

PRO-FRENCH NAVAL STRATEGY IN WAR & PEACE

Or How to Sweep the Bulldog from the Seas

By Kenneth G. Waido

Mark G. McLaughlin's introductory article about Avalon Hill's game of the Napoleonic Wars, *WAR & PEACE*, entitled "Napoleon's Empire—A Tour de Force of WAR & PEACE" appeared in *THE GENERAL* (Vol. 17, No. 1) some time ago. In his article, Mr. McLaughlin detailed very well the alternative land campaign strategies which should be employed by both the pro-French and the anti-French coalitions in order to achieve victory in each of the nine scenarios. In his discussion of the Grand Campaign Game, he stated—quite correctly—that it "can be a traditional recreation of the Napoleonic Wars, or a six-player free-for-all." He then proceeded to outline each major state's military and diplomatic chances of winning the game, or sharing in a coalition victory.

I believe important one element of *WAR & PEACE*'s Grand Campaign Game that was only superficially referred to in Mr. McLaughlin's article. That element has also not been addressed in any subsequent article printed. This element is, of course, the bitter battle for control of the seas by the naval forces of the pro-French and the anti-French. Mr. McLaughlin's summary statement concerning the naval aspect of *WAR & PEACE*, "the sea campaign is interesting, and the French first turn and its consequences can set the stage for an even war at sea", ignores the depth of detail and strategy possible. It is the purpose of this article to explore these depths for one of the protagonists—the French and their allies.

For the purposes of this article, the Grand Campaign game is assumed to be a contest between only two players. Major state's alliances are thus only subject to change by Alliance Phase die rolls and/or invasions. An "even war at sea" is interpreted here as an advantage to the pro-French. This assumes "even" means that both sides have equivalent naval factors, transport capability, and mobility. The pro-French goal in naval strategy is to achieve actual superiority over the anti-French player. If the English fleets can be forced to hole up on their home island or be blockaded in foreign ports, then their army and, more importantly, their production points become useless in game terms. The purpose of this article is to outline pro-French strategy in the Grand Campaign and to indicate chances of the French player achieving victory at sea and how this control (or non-control) of the sea will affect overall pro-French land strategy.

Initial Deployment

Mr. McLaughlin's article contained a *Chart E* which listed the "Naval Forces in Campaign Game". Taking the initial political status of major and minor states in the Grand Campaign Game into account, *Chart E1*, below, indicates that the anti-French powers (England, Russia and Portugal) start the game with a one naval strength point advantage and a slight advantage in transports.

Chart E1

Naval Forces in Campaign Game

| | Pro-French Powers | | Anti-French Powers | | |
|------------|-------------------|-----|--------------------|-----|------|
| | Fr. | Sp. | Eng. | Ru. | Por. |
| Fleets | 9 | 4 | 12 | 1 | 1 |
| Transports | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 1 |

In addition to their numerical combat strength point superiority, the anti-French coalition begins play with a tactical advantage since ten of the pro-French naval units are blockaded in ports by English fleets. Only three French naval units and a lone transport are "free" to move without first attempting to "run" a hostile blockade. (See the map preceding this article which shows the situation at the start of the Grand Campaign Game.)

The pro-French must avoid the historical situation where the English fleet under Nelson defeated the combined French and Spanish fleets off Cape Trafalgar in October 1805. However, as Mr. McLaughlin indicated in his article, the pro-French must "mass" their fleets in order to achieve victory over the English—thus laying themselves open to a repeat of Trafalgar. By examining the *Naval Results Table* for combat at sea, it becomes clear that the pro-French can never "win" a 1 to 1 Combat Ratio odds battle with the English fleets. Due to die roll modifications for English morale (representing English leadership and superb gunnery), the best the pro-French can hope for in a 1 to 1 battle is to force an English retreat; they can never sink an English naval unit (a seemingly unrealistic design problem). Therefore, the prime tenet of pro-French naval strategy is to never willingly fight the English at less than 3 to 2 Combat Ratio odds.

