

Review of Battle of Coutras (1587)

by Andrew L. Cozzi

When Russ Gifford told me he was organizing a **Musket & Pike** tournament via VASSAL I was delighted because while I've had the game for many years, I never had the opportunity to play it with anyone, only solo. Now I have the opportunity to play it with *several* players and compare our strategies and tactics.

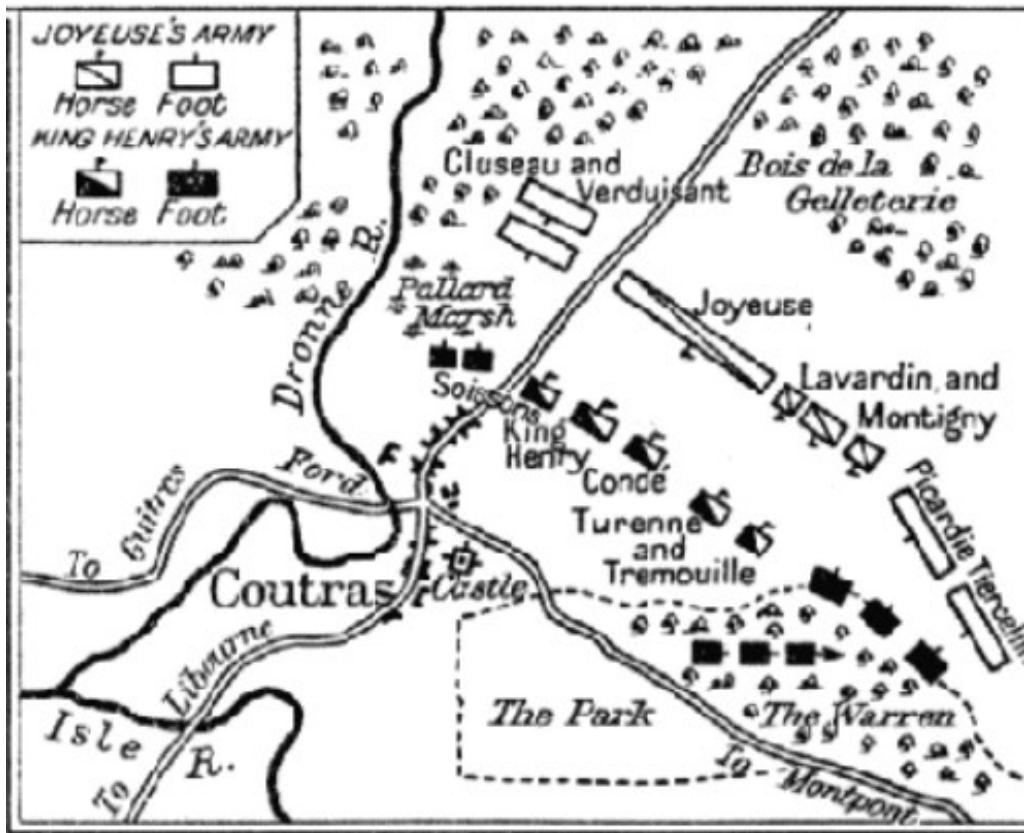


Figure 1: Plan of the Battle of Coutras, from Sir Charles Oman's *The Art of Warfare in the Sixteenth Century*

The battle chosen was the *Battle of Coutras*, part of the *Wars of Religion* between the Catholics and Protestant Huguenots in France.

In front of the village of Coutras, the Huguenots made a decisive defense being protected on the west and south respectively by the small river Dronne and Isle. On the south-east there was a cultivated area that reduced speed and offered also some protection. Behind them there were two roads that would have allowed a safe retreat while screened by cavalry. The area is clear flat land, ideal for cavalry but also for Shot and Pike warfare. The battle was balanced in forces of roughly 5000 infantry and 1800 cavalry on both sides.

