

# The Battle of Blasthof Heath Refought 40 Years On

By Rob Grace

## Recruiting the Armies

Some years ago I picked up a second hand copy of “CHARGE! or How to Play Wargames” by Brig P Young and Lt Col J P Lawford, published 40 years ago in 1967. The spirit of these rules seemed to encapsulate a ‘golden age’<sup>1</sup> of wargaming where the focus was on fun, and historical accuracy came a very poor second. Suitably inspired I started to cast around for old-fashioned wargame figures to match the ‘toy-solder’ approach wargaming.

I wanted figures suited to the War of Austrian Succession (1740-48), which seemed the best match to the games described in “CHARGE!”. It is also a period where one can field a British army against the French and not feel there’s something wrong if you lose; indeed I suspect that the repeated beatings we received from the French are the reason why this war is conveniently overlooked in favour of other 18<sup>th</sup> century conflicts.

My search for suitable figures began with Spencer Smith Miniatures, who also market the Willie and Tradition ranges, all of which are featured in photographs in “CHARGE!”. The Willie figures are beautiful, being much better proportioned than many of the more ‘chunky’ ranges of figures that dominate the market today. Unfortunately the range is too limited to build anything like a representative force. The other ranges didn’t quite suit me, the Tradition seeming too wooden and the simplicity of the Spencer Smith figures, now cast in metal as opposed to the old plastic range, while appealing didn’t capture the voluminous appearance of the large cuffs and coattails that I associate with the period.

Casting around for alternatives I bought some 42mm figures from Irregular Miniatures both Seven Years War and Marlburian but again found the ranges not to my taste. I also thought about switching period, buying some the 42mm Franco-Prussian figures simply because they beautifully replicated the old tin soldier look and were easy to paint. Unfortunately moving up in scale, together with the longer weapon ranges of the later period, made the ground scale used in the rules look rather cramped; and the limited size of my wargames table wouldn’t accommodate increased the firing ranges. As a result I also abandoned this option, but apart from the problem of space I can certainly recommend these figures, and the range continues to grow.

Frustrated I returned to the Spencer Smith figures, and having played around with some modelling putty to bulk out their hats and coats, was pleased with the end result. The effort involved in modifying individual figures in this way was clearly too prohibitive to be a practical solution, so I contacted Peter Johnstone of Spencer Smith and asked if he would be prepared to cast figures from masters that I produced in this way. Peter was more than helpful and the initial results gave me the confidence to press on.

Now after starting a project comes the difficult bit, painting figures. For once I avoided the usual pitfall of buying a massive pile of figures that never seems to shrink no matter how many I paint. To limit the number of figures required to get started I chose to build forces sufficient to replay the first example game in “CHARGE!”, namely the Battle of Blasthof Heath.

My initial idea to base my armies on the British/Allied and French armies of Cumberland and de Saxe respectively was dropped as I found myself thinking about tampering with the rules

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<sup>1</sup> In reality I suspect that it wasn’t that the games of my youth were any better, but being young was!

to give the British an ‘edge’. The rules recognise the problems arising from an emotional attachment to historical units and for this reason recommend the use of fictional armies. I couldn’t bring myself to adopt this approach so instead I elected to base my forces on the campaigns between the Austrians and Bavarians up and down the Danube valley. This campaign was very much a sideshow about which I knew little and so held no prejudices over the relative merits of either army.

Having assembled the necessary forces the next step was to build some simple terrain. I wanted the terrain to match the simplistic look of the original but without going so far as to use a Tradition catalogue to represent a hill! The buildings and bridge were free download paper models printed out from the Internet and pasted onto foamboard. The hill was simply a slab of polystyrene coated with newspaper and PVA glue, while the river was cut from old cereal packets with the banks carved from self-adhesive cork tiles. With everything now in place I invited a friend round to put the project to the test of battle.

