

# BLACK POWDER

Skirmish Wargame Rules for the period A.D. 1600-1870

By  
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## INTRODUCTION

This is a set of wargame rules for simulating skirmish level battles in the "black powder" period of history, roughly A.D. 1600-1870, using 20-28mm size model figures. The rules give unit leaders a number of special characteristics, to allow players to develop them over time in a "role-playing" manner from game to game. The rules treat other figures in a much more general sense. The rules use move-countermove turns, and treat most terrain in a general way, to keep the games relatively fast moving.

Figure-to-Man Ratio: Each figure in the game represents one actual man. Figures should be grouped into units of 10-20, roughly a platoon, raiding party, or a few files. Each unit should have a leader (usually a lieutenant), and some may also have a standard-bearer and a musician. Beginning players should have one unit of perhaps a dozen figures. Experienced players can easily handle three or four units.

Ground Scale: One inch on the game table represents a nominal two paces (five feet), which yields a ground scale of about 25 paces to the foot. A typical game table of six feet by eight feet will thus represent an area of only about 200 paces by 150 paces. Each turn represents an undefined but fairly short period of time. All measurements between figures are made head-to-head.

Mounting Figures: It is good to mount figures on bases for stability and ease of movement. A good base size for foot figures is a square 20mm X 20mm, or a ¾" washer. For horsemen, a good base size is 20mm-25mm wide X 40mm-50mm deep.

## TERRAIN

A game of *Black Powder* will usually be played on a flat rectangular table. It will be covered with green or brownish felt to simulate the ground, and have model hills, trees, houses, etc. placed on it to represent the ground over which our metal or plastic heroes will battle.

Hills: Represent hills by beveled contours cut from foam padding or insulation board about one inch thick, or you may prefer commercial products such as the excellent Geo-hex (which is especially realistic when placed beneath the felt. A contour represents about ten feet of height, just enough to hide a horseman. Since contours are not very high, we assume figures on the same or different contour levels can see one another unless another contour or other blocking terrain intervenes, even across the crestline of the hill.

Woods: Represent woods by a patch of felt or similar material scattered with trees. The tree models are purely representational. Woods are rated either as open or thick. Open woods are generally rated as rough terrain. Sighting within them is 24" (50 paces). All weapons have their range inside cut in half. Stationary figures that do not shoot may claim 50% cover; other figures receive 25% cover. Thick woods are always rated as dense terrain. Sighting inside them is 12".

All weapons have their ranges cut 75%. Stationary figures that do not shoot may claim 75% cover; others may claim 50% cover. The thick brush growing around the edge of a woods prevents sighting past the edge of the woods unless the figure looking and his target are both within one inch of the edge, and thus can peer past it. Figures hidden on the fringe of a woods (within one inch of the edge) are visible 12" away, or at any distance if they shoot.

Obstacles: Walls, fences, and other such obstacles are treated exactly as they appear, as are house models (e.g. doors and windows are as they appear on the model). Figures behind open fences are seen normally. Crawling or stationary figures that do not shoot may claim 50% cover; other figures receive 25% cover. Figures behind rail fences or walls are seen at 48". Crawling or stationary figures that do not shoot may claim 75% cover; other figures receive 50% cover. Figures shooting from two contours or more above a wall or fence may shoot freely at targets more than two inches beyond the obstacle.

Buildings: For figures moving around inside houses, you may wish to make a template of the model off-table, and move the figures around in a hidden manner. Figures looking or shooting out of doors and windows get 50% cover. Figures shooting from behind parapets get 75% cover. Figures shooting out of slits or loopholes get 75% cover and cannot be hit at long range. One figure may try to fight his way through a door or window, but two figures may defend such an aperture.

Brush, rocky ground, etc. is rough terrain. Sighting into or within them is 12". Stationary figures that do not shoot may claim 25% cover; others may claim no cover. All weapons have half normal range.

Swamps are either marshy or wooded, and are always dense terrain. Treat marshy swamp as brush for sighting and cover. Treat wooded swamp as dense woods for sighting and cover.

Deep Water: Figures can generally wade across water at half speed if it is knee-deep or shallower, and at one-quarter speed if it is waist deep. Swimming speed is usually six inches per turn.