Battle of Coutras, 20 October 1587

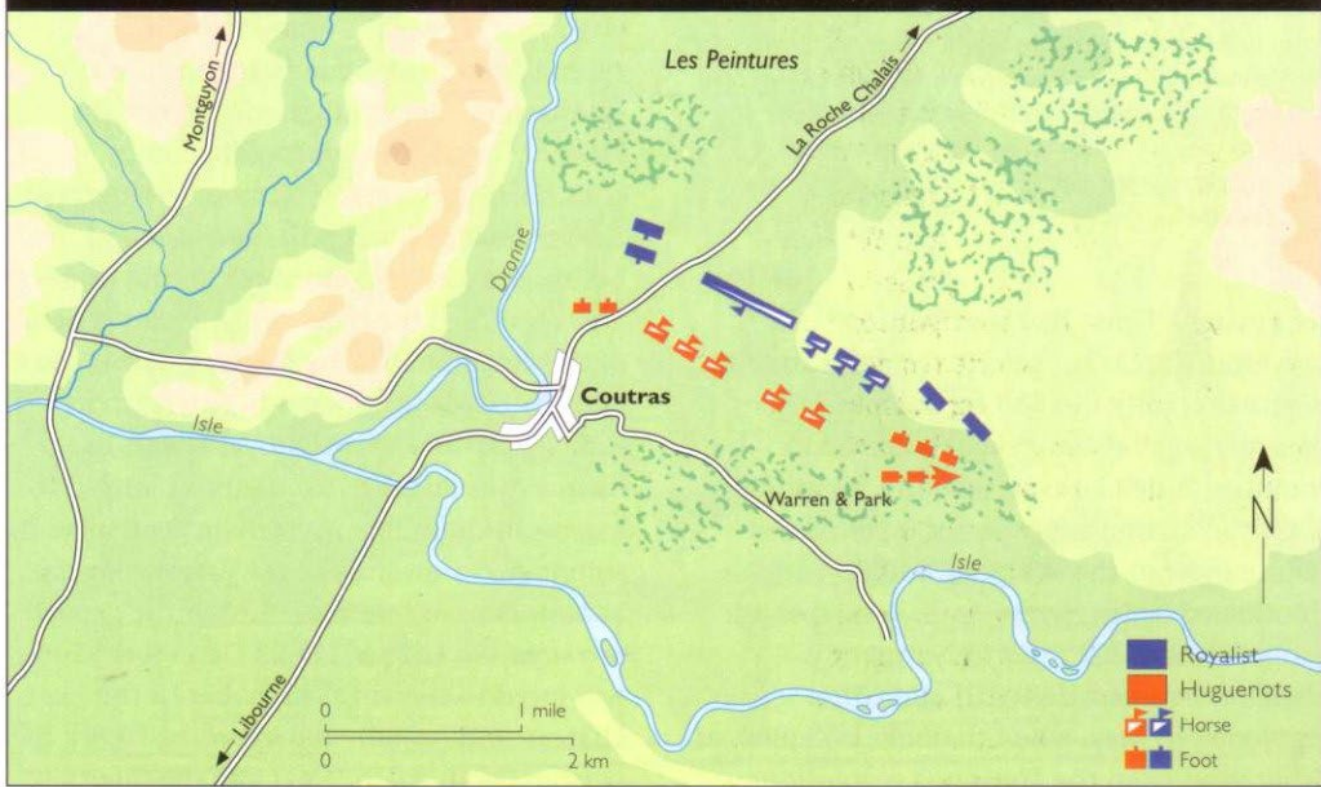


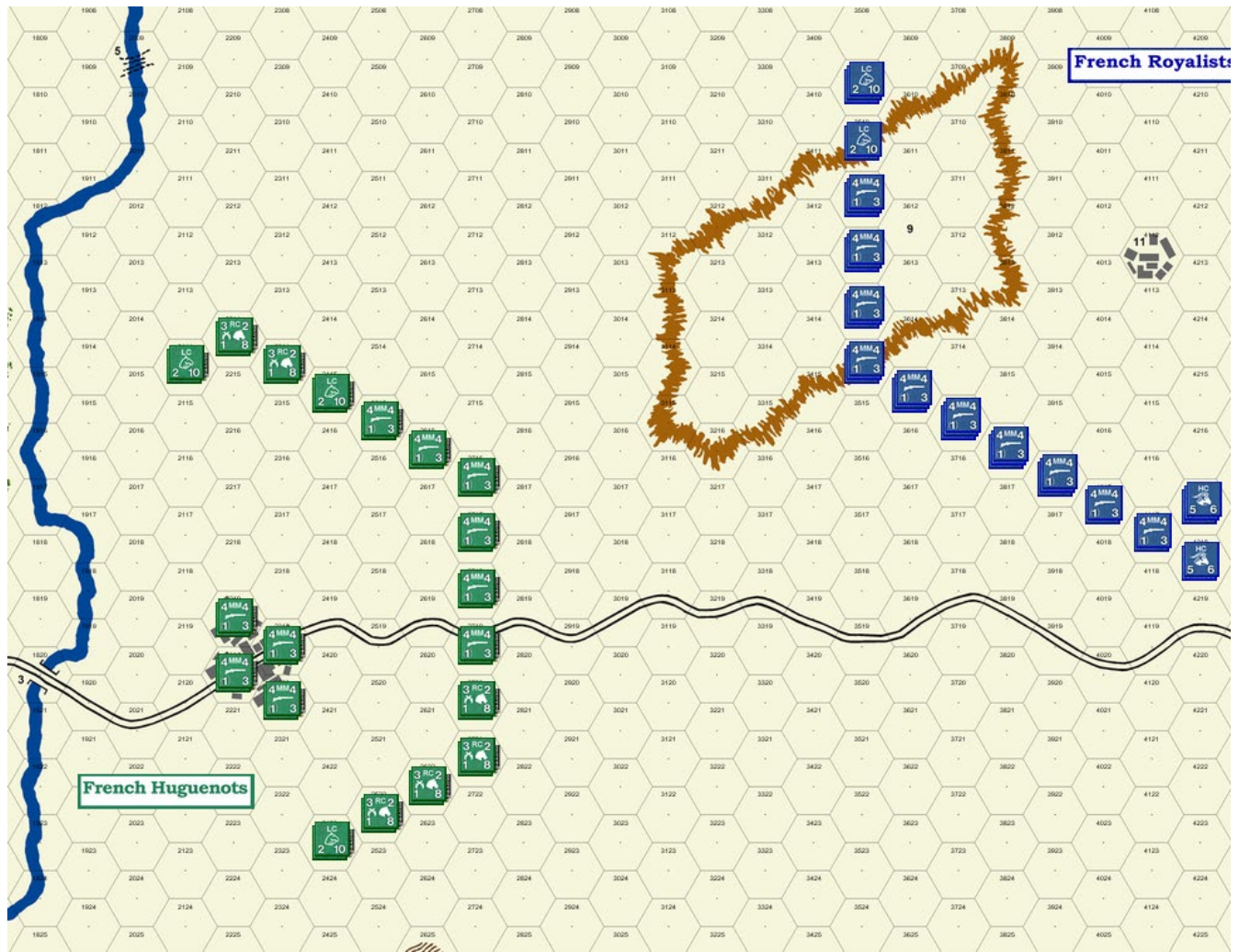
Figure 2: from *"The French Religious Wars 1562-1598" Essential Histories*, Osprey

My opponent George Curtiss, would play the French Huguenots and I the French Royalist. The Royalists need to advance and as a victory condition, occupy the village. The Huguenots need to prevent this from happening.

