Bolt Action Mass Battles

It's time to unleash the full force of your armies as Alessio Cavatore brings us some exciting new **optional rules** for massive games of Bolt Action:

The rules of Bolt Action have been designed for platoon-level engagements involving a few reinforced platoons, and played on a 6' x 4' table. They play best with twenty to fifty infantry, one or two artillery pieces and one to four vehicles (counting transports and AFVs).
However, wargamers being wargamers, we have all sooner or later faced the challenge of how to handle a massive game with many more units than that, and/or played on a gigantic surface.
The optional rules presented in this article should help with running such larger games.

MORE UNITS THAN YOU HAVE ORDER DICE?

Perhaps the most common 'size' problem is having more units in your force than you have Order dice for. Well, obviously you need to buy more dice! Alternatively, you can of course use normal dice, as suggested on page 10 of the rulebook.

However, if neither solution is immediately available, you should not let that deter you from playing a game. You can set an Order Dice Limit (ODL) – a maximum number of dice for both players, say for example 12 dice, which conveniently is the amount of dice in a pack of Order dice.
Your force can then comprise of any number of units, but you know that the ODL you have is 12, or whatever other limit you decided for. At the end of the turn, you and/or your opponent will then have

some units that have not been activated that turn – those units will do nothing that turn and simply remain where they are.

This ODL rule can generate a few rules issues, which should be covered by the exceptions listed below. It is important to know that these exceptions to the normal rules only apply as long as you have more units left in your force than the ODL. When the number of units left in your force is equal to or lower than the ODL, the rules revert to normal.

o   When a unit that has not been ordered yet that turn is destroyed, do not take an Order die out of the cup. If a unit that has already been ordered that turn is destroyed, keep its die aside until the end of the turn and then put it back into the cup at the beginning of the next turn. These two differences of course mean that you cannot keep track of the enemy units destroyed using their die, so you will have to write it down instead, if it matters.

o   If a unit is shot at and wishes to go Down, but you have run out of Order dice, the unit can still go Down as normal, and you don't need to mark it as Down (as anyway that turn they cannot be activated any longer). These "pseudo-Down" units however will not have the option of losing a pin marker and retaining their Down order at the end of the Turn, as they don't have a Down Order die next to them in the first place!

o   If a recce vehicle wishes to execute an escape move, but you have run out of Order dice, the vehicle cannot make its escape move.

o   If a unit that has not been ordered yet that turn wishes to fire at chargers, but you have run out of Order dice, the unit cannot fire.

o   Anything else? Let us know and we'll add it here!

MULTI-PLAYER GAMES

If more than two players want to join forces and play in a (large) multi-player game, there normally are two different ways in which this can happen: a force made of two or more forces of the same nationality, or a force made of two or more forces of different nationalities. Let's look at these in some more detail.

SINGLE-NATIONALITY MULTIPLAYER FORCES

These forces are by far the easiest ones to handle, as all they are really is just a large normal force. So, if for example player A has a 1000 pts force (made of one or more platoons), and player B has a 750 points force (also made of one or more platoons), and both forces are from a single force list, say the Armies of the US for example, then this is just the same as a 1750 pts US force.

When it comes to the game, you can either simply put a US die for each unit into the cup, and then the players control their own troops on the field and can cheerfully agree who gets the next US die drawn from the cup, or agree that they get one each in turn…

Alternatively, the two players can have dice of different colours – ideally dice that still go well with their troops, like green dice for US Army soldiers and Olive Drab dice for Airborne US troops, but that's not strictly necessary, of course. This will save any debate about whose units are going to get the die that is drawn from the cup. Trust us, this normally speeds up gameplay considerably!