## **LEADERS**

A leader is any man who commands others. Leader figures usually represent sergeants, low-ranking officers, tribal chieftains, etc. A leader may, in a series of campaign-style games, start out as a low-ranking novice and advance in skill and authority over the course of many games. Several units may be placed under the command of higher-level leaders.

Abilities: Leaders have four abilities, described below. A leader may not raise any ability more than one point during any encounter.

Activation Points and Command Radius (AP and CR) is his ability to control the figures in his unit. The more experience a leader acquires, the more AP he has and the greater his CR; thus we represent both abilities with the same number. A leader with AP = 4 gets 4 activation points per turn, and has a CR of 4 inches. A leader may activate figures outside his chain of

command at a cost of +1 AP. Leaders start with an AP rating of 4. If the leader takes part in a successful encounter, add 1 point, up to a maximum of 12.

Combat Skill (CS) is his fighting ability. The base is '3'. There is no upper limit. Each time a leader kills three opponents in combat, raise this skill one point.

Marksmanship (MK) is his shooting ability. To start, roll one die and add one. The rules group total points into "poor", "good", and "marksman" levels, as shown:

1-4 = Poor  
5-9 = Good  
10+ = Marksman

If a leader hits three targets at long range during an encounter, raise this ability one point.

Charisma (CH) is the leader's ability to inspire his men. To start, roll one die and use this score. Group total CH points as follows:

- 1-2 = Lackluster: No morale additions
- 3-6 = Competent: +1 on morale tests for figures within two inches
- 7-11 = Inspiring: +2 on morale tests for figures within two inches, +1 on morale tests for figures within six inches.
- 12+ = Heroic: +2 on morale tests for figures within six inches, +1 on morale tests for figures within the leader's CR

If, during an encounter, a leader rallies three figures from rout, raise his CH one point.

### **RATINGS FOR OTHER FIGURES**

The "other ranks" in a force also have certain factors which describe their abilities. If you don't mind the paperwork, you can keep track of these separately for each man. However, it is far simpler to give all the figures in a unit the same factors:

Morale Number (M#) represents a man's basic "willingness to be there". It is a positive or negative integer, which acts as a modifier to all of his morale die rolls. Elite troops would be +1, while militia would be -1 or even -2. Most figures are +0.

Combat Skill (CS) is the same as for leaders. It should range from 2-4, where a 4 would be a deadly fighter born and bred for warfare.

Marksmanship (MK) is the same as for leaders. Generally militia and conscripts are poor, while rangers and Schuetzen types would be expert.

Training (TR) rates how well a man understands and follows orders during a fight. Figures unused to the military, or (more importantly) unused to skirmish warfare, are rated as untrained. It costs +1 AP to activate an untrained figure.

Footmen or horsemen: Figures on foot are footmen; mounted figures are horsemen or cavalry. Horsemen must be classed as heavy or light cavalry. Generally men riding larger horses such as heavy dragoons or cuirassiers are rated as heavy cavalry; those on smaller horses are rated as light cavalry.

Woodsmen: These are men “born and bred” to wilderness fighting, or who have received special training in such warfare. Examples might be rangers, Hungarian *Grenz*, American Indians. Most regular light infantry are *not* woodsmen.

### **STANDARD-BEARERS AND MUSICIANS**

If a unit has a standard-bearer, this figure never tests morale. Any friendly figure within 12” of the standard-bearer unit adds +1 to his morale tests. This bonus also applies to captured enemy standards. If a unit has a musician, and the musician is within two inches of the leader, the leader’s AP is doubled. Standard-bearers and musicians are assumed to be armed like the majority figures in their unit, and so may shoot and fight normally.

### **TURN SEQUENCE**

The two sides trade active and passive roles each turn. Roll a die at the start of the game to see who is the first active side. In a multi-sided game, roll off for the order of active roles. Follow this sequence of events each turn:

1. The active side does all desired (or required) moving and shooting. Mark or record figures that need to reload. Always move leaders last, and judge CR from the start of the turn.
2. The passive side tests morale for figures charged by cavalry, then does defensive fires with figures that have been charged this turn and are loaded.
3. Conduct one round of hand to hand combat with eligible figures.
4. The active side now tests morale to rally routers, then both sides take any remaining morale tests required.

