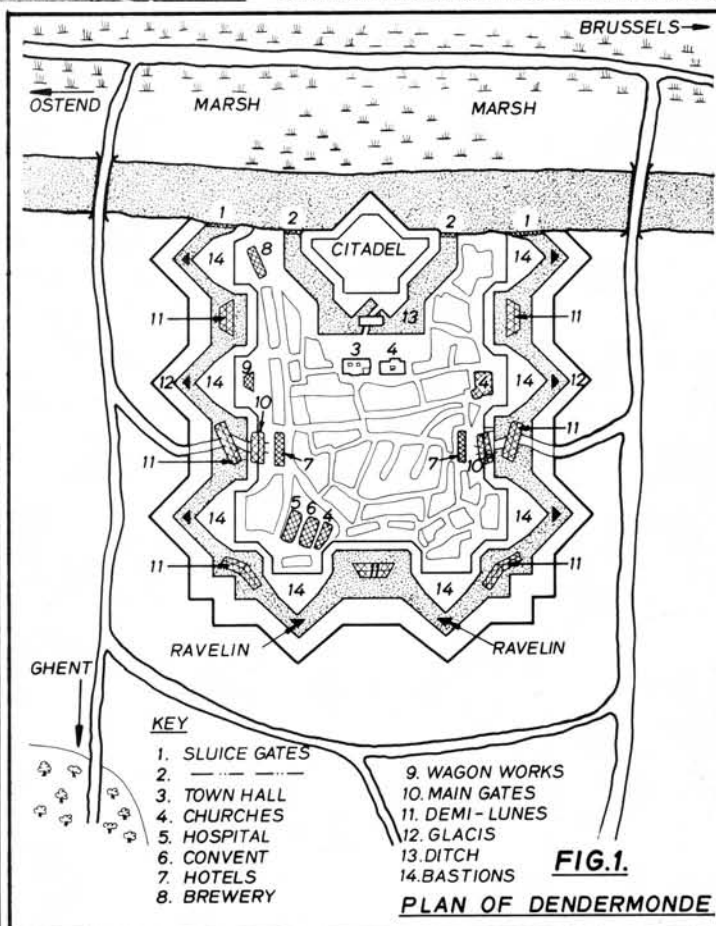
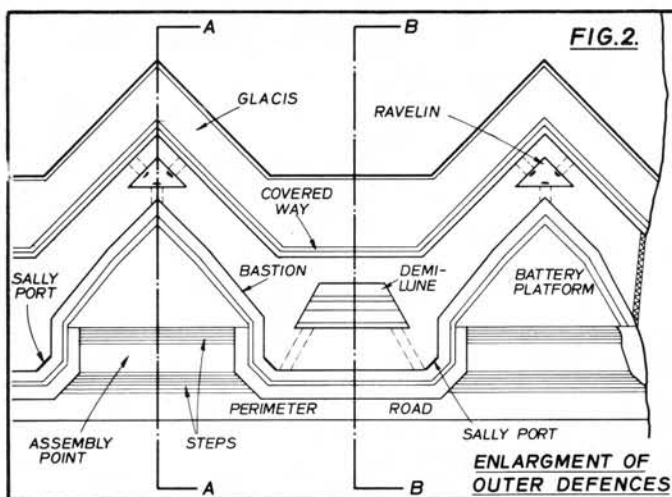


Proud owner of one besieged city and its fortifications; author Ron Miles surveys a polystyrene Dendermonde in his wargames room in Southampton. Note plan of the city on the wall at right.

THE SIEGE OF DENDERMONDE

Ron Miles with Part 1 of an exciting new series for wargamers which will recreate in detail a siege in the age of Marlborough. Why not follow the instalments and feature a siege as your club's next campaign?



The origins of this siege in miniature lie in my interest in the Marlburian era in general as a wargames period. In an age when siegecraft and sieges were widespread one does not campaign for long before one comes up against the siege situation and it was just such an occurrence that promoted our "Siege of Dendermonde" game and this short series of articles.

As far as I know, no-one has gone much into sieges as literal wargame exercises, being content to leave this fascinating aspect of warfare to be rapidly decided off the table by dice throws and charts etc., but I was so taken with the idea of fighting out the whole thing that

I hopefully and foolishly picked up a book on siegecraft by Vauban and from that moment I was hooked!

As is usual, one thought led to the next and after reading several books, and talking to various people on the subject I worked out a basis. A walled town of about 2,000-3,000 inhabitants with 6-8 bastions based on Vauban's theory would give the scope for all facets of a siege. Taking a scale of 1"=10 yards, this gave a town of 1260 yards from the apex of the citadel to the apex of the furthest bastion. After working out the population, the minimum number of troops it would take to hold such a place and a background legend for the whole

affair, I then started on the practical side.

First and foremost, a mockup was necessary to get the angles correct. The glacis, apart from needing to be the minimum width to give the maximum killing ground, also had to line up with the walls