Our Initial positions were quite standard. Royalists as far forward as possible and the Huguenots as far out as permitted by the rules.

I expected the Huguenots would have applied the standard practice of waiting for the opponent to approach, then fire and move back a few hexes so as to be out of musket range the following turn. As the common objective is the control of the Coutras village four hexes, the Royalist only choice is to advance and try weakening the defender's line and then concentrate forces in the weakest spots that may develop.

Initial positions:



TURN 1: On the first turn the Royalists advanced but remained out of range of the Huguenots muskets while moving the light cavalry on the far right in order to open up George's defenses. My secret objective was to bring the light cavalry over the ford, move south to the road and enter the town from the west, forcing a retreat of some Huguenot forces to protect the city.

The Huguenot player wisely spread his forces but kept them one hex away from my HC in the south part of the map.

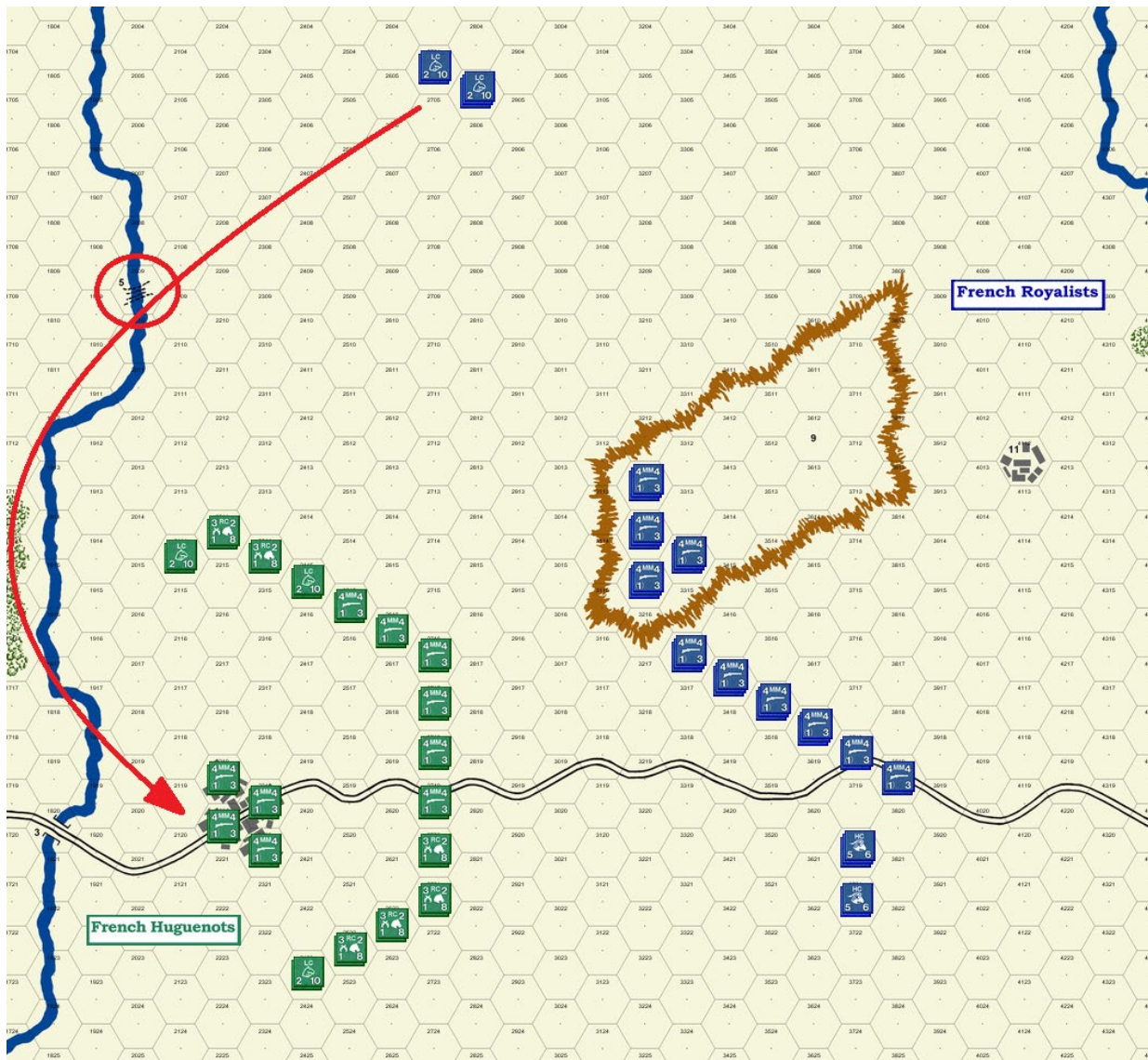


Figure 3: Turn 1

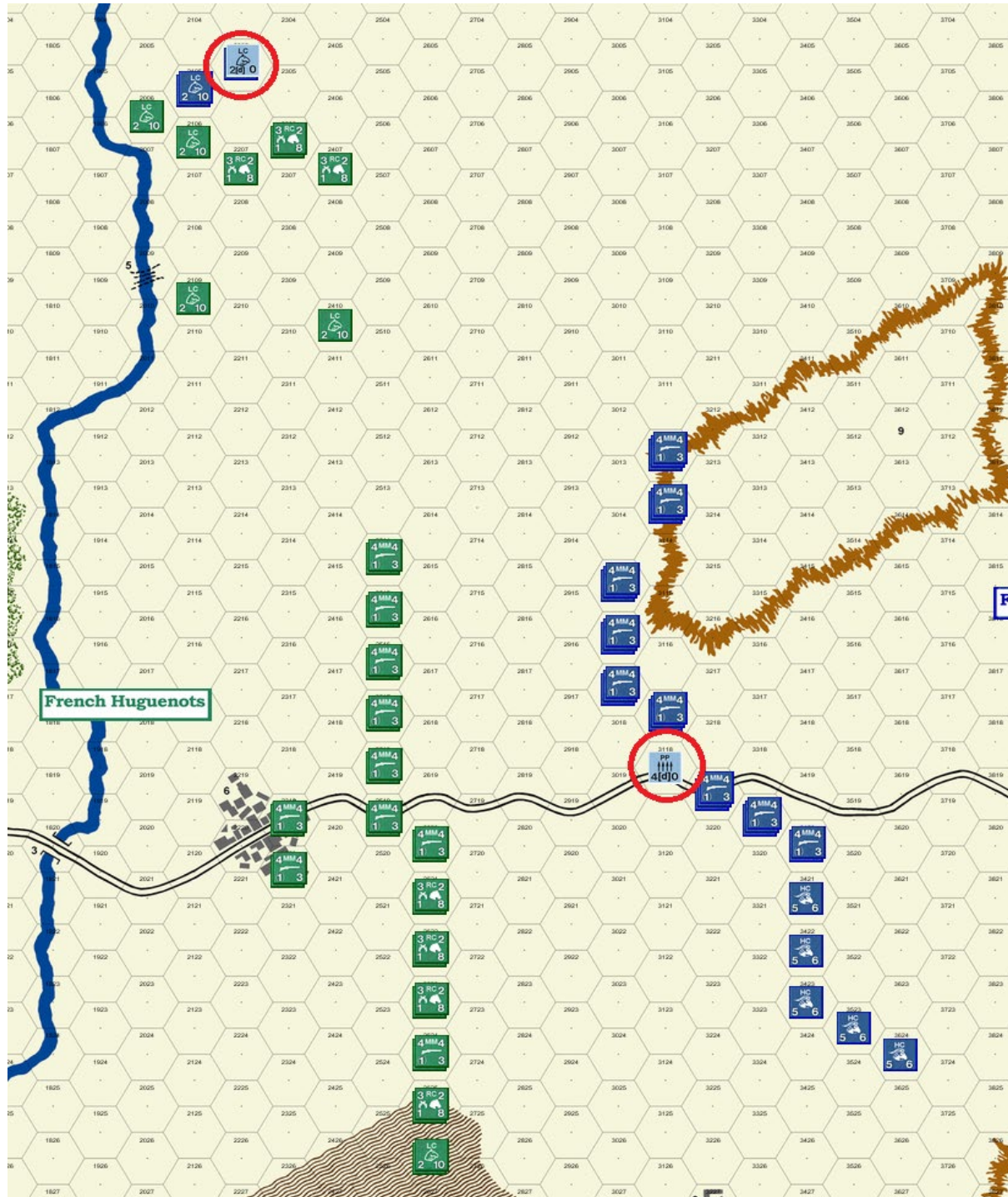
TURN 2:

On turn two the Royalists advanced closer to the city, in part using the road while my light cavalry advanced closer to the bridge.

George wisely saw the cavalry threat and reacted swiftly with his RC and LC. First a caracole fire with his RC followed by a melee in conjunction with their LC.

In the center a concentrated fire managed to eliminate a MM and disrupt a PP.

