Marching and Entering the Table

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Introduction

Just getting there is half the battle. While many games begin with the armies fully deployed and ready to go, some of the more interesting situations involve the initial approach to contact, with the main bodies of the two armies strung out for miles as they march to the sound of the guns.

This system includes two interrelated rules: one for easily handling long columns of marching troops that are not yet engaged, and one for cleaning up the problems that occur when troops enter the edge of the table in close proximity to the enemy. As a bonus, the marching rule also allows for a certain amount of limited information and deception.

This rule was originally concocted for Napoleon's Battles, and has since been adapted to Volley and Bayonet. The details (like the length of march blocks, and the size of the "entry bubble") are stated for V&B, but commentary is included to help with adapting the rules to other systems.

The first part of this page is a statement of the rule as it applies to Volley and Bayonet; it is then followed by a "Commentary" section that explains the design, and offers some tips on how to take appropriate advantage of the rule.

By the way, this rule is still a little rough. We like the general concept a lot, but it is by no means in a finished condition.

March Blocks

Each unit in Volley and Bayonet has a march-column length, in 600-yard Blocks:

Unit Type	March Blocks
Linear Infantry	1
Mass Infantry	2
Skirmish Infantry	1/2
Foot Artillery	2
Formed Cavalry	2
Skirmish Cavalry	1
Horse Artillery	2

March Blocks are 600 yards long; the width is less important, but should be about 50 to 100 yards. Blocks are reversible, marked with a March Column symbol on one side, and a Field Formation symbol on the other.

Note that Commanders do not get (or need) March Blocks.

March Movement Rates

March Block Type	Off Road (per hour)	Road (per hour)
Foot	3200 yards	4800 yards (8 Block lengths)
Mounted	4800 yards	7200 yards (12 Block lengths)

March Serials

Before play starts, players divide their troops into March Serials. Normally, each Division is a Serial; however, in some cases, Brigades or Corps could be Serials. Each Serial must have at least as many blocks as is called for in the March Blocks Table, but a Serial can have extra blocks.

Corps troops could have their own Serial, or could be divided up and included in the divisional Serials.

A given Block in a Serial does NOT represent a particular unit. Instead, all of the Blocks in a Serial, taken together, represent the entire Serial. The player treats all the Blocks in a Serial the same until the Serial is revealed (i.e., converts into actual units).

Each Serial moves at the rate of the slowest troop type in the Serial. Thus, a Serial that contains any Infantry or Foot Artillery (the vast majority of Serials) moves at the "foot" rate. A Serial that is entirely Cavalry and/or Horse Artillery moves at the "mounted" rate.

Movement and "Revelation"

March Blocks cannot contact enemy troops or enemy blocks, and cannot fire or be fired upon. Unlike normal troops blocks are always in command. Blocks can use half their movement allowance to change from March Column to Field Formation. Blocks that do not move in a movement phase can be marked "Stationary" just as normal bases can.

A player has the option to Reveal any or all Blocks at the beginning of any friendly movement phase. "Revelation" is simply replacing Blocks with normal troop units. Revelation is required when inside Detection Range of enemy troops or Blocks.

Detection Range is 2700 yards (1.5 miles) when there is a clear line of sight, and 500 yards (0.25 miles) when there is no line of sight.

At the end of each movement phase, both players are required to Reveal Blocks that are within Detection Range of enemy troops or Blocks. The phasing player must Reveal first, and has the option to Completely or Partially Reveal any Blocks anywhere on the table, but at a minimum must Reveal those Blocks that are within Detection Range of enemy troops or Blocks.

Next, the non-phasing Player has the option to Completely or Partially Reveal any Blocks anywhere on the table, but at a minimum must Reveal those Blocks that are within Detection Range of enemy troops. Note that there cannot be any phasing player's Blocks that are in Detection Range at this point, since they were required to Reveal first.

To Reveal a unit, the player removes the number of Blocks called for in the table: one Block can be replaced by two infantry skirmishers, one cavalry skirmisher, or one linear infantry unit; two Blocks can be replaced by the others units. The unit is Revealed in the same formation as the removed Blocks. If a unit was represented by two Blocks, the two removed Blocks must be contiguous if in March Column, but need not be contiguous if in Field Formation. ((This paragraph needs a lot of work.))

