

MATCHLOCKS 1672



French vs Dutch tabletop action in the Low Countries, using the *Never Mind the Matchlocks* rules and the North Star 1672 range of figures, by *Matchlocks* author Andy Callan.

The *Matchlocks* rules are billed as being suitable for 'small battles in the English Civil War and thereabouts'; so when *Wi* Editor Dan asked me to put on a game using North Star's gorgeous 1672 collection (French and Dutch), this was the ideal opportunity to put this 'thereabouts' idea to the test.

I am the first to admit that I know next to nothing about the French King Louis XIV's wars against the Dutch in the latter half of the 17th Century, so I turned to North Star owner Nick Eyre for some advice on tactics and what, if any, adjustments might need to be made to the rules. Over a chat at The Other Partizan show in October 2024, we soon concluded that the rules should be very suitable - it was mostly a case of making some minor adjustments to the rule's Doctrine Dice mechanism (which determines unit tactics in an attack, rather than leaving it for the player to decide). These are the combined changes that we came up with:

Infantry: No changes necessary, despite some reduction in the proportion of pikemen, but treat the Form Hedgehog response to a Cavalry attack as more of a simple Close Ranks. Swiss Infantry serving in the French army (who were of notably high quality, and retained distinctive helmets and body armour for their pikemen) should be treated as Veterans.

Cavalry: All should operate in Line Formation. Treat French - who seem to have been notably aggressive in this period - as the equivalent of ECW Royalists, and thus more likely to charge

into combat. Victorious Cavalry (of either side) who charge will take only two (not three) Disarray Tokens; this reflects increasing levels of unit discipline in this period.

Artillery: Field guns are not immobile, but take a full turn (two actions) to unlimber or limber up. Move 6" per move action. Batteries of up to two guns are allowed.

TO THE TABLETOP

The game pitched me, as the French General the Marquis de Vachequirit, against the Dutch under General Leerdammer, played by Steve Wood: a notably wily opponent and a key collaborator in the development of these rules.

In the ebb and flow of campaigning, the French have found themselves temporarily on the back foot, and Vachequirit has been ordered to defend the defile at Postel with a small rearguard, while the main army makes its escape to the South. Leerdammer must force his way through 'at all costs', with a force that is stronger in Cavalry, but lacking in any Artillery.

The game was played lengthways on a 6'x4' table, and all figures were from Nick Eyre's personal collection. We diced for the Leaders' Command Ratings at the start of the game, resulting in the Dutch with a Cavalry Brigadier rated Amateur (probably some bigwig's nephew!), while all other Leaders were rated Able - the medium rating.