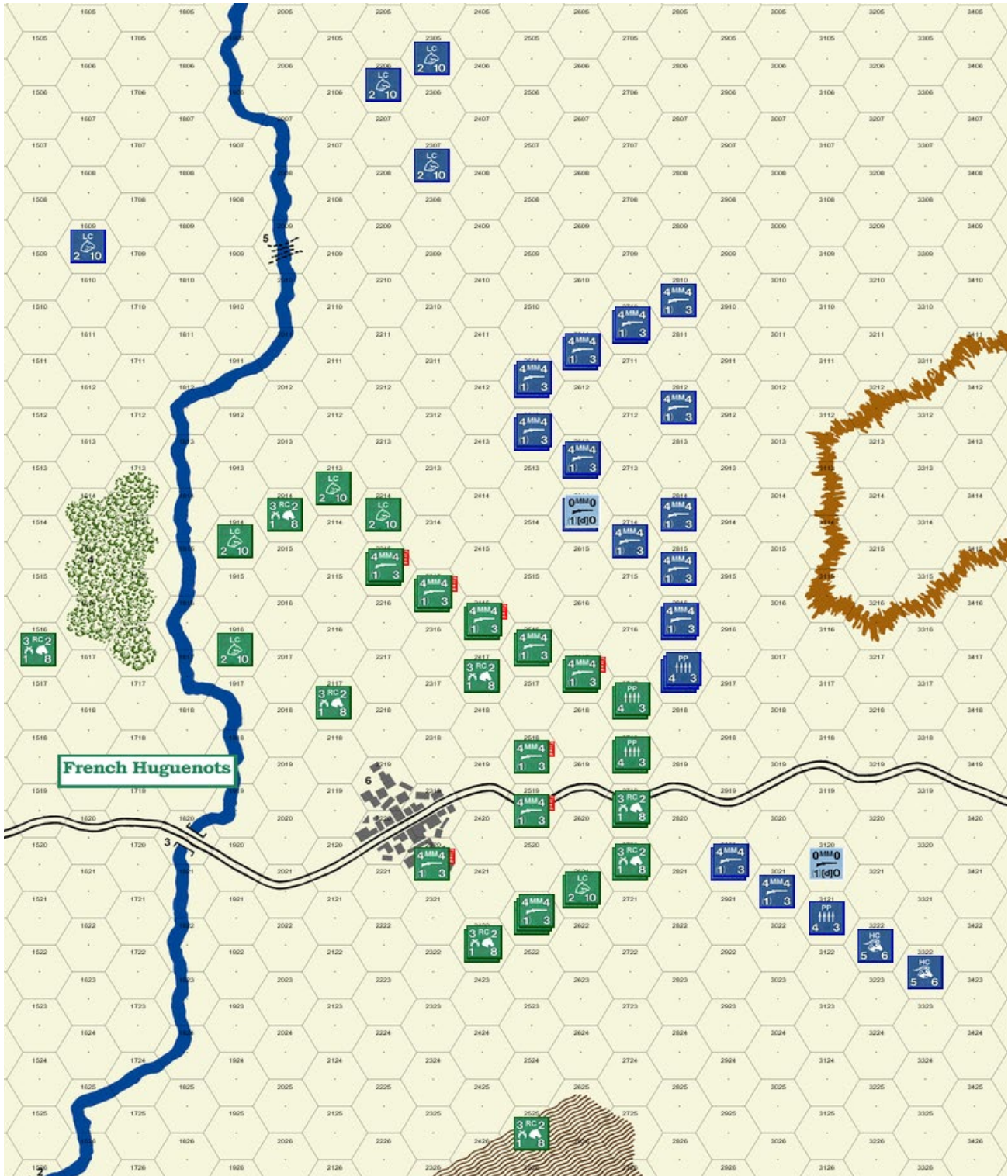
For a sudden rule amnesia... the two units finished their movement on the road that has a lower protection from fire. The Royalists lost their first units.



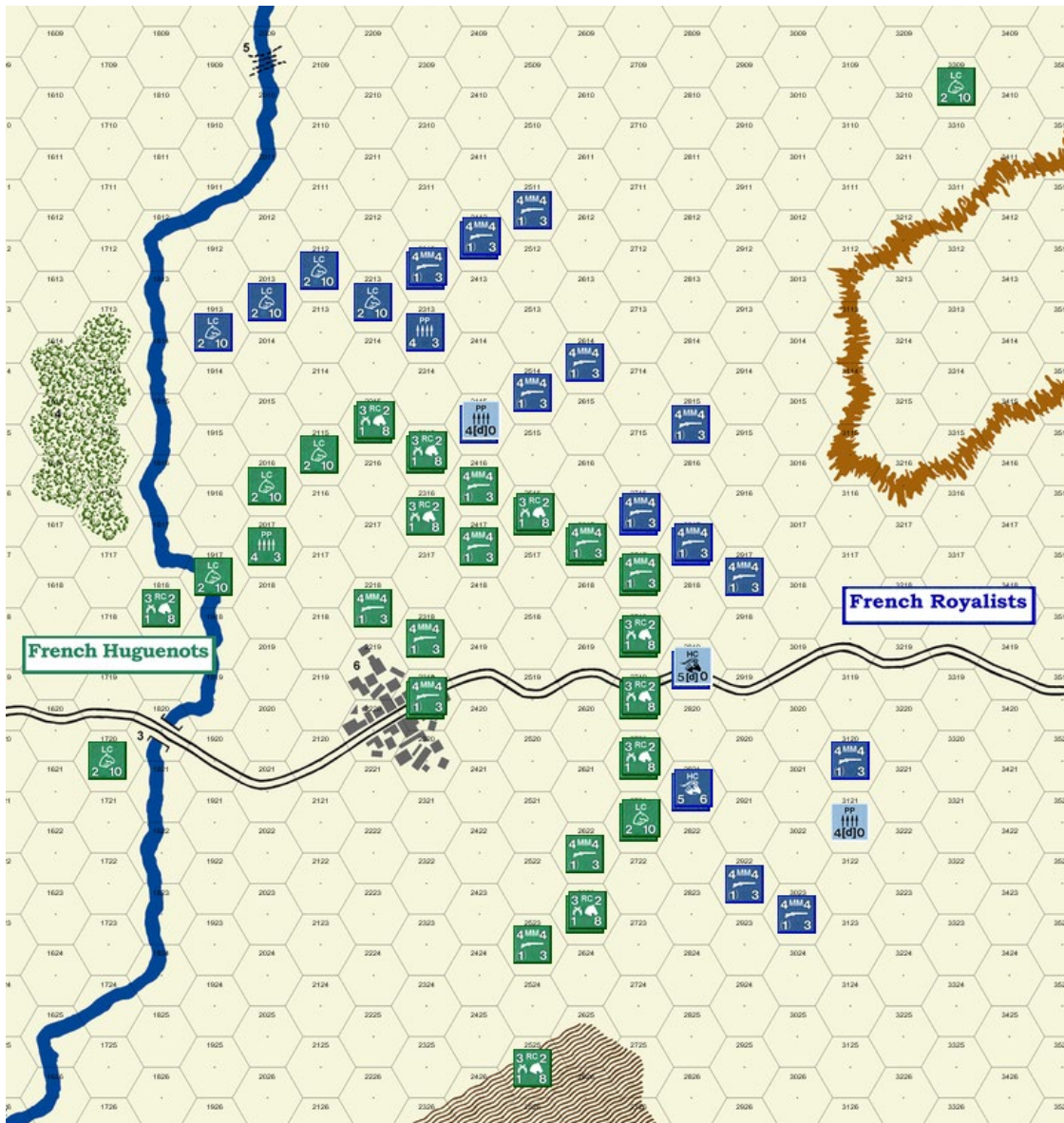
TURN 3 & 4:

The Royalists kept advancing, but their losses started to increase rapidly, creating some holes in their line. Those needed to be closed to prevent any flanking attack from the Huguenots. So the Royalists renounced their initial plan to use their LC to reach part of the city across the river and tried instead to block any possible flanking attack.

As the Royalists get closer to the city and the front starts to shorten, their hope... “new strategy” is to start using the three stacking high abilities.



TURN 5: The Huguenots started to run out of terrain to withdraw after firing and had to make a stand in front of the village. But as the Royalists closed in, they achieved only Disruptions while their losses increased.

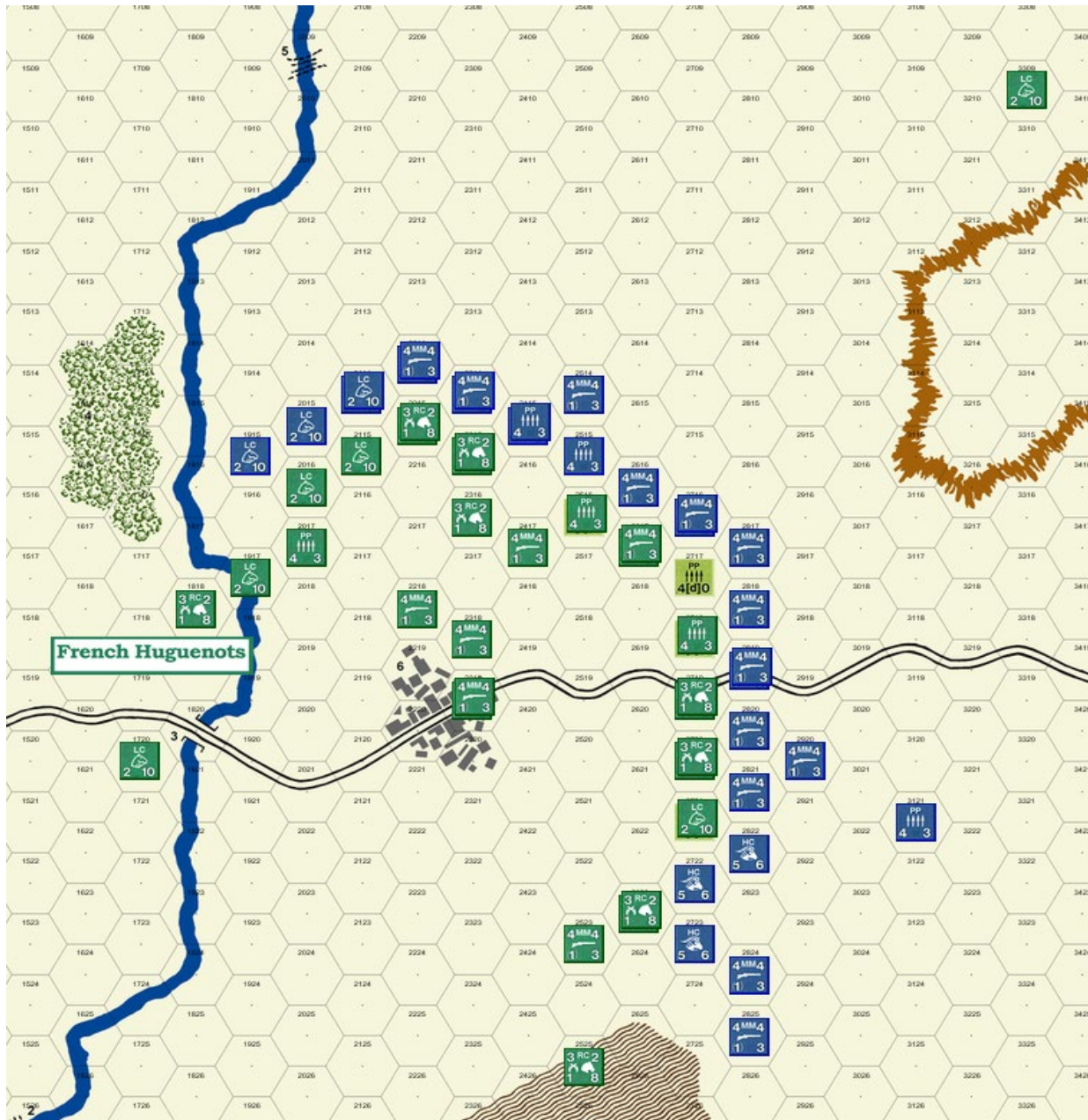


The losses at the end of turn 5 were almost all on the Royalist side. This completely disrupted their plan to start using 3 high stacking but as von Moltke said: *“No plan survives first contact with the enemy”*.