September 1805 Pro-French Naval Phase

The pro-French initial move and probability of success depends heavily on where the anti-French player deploys Nelson and his English fleet. The anti-French have four basic choices in the placement of Nelson, since he can be set up "anywhere in the Mediterranean": a) in the English port-fortress at Gibraltar; b) "at sea" in the Mediterranean; c) with the English fleet blockading Cartagena; and d) in an Austrian port (either Venice or Trieste).

The pro-French first move and first objective must be to free a pro-French fleet in one of the blockaded ports; there are three French naval units in Toulon for this purpose. With a movement allowance of four points, any of the English blockades in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic or the North Sea can be attacked by these. The best chance of pro-French success is against the single English units blockading Cartagena (if Nelson isn't there also), Cadiz, or Amsterdam. One of these blockades can be attacked using 2 to 1 odds on the Naval Results Table, which nets the French a 66.7% chance of eliminating the blockade (including a 33.3% chance of actually sinking the blockading enemy unit).

In order to attack the blockades, the French fleet must first get past Nelson and/or other possible anti-French interception attempts. If Nelson starts the game in a coastal hex, either in port at Gibraltar or either of the two Austrian ports, or with the fleet blockading Cartagena, his chance of intercepting the French force is 50.0% (a Nelson-led fleet receives a +1 die roll modification on the *Pursuit Table*). If Nelson is successful in intercepting the French, he must fight at the lower end of a 2 to 1 combat ratio (although his forces would receive a -2

die roll modification). Nelson's potential results in such a battle are: a 50% chance of forcing the French back into Toulon; a 33.3% chance of he himself being forced back to Gibraltar (the closest friendly port); and a 16.7% chance of being sunk. This latter figure is probably too much of a gamble for the anti-French player to accept on the first move of the game.

If Nelson starts the game "at sea", his chances of intercepting the French are 66.7% (a Nelson-led fleet at sea receives a +2 die roll modifier in pursuit). Although his chances of interception are better, Nelson would still have to fight at the lower end of a 2 to 1 odds battle with the potential results described already. The pro-French should welcome a "solo" Nelson attack early in the game on the three French units. A first turn loss of Nelson would do wonders for the French naval campaign in *WAR & PEACE* (and would recreate the historical situation since Nelson did die of wounds suffered at Trafalgar in October 1805). But, *WAR & PEACE* is a game—and an anti-French player, in my opinion, would be foolish to lose an important leader on the game's first turn. Nelson is the only naval leader in the game and is, literally, irreplaceable.

But Nelson does not have to attempt to intercept the French moving from Toulon by himself. The English fleet which starts the game in Gibraltar has a 33.3% chance of catching the French. Combined with Nelson's chances, the probability of both uninvolved English units bringing the French to battle are 22.2% if Nelson starts "at sea" and 16.7% if Nelson starts in a coastal hex. [The probability of two events occurring together is obtained by multiplying the probability of the two events occurring individually.] Despite the lower odds of joint interception, if both English units did succeed, the battle would be fought at 3 to 2 odds with the English force receiving a -2 die roll modification. This means that the English would enjoy a 33.3% chance of forcing the French back to Toulon, a 33.3% chance of sinking at least one French unit, and only a 33.3% chance of themselves being forced back. The English would have no possibility of losing a unit (or Nelson).

The pro-French can counter the anti-French potential use of the Gibraltar-based naval unit in any interception attempt by simply placing three Spanish cavalry units (which can set up "anywhere in Spain") within four movement points of any of the following three hexes on board 1: D23, E23 or F23. If the English fleet leaves Gibraltar to intercept the moving French fleet from Toulon and the English are not forced back to port, the Spanish cavalry can then move into position to attack and capture Gibraltar during the September 1805 anti-French Combat Phase. Gibraltar cannot be attacked while it is occupied by one army and one naval strength point. The loss of Gibraltar would leave the anti-French with only Venice and Trieste as friendly ports in the Mediterranean. Since both cities soon come under pressure from pro-French land forces under Messina, the anti-French coalition cannot afford to lose Gibraltar. (The loss of friendly ports in a sea zone means all fleets which are forced to retreat as a result of combat on the Naval

Results Table are treated as unescorted transports, which means they are either captured by a neutral state or they are sunk—either way they are lost.)