Figures that fail morale and rout make an immediate double-speed rout move at the end of the phase in which they routed.

### **MOVEMENT**

Activating Figures: It takes 1 AP to activate a figure within the leader’s CR. It takes 2 AP to activate a figure beyond this distance. An activated figure may act normally. Figures that are not activated are isolated.

Isolated Figures: An isolated figure may not move or shoot voluntarily except as follows: The figure may do a defensive fire if charged. The figure may move in a straight line toward a visible leader able to command it. The figure may move in a straight line away from all visible enemies. Isolated figures may not rush. Isolated figures fight normally in hand-to-hand combat.

Moving Your Figures: Footmen may move freely in any direction each turn. They pay no turning costs. A horseman must pay two inches for each 45 degree facing change he makes during his move. Horsemen moving a total of six inches or less may make any number of turns. Horsemen moving twelve inches or less may turn a total of 90 degrees. Horsemen

moving more than twelve inches may turn a total of 45 degrees. Figures violating this rule fall off their horses and are disabled on a die score of 4-6.

Rushing: A figure may make a double-speed “rush” move in a straight line. This is usually done to reach the enemy, but may be performed at any time. A figure that rushes may not rush again until it rests one turn.

Charging: A charge is a move to make contact with the enemy. No morale test is needed to charge, but footmen may not charge horsemen who moved on their most-recent turn.

Bayonet Hedge: A line of eight or more figures in base-to-base contact, armed with bayonets, who were stationary and did not shoot on their last move may claim to be in a bayonet hedge. Men in a hedge formation need not test morale vs. horsemen, and the horsemen get no bonus vs. these figures in combat. A second rank of figures touching the front rank of a hedge may shoot straight forward through their comrades. Naturally a hedge charged from the rear (charger starts the turn behind the hedge) does not count as a hedge.

Boats and Canoes: TBD

Costs for Actions: The list below is not complete, but gives a general idea of the movement cost to perform various actions:

Horse with two riders:	2/3 speed	Climb a ladder:	4” per turn
Mount or dismount:	1/2 turn	Climb a rope:	2” per turn
Carry a friend:	1/2 speed	Smash down a door:	4 turns
Set up a ladder:	1 turn	Climb through a window:	1 turn

## SHOOTING

Procedure: To shoot with a figure, measure the range from the shooter’s head to the target’s head. The shooter must have a line of sight, unless throwing a grenade. Figures may shoot up to 45 degrees to the left or right of their front facing, except that horsemen may shoot up to 45 degrees left and 180 degrees right. Look up the base score to hit on the Shooting Chart and modify it if required. For example, if the base score to hit was a 4 and a –2 modifier applies, then you must roll a 6 to hit your target with that figure. If the modified required score is 7 or more, then you must roll a 6, then a 4-6 on a second roll, in order to hit your target. If the score needed is an 8, roll a 6 then a 5-6; if a 9, roll a 6 then a 6; if 10+, no hit is possible.

Type of Fire: Nearly all the shooting in a game at this scale is individual aimed fire; there are no volleys. However, wall guns and grenades have an area of effect.

Wall Guns and Grenades: Wall guns and grenades have a four-inch-diameter area of effect, or burst circle. Place the burst circle with its far edge at the desired range. Any figures whose heads are within the area of effect are eligible targets. After placing the circle, the shooter and the target each roll a die. If the target’s score is higher, the target player may then move the burst circle up to two inches in any desired direction, but not past the far range of the weapon. For wall guns, also take two straight lines from the shooter to the outer edges of the circle. All

targets in this “cone of fire” are also eligible. A solid obstacle more than waist high on the same or a higher contour level stops the cone at that point.

Artillery: Cannon are very powerful in a game at this scale; canister fire from a six-gun battery could easily sweep the entire game table. Artillery rules are TBD at this time.

Shooting and Moving: It usually takes very little time to aim and fire a weapon; therefore, a figure may claim to shoot at any point during its move, taking two inches off its movement to do so if footmen, and at no cost if horsemen. Figures wishing to charge the enemy, however, must shoot at the start of their move.

