

THE IX CORPS' ATTACK AT WAGRAM, 5 JULY 1809

SAXONS ON THE DANUBE

The Battle of Wagram was the last major act of the war in 1809, fought over two days in July between the greatest powers in Europe at the time, Napoleonic France and Hapsburg Austria. The war had started with the Austrians taking the offensive and advancing into Bavaria to take revenge for the humiliating defeat of 1805. Moreover, with the support of funds from Britain, Austria sought to redress what they saw as a French overthrow of the balance of power.

By Derek Bruce

Since the War of 1806, many of the German states that had once been part of the Austrian-controlled Holy Roman Empire had been forced to join the Confederation of the Rhine, which was under French influence. The Hapsburgs believed that many of these German states would welcome their armies, that they

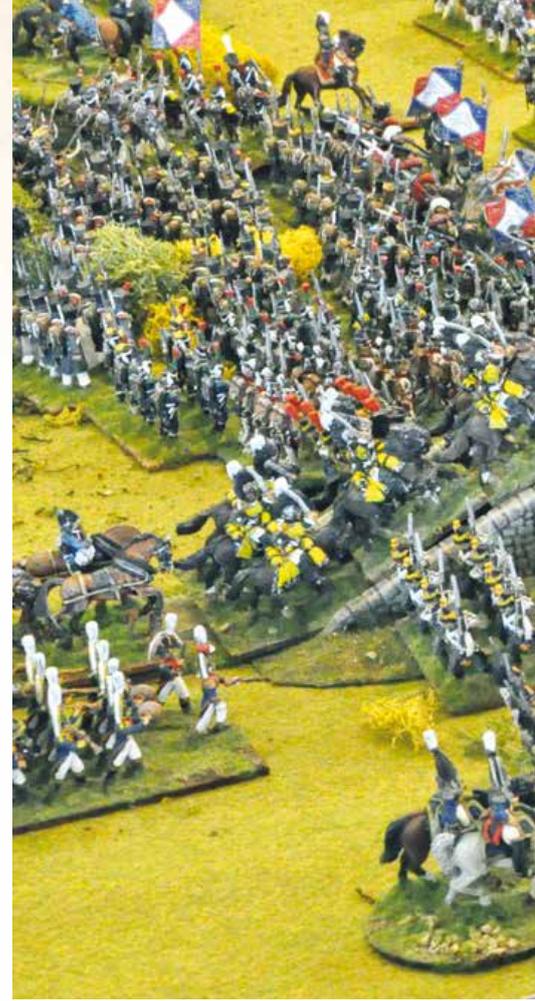
would be seen as a liberating force from the revolutionary and modernising influence of the French and a chance to restore the old order.

In April, the War of the Fifth Coalition (1809) began with the Austrian armies advancing along the Danube valley towards Bavaria and the German principalities, as well as mobilising in Italy and Poland. Napoleon, with the support of his independently acting marshals, was able

to prevent the Austrian westward advance in Bavaria with a combination of French and allied German Confederation armies. Contrary to the expectations of the Hapsburgs, rather than welcoming the invading Austrians, the German members of the Confederation made a huge contribution to stopping their advance. At Landshut, the Confederation was a match for the Austrians twice, and at Eggmühl a week later, an allied army stopped the Austrians, who were then forced to retreat back towards Vienna – the capital of the Austrian Empire.

In May, at the Battle of Aspern-Esling to the north of Vienna, Napoleon's pursuit was checked. Although the French had occupied the capital, the Austrians did not feel defeated. Two months of consolidation and planning followed, giving the French and their Confederation allies time to plan their crossing of the Danube. To achieve this, Napoleon assembled engineers and pontoons to construct many bridges on the south bank of the river, with the plan being to float them out across the torrent and subsequently form a bridgehead.

← Napoleon surveys the field of battle in this 1836 painting of the Battle of Wagram by Horace Vernet.
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The allied French and Saxon forces close on the Austrian positions.