### **The Battle**

The Battle of Blasthof Heath is used in “CHARGE!” to illustrate the mechanisms in the basic rules and so these were the rules used for the game (the book also includes an advanced set of rules with another larger game to illustrate their workings). These basic rules are the archetypal “back of a postcard” set, with players taking alternate turns to freely move and fire their figures without any command and control restraints and the game being won as soon as one side has lost more than half its strength in figures. Figures are moved individually, infantry and guns up to 6” and cavalry 12”, and firing and combat decided by fairly simple dice throwing mechanisms.

The battle itself is a fictional contest between the ‘Elector’ and the ‘Emperor’, in which the forces of the former having been defeated are seeking to prevent the advancing Imperial army from seizing a bridge over the River Blast. The Electoral rearguard under General Soubise has to either destroy the bridge<sup>2</sup> or hold it until nightfall<sup>3</sup> against the advance guard of the Imperial forces under Count von Kornberg. The forces available to the two commanders are listed below.

#### **Electoral Rearguard**

Soubise & ADC	
Hohenzollern DR	1 officer & 12 troopers
Max Josef IR	3 officers & 40 soldiers
Field Artillery	2 guns, 1 officer & 10 gunners
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>69 figures (50% = 35 figures)</b>

#### **Imperial Advance Guard**

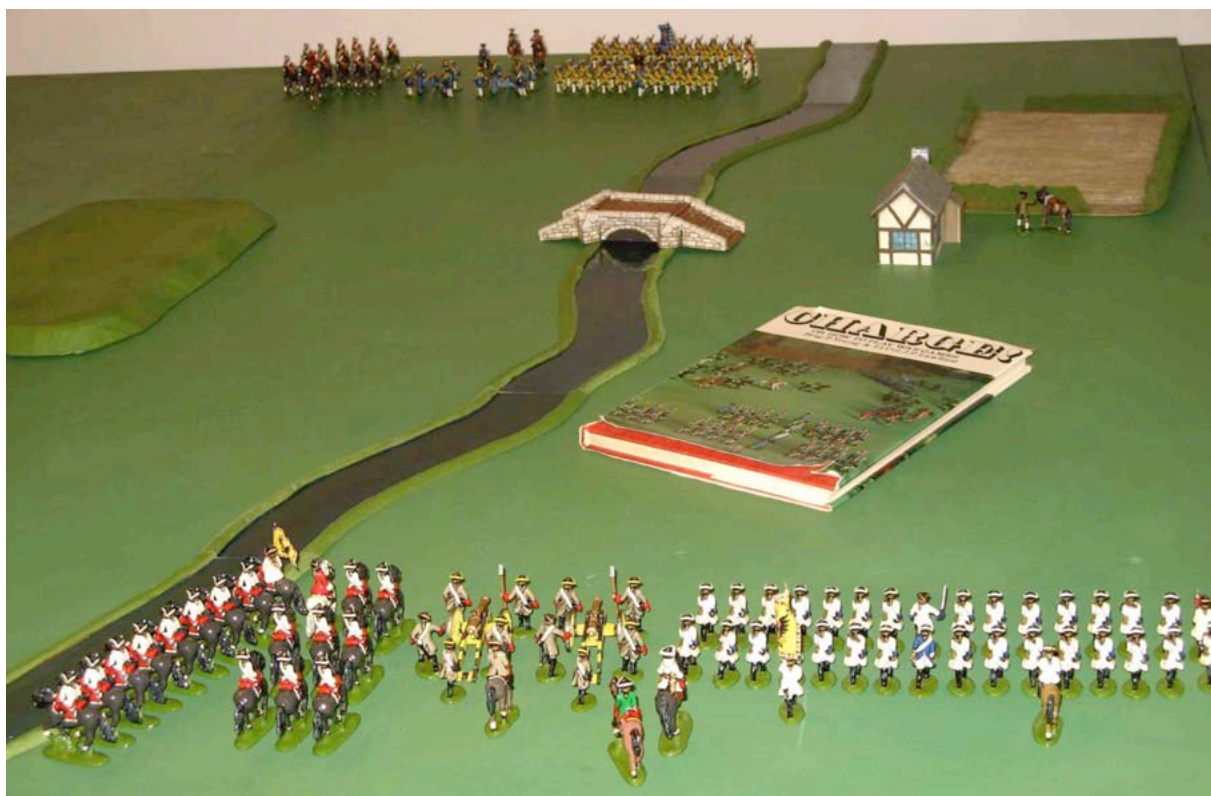
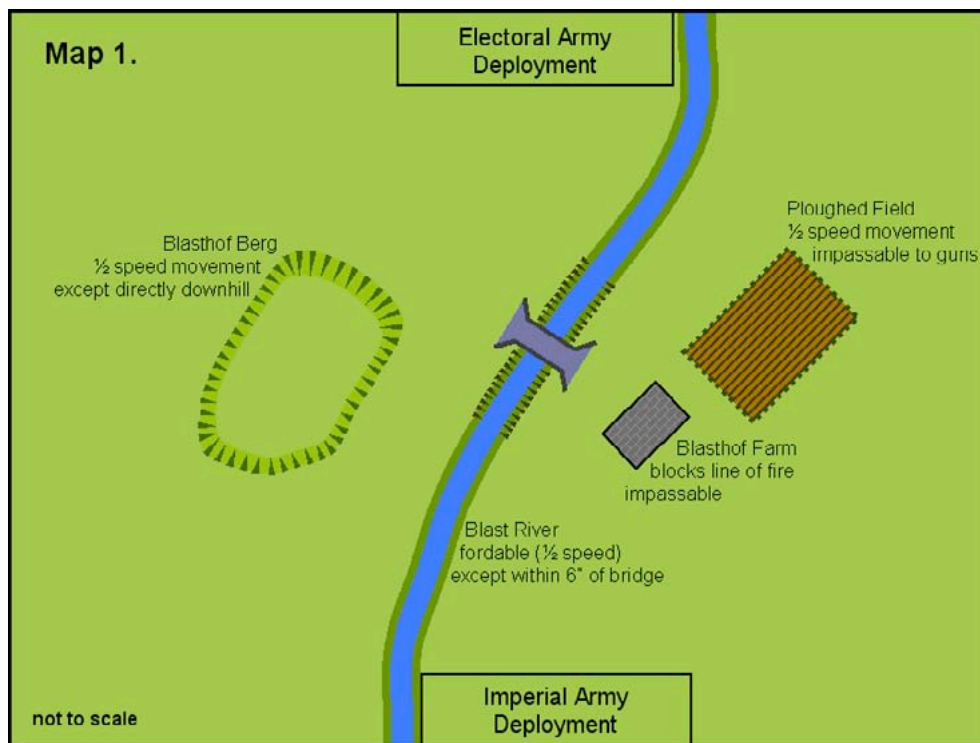
von Kornberg & ADC	
Birkenfeld CR	2 officers & 16 troopers
Hoch und Deutschmeister IR	2 officers & 32 soldiers
Field Artillery	2 guns, 1 officer & 10 gunners
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>65 figures (50% = 33 figures)</b>

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<sup>2</sup> Requiring both ends to be held for 6 uninterrupted moves.

<sup>3</sup> Nightfall would arrive at the end of move 15.

The armies were deployed as per the original game, the Imperial forces being 24" from the nearest point of the bridge, while 24" would take the Electoral forces to the far end of the bridge. From here on everything was left up to chance or the skill of the opposing commanders. Soubise won the toss as per the original encounter, which he had won, and as it proved, an ominous omen for von Kornberg.