FRENCH ARMY

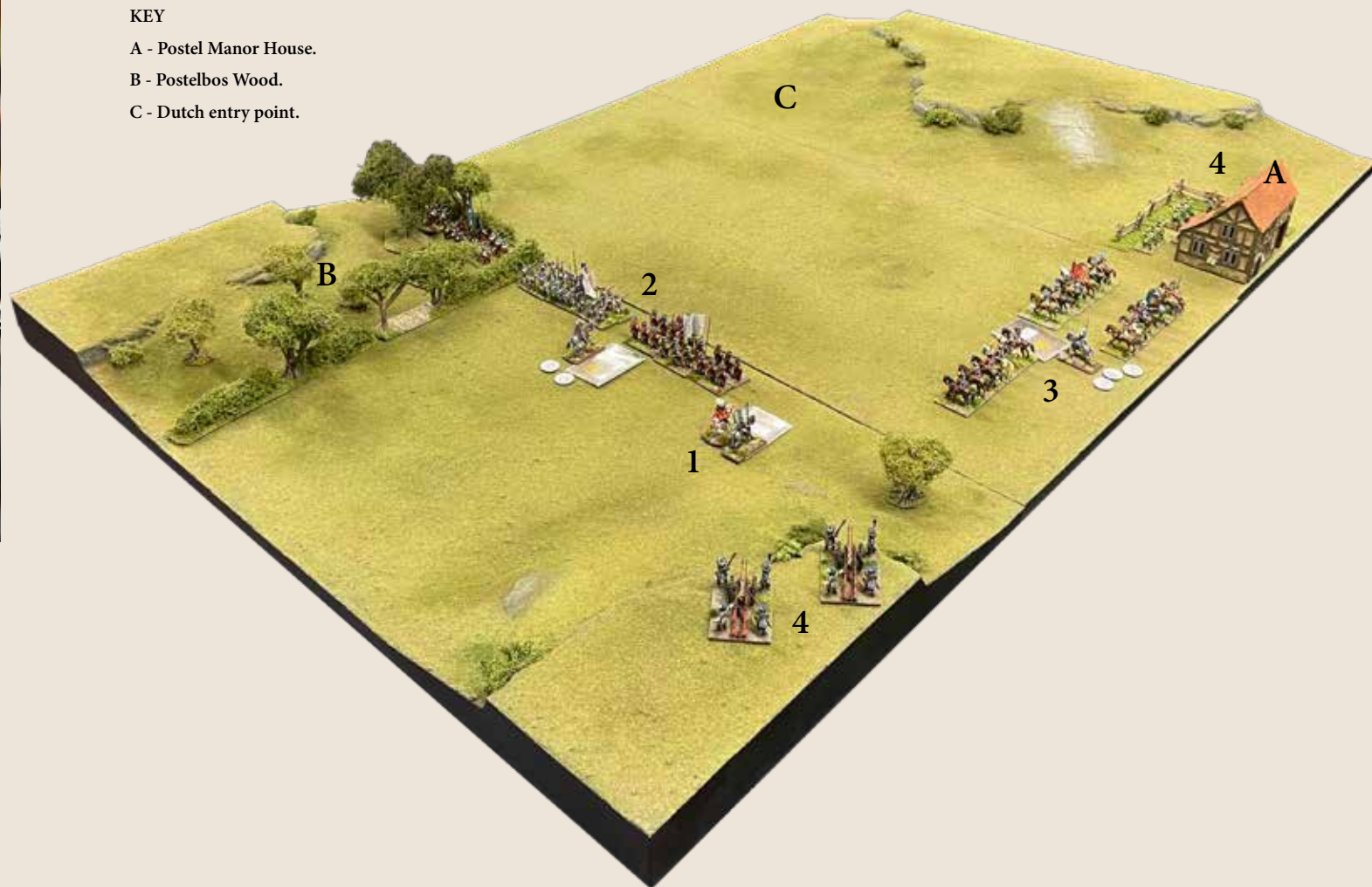
		Army MoraleTokens
1. C-in-C General the Marquis de Vachequirit	0 pts	
2. Infantry Brigade, Brigadier Boursin	5 pts	
3 x Infantry Battalions 2 Seasoned @ 24 pts	48 pts	4
1 Veteran (Swiss) @ 30 pts	30 pts	2
3. Cavalry Brigade, Brigadier Reblochon	5 pts	
3 x Cavalry Squadrons @16 pts	48 pts	3
4. Not Brigaded		
2 x Field Guns @ 9 pts	18 pts	2
1 Company of Dragoons @ 12 pts	12 pts	1
Army total	166 pts	12 tokens

KEY

A - Postel Manor House.

B - Postelbos Wood.

C - Dutch entry point.



DUTCH ARMY

		Army MoraleTokens
C-in-C General Leerdammer	0 pts	
Infantry Brigade, Brigadier Leyden	5 pts	
3 x Infantry Battalions @ 24 pts	72 pts	6
1st Cavalry Brigade, Brigadier Maasdam	5 pts	
3 x Cavalry Squadrons @ 16 pts	48 pts	3
2nd Cavalry Brigade, Brigadier Beemster (Amateur)	5 pts	
2 x Cavalry Squadrons @ 16 pts	32 pts	2
Not Brigaded		
1 x Company of Dragoons @ 12 pts	12 pts	1
Army total	179 pts	12 tokens

DEPLOYMENT

The French deployed in an arc, with their right held by the dismounted Dragoons, occupying the Postel Manor House. The Cavalry were next to them, and the Infantry on the left, with one regiment deployed behind the hedges of the Postelbos Wood. Their Artillery was positioned on top of the hill overlooking the defile, hoping to fire overhead and disrupt the Dutch advance.