The Commanders of the Serial must be placed on the table when their Serial is Completely Revealed, but can either be placed on the table or held off when they are Partially Revealed. In either case, the Commanders simply appear wherever the player desires.

When making Partial Revelations, it is possible for a player to accidentally fail to leave enough Blocks to finish Revealing. If so, the troops who cannot Reveal due to lack of March Blocks in play are considered destroyed, and do count toward Exhaustion.

Entering the Table

Units always enter the table as March Blocks. Due to the size and speed of March Blocks, eight foot March Blocks or twelve mounted March Blocks can enter the table in one turn along a given road.

Blocks entering the table have two choices: enter in march column and make a measured move onto the table using March Block speed, or simply "materialize" in the Entry Zone (which is also affectionately known as the "Entry Bubble").

When entering by normal march column movement, simply measure how far the first Block can go, and place the remainder in a single-file column behind. If the Serial remains on roads the whole time, this is all that is required. If the Serial leaves the road during the first move, there is a little fiddling to be done. It is also important to remember the March Blocks cannot contact enemy troops or Blocks, and must be Revealed at the end of the movement phase if they are within Detection Range.

When entering by "materializing", first players must adjust the position of enemy troops that are near the Entry Zone by "Displacing". All enemy troops or Blocks within 900 yards of the point of entry must Displace, and all enemy troops or Blocks within 1800 yards of the point of entry can Displace.

Displacement is performed by moving the unit or Block up to 900 yards, without regard to terrain, friendly troops, or enemy troops. The Displaced unit or Block can change facing freely, and retains its formation and any other status, such as "stationary". The Displaced unit or Block must end this move more than 900 yards from the point of entry. Note that only enemy troops and Blocks Displace, never friendly troops and Blocks.

After Displacement is done, there is now a "bubble" 900 yards in radius around the entry point. The entering Blocks are now placed anywhere inside the "bubble", and they cannot move any farther that turn.

Commentary: Notes on Design and Strategy

Each March Block is 600 yards long. The width of the blocks is less important, but they should be about 100 to 300 yards wide.

March Blocks Commentary

The size of each block, and the number of blocks required for each troop unit is pretty straightforward, taken directly from the Volley and Bayonet rules. Blocks need to be 600 yards long, and should be 75 yards wide. This width allows the player to pack four of them side by side into the area occupied by two infantry brigades.

When making blocks, you have a couple of choices: either make them flat, so they can be flipped to note moving and stationary, or doll them up with "dust clouds" (i.e., tan-dyed cotton) as suggested in the V&B rule book. Also note that you can keep march blocks underneath troop units that are actually in March Column, even after they are revealed. Just make sure you don't get March Column markers mixed up with units that have not yet been revealed. (I personally prefer to keep two sets: one set of 600-yard long March Blocks and one set of 300-yard long "dust cloud" march *extensions*.)

March Movement Rates Commentary

A few design notes here. First, the march Block movement rates are considerably more generous than the rates in the main V&B rule book. This is intentional, since March Blocks are only in play when the enemy are not in close proximity, and that's when movement is the easiest and fastest in real operation. Second, all foot troops march at the same speed, and all mounted troops march at the same speed. This is partially for simplicity and partially to facilitate deception; you don't have to reveal which Blocks are Heavy Batteries, which are Cavalry Skirmishers, and which are Linear Infantry.

Also, an entire Serial moves at the same speed, even if part of it is Heavy Artillery and part is Light Cavalry. This is once again partially for player convenience and partially for deception. It also relieves the players of the need to set a march order and stick to it during play. While this takes away a real-world obligation (actual field commanders would pay close attention to the order of march), it has two real advantages: first, the enemy does

not get any clues whatsoever about the composition of the enemy Blocks, and second, it is assumed that the fast troops (light cavalry attached to an infantry division) would in fact be moving from one part of the formation to another, passing the slower troops. This happens "invisibly", and the player (who is an army commander, not a division commander) need not fiddle with it until the division gets into contact with the enemy.

Finally, a note to scenario designers. The march movement rates in this rule are generic, like Volley and Bayonet itself. If you have some good reason to make one army faster (French infantry, Stonewall Jackson's "Foot Cav") or slower (Russian, Austrian, and even British infantry), go right ahead. Just keep the road movement rates equal to an integer multiple of 600 yards, so that players can easily and accurately eyeball where the columns can get in one move.