Although this article is devoted to French naval strategy, it is important to consider the best strategy for the enemy in order to be prepared. In my opinion, the best location for Nelson and his force would be to reinforce the fleet at Cartagena. This deployment frees the English fleet starting the game blockading Cartagena for possible interception of the French fleet from Toulon without the loss of that blockade. It allows the Gibraltar naval unit to remain in that port and does not risk the loss of the “Rock” to Spanish cavalry. The best reason, however, for the anti-French to start Nelson at Cartagena is that it forces any French attack there to be fought at the 3 to 2 Combat Ratio, which nets them only a 33.3% chance of success.

The major advantage to the anti-French player, however, of deploying Nelson’s force at Cartagena with the blockade is that it forces the three French naval units into the Atlantic Ocean or the North Sea to seek a blockade they can hope to lift. As the French fleets venture into the Atlantic, they become subject to interception by the Portuguese fleet in Lisbon. The Portuguese, like any fleet attempting an interception from a port, have only a one-third chance of interfering—and to do so would be suicide. The French would be able to fight the Portuguese using the 2 to 1 odds, which nets the French about a 50.0% chance of either sinking or capturing the Portuguese navy and an 83.3% chance of having the interception become meaningless (i.e., a SR, SS or SC result from the Naval Results Table).

Given all the above, the French force from Toulon should feel safe in their attempt to reach a port in the Atlantic or North Sea blockaded by a single British unit. As discussed earlier, the Toulon fleet has a 66.7% chance of lifting a single fleet blockade which includes a 33.3% possibility of actually sinking the English blockading fleet.

What the pro-French should not attempt to do in the early game is to “run” every English blockade. Each blockaded force has a 16.7% chance of escaping the blockade. The other side of the coin: each pro-French blockaded force also has a 66.7% chance of engaging the blockading enemy in a 1 to 1 combat. The problems with the pro-French attacking English fleets at 1 to 1 odds has been discussed before; they can never sink an English unit. The best the pro-French can hope for is a SR result, forcing the British to retreat. A SR result has a 33.3% chance of occurring—which means a blockaded French force has only a 38.9% chance of either escaping or lifting an English blockade by themselves. While a 38.9% probability appears very appealing to many players, they should realize that the English have a 27.8% chance of either sinking or capturing a pro-French unit attempting to “run” the blockade. Since we are not likely to see the anti-French do battle with a solo Nelson at 2 to 1 odds with a 16.7% chance of being sunk, the pro-French player should not risk a 27.8% chance of losing a naval unit for every blockade they attempt to escape. Remember too, the English receive special production points to rebuild eliminated naval units while the pro-French must use their regular production points, which are usually required elsewhere in the continental war. Thus, pro-French naval strategy must be to lift the blockades from the outside and not fight through them from the inside.

September 1805 Anti-French Naval Phase

The odds are in favor of the three French naval units from Toulon lifting the blockade at Cadiz or Amsterdam; but what does the effort bring the French and what can be the expected English

response?

The effort of lifting a blockade nets the pro-French a four-unit fleet. The anti-French have a choice of two responses: 1) if the initial blockading fleet was not sunk (66.7% chance that it wasn’t), that fleet, Nelson and his fleet, the Portuguese fleet and the Russian fleet can sail and attempt to blockade the new large pro-French fleet in whichever port they have fled to; or 2) if the initial blockading English fleet was sunk, do nothing.

Why can’t the anti-French do anything if the initial blockading English fleet was sunk? The answer is again tied to the value of Gibraltar. In order to blockade the four-unit pro-French force in port, the anti-French will need to pull in all available fleets, including the Portuguese and the Russians, and the Gibraltar fleet. Again, the pro-French can force the anti-French to keep the English in Gibraltar by the simple placement of the Spanish cavalry.