## Turn 1

Soubise elected to move first, and the electoral troops stepped out smartly towards the bridge appearing to reject any subtle manoeuvring in favour of the direct approach, half of the infantry moving as if to cross the river

In reply von Kornberg led all his Cuirassiers across the river, determined not repeat the error from the past encounter where by dividing his cavalry either side of the river he sacrificed his superiority in that arm. Simultaneously the Imperial infantry and guns advanced towards the bridge, an impressive, and impassive, wall of white.

## Turn 2

Soubise's infantry left wing, reinforced from the right, pressed on to ford the river, a volunteer being sent ahead to confirm the feasibility of the ford<sup>4</sup>. The infantry right wing and the cannon continued their advance towards the bridge but the Hohenzollern Dragoons to their left slowed their pace, merely edging forward, unwilling to go it alone without infantry support.



As Electoral right wing hesitated Kornberg sent his cavalry out on a sweep designed to pass around the hill and seek out the enemy flank while the Imperial infantry and guns continued their inexorable advance.

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<sup>4</sup> Actually the figure was a marker for the front rank who refused to stand up on the edge of the riverbank.



### Turn 3

The Electoral infantry forded the river its slippery banks causing them to fall into some disorder as they did so<sup>5</sup>. The remaining infantry and artillery continued to close on the bridge. The Dragoons however, faltered at the sight of the Imperial Cuirassiers and did not budge an inch. 'Aha' cried von Kornberg, 'I see your fellows have lost their appetite for a fight!' 'Oh no', retorted Soubise, 'I'd just forgotten to move them, thanks for reminding me.' As von Kornberg cursed under his breath the Hohenzollern Dragoons edged forward without conviction.

As the Imperial cavalry continued their sweep von Kornberg noticed his artillery halt while the infantry marched on. Sending his ADC to ensure the cavalry stuck to the plan von Kornberg galloped back to determine why the artillery had deviated from it. As he splashed across the river his artillery opened fire on the Electoral infantry but at long range achieved nothing<sup>6</sup>.



### Turn 4

On the Electoral right flank the dragoons continued to dither as Soubise diverted the right wing of the Max Josef infantry regiment to bolster his increasingly nervous cavalry. On the right flank the remainder of the Max Josef IR managed to regain some order on emerging from the river, even if it was in an unconventional 3-deep formation. In the centre the Electoral guns opened fire on the Imperial guns but missed prompting von Kornberg to claim he had deliberately opened fire too early last turn in order to lure Soubise to halt his guns and do likewise.

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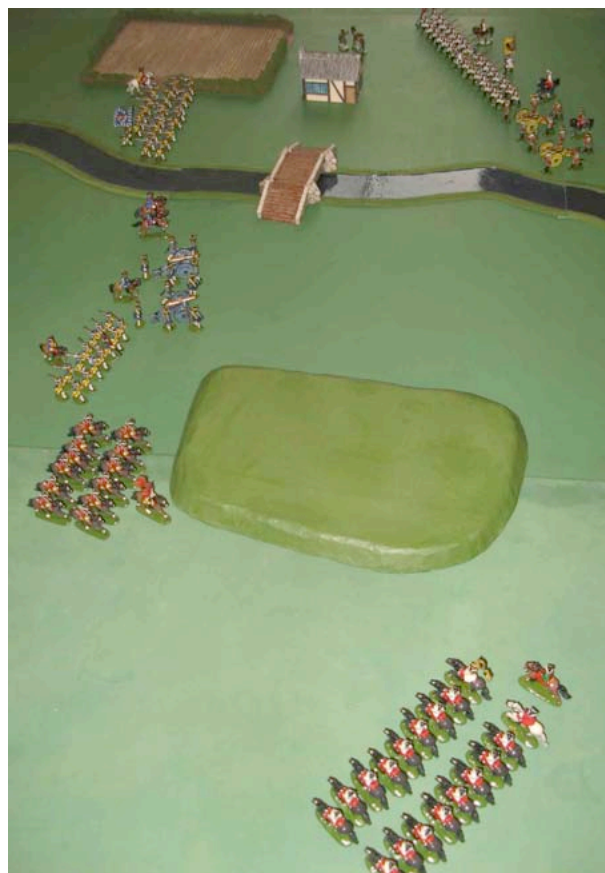
<sup>5</sup> Again caused by the tendency of individually based figures to topple on terrain features.