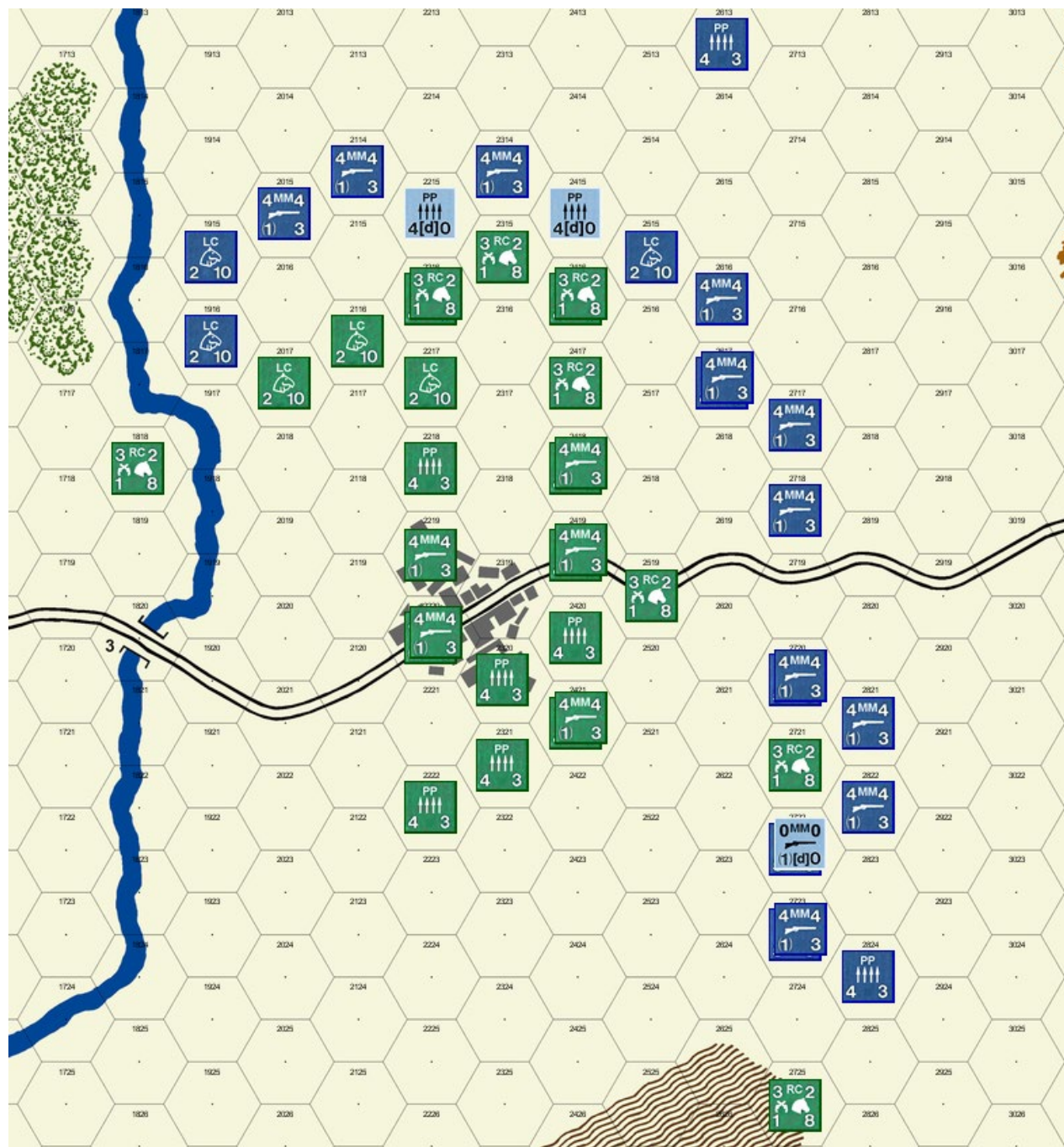
4 MM4 (1) 3									
4 MM4 (1) 3	4 MM4 (1) 3	4 MM4 (1) 3	4 MM4 (1) 3	4 MM4 (1) 3	PP 4 3	PP 4 3	PP 4 3		
HC 5 6	LC 2 10								

TURN 6 & 7: The Royalists continue to close in toward the village and start to cause some losses to the Huguenots. The Huguenots keep a good line around the city delaying any possible Royalist advance. They even keep a RC in the plow fields in the south that threatens a flanking attack against the powerful HC.

