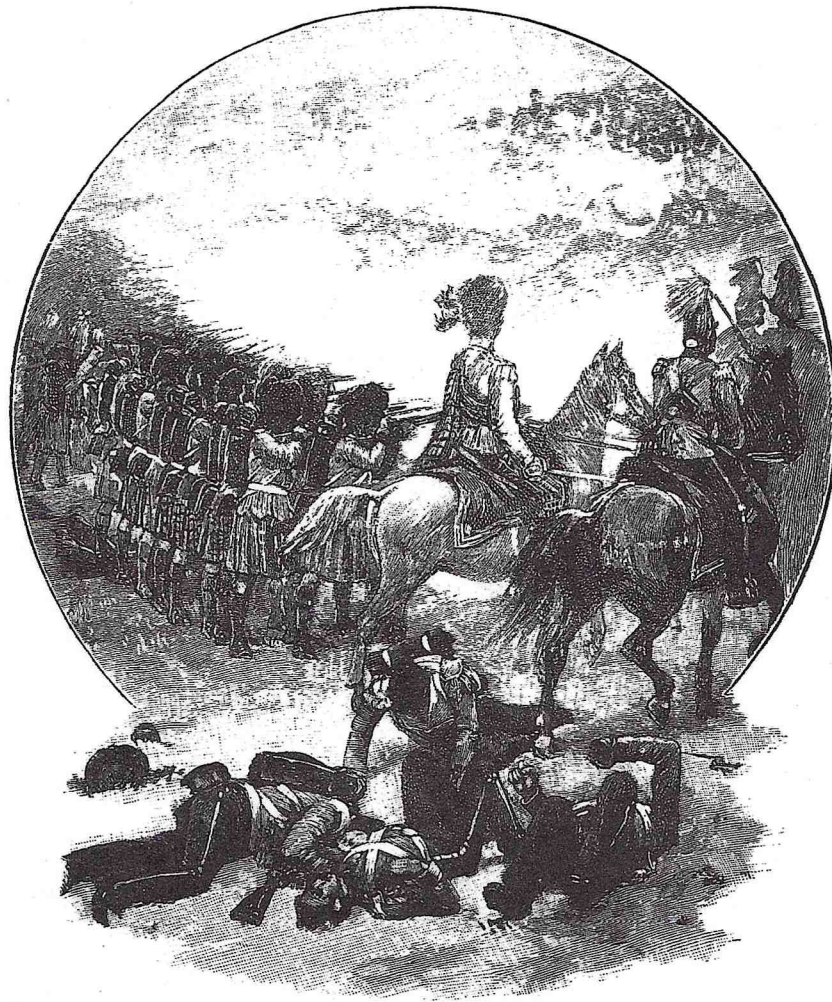
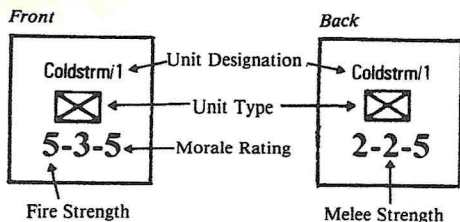


# THE CRIMEAN WAR

ALMA, BALACLAVA, INKERMAN, TCHERNAYA RIVER



Game Analysis:  
BY RALPH VICKERS



## THE CRIMEAN WAR

Quadrigame

Simulations Publications, Inc.

257 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10010

### Design:

Tchernaya River — Steven Ross

Alma — J. Matisse Enzer

Inkerman — Martin Goldberger

Balaclava — Thomas Gould

Graphics: Redmond A. Simonsen

Topic: Four battles of the Crimean War, 1854-55, involving French, English, and Sardinians versus Russians

Size: Each game one 18 x 22-inch map, 100 counters

Scale: Various tactical levels, not all scales specified

Game System: Alternating player phases with movement — defensive fire — offensive fire — melee — rally sequence. Morale rules.

Complexity: Moderate

Price: \$14.00

Solitaire Playability: Good

Published: April 1978

In real life it isn't enough merely to supply troops with weapons and ammunition — they must also have the will to use them.

Generally in wargames combat is simulated as a mathematical equation of purely physical elements, weaponry, supply status, terrain, numerical odds, etc., yet in every real battle situation there is always a human factor, and some observers feel this can be more decisive to the outcome than any of the other prevailing conditions. If this is true, then we don't see enough of this factor in wargame simulations.