Shooting Between Friends: It can be risky to try and shoot through a gap between two friends. If the gap is six inches wide or more, there is no restriction. Otherwise there must be a one inch gap between friendly bases for each one inch distance from the firer's base to the gap. So if the gap is three inches away, it must be three inches wide to shoot through. The exception is a massed unit. One rear rank of a massed unit may shoot straight forward through the front rank of the same unit, if the figures are in base-to-base contact.

Reloading: Many weapons have a reload time of one or more turns. To reload, a figure must be stationary that turn. Turns of reloading need not be consecutive. A good way to mark reloading figures is to place a black washer under the figure until it reloads. If the reload time is “0”, the figure may shoot and reload on the same turn if he does not move. If it does move, it must reload one turn.

Massed Targets: A group of four or more figures all with less one inch or less between bases is a massed target. Massed targets are easier to hit with individual aimed fire.

Defensive Fires: A defensive fire is possible for figures with loaded weapons who are charged, and who are not routing. The target must be the man or figures charging the shooter. The range is taken as one inch, and the target cannot claim any cover. A defensive fire counts as shooting for the figure's next active turn.

Cover: There are three levels of cover, 25%, 50%, and 75%. More than 75% cover means the target cannot be hit.

Priority of Fire: Figures must follow this priority of fire when selecting their targets:

- A leader, and any man within two inches of a leader, may shoot at any eligible target the player chooses.
- Other figures must shoot at the nearest target, or at another target within four inches of the nearest target.
- No more than two figures may shoot at a given target unless the extra figures have no other targets, and no more than one figure may shoot at a leader, standard-bearer, or musician unless there are no other eligible targets.

Effects of Hits on Leaders: When a leader is hit by shooting, roll to see the effect of the hit:

- 1-3: Light wound. The leader is helpless for one turn. There are no other effects. Two light wounds equal a heavy wound.
- 4-5: Heavy wound. The leader is helpless for two turns. He must then move half speed, and suffers a -2 shooting penalty. Figures fighting against him in combat get a +2 bonus. Two heavy wounds equal death.
- 6: Dead! Better luck next game.

## **COMBAT**

Eligible Figures: Combat takes place between figures in base-to-base contact; these figures are said to be “engaged”. If several figures on each side are engaged, neither side may “gang up” several figures against a single opponent unless some figures have no other unengaged enemy figures at which to strike. If several figures do manage to gang up on one opponent, the attacking player strikes with one figure, but may claim a bonus for outnumbering the enemy, and the lone defender strikes back at that attacking figure only.

Procedure: To conduct a round of combat, each engaged figure rolls one die against its opponent, and the two sides compare scores. If one figure’s score is two or more higher than the enemy’s score, the enemy is hit and dead/disabled. If a leader is hit, roll for effects as above under Shooting. Modify each man’s score according to the combat modifiers listed on the playsheet.

Weapon Superiority: In combat, weapons are ranked by superiority (see the playsheet). A heavy handarm is a two-handed chopping weapon such as a halberd, Lachaber axe, etc. A lance in a continuing combat counts as a regular handarm. Improvised weapons are clubbed muskets, pitchforks, etc.

Moving out of Combat: A figure may retreat from combat on its turn as long as it does not come within one inch of any other unengaged enemy figures. When a figure retreats from combat, the enemy gets a free strike at the retreating figure; take this strike during phase one of the turn.

Example of Combat: A cuirassier attacks a lone footman in the open. The cuirassier gets a +1 for horseman vs. footman in the open, and +1 for heavier armor. The footman gets no bonuses. The cuirassier scores a 3. The footman scores a 4. The cuirassier’s final score is a  $3+2 = 5$ . The footman’s score is a 4. Since the difference is only 1, there is no effect and the fight will continue next turn.

## **MORALE**

When to Test: Figures need to test morale under three conditions during a game. When a horseman charges a footman in the open who is not part of a bayonet hedge, the footman must test morale. Each time a unit suffers 1/3 losses, or if the unit was hit by volley fire, each man in the unit must test morale.