MULTINATIONAL FORCES

These forces mix platoons drawn from different nationalities. These different nationalities' platoons can of course be controlled by the same player, but we definitely think it's more fun if each nationality forces are controlled by a separate player (who should most definitely have, or at least attempt, the right accent!).
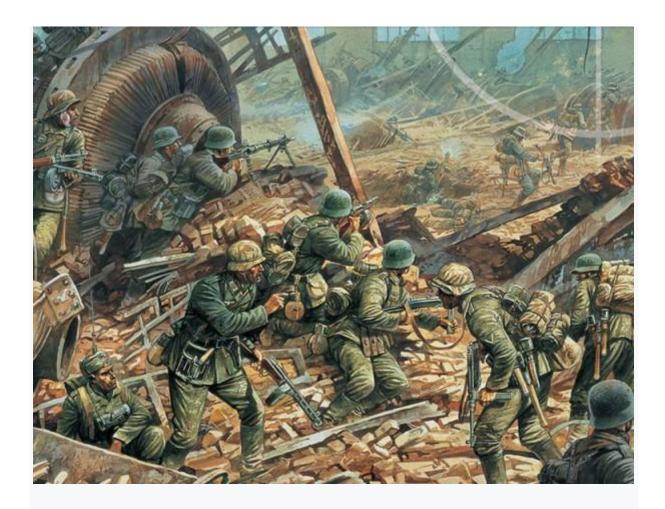
First of all, we encourage mixing nationalities only with both sides' agreement, as mixed forces may trigger rules conflicts, which will need to be resolved on the fly by the players. As a guideline, special rules that affect the whole force or individual units of a particular nationality do not affect their allies. For example, the Morale bonus of a British officer would not affect US units in range, and the Modern Communications army special rule of the Americans does not affect British units that are in Reserve alongside their US counterparts.

When assembling a mixed force, select at least one platoon from one army list (e.g. Armies of the US) and then at least one platoon from another army list (e.g. Armies of Great Britain). The points cost total of all of these platoons added together must be equal to the agreed point total, in other words equal to the opponent's. For example, if you are about to face 1000 pts of Germans, you may want to select one or more US platoons to a value of 500 pts and one or more British platoons to a value of 500 pts. Of course the split does not have to be 50-50, and we leave that to he players (e.g. a 1500 pts Italian force may join a 500 pts German contingent against a 2000 pts British force in a game set in North Africa…).

If you are using theatre selectors to pick those platoons, it is best if you pick forces that make sense together – for example an American platoon from the 1944 – Normandy selector in the Armies of the US would go well together with a British platoon from the 1944 – Normandy selector in the Armies of Great Britain.

You may of course try some "what if" scenarios and have your Germans fight alongside the Western allies against the Soviets, or even ignore all historical accuracy and simply have fun – how about a game with a mixed German and French force fighting against a Soviet-Japanese army!
As described above, during the game you may use the same colour dice for the entire mixed force, in which case you'll have to decide which unit gets the dice – by debating it with your allied player. Alternatively, you may assign different coloured dice to each nationality.
At the end of a game, each nationality scores Victory points individually (which gives you bragging rights), but the forces fighting as allies will of course add their points together to calculate which side has won the game, as normal.

SPLITTING INFANTRY/ARTILLERY OVER SEVERAL TRANSPORTS

In reality, an infantry squad could make use of several small transport vehicles, which would stick together as a column. A good example of this could be a ten-man British section divided over two Bren carriers.

In game terms, you can field two or more transport vehicles together as a 'transport unit', as long as they come from the same entry in a book. This unit of vehicles operates just as a normal unit, with the exceptions noted below:

o   The vehicles in the unit can be up to 3" away from each other to remain in formation (rather than the normal 1").
o   The unit automatically passes Morale checks.
o   If the unit fails an Order test, the vehicles in the unit simply remain stationary (in confusion) instead of making a reverse move.
o   When this unit shoots, each weapon can fire at a different target, as normal for vehicles.
o   When shooting or assaulting this unit, enemy units pick a single vehicle in the unit as a target and fire/assault against it, as if targeting an individual vehicle model.
o   If a vehicle takes additional pinning markers (from damage results for example), these markers are added to the unit's pinning markers.
o   If a vehicle in the unit is immobilized, it is automatically abandoned and counts as destroyed.