March Serials Commentary

Each March Serial needs to be labeled somehow to keep the blocks from getting mixed up. My prefered solution is to put letters on each Serial; another method might be to keep one label (either fixed or removable) at the head of each Serial. Also, you should mark which Blocks are infantry and which are cavalry -- bearing in mind that cavalry that are part of an infantry organization are treated as infantry Block until they are Revealed.

Normally, each Division should be a Serial; however, in some cases, some smaller units might be separate Serials, either for flexibility or for deception. In the extreme, there is nothing to stop a player from taking a single cavalry skirmisher and turning it into a March Serial of 12 March Blocks.

In order to make entering the table simpler, players are advised to take March Serials of some multiple of 8 Blocks for infantry or mixed units, and 12 Blocks for units that are entirely cavalry and horse guns. By keeping the Serials uniform, you enhance your ability to bluff and posture; that cloud of 16 Blocks could be the Imperial Guard, or it could be one regiment of militia cavalry.

In addition, the judicious use of excess Blocks can return scouting and screening to the critical roles they are on actual battlefields -- techniques frequently neglected on the table top. Push out a few Blocks in front of you army to force the enemy to reveal their troops, or to prevent the enemy from getting close enough to reveal your troops. When your leading Blocks get detected, consider whether to do a Partial Revelation and just reveal one or two skirmishers where those leading blocks are, or whether to do a Complete Revelation, letting those leading Blocks be removed as excess. If you have a hard time rationalizing this latter tactic, consider that a patrol of ten or twenty men could perform this role, without being represented by even a skirmish unit (which is about 500 men).

Movement and "Revelation" Commentary

Complete Revelation can be used to either lunge forward or step back at the last minute. If you have lots of excess Blocks, you can remove the excess from the tail of the column to shift forward, or from the head of the column to avoid getting engaged too quickly.

Partial Revelation can get a little tricky. The reason you have to put real troops down in a Partial Revelation is to prevent using dummies to find enemy dummies. You have to use real troops unless you are willing to commit the whole Serial. The big danger in Partial Revelation is getting too cute with revealing lone skirmishers; if you miscalculate your ability to do this (or miscalculate the size of the Serial in the first place), you are severely punished by having the excess troops killed. Don' goof that up! The reason the punishment is so severe, by the way, is to prevent a wise-guy from cheating (getting a big unit over a bridge for example) and then saying "Oh, gee, I goofed up! This division is eleven march blocks, not six!"

Entering the Table Commentary

This rule can lead to some shocks the first time you play it. Here you are, waiting with fixed bayonets and double-shotted guns for the hapless enemy that is marching toward you, and suddenly, just as they arrive, you are magically transported a half-mile back, giving the enemy a perfect little assembly area to sort themselves out in. Unfair!

However, this actually solves a nasty edge-of-the-world problem. We used to fantasize about adding a little table at the edge of the big table to allow the entering troops to get ready to enter; then it occured to us to just "space warp" the table for a moment, making them some room right on the table itself. Once you get used to the idea of waiting 901 yards from the road head, it's not such a big deal anymore. And it sure is easier than the on-the-fly

carpentry job required to add that little side table!

For the scenario designer, it is important to not put any key terrain or objectives too close to entry points; it would be a little unfair for an entering cavalry skirmisher to magically eject a guard brigade from a critical town and thereby cost them a victory. So keep those fortifications, towns, hills, and so forth at least 901 yards from the entry points.

And now a few words to players about how to use a road to best effect, and (more importantly) how to get the heck off the road so that the next March Serial can get on the table behind you. First, if you just stay on the road and keep moving full speed, there cannot be a problem: the next eight or twelve Blocks will come on like clockwork. If, however, you leave the road, you should do so in a column of Blocks that are stacked two-deep as you leave the road. By tightening up the column as you leave the road, it keeps the tail of the column from dallying around and getting in the way of the next Serial. And doubling up is perfectly legal; if you take a little time and get used to how to leave a road gracefully, you will shortly develop a drill that will work every time, without conscious thought; just like real drillmasters would have done.