<sup>6</sup> It has been rumoured by some that the real reason the artillery opened fire was that von Kornberg had forgotten that artillery range in the basic rules is half that in the advanced rules but sought to save face by blaming his unfortunate artillery commander for opening fire too soon.





The Imperial cavalry continued their wide sweep around the Electoral flank bringing themselves at last within charging distance while, as intended, avoiding the Electoral infantry. The Imperial guns under von Kornberg's close supervision limbered up and moved forward catching up with the Hoch und Deutschmeister regiment as it wheeled left to align its line of advance with the bridge.



## Turn 5

The nerve of the Electoral force showed signs of failure with the infantry on left halting and awaiting the Imperial assault while the dragoons on the left started edging backwards to avoid combat with the Imperial cuirassiers. This left the only aggressive manoeuvring to the right wing of the Max Josef regiment, which rapidly stepped up to put some backbone into the Hohenzollern Dragoons. Despite the appalling display of lack of morale fibre the fates smiled on the Electoral forces as their guns managed two hits on the Imperial battery but, in addition to killing a crewman, destroyed one their pieces thus giving their artillery the upper hand in future turns. **(Losses, Empire:Electorate = 1:0)**

Eager to press on, von Kornberg's ADC brought the cuirassiers once more into charge reach of the Electoral dragoons, again sweeping wide to avoid entanglement with the Electoral infantry. The Imperial artillery returned fire against the Electoral guns but missed much to von Kornberg's annoyance, who undaunted continued to advance his infantry bringing the bridge within range of their muskets.



## Turn 6

Feeling confident that his cavalry flanking force would soon start to press its advantage von Kornberg offered Soubise a chance to surrender, but was ignored. Soubise inched forward the left wing of the Max Josef regiment obviously unwilling to leave its flanks uncovered, their freedom of action clearly inhibited by their fear of the Imperial cavalry even when none were in sight. Similarly the dragoons on the Electoral right fell back once again only stopping when able to line up alongside the advancing right wing of the infantry who formed line in anticipation of an Imperial attack. In the centre the Electoral battery now confident in its superiority switched targets to engage the Imperial infantry immediately inflicting 2 casualties. (3:0)



Seeing his infantry being killed by the enemy's artillery and unable to reply, von Kornberg was compelled to press his infantry forward to engage their opposite numbers before the odds became too great. The miserable performance of his remaining gun, firing at and missing the enemy's battery, only confirmed his decision not to waste time on an artillery duel. The ADC leading the cuirassiers, aware that pressure was building in the centre, gave up trying to engineer an engagement against the enemy's cavalry while avoiding his infantry and charged in.

### Turn 7

The Electoral infantry at the bridge now added their fire to that of their artillery as the advancing Imperial infantry was now in musket range, both infantry and guns killing three each reducing the front rank of the Hoch und Deutschmeister regiment to a bloody ruin. On their right flank the infantry were equally successful shooting down two of the charging cuirassiers and holding the other three that charged them to a draw. The dragoons however had more mixed fortunes killing two cuirassiers but losing three of their own number. **(13:3)**





The cuirassiers that were rebuffed returned to the fray rejoining their more successful comrades who had bested the dragoons. At the same time the Imperial artillery finally found the range of the Electoral guns killing two crewmen. The Imperial infantry between Blasthof farm and the river fired back at the enemy infantry killing four, while a detachment was sent round the farm to flank the enemy. **(13:9)**