o   Infantry units can board the unit of transport vehicles, as long as the transport unit's TOTAL transport capacity is equal or less than the number of men in the infantry units. So, for example, if two Bren carriers (transport capacity 5 each) have formed a transport unit, a section of ten British riflemen could board them. To do so, move the infantry units as if they were mounting onto one of the vehicles, and then assume the men are spread across all of the vehicles – it does not matter exactly where each man is. The infantry units are now transported by the vehicles of the transport unit. If any of the transported units wishes to dismount, dismount them as normal from one of the vehicles. If the passengers are forced to dismount (because a transport is damaged or knocked out, etc…), all transported units must immediately dismount, as described above. If a vehicle is destroyed while carrying passengers, all embarked units must disembark and suffer D6 hits. These hits are divided as equally as possible among the transported units, randomising any excess hits.

o   Artillery units can also be towed as above, but each artillery unit takes up one entire transport vehicle and its full transport capacity. You can have a mix of artillery and infantry units on board a transport unit.

o   If the transport unit does not have any passengers in any of its vehicles, then the unit as a whole suffers from the vulnerability of transports to enemy proximity. This means that if the unit ends the turn closer to an enemy unit than a friendly one, the whole transport unit is destroyed.

o   *You will inevitably find a few odd situations with particular types and combinations of vehicles and units, in which case players will have to come up with a sensible solution among themselves!*

VERY LARGE TABLES

If you are playing on a floor or a very large gaming table, you will find that the distances feel wrong and/or that scenarios are written so that they last too few turns, which in some cases might even make the scenario impossible to achieve within the given time!

One way around this problem is simply to double all measurements (movement, weapon ranges, set-up distances, etc.), while keeping the number of turns the same as presented in the scenario you are playing. So literally you are playing the same scenario, but making use of a larger space. Alternatively, you can just double the set-up distances, so that for example opposite forces start the game 24" from the middle line rather than 12", and then double the amount of turns in the scenario you are going to play. This solution will result in a game that will last longer, but will give you the impression of covering a lot of ground, with a lot of manoeuvring. Oh, and keep in mind that the first few turns would not see much shooting, as most weapons are going to be out of range!

MULTIPLE ACTIVATIONS WITH A SINGLE DICE

This is a complex solution, and one that turns Bolt Action into something considerably different. For this reason, we will just touch upon it, as a proper alternative system of this kind could take many, many pages, or indeed almost warrant a supplement in itself.

Basically the idea is that when you draw a dice, instead of activating a unit, you activate a group of units. The most intuitive way of doing this is that each Platoon is activated by a die. So at set up you only place one die per Platoon in the mug, but you still need to have at hand enough dice for all of the units in your army (alternatively you could use 'activated' markers, like glass beads, to show that a unit has been ordered that turn).

When one of your dice is drawn, you pick a platoon and then give an order to each of the units in the platoon, in any order you like. Place one of your dice (or markers) next to the units as you execute their orders. Once all of the units in the platoon have been ordered, then you can draw the next die from the mug.

This is easier said than done, as your platoons tend to get intermingled during a battle, so that it might get difficult to remember which units belong to Platoon A and which belong to Platoon B… So it certainly helps if you keep your platoons very small and/or easily recognisable. You could for example have a platoon made up of airborne troops and one made up of normal army soldiers with all of the vehicles. That should make it very obvious which models are activated together. Alternatively, you can paint identification marks either directly on the units themselves or just on the edge or under their bases…

As you can appreciate, this speeds up the game, moving it one step closer to games where each side moves all of its models first and then the other moves all of its. The gaming experience is going to be quite different from normal Bolt Action, but it might help resolving really, really huge games within a reasonable time. Whatever you do, proceed with caution!