The odds are that the initial blockading British fleet will survive and would be available to help blockade the pro-French. Another assumption being made here is that the Russian fleet is within four movement points of any port in the Atlantic Ocean. This assumption means that certain hexes (on board 3—F2 and F4, G1 to G4, H2 and H3, I2 to I4, J1 to J4; on board 2—EE4 and EE5; and CC2 on board 4) are hexes for land movement purposes only and are not considered coastal hexes for sea movement. If they do count as full coastal hexes for sea movement purposes, it would take the Russian fleet three months just to get out of the Baltic! [Designer’s Note: Mr. Waido’s assumption is correct. Movement between the Baltic and the North Seas requires only one naval movement point.]

October 1805 Pro-French Naval Phase

The tactical situation the pro-French find themselves in during October 1805 is one of the following: either 1) they have a four-unit fleet in Cadiz or Amsterdam and a three-unit anti-French fleet “at sea” either in the Atlantic or North Sea, respectively, or 2) they have this fleet blockaded by a four-unit anti-French fleet under Nelson either in Cadiz or Amsterdam. If, as is likely, the pro-French fleet is blockaded, they should attempt to “run” the blockade. While this suggestion seems to fly counter to the cardinal precept that the French never engage in 1 to 1 combat with English naval forces, let’s examine why this maneuver is recommended now.

In the “Design Analysis—WAR & PEACE Errata and Clarifications” article by Frank Davis printed in *The GENERAL* (Vol. 17, No. 1), Rule Ob2. was clarified as follows:

“If a force is composed of equal numbers of strength points of two or more different morale values, the morale value of the force is automatically the lowest morale value present in the force.”

While the above is presented in the context of *army* morale, the assumption here is that it also applies to *naval* morale. [Correct.] Thus, the anti-French blockading force would not receive the -1 die roll modification for English morale in naval combat, although they would still receive -1 for being under the leadership of Nelson.

So, the anti-French must attempt to “run” the blockade to free themselves for further operations. Again, the pro-French have a 16.7% chance of escaping the blockade by rolling a six; a 66.7% chance of attacking the anti-French blockading force at 1 to 1 odds by rolling two through five; and only a 16.7% chance of failing to “run” the blockade by rolling one and having the anti-French fleet refuse to engage in battle. The possible result of any four unit to four unit, 1 to 1 naval combat for the pro-French is: a 33.3% chance the anti-French would be forced to retreat; a 33.3% chance they (pro-French) would be forced back to port; and a 33.3% chance of losing a naval unit (either sunk or

captured). Since 66.7% of the combat results are essentially favorable to the pro-French—or at least don’t hurt—and since they have a 16.7% chance of escaping the blockade entirely, the chances are that 61.2% of the time the pro-French force would not lose a fleet in this instance. If the four-factor pro-French fleet is successful in escaping the blockade (a 38.9% probability) of leaving freely from an unblockaded port, it is still susceptible to potential anti-French interception from either a four-factor force in a coastal hex or a three-factor force “at sea”.

Thus, in summary of the October 1805 pro-French naval movement phase, if the pro-French have mobility or are able to escape an anti-French blockade, there is a good chance they will not be intercepted during movement as the British have no better than a 50% chance unless they have a fleet at sea with Nelson. If the pro-French fail to get past the blockade, they should just wait until the November turn and attempt another blockade “run”, and should continue to do so until they are successful.

Assuming the Pro-French can move, or will eventually be successful in getting out of a blockaded port, they can take their four-factor fleet and attack any of the English blockades, except the one at Brest. The pro-French fleet is able to achieve 2 to 1 combat odds against any other blockade. The possible results of a 2 to 1 battle for the pro-French are: 33.3% that the blockade will be lifted by sinking one of the blockading English units; 33.3% that the blockade will be lifted by forcing the English to retreat; 33.3% that the attempt will fail when they are forced to retreat themselves.

The pro-French player should continue this blockade-by-blockade lifting strategy as long as the anti-French player allows or until all pro-French fleets are blockaded by anti-French forces that can do battle using the English die roll modification. If that situation develops, there are “diplomatic” methods the pro-French player can use to help change the balance of power on the seas.