## Turn 8

The Electoral infantry wheeled a section to counter the Imperial flanking detachment while the reminder continued the fire fight against the infantry to their front inflicting three and half casualties. These losses were added to another two and half casualties from the artillery, for a total of six dead, saw the remains of the Deutschmeister front rank swept away. On the Electoral right flank things were going less well as the dragoons were once again enmeshed with the cuirassiers. The Max Josef infantry shot down another two enemy cavalry and killed another in combat and held off another for no loss. The decision by the Imperial ADC to risk engaging both the infantry and the cavalry was beginning to look like a serious error, meanwhile the cuirassiers maintained their ascendancy over the dragoons in combat killing three including the officer while only losing one in return. (23:12)





The Imperial cuirassiers sensing victory over the enemy dragoons charged in for the third time, but this time most gave the enemy infantry a wide berth only one being contacted. Away from the cavalry combat the Imperial artillery returned to its bad habits way and failed to register a hit, while the musketry from both elements of the Imperial infantry inflicted a total of five casualties on their Electoral opponents. These successes were starting to look like too little too late, as Von Kornberg sensed that his force could not sustain many more casualties without breaking. (23:17)

### Turn 9



The cavalry combat was nearing an end the dragoons clearly having had enough, as some of the unengaged figures did not rejoin the fight. The supporting infantry also disengaged and

reformed to bring all its muskets to bear on any survivors, although in doing so they left a lone musketeer engaged by the enemy cavalry to his fate. The lone musketeer, a veteran of two rounds of combat and with two cuirassiers already to his credit, was undaunted; when his shot failed bring down his opponent he simply applied the bayonet to notch up his third kill<sup>7</sup>. The dragoons failed to follow his example losing three men to the cuirassiers for no return. Meanwhile the Electoral artillery and infantry continued to take their toll on the Imperial infantry killing a further a further three each. **(30:20)**



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<sup>7</sup> This particular musketeer (figure) has been recognised for an outstanding combat performance, his final combat victory requiring a 6:1 score on the dice, with a field promotion to NCO. As a result his hat lace will be upgraded (re-painted) to silver lace.





fight alone only managed to kill two, while the remaining gun still firing at the enemy artillery killed another crewman. The cuirassiers despite finally breaking through to threaten the Electoral artillery also appeared to be running out of steam only despatching a single dragon, albeit for no loss. (30:23)



### Turn 10

With no infantry left to engage, the Electoral guns were swung round to face the threat to their rear posed by the cuirassiers bursting through the remaining dragoons. This proved an unnecessary precaution as this menace was eliminated by a crisp volley from the right wing of the Max Josef regiment; sweeping two more cuirassiers into oblivion and bringing their total for the action to eight without loss!



With the Imperial forces clearly having shot their bolt even the surviving dragoons showed some enterprise with one attempting to capture von Kornberg's ADC. As the Imperial flanking assault collapsed in disarray the Max Josef infantry applied the coup de grace on the left flank killing another three Imperial infantry. The Imperial losses now totalled 35 and exceeded the half the original force, at which point they broke and fled from the field. Soubise congratulated himself on his win and turned to destroying the bridge before the main Imperial army arrived. (35:23)



As a postscript to the action there was still a melee in progress between a solitary dragoon and von Kornberg's ADC. This action was rapidly resolved in the ADC's favour and he galloped off as the dragon toppled to the ground, but the ADC may have escaped from the frying pan only to fall into the fire, as a scapegoat for Von Kornberg's failure. **(35:24)**

## **Post Mortem**

With drinks in hand the outcome of the game was dissected, the primary cause of the Electoral victory being the astounding performance of the right wing of Max Josef Infantry regiment who repeatedly saw off all their opponents without losing so much as a single figure. While it was agreed that von Kornberg had been unlucky, the vagaries of the dice simply added to the enjoyment and both parties agreed it had been great fun. The true worth of the game is that it has inspired me to keep painting with a view to trying out the advanced rules and possibly even setting up a simple campaign.

I hope anyone who has read this far will have enjoyed the account as much as I enjoy reading those in "CHARGE!" and is perhaps inspired others to turn back the clock to the simple days of old.

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