Procedure: To test morale, roll one die for each affected man, and modify the score as listed under morale modifiers on the playsheet. If positive final score (‘1’ or more) means the man passes the test. A final score of zero or less means the man fails the test and routs.

Routing figures are trying to leave the scene as quickly as possible. A routing man must move as directly as possible away from the enemy until he leaves the game table. Figures move double speed on the first turn of a rout. Routing figures that cannot avoid coming within one inch of an enemy figure surrender. Either just remove them from play, or have them escorted off the table, with one captor per ten prisoners required. The referee may rule out surrender in some scenarios, substituting a fight to the death instead.

Rallying: A leader may try to rally figures from rout. A leader may try to rally any figure within four inches. Take a normal morale test for the figure; if it passes, it stops routing and may act normally next turn. Figures that rally may not use charge speed until they rest for one turn. Men belonging to a unit reduced to half strength or less may not rally from rout.

Example of a Morale Test: A lone footman is charged by a cuirassier in the open. The footman has a morale number of 0, and his unit has suffered 6 out of 10 figures losses. His leader is two inches away and is competent. The player rolls a 4 for the man. He has no basic modifier for M#. He suffers -2 for 50% losses to his unit, -2 for foot charged by cavalry, and +1 for competent leader within 2", for a total of -3.  $4 - 3 = 1$ , so he passes the test.



## BLACK POWDER – CHARTS

Turn Sequence	Leader Hit Results (1D6)
1. Active side does movement and shooting.	1-3: Light wound, helpless one turn.
2. Passive side tests morale vs. cavalry charges, then does defensive shooting.	4-5: Heavy wound. Helpless two turns, then –2 penalty on all rolls and move half speed.
3. Fight one round of combat	6: Dead.
4. Active side rallies routers.	Two light = heavy, two heavy = dead.
5. Take general morale tests.	

Movement Table and Costs to Cross Terrain Types						
Figure Type	Base Move	Clear	Road	Rough	Dense	X-Obst
Woodsman	8	1:1	1:2	1:1	2:1	1"
Other footman	8			2:1	4:1	1"
Heavy cavalry	12			4:1	No entry	2"
Light cavalry	16			3:1	No entry	2"
Wagon or Cart	6			4:1	No entry	Cannot
Figures may charge in a straight line at double speed; they may not charge again until they rest one turn. Figures move double speed on the first turn of a rout.						

Shooting Table					
Weapon	Base to Hit	Range		Re-load	Modifiers to Score to Hit
		Close	Far		
Spear	5	4	8	0	Far range: -2
Bow	5	9	18	0	Firer mounted: -1
Pistol	4	4	8	1	Each linear 12" the target moved: -1
Matchlock	4	12	36	3	Non-gunpowder vs. armor: -1
Carbine	4	9	18	2	Each 25% cover (to 75%): -1
Flintlock	4	12	36	2	Poor shot/Expert shot: -1/+1
Grenade	4	6	-	1	Aimed fire vs. massed target: +1
Wall gun	4	36	72	2	
Flintlock rifle	3	36	72	4	Need 7 to hit? Roll 6, then 4-6.
Cap and ball rifle	3	36	72	1	Need 8 to hit? Roll 6, then 5-6.
Breechloading rifle	3	36	72	0	Need 9 to hit? Roll 6, then 6 again.
Repeating pistol	4	6	12	0*	Need 10+ to hit? No hit possible.
A reload of 0 means the figure can shoot and reload on the same turn if it does not move.					
*Until out of bullets, then 1 turn to reload each chamber.					

Weapon Superiority	Combat Modifiers	Morale Modifiers
Lance, 1 <sup>st</sup> round	Horseman in open vs. foot* or lighter cav: +1	M# of tester: +/-#
Heavy handarm	Outnumber target (per man): +1	Unit at 50% losses or more: -2
Bayonet, handarm	Superior weapon: +1	Foot charged by cavalry*: -2
Improvised weapon	Heavier armor: +1	Leader's morale bonus: +?
	In defensive cover: +1	Flag within 12": +1
	Enemy on rope or ladder: +1	
	The maximum bonus is +2	Bayonet hedges do not test morale vs. frontal cavalry charges
	Score difference of 2 = enemy dead	
	*Ignore if vs. bayonet hedge	