In July 1809 Napoleon attacked across the wide and fast-flowing Danube. He was aware of the need to cross the river and consolidate his forces and then to break out to engage the assembled Austrian army at Wagram. Napoleon had amassed an army of approximately 190,000 men and over 600 guns, split into several corps.

The Saxon army at Wagram formed the IX Corps, commanded by the French marshal Bernadotte. He originally had three divisions, totalling approximately 18,000 men, and 38 guns under his control. Each of the three divisions of infantry had supporting cavalry and guns, in the French style of organisation. Bernadotte's command had been reduced over the days leading up to the battle. Many of the Saxon troops had been used in different tasks; one division was protecting the bridgehead, while some of the cavalry had been co-opted to other commands.

Most of the guns had found getting across the Danube bridges difficult and had become detached from the

main body. During the movement over the river the Saxon corps was not seen as a priority. It had taken most of the day to get the troops across the Danube and into position.

The Saxons had been given the task of holding the left flank while keeping contact with both flanks: on the right, the Army of Italy, and on the left, Masséna's Fourth Corps.



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A map of the town, cities, villages and general terrain in the area surrounding Wagram.



Deployment zones for the Austrian and Saxon forces near Wagram.

THE GAME

The time is approximately 6.00 pm on 5 July. I have used the *General de Brigade* rules, as I believe they give a good feel of warfare in the Napoleonic age. I also like the command ideas and how they add delay and confusion to the outcomes. This size of game could be played with many other sets of rules.

Austrian victory conditions

Victory: Hold the village of Wagram at the end of the game.

Glorious victory: Push the Saxons back south of Aderklaa and break at least one Saxon brigade.

Saxon victory conditions

Victory: Have troops in or on the edge of Wagram and prevent the Austrians from breaking your left flank.

Glorious victory: Capture Wagram and push back the Austrian cavalry.

COMMANDERS

Bernadotte

He was a good commander and had previously shown great ability. However, at the time of Wagram, Napoleon's trust in his ability was in doubt. It may have been Napoleon's lack of faith in him that led to Bernadotte being given the command of

the Saxon army. For this game Bernadotte should be classed as Average. Things were not helped by the language difficulties between the troops and the insistence that orders were issued in French.

All the Saxon brigade commanders should either be diced for or graded average. (To give an accurate feeling of uncertainty, I would recommend that their ability is only diced for when first needed, not at the start of the game.)

Bellegarde

He was cautious by nature and for this reason should either be graded poor or have a deduction made for his lack of opportunism. His decision not to use Aderklaa to keep in touch with the Third Corps left a gap in the Austrian defensive line, inviting an attack by the French army.

The Austrian brigade commanders should be graded as average or diced for as per the rules.

HISTORICAL DEPLOYMENT

Saxon

Both infantry divisions deploy to the right of Aderklaa and within one move of the right table edge (one battalion must remain within one move of the right table edge; this is to recognise that the rest of

ORDER OF BATTLE

Saxon

IX CORPS – C-IN-C MARSHAL

BERNADOTTE, PRINCE OF PONTECORVO

Advance guard (GM von Gutschmid)

Saxon hussars: 2 x 12 figures

Prinz Clemens: 2 x 12 figures

First Division (GL von Zerschitz)

First Brigade (GM von Hartitzsch)

Leib-Grenadier battalion: 1 x 32 figures

Second Grenadier battalion: 1 x 32 figures

Second Schützen battalion: 1 x 18 figures

Second Brigade (GM von Beschau)

König's infantry battalion: 1 x 32 figures

Von Niesmeuschel's infantry battalion:

1 x 32 figures

Saxon artillery

First light battery 4 x 4-pdr

Second Division (GL von Polenz)

First Brigade (GM von Lecoq)

Prinz Clemens' infantry battalion: 1 x 32 figures

Von Low's infantry battalion: 1 x 32 figures

Von Cerrini's infantry battalion: 1 x 32 figures

Second Brigade (GM von Steindal)

Prinz Anton's infantry battalion: 2 x 24 figures

Prinz Maximilian's infantry battalion:

