ability in the early going, an early Italian advance means several corps will be out on a limb and easily chewed up (which approximates what happened historically). They're better off choosing the option of defending the key road junctions at Mortara and Vigevano, giving ground slowly, and gradually falling back on Novara. They can use their 4th Division to operate east of the Ticino, which the Austrians will have to take seriously since exiting the map in that direc-



TERRAIN TERRENO

Clear
Terreno aperto

Wood
Bosco

Marsh
Palude

Road
Strada

Castellazzo

Fortified farm
Cascina fortificata

Village
Villaggio

Fortified city
Città fortificata

City
Città

Ridge
Cresta

Bridge
Ponte

Ditch, stream
Canale, torrente

Ford
Guado

Minor river
Fiume minore

River
Fiume

Supply center
Centro di rifornimento

tion (towards Milan) will garner Italians Victory Points. In contrast, the Austrians have several choices. They should have no problem crossing the Ticino and brushing aside the small Italian covering force. After that, their options are numerous – they can push on to Vigevano (up the west bank of the Ticino), drive on Mortara (east of the Agogna), advance across a broader front on both key road junctions, or eschew these options and push up the east bank of the Ticino and cross that river upstream at Magenta to flank the Italian left. In any case, the initial Italian response is guaranteed to be

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south map edge – on the left rear of the Austrian position. In real life, the commander of this division, Girolamo Ramorino, was outmaneuvered by Radetzky and kept his entire division on the south bank of the Po; i.e. totally out of the battle. (He was subsequently executed for his performance) The Italian player has several options with this formation, from holding the western flank of the main position to launching an attack on Pavia, threatening Austrian supply. On the other wing, if the Italian 4th Division can grab the village of Abbiategrasso, a key road junction, they can do a lot to stop Austrian moves east of the Ticino.

Mentioned above, the Austrians have several distinct advantages over the Italians. They have five formations while the Italians have seven. This means that the Italians will never be able to activate their entire army at once while the Austrians can (usually in the afternoons). Austrian formations (corps) are also more powerful than the Italian ones (Divisions)

meaning they can get more out of each activation. Indeed, they must do so. Somewhat paradoxically for a game with such limited movement ability, time is critical, especially for the Austrians. Initially, he must make haste (albeit slowly) and move forward as quickly as possible. The Italians have an extremely limited response (oddly, since they were the once to announce the end of the Armistice) and if they activate the “wrong” corps, in effect it allows the Austrians to steal a march. Given the small movement allowances and the prohibition of voluntarily moving out of supply, breakthroughs are difficult to achieve and must be exploited to the fullest. On the other hand, the Italians will generally have night to regroup (when combat is prohibited) and the advantage in formation



very slow and the Austrians must make haste before the Italians can bring up their main forces. All this means the game remains fresh and eminently replayable.

While the Austrians carry the burden of the offensive, this does not mean the Italians are doomed to passivity. To reach Novara in strength, the Austrians will have to take some risks and a well-timed Chrzanowski Commander Activation can ruin the Austrian player's day. On top of that, the game gives the Italian player the benefit of a historical doubt. Early on March 21 (Day 2), the Italians get the bulk of their 5th Division that appears on the

activations in the morning to either fall back or launch a counterstroke. This allows them to survive a defeat or two and still maintain their integrity. All of these are very much the capabilities of the actual combatants. Overall, there is a surprising amount of replayability here and many ways to win (or lose). I have won twice as the Austrians without taking Novara and once as the Italians almost losing it.

I have to say that I was pleasantly surprised by the game. Given my inclination to buy games on unfamiliar topics (in gaming circles, anyway), I usually end up playing these things once – maybe twice – and then they sit. *Radetzky's March* has already seen four playthroughs and will surely find quite a few more. The game plays quickly, will often follow divergent paths, and provides both players with something to think about. It not only storyboards well but the various paths the game may take are all well within the bounds of historical possibility. And all for a hair more than the price of a magazine game. (I note that others apparently concur since, as of this writing, the game has all but sold out.) *Radetzky's 1848-1849 campaign* is a virtuoso military feat that labors in obscurity. If you can grab a copy, here's a chance to learn a little about it and have some fun in the process. **Bravissimo!**



Note -

t = Move

Cost