The Dutch had to enter the field one Brigade at a time, and to deploy from a march column into their fighting formations.

In the interests of the quick game (since we knew things would be regularly interrupted for photography) it was agreed to dispense with the initial Manoeuvre and Bombardment phase.



The view from Postel Manor House, looking back towards the sweep of the French lines.

TURN ONE

After flipping the first card of the Play Deck, to dictate the order of play, the Dutch 1st Cavalry Brigade entered and deployed, then their mounted Dragoons moved up towards the Manor House. The French Artillery, firing diagonally across the table, found they had no targets in range (48"). The Dutch Infantry also entered and deployed, but the 2nd Dutch Cavalry Brigade was the last card in the pack, so could do nothing this turn (in *Matchlocks/Billhooks*, the last card in the Play Deck is never turned; thus, one brigade fails to take an action each turn). At this stage, Brigadier Beemster seemed to be living up to his Amateur rating!

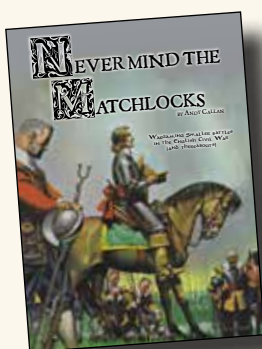


The Dutch forces make their way onto the battlefield.

RULES AND CARDS

Never Mind the Matchlocks was as a free supplement with the October issue of *Wargames Illustrated*, Wi443. *Matchlocks* can now be purchased as a stand-alone publication from wargamesillustrated.net.

The cards required for play - including Leader Cards specifically designed for the French and Dutch wars of the late 17th Century - can be downloaded for free from nevermindthebillhooks.com, or purchased as a professionally-printed deck from wargamesillustrated.net and northstarfigures.com



TURN TWO

The Dutch Infantry and Cavalry continued their advance, with the Dragoons making rapid progress on the left, when a 'Perk' Bonus Card gave them an extra move. The French Artillery opened fire, but to no effect (12 dice, no 6s!). Brigadier Beemster finally put in an appearance.



Honorary Dutchman Steve Wood moves his forces onto the table, with the Dutch Dragoons heading left towards the Manor House.



The Dutch army advances.

MORALE TOKENS

At the beginning of *Matchlocks* (and *Billhooks*) games, the two players take a number of Army Morale Tokens, dictated by the number of units they have in their armies. For example, players take one Army Morale Token for every Squadron of Cavalry they have in their army. During the course of the game, players will lose Army Morale Tokens as their troops suffer setbacks. When a player has no Tokens left, they must concede defeat.

TURN THREE

The Dutch continued their steady advance. Launching a pre-emptive strike, the French Cavalry attacked with one regiment, rolling a Charge on its Doctrine Dice, which was matched by their Dutch opponents. This was going to be a bloody affair, as charging Cavalry reroll any misses. The Dutch came out on top, winning the Melee by six kills to four, and pursued the French off the table, with the loss of two Morale Tokens.

The Dutch Infantry advanced and opened fire on the French Cavalry, who countered with an attack of their own. Rather against the odds, the French won the fight, driving the Infantry back, Daunted, so the Dutch lost their first two Morale tokens.

The Dutch infantry are Daunted by the French Cavalry charge.

DOCTRINE DICE

[illegible]

TURN FOUR

The Dutch drew a Special Event Card, Loot the Baggage, but would have to wait until any French Cavalry got within 12" of their baseline before they could put it to use.