The human elements are courage, stamina, fear, determination, discipline and so on. For convenience these can be summarized as morale.

How large a role should morale play in wargame combat simulations? Obviously this is a debatable point. If morale in real situations can be assigned a minor value (say, for example, 10%) then wargame designers are justified in the present practice of 'taking it or leaving it.' But if morale must be given a higher value (say more than 30%) then any combat system that does not incorporate this factor into its equations is not even approaching the outer fingers of a realistic simulation.

According to General Eisenhower, 'Morale is the greatest single factor in successful wars.' (*The New York Post*, June 23, 1945.) Napoleon was even more specific: 'In war, morale considerations account for three-quarters, the balance of actual forces only for the other quarter.' (From a letter, August 27th, 1808.) Napoleon also said somewhere (if memory can be trusted) that in battle the number of disabled men was not nearly as important as the number of men who were frightened. Clausewitz, Liddell Hart — even Lenin — figure among the ranks of military observers who have remarked on the paramount importance of morale. Obviously this is a subject that should receive far more attention in the hobby than it does.

With this in mind, it was an unexpected pleasure to open *The Crimean War* and discover that here morale plays a major role. Basically what morale means in these games is this:

Take an attack up a steep slope at 2:1 odds. A unit with a low morale rating of 1 doesn't have a hope of capturing the position, but the chance of success for a unit of the same morale strength and a morale rating of 4 is 50%; for an elite morale 5 unit it would be 66%. Or to put it another way, to have a 50% chance of success morale 1 units would have to storm up the slope at odds of 5:1. This has the 'feel' of realism.

But there's more. If the defenders are well protected in a town or behind redoubt walls, the system nicely reflects their consequently raised morale. Also, a unit's temporarily lowered morale, which can reasonably be expected if its first attack was repulsed or it came under particularly withering enemy fire, is simulated by the system.

These morale factors, and other refinements, are built into a type of combat results table that we also don't see enough of. Not the simplistic 'defender doubled in rough terrain' type of system, but a graduated table that differentiates between eleven terrain features classified into five types. All this is organized into a smoothly functioning, easy-to-handle system. This is first-class game designing.

But it is the very excellence of the morale rules that leads us to lament over another area of these games where the same high standards are not maintained.

Have you ever noticed when you listen to the first few bars of a new song or watch the opening of a movie how quickly you are aware of the 'level of quality'? And if the tune is catchy or the humor sharp, you can reasonably expect that quality to be maintained at the same level right through to the end. The reason for this is the songwriter's or scriptwriter's 'professionalism.' Professionalism here is not defined in the sense of the creator's source of income but his dogged endurance in maintaining both the highest level of performance he is capable of and also an exhaustive attention to detail. (A large measure of what we call talent or skill is really just a painstaking attention to detail.) But wargames — with some notable exceptions — still generally come out 'spotty.' If we find a high level of performance in one level of a game it's no guarantee that the same standards will be maintained elsewhere. This suggests that there is still a fundamental flaw lurking somewhere in the accepted procedures of game designing.

The designers of these games, who gave us the fine features already discussed and more to be mentioned later, were quite capable of a higher level of performance in another area — systems organization — than they turned in. Why here did their standards droop?

For instance, take the 'Restricted Movement Rules' in the *Inkerman* game. These would certainly win a prize if prizes were awarded for jumbled, nearly irretrievable data. Apparently SPI caught enough flak on one aspect of this subject to sting them into making partial amends. In these games a 'disrupted' status is indicated by flipping a unit over, but this leaves disrupted units so nearly indistinguishable from non-disrupted units that in a gang they can be lost from sight. To remedy this obvious oversight SPI suggests in the errata that the disrupted sides be marked with a dot. Why didn't they mark the dots?

Wargame makers still have not given enough thought to this subject. Granted, there have been some improvements. Remember how not so many years ago they were still scattering the game charts throughout the rules instead of organizing them all on the same page? Yet there is a multitude of good reasons to justify the time and effort to achieve good systems organization. Here are just a few:

1. If a system is well organized it can handle more data. For instance, in the *Alma* game there are special rules about 'Parent Units.' These are sort of unit integrity rules that reduce fire power effectiveness if two units from different parent units both fire at the same target. This is not a bad idea, certainly it's worth a try. Unfortunately it's poorly organized, the result being that the slight interest the idea might bestow on the game does not compensate for the extra time and mental watts players must expend if the rules are utilized. Players must read

some tiny print on the units to determine that the 41/2d is compatible with the 47/2d but not with the 4/2nd. The key is the number to the right of the slash. At least, for the French and British units. But the system seems to change in regards to the Russians (although the rules don't mention this). Thus it seems that a Russian BB/1W is *not* compatible with the Russian MOS/1W as the rules state, but with the BB/2W.