2 x 24 figures

Saxon artillery

Second Heavy Battery: 4 x 9-pdrs

Cavalry brigade (GM von Feilitzsch)

Leib-Garde kurassiers: 1 x 12 figures

Garde du Corps regiment: 1 x 12 figures

Karabinier regiment: 1 x 10 figures

Austrian

FIRST CORPS – C-IN-C GENERAL OF CAVALRY BELLEGARDE

First Division (FML Dedovich)

GM Henneburg's brigade

No. 17 infantry regiment: 2 x 24 figures

No. 36 infantry regiment: 2 x 24 figures

GM Wacquand's brigade

No. 11 infantry regiment: 2 x 24 figures

No. 47 infantry regiment: 2 x 24 figures

Brigade battery

6 x 6-pdrs

Second Division (FML Fresnel)

GM Clary's brigade

No. 10 infantry regiment: 2 x 24 figures

No. 42 infantry regiment: 2 x 24 figures

GM Motzen's brigade

No. 35 infantry regiment: 2 x 24 figures

EH Carl's legion: 1 x 48 figures

Brigade battery

6 x 6-pdrs

Artillery reserve

Position battery: 6 x 12-pdrs

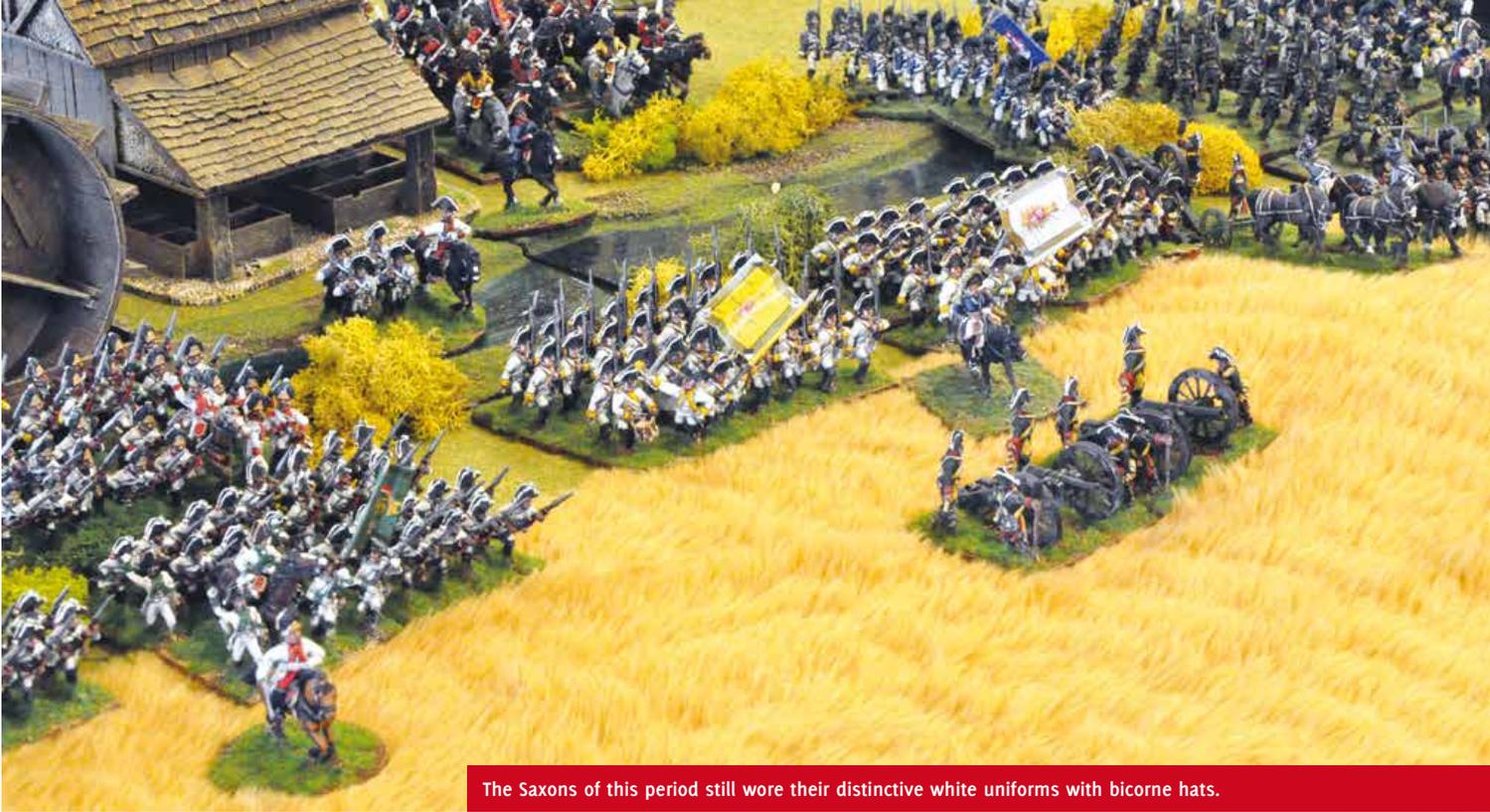
Cavalry reserve division:

FML Hessen-Homburg

Cuirassier brigade: 2 x 10 figures

Cuirassier brigade: 2 x 10 figures

Dragoon brigade: 2 x 10 figures



The Saxons of this period still wore their distinctive white uniforms with bicorne hats.

the Allied army is to the right, and its flank must be protected).

Only one artillery battery can be deployed with the infantry at the start; the other is on the baseline awaiting orders.

The advance guard should be placed behind Aderklaa. The cavalry brigade is behind the advance guard on the baseline awaiting orders.

Austrian

First Division: to the Left of Wagram behind the wooded stream without the guns, which can arrive after the third move to the right of the stream.

Second Division: in and in front of Wagram but behind the stream.

Both brigades start on a Hold order. The cavalry reserve arrive on the second move on their right flank.

TERRAIN

Most of the terrain is open fields without significant problems for formed troops. The small rise to the south-east of the field would let artillery placed on it fire over intervening troops.

The road only gives advantage through the villages and a move bonus for artillery if traveling the whole move along it.

Wagram was a small unfortified village, but would give cover for infan-

try placed in it. Aderklaa consisted of poor-quality buildings and offered little protection; cavalry and artillery can only pass through via the road.

The wooded stream was deep in places and had fairly steep sides, making it impassable for artillery and difficult going for other troops.

SPECIAL RULES

1. The Austrians should not move from their positions until turn 3.
2. I have discounted the battalion guns from the Saxon army.
3. All Austrian infantry should be graded as line, and the cavalry and artillery as veteran. Optionally, one cavalry brigade can be graded as elite.
4. The Saxon infantry is line; the Grenadiers and Schützen are veteran and the latter can be deployed as skirmishers. The advance guard and cavalry are all veteran apart from the Garde du Corps, which have elite status. The Saxon artillery is second line.
5. The Saxons attack and move in line only.

THE REFIGHT

I found that in historical refights the outcome has been similar to the actual battle.

Using the *General de Brigade* rules, I put all the Austrians on a Hold order to start with, as well as restricting any movement until turn 3; this will allow the Saxons to deploy. In this refight the game started with a cavalry clash.

The Saxons found it a tough nut to crack trying to get to Wagram as the casualties mounted. By keeping the infantry in two lines they were able to rotate the units before the final assault. The numbers in the orders of battle recreate the problems of deployment and restricted space.

A couple of 'what ifs':

1. The Austrians did not defend Aderklaa – in one game I allowed one unit of 24 skirmishers from Motzen's brigade to be deployed in the village on a Hold order.
2. Massena was defeated on the Saxon left – an Austrian force could appear on the left flank, with cavalry from the Reserve and infantry entering along the road to the south-west.
3. Napoleon sees the possibilities of pressing the attack – he moves forward with the guard deployed at Raasdorf.
4. The Army of Italy is pushed back on the Saxon right and the Austrians enter from the right. **WS&S**