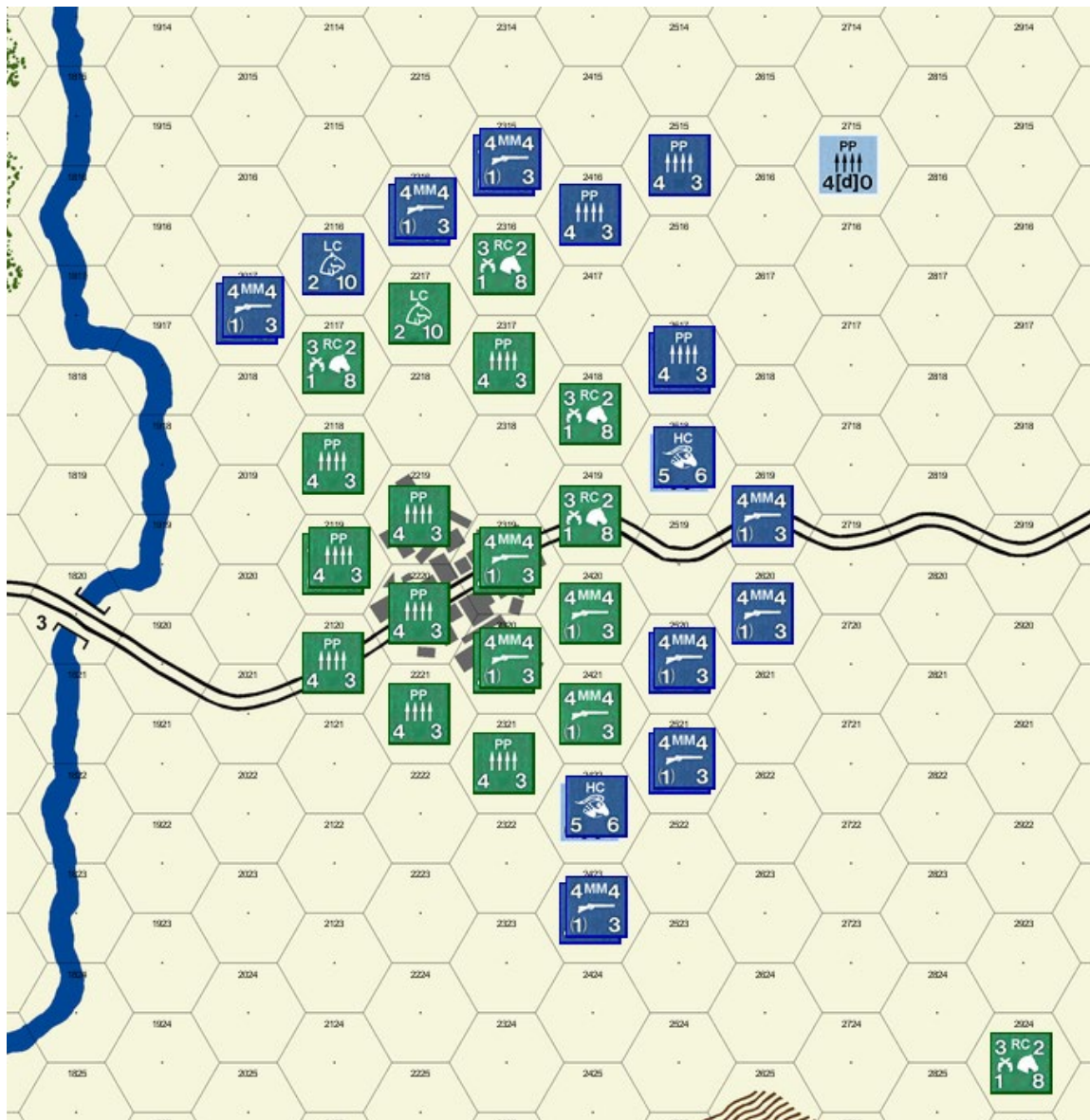
The Huguenots also keep another RC just beyond the stream as protection in the west (East on map).



TURN 8 & 9: The Royalists continue to get closer to the village and try to surround it. Their best chance at this time is in the south where the HC protected by a musket are very powerful. The Huguenots continue to take losses.



TURN 10: The Royalists have more spaces now where to concentrate their forces to create attacks at better odds. The Huguenots try to prevent the Royalist from being able to melee a village hex. The Royalist feels he is running out of time, only two turns to the end. Now though losses are evenly matched between the two sides. The Huguenot RC in the south comes back after being disrupted during a previous melee. This unit will be very important towards the end game.



TURN 11: With a bit of a surprise the Royalist player finds that the Huguenots have formed 4 squares in the city hexes. After consulting frantically the rules, agrees that nothing in the rules forbids forming infantry squares in cities. He therefore places as many forces he can master close to the two most eastern city hexes (western on map).

Highlighted in red, the Huguenot RC that had a few turns prior retreated to the south, now returns and causes a disruption to a Royalist unit close to the city hex during a Reiter caracolla.

If left there disrupted, it would have caused problems to the Royalists because it would have used up a precious space in the ensuing melee next turn for control of the city.



TURN 12: Playing everything on the last die roll the Royalist roll a shameful 5, 5, and 6 making up egregiously for the previously unlucky rolls.

The Huguenots try to repeat the lucky rolls to win at least one of the two city hexes unsuccessfully.

In the end we settled on a draw. Two hexes each is a fair result that makes everyone happy.



I enjoyed playing with George who is a very pleasant person and an excellent player. We found the scenario to be balanced and could have gone either way but in the end the important thing is that the game satisfied both players.

Now we are both looking forward to the next battle! - Andrew L. Cozzi

Editor's note: Fifty years after *M&P's* debut, the clash of arms once more rang around the world. 24 players from the US to the UK (and Thailand!) jumped at the chance to do battle.

This tournament only occurred because the **SPI Opponent's Finder** service allowed me to announce it to hundreds of SPI players around the world. Want in on future action? It is free. Click here: [Finding SPI Opponents \(spigames.net\)](http://spigames.net)

Many thanks to Andrew Cozzi for this great play-by-play, which captures the rapid action and fast changes in fortune *Musket & Pike* offers! And special thanks to Stephen Oliver for his great VASSAL module for *M&P*, whose pictures you see in this report. --RHG