Alliance Phase Influences on the Naval Campaign

Proper manipulation of the Alliance Phase is as critical to the pro-French in their naval strategy as to other aspects of the Grand Campaign. The pro-French begin the game with a disadvantage in the Alliance Phase in that there are three anti-French major states compared to the two pro-French major states. This means pro-French land forces must occupy two anti-French production cities before they can obtain the necessary die roll modifications to influence major changes during the Alliance Phase. Since the Alliance Phase is omitted during the September 1805 turn, the pro-French have two turns to capture an anti-French production city (Innsbruck is the logical target) and eliminate the anti-French advantage. It is also very critical that the French never allow Napoleon to become involved in a battle where he would be forced to withdraw. If he is forced to withdraw, the anti-French receive three points which would give them virtual control of the Alliance Phase. If the pro-French have not captured an anti-French production city by the conclusion of their October 1805 Combat Phase, they face the unhappy prospect of the anti-French changing the status of Spain to neutral or Prussia to anti-French. (The anti-French player will likely first attempt to change the status of Prussia in order to add pressure to the pro-French land forces invading Austria.)

Once the pro-French have gained an advantage in Alliance Phase die rolls, they should avoid the complete conquest of Austria until the following events happen (in the following order): 1) the status of Russia is changed from anti-French to neutral; 2) the status of Prussia is changed from neutral to pro-French; and 3) the status of Russia is changed from

neutral to pro-French. Changing the status of Russia to a neutral eliminates the Tsar's armies from assisting the Austrians in the defense of their country. As important, it also eliminates a fleet from the anti-French naval forces.

After the French player has been successful in making Russia neutral and Prussia pro-French, he needs to reevaluate his position. Austria should be ripe for conquest by the end of December 1805. In so doing, the pro-French should have been successful in the creation of Dalmatia—completing the Italian Minor States Group. Thus, by January 1806, there should only be one anti-French major power (England) and three possible pro-French powers (France, Spain, Prussia). There should also be, as discussed, a pro-French minor states group. This gives the French a -3 die roll modification during the Alliance Phase, or a 50.0% chance of changing the status of Russia to a pro-French major state in January 1806 or a subsequent month.

Whether the pro-French need Russia on their side or not depends upon another die roll during their January 1806 Alliance Phase. This is the roll for "foreign wars". If the French are lucky enough to see a die roll of "1", England will become involved in a war with the United States which requires the British player to send two naval combat units and two transports to the Americas. If this happens, the pro-French should concentrate on conquering England—and not Russia—to win the game during the next two years. The odds are, however, that England will not become involved in a war with the United States at this time. Too, the English are allowed to add another naval unit to their Force Pool in January which they will have enough production points to build by February 1806 at least. If this does occur, and England is not at war in the western hemisphere, the pro-French need to change the status of Russia to a pro-French major state.

With Russia a pro-French power, the following should be the objectives for the French coalition for 1806: 1) Russia should attack Sweden; 2) the French should attack Denmark and then, if needed, Sweden; 3) the Spanish should attack Portugal. The first two objectives will be easy to bring to their ordained conclusion by the end of 1806. Whether Spain conquers Portugal or not is not crucial—though it would be nice. Portugal cannot defend itself alone against the Spanish and every English strength point transported to Portugal's defense makes the defense of embattled Britain more difficult.

Naval Phases of 1807

In January 1807 the pro-French have another die roll to create a "foreign war" between England and the United States. Assuming no war between these in 1807, and assuming pro-French conquests of Denmark and Sweden, *Chart E2* outlines the new naval balance of power in 1807.