(Wargamers are accustomed to taking this sort of thing in stride. But wargaming is a weird world. While designers expect us to cope with this sort of thing as a matter of course, yet for setting up of the game they carefully instruct us — lest we err — in Rule 22.1 to 'Place the playing map on a smooth, flat surface....' It must be assumed that SPI has received a number of rules queries on this point.)

This idea would have worked if it had been better organized. As one example of a first class solution to a similar problem see *Eylau* by World Wide Wargamers. Here related units are clearly and attractively distinguished by colorful overlaid circles. Instead of having to peer and squint one sees the whole picture at a glance.

2. *A well organized system presents data in an easily retrievable form.* Show any wargamer a unit with 5-2-4 printed on it and before your Napoleon tricorn can drop to the floor he will tell you the 4 refers to movement allowance. Wrong — in these games. The 4 refers to Morale. In fact, except in *Alma*, movement allowances are not given on the units at all, and in that game the allowance is not shown in the usual place but up beside the unit type box. Perhaps it's too much to hope that what we thought were standardized procedures can always be observed, but in this case there is no good reason why movement allowances shouldn't be given as they always are, and why these allowances shouldn't be printed where they should be. Why confuse everybody with pointless innovation? Not only that, the movement allowances can only be found buried in the rules, and they are not even presented in tabulated form. You find the allowances for infantry, cavalry and horse artillery in the standard rules, then you hunt through the exclusive rules for artillery and engineers. If all this is a new trend in wargaming it should be stamped out now.

Good designers will not drive us again and again to search through the rules for information that can easily be presented in a more retrievable form. For instance, why here did the designers not include the movement costs on the terrain keys printed on the maps? They can't say there wasn't room. If they can present parent unit data in miniscule print on the units they can do the same on the terrain keys. Why didn't they print the British reinforcement entry hexes on the *Alma* map to save us one more needless job of research? Why do they print the victory point hexes on one map but not on another? In *Tchernaya River* why didn't they indicate on the turn record chart when reserves can be moved? The same for French movement and Russian preservation in *Alma*? Surely by now the routine provision of this sort of data on the map charts is a well established norm?

3. *A well organized system takes into account the fact that the average wargamer is not endowed with Instantaneous Total Memory Recall.* At every reasonable opportunity a system should provide a helpful prompt. Presumably designers like to have their games played the way they designed them. But who can infallibly remember all the exceptions tucked away in the rules? For instance, in *Alma* the town of Bourliuk is shown on the map like any other town. But the Russians had stuffed every building in Bourliuk with straw and converted the town into a blazing pyre. During the entire game no one can enter it. Why didn't they remind us of this fact with a couple of extra splashes of ink?

None of these points is a big deal in itself, but taken together they add up to a great deal of checking, double-checking and potholes that could have so easily been avoided by a bit of thought and effort devoted to systems organization. Why not 'smooth the way'? Why make wargames more pernicky than they have to be? Can't wargame designers see that careful systems organization makes games easier, and thus more

enjoyable. and that = more appealing = more saleable = more *profitable*?

However, these are four very good games. SPI's concept of the *QuadriGame* was a great inspiration. The basic system is well conceived — one set of standard rules for all four games and then exclusive rules for each game — and not only gives us four *different* games, but also a fine overall view of a particular campaign. And special mention should be made about the interesting, informative historical background booklet, a 16-page account of the historical setting together with special articles on each battle (with the maneuvers illustrated on reproductions of the game maps) plus other special features. After all, wargames are based on historical facts, but SPI is the only publisher in the hobby that pays more than lip service to this concept.

**Tchernaya River:** This game offers quite a number of possible viable strategies, an essential element if any game is to hold its interest for more than a couple of play-throughs. Perhaps the best strategy, however, is the one the Russians actually used. Try it — it's clearly explained in the historical background booklet. In this game the morale-disruption rules really do their job, giving a fine feel of realism as the battle progresses. The game system demands adequate softening up of the enemy defenders by artillery, and then careful co-ordination of attacks. In this game piecemeal attacks will just keep you in a state of helpless disorganization, if you are the Russians. The French and Sardinians should stay hunkered down in their strong initial positions until all their reserves are released.

