Seven Years War: Adapting from the Napoleonic Era to Linear Warfare.

John Tiller Software has put out a number of games over the years for the Napoleonic Era (and more recently, Wars of the French Revolution.) However, the era of Linear Warfare found in Seven Years War is going to take some effort for Napoleonic players to adapt to, as this game has some subtle changes which will influence your style of play. I'd like to take a few moments to highlight the changes you'll see, and how they may affect your play.

Infantry: Infantry will likely be the single biggest change in the game for you for a variety of reasons. The armies of the Late Linear era were trained and drilled a bit differently than the mass armies of the Napoleonic era, and that leads to some extremely important changes.

1) Column. By far, the most important change is column. The attack column formations that were widely used by most nations in the Napoleonic era simply hadn't been developed at this point. The French were already starting to take some of the theoretical steps down that road, but even those were halting steps. Nobody really had anything resembling a true "Column of Attack" at this point.

Because of this, this game treats the column formation very differently than the Napoleonic games. In effect, the values have been changed to make the column a "Column of March" (which did exist.) Specifically, the firepower value of columns has been gutted. More importantly, this game introduces a Column Melee Modifier, and that modifier is generally a very harsh penalty for units that melee in column. In effect, columns should not be able to successfully melee under anything but the most favorable odds.

Combine this with the fact that the rules do not allow you to change formation while in D status, and that makes column infantry extremely vulnerable. A unit can be "trapped" in column formation for a number of turns, unable to do much of anything useful.

Historically, units would deploy into line well away from the enemy, and certainly before they came into contact. Because units in D status cannot change formation, this would be a good practice for players to follow here as well.

2) No square. The infantry units of this era very rarely formed square. Instead, they would often turn the 3rd rank to the rear if needed to repulse a cavalry attack. Therefore, infantry units are typically restricted from forming square. However, as I'll mention in regards to Cavalry, the lower charge value (combined with the overall lower stacking values) means that good order infantry can generally stand to a frontal charge.

3) Very few light troops. While there were some highly trained light infantry (most notably the Austrian Grenzer units) line units were not trained to use skirmishers in a Napoleonic fashion. The only light troops you'll get are specific light infantry units. The Light Troops generally fit into one of two categories. You have the trained Light Infantry, most notably the Austrian Grenzers and then Jaegers in the service of the North German States, who were highly trained light infantry. Then, there were more hastily raised troops (such as Frederick's "Freikorps") which tended to be of considerably lower quality.

Cavalry:
Lower Charge Values: Cavalry Charge Values are generally lowered 1 step across the board compared to the Napoleonic Games. While the cavalry of this era was better than say the Era of Marlborough in the charge, it's still not as well developed as you would see a few years later. The Prussians led the way in reforming Cavalry, especially heavy Cavalry.

This means that you'll need to choose your moment to use Cavalry fairly carefully. They'll only really be effective against other Cavalry, tired and disrupted infantry, or from the flank and rear. One thing the M&P engine allows is a melee bonus for a given unit, and most Prussian Cavalry carries this bonus (+1 for Light Cavalry, and +2 for Heavy.)

Artillery:
Artillery is less changed than the others, aside from being a bit less mobile than you may be used to. As in Renaissance, the previous game in the M&P series, heavier guns such as 24pdrs need to "set up" once unlimbered, so may take several turns before they are able to fire. The famous Frederickian Horse Artillery is actually pretty rare. It was only ever a single unit, and was in very few battles that are represented in the game.

Note, the decision was made to assume that the 3 pound battalion guns most armies used are always attached to the mother unit. This cuts down somewhat on counter clutter, and is in keeping with the era. They are factored into the base firepower of the units, which tends to increase the firepower of line infantry units in game.

Other considerations:
1) Stacking. The stacking limits in the game are quite low compared to the Napoleonic games. This is a reflection of the different doctrine of the era. This does make maneuver and getting good melee odds more difficult.
2) Command. The armies are always going to be a bit less nimble in their command arrangements. Command and control was still in an early stage of development at this point, and you didn't really have permanent divisions or brigades, but these things would be done ad hoc on the battlefield. Also, one big rule change is that detached units cannot melee. This is to reflect the importance of command, and will tend to slow down the action a bit.

Phases vs. Turns

A large change is the default Optional Rules set as the defaults for this game. Manual Defensive Fire is automatically selected and so the default mode of play for SYW is in Phases rather than Turns, which the Napoleonic series defaults to. Both systems have the ability to use either format, but during development it was determined that playing in Phases, with discrete movement, fire & melee phases provided a closer "feel" to the period we were trying to model. If you do not wish to play in Phases you simply need to de-select the Manual Defensive Fire optional Rule when you begin a scenario.

Visibility

We have made the default day time visibility range set to 18 hexes. One of the complaints people have voiced is being able to see too much, and hence having more information available to them than a historical commander might. By radically reducing the visibility it will require more scouting to gain intelligence, which should give a bit more of a accurate feel to the battlefield.