Chart E2
Naval Forces in 1807

| | Pro-French Powers | | | | | Anti-French Powers | |
|------------|-------------------|-----|-----|------|-----|--------------------|------|
| | F. | Sp. | Ru. | Den. | Sw. | Eng. | Por. |
| Fleets | 9 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 14 | 1 |
| Transports | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 |

The above chart indicates the pro-French will have numerical superiority of naval units over the anti-French sixteen to fifteen (England is able to add another unit to its Force Pool in January 1807 and should have enough production points to build it immediately, but the balance of naval power could well be seventeen to fourteen if Spain manages to conquer Portugal) and a numerical superiority in transports of six to three (or seven to two). The pro-French must be in position to invade England in early 1807 in any attempt to win the game via these victory conditions. The anti-French, especially if Portugal has fallen, simply do not have enough naval forces to prohibit the pro-French

coalition from making a landing. And, the pro-French now have enough transport capability to invade and supply an invading army.

The pro-French naval phases of 1807 should all be concentrated on the invasion, re-invasion and supporting invasions in an attempt to overwhelm England. Priority for the pro-French production points must be for the reconstruction of naval units lost battling the English, who will throw everything they have into the fray. If England is not conquered by the end of 1807, the pro-French should abandon all attempts and seek victory by conquering either Russia or Spain. The logical option is to overrun Russia, since the Spanish navy can help keep the pro-French rear secure from English harassment.

Naval Phases of 1808—And Beyond

In January 1808, the anti-French will have achieved numerical equality, again, with the pro-French naval forces (assuming that Portugal has not been conquered by the pro-French troops). This means that the invasion of England, if not undertaken yet, is beyond reach. Pro-French naval phases during 1808 and beyond should be used to keep the English in check. This strategy must be followed unless the pro-French are very close to conquering England.

Since the anti-French will have succeeded in matching the pro-French in terms of number of naval units, the pro-French may be placed in the unhappy position of having to "run" English blockades even though this risks 1 to 1 combats. If a pro-French fleet is successful in escaping a blockade, it should remain "at sea" where the fleet cannot be blockaded again by the enemy. But, while "at sea", they can attempt to intercept any English invasion attempts or attempts to transport army units or production points to the continent. The pro-French must now take an aggressive harassment role with the goal of forcing English retreats. Borrow a precept from Mahan; maintain a "fleet in being".

The pro-French land campaign, meanwhile, has shifted to the east. The actual invasion of Russia probably should be delayed until at least March 1809. It will take the Austrians until late 1808 to complete rebuilding their army, thus making themselves eligible for a status change during Alliance Phases. Also, French strength points lost in the abortive invasion of England may be replaced, which takes time. With Prussia and Austria able to protect the French flanks and supply lines, the invasion of Russia will have a high chance of success. The Spanish should keep the English busy in Portugal. The pro-French fleets should be fairly successful in keeping the English naval power frustrated.

Summary

If the pro-French are to win the Grand Campaign in *WAR & PEACE*, control of the sea is essential. Victory, whether by conquest of England or of Russia, rests on the French admirals. Pro-French control of the sea must be accomplished during 1806. Even with control of the Alliance Phase, if the pro-French have not conquered England by January 1808, or are very close to doing so, they must shift their search for victory elsewhere. An anti-French Spain, as Napoleon learned, is extremely difficult to conquer—particularly if supported by English production points. The recommendation then is to overwhelm Russia.

To repeat, the purpose of this article was to outline pro-French naval strategy in the Grand Campaign. The discussion of how control, or non-control, of the sea affects overall French strategy and the land war has been informative I hope. In the process, we have ranged through a number of other topics, and perhaps highlighted what I consider to be a failing with the Alliance Phase in a two-player

game. (As seen in this article, the pro-French can achieve control of the Alliance Phase by 1806 and can use it to their advantage to isolate England. While I believe that the Alliance Phase needs to be modified, I am neither a designer nor developer, nor am I necessarily an advocate of play balance. One change I have used, quite satisfactorily, is to *not* consider cities, which produce only production points for landwehr, as production cities until after the home country has been conquered and the landwehr units are actually added to that country's Force Pool. This means cities such as Innsbruck and Konigsburg are not production cities for Alliance Phase purposes until after their home countries have been overrun and then reinvaded. This small adjustment makes a world of difference.) I sincerely hope that it has proved instructive. For those would-be Nelsons among the readership, I hope it has given you pause to consider how easily the English Bulldog can be leashed. ☆