But speaking of reserves, there are rules in this game which are common in wargames but sometimes do not ring true. This concerns reserve units which cannot move until a designated game turn. So there you have the French 1st Infantry Division on the allied left flank idly buffing their nails while the Russians swarm across the aqueduct, winning the war right under the French noses. Historically the French may not have moved until turn 5, but then historically the Russians didn't channel their attack in that direction. This rule needs more thought.

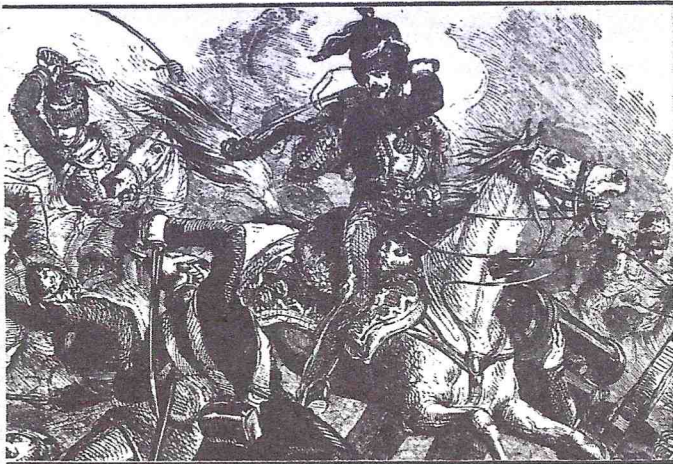
**Alma:** This game is great fun for the Allied player who commands an overwhelming force. It depicts realistically the difficulty of moving large forces over difficult terrain. A battle the Russians were too confident they would win, but any wargamer will see at a glance that they won't.

The flaw in this game is the Russian preservation rule. The Russian commander knows that sooner or later he will have to start retreating his units off the map. In the real battle, if the Russians had known this fact they wouldn't have fought the battle at all. How can anybody simulate precognition convincingly? Here the designer attempted the mind-bending task, but it didn't quite come off.

The worst feature of this rule is that it inhibits a whole-hearted Russian attempt to hold his ground. He knows the harder he tries, the greater will be his disaster when the allies finally get rolling. There are no victory conditions to tempt him to simulate the actual events. Instead he starts right away planning his retreat. Perhaps the Russians can win this game by forming a rearguard of all artillery units (no victory points lost for these destroyed), contrive to lose four infantry units as quickly as possible to trigger preservation, then get out of there.

**Inkerman:** A very interesting situation of growing pressure on Inkerman Ridge, starting in the confusion of fog. This is the most ambitious of the four games with plenty of optional rules. As remarked earlier, the system to handle all these complications has not been well organized, but organize it yourself and you'll have an enjoyable game. Despite its lop-sided appearance in favor of the Russians, in play it seems well balanced. Truly satisfying to the allied player if he wins.

**Balaclava:** A hard test of the realism of the game system, and we're happy to report the system passed the test. You can order the Light Brigade to charge, and watch them achieve just about what they did in history. If you have never fully understood why the Light Brigade made the most famous charge in the annals of warfare, try this game.



## The Crimean War DESIGNER'S NOTES: Martin Goldberger

Mr. Vickers' article is, to me, a welcome case of praise with faint damn. His criticisms are often correct; however, he seems to have gone out of his way in order to find something to criticize. His article opens with a commentary on the importance of morale in war and the use of the concept in the game. He then airs complaints on the designers' lack of 'professionalism' in their 'systems organization,' finally proceeding to very sketchy descriptions of the games' play. He does not cover historical accuracy, game system, or game play except in the most general terms. I am pleased with his overall appraisal, but would have been more appreciative had he concerned his article to factors that, in my opinion, should matter most to the gamer.

Production of *The Crimean War* involved a pair of 'firsts.' It was the first of SPI's series of games with complex rules and few counters. Subsequent games in this style have benefitted from our inevitable pathfinding errors. The other first concerns the four designers — the folios were our first complete games. Many of the mistakes Mr. Vickers cites are directly related to our inexperience.

The author lists three points of game 'systems organization.' I will respond to his comments by grouping rather than in the order in which they are presented in his article.