The Dutch Dragoons got the better of a firefight with their opposite numbers, despite the latter being in cover. Having no better target, the French Artillery fired at the enemy Dragoons, and finally scored a hit.

The French ordered an advance with their Infantry Brigade. The left-hand unit had to scramble over the hedge, becoming Disarrayed in the process.

The Infantry-vs-Cavalry fight continued in the centre - the Dutch lost again, and continued to fall back.

Beemster advanced his Cavalry Brigade, sensing victory, and Reblochon ordered the last remaining unengaged French Cavalry to fall back and protect the flank of their Infantry.



The Dutch continue to be pushed back by the cavalier French Cavalry.



The Cavalry engage as Beemster advances.

DISARRAYED AND DAUNTED

Units may become Disarrayed following difficult manoeuvres, or as a result of combat. A unit in Disarray is less effective in combat.

Daunted troops are scared and shaken. Psychologically, they are close to quitting the battle.



Specific Matchlocks Tokens can be downloaded, or (as in our game) Billhooks MDF tokens can be used.

TURN FIVE

The ongoing Infantry/Cavalry melee finally fizzled out after three turns with neither side breaking, so the Dutch Infantry held its ground, and the French Cavalry had to withdraw, only to be destroyed by fire as they passed across the front of another Dutch regiment. Two more French Morale Tokens lost!

The French got a measure of revenge when their Infantry put in some effective volleys on their Dutch counterparts.

The French Dragoons were reduced to half-strength by their opponents, and failed the subsequent end-of-turn Morale test, losing two more Army Morale Tokens.



The remnants of the French Cavalry in the crossfire.

THE PLAYDECK

All *Billhooks* games use the turning of cards to determine the order of play. When the top card from the Play Deck is turned it reveals which commander takes the next turn, or a Bonus Card, which can be used to the player's advantage.



THE FIGURES

The 1672 range is available from North Star Military Figures (northstarfigures.com). It covers the armies and enemies of the French King Louis XIV in the period 1665 to 1680, including the War of Devolution and the Dutch Wars. The range has been named '1672' after the date of Louis' invasion of the Dutch Republic, later known as the *Rampjaar* (or Disaster Year), in Dutch.



TURN SIX

The Dutch Dragoons mounted up and moved to menace the French flank, untroubled by the enemy Artillery, who missed again!

Beemster attacked with his foremost Cavalry squadron and won decisively, routing the last of the French Cavalry with the loss of another two more Morale Tokens, meaning the French now had only two left!

The decisive stroke came on the Dutch right when their Infantry forced their way through the exhausted and Daunted survivors of the Infantry/Cavalry fight, and attacked the opposing French Infantry. The French lost the fight and failed their morale test, forcing them to fall back, Daunted, into the wood, leaving the army with zero Morale Tokens in the pot.

At this point Vachequirit threw in the towel. With no Cavalry to cover his retreat, his guns would certainly be lost, so the best he could hope for was to extricate what was left of his Infantry through the Postelbos wood, where the enemy Cavalry could not pursue him.



The closing stages of the battle, with the French Cavalry routing off the table, upper left.



The French Cavalry rout.



It ended with a win for the Dutch following some decisive hand-to-hand combat.

CONCLUSION

Another game in which the author lost - something I'm getting used to! (See 'Matchlocks in Notts' in *Wi445*). In retrospect, my key mistake was in the initial deployment of my guns, although a proper 'Manoeuvre and Bombardment' phase might well have helped. Also, I allowed Steve's Infantry attack in the last turn because the rules said nothing about getting Disarrayed by moving through Daunted (rather than Disarrayed) friends. This is something I have subsequently amended in an Errata document, available under 'Resources' at nevermindthebillhooks.com.

Your best endeavours on the tabletop will always fail if the cards and dice are against you, and this is true of all the rules in the *Billhooks* family. The good thing, though, is that this makes for a very congenial and non-competitive gaming experience. Since the rules, as much as your own decisions, are creating their own battle narrative, you are never too fussed about losing, but it does leave you keen to try for better luck next time!