**The counters.** The author has correctly identified a problem common to virtually every wargame printed: when a large number of counters are placed in a small area, it is difficult to distinguish face-up from face-down counters. However, in such a situation, a dot is practically worthless. Testing did not reveal a major problem and the counters were designed accordingly.

There is only a certain amount of space available on a counter, and it must be apportioned by need. Historical designations, no matter how valuable (and certainly this game is not the first to contain a form of parent-unit command control) are the lowest ranked information going on the counter. They have been placed across the top of the counters for ease of play, hence the lack of unit size designations. Mr. Vickers has found no fault with *Inkerman*, which also requires the player to read parent unit designations. He should have simply stated that the *Alma* rules don't say which side of the slash indicates each nation's parent formation (although if you can't determine that the French 4/2d is not compatible with the British 41/2d ...).

The absence of movement allowances from counters is neither innovative nor daring. Counters in SPI games as far back as the *Blue & Gray I* have appeared without indicators. Infantry cavalry and artillery units in *Alma*, *Balaclava* and *Tchernaya*

*River* (which all possess the same game scale) were supposed to have identical movement allowances. They don't, and the gamer is forced to remember at most five movement allowances when playing *Balaclava* or *Tchernaya River*. (*Inkerman* has the movement allowances printed on the game map.)

**Rules.** SPI's Art Department rather than its game designers are entitled to the credit for the collation of game charts and tables into a single location. The only input we have is deciding which charts and tables are placed on the game map. Mr. Vickers is entitled to comment on the 'dispersal' of the individual unit movement allowances throughout the rules. We goofed, but to single out information that is represented in two places instead of one as a major mistake and inconvenience is excessive. He is also correct in pointing out that the restricted movement rules in the *Inkerman* scenarios are convoluted; but 'jumbled, nearly irretrievable data'? Hardly. Mr. Vickers has missed the reason for their inclusion in the first place. The battle started with a fog-obscured dawn surprise attack on the 'deployed' (i.e., sleeping) British army. Commitment of units on both sides was unaffected by the fact that fighting might be going on a few hundred yards away. This problem of large numbers of reserves and reinforcements actually on the game map was not easily solved and resulted in a bit of heavy-handed writing. However, I did try for historicity without requiring the players to slavishly follow both forces' actual march orders.

**Maps.** There indeed is an omission of some ease-of-play information from the maps and game-turn record charts. Again, we forgot. The lack of terrain movement costs is a different matter. Mr. Vickers apparently has not played an SPI game for a long time, otherwise he would have noticed that these have not been included on the terrain keys for at least a year and a half. The terrain key is just that, a key indicating what map symbols and colorations represent the various game features. *All* of the information on these features is listed (in one place in a tabulated form, as the author requests) in the game's Terrain Effects Chart.

Mr. Vickers comments on the games themselves, while complimentary, are somewhat shallow. His complaint about the lack of reaction of the French Reserve units in *Tchernaya River* is amusing when compared with his complaint about the inclusion of detailed rules covering this type of problem in *Inkerman*. The problem with *Alma* is its Victory Point Schedules (I am at present testing new ones) rather than the Russian Preservation Rule. The designer is not simulating precognition but the Russian commander's orders. The Russian player may not flee the field from a superior army until the commander realizes that he is in danger of losing his entire command and the war in this one battle. Mr. Vickers' reference 'the system to handle all of these complications has not been well organized' is, to put it mildly, overstating his case. The complications have been stripped from the exclusive 'standard' Rules and are presented in a series of pregrouped optional rules. The wording of the rules may not be Shakespearean, but they are nothing if not well organized with respect to playing one optional rule with any others (and only those) that it affects. *Balaclava*, while a good game to play, is hardly a 'hard test of the realism of the game system.' First off, the players should never end up in the historical situation except by deliberate intent (the Allied player has a view of the battlefield and the accompanying perfect intelligence that was available only to the Allied high command, not to the actual field commanders). Even if the deployment is recreated, the Light Brigade is unlikely to be destroyed unless the Allied player literally recreates the exact charge. The game, no more than Errol Flynn in the movie of the same name, explains the incredible stupidity that resulted in the charge of the Light Brigade (while the game's historical article *does* shed some light on the subject).

In conclusion. *The Crimean War* is, as Mr. Vickers' agrees, a good simulation and a good game. However, I would rather he had proved his compliment through in-depth discussions of detail, historical accuracy, game system and game play instead of concentrating on the faults produced by inexperience. And I *still* don't know what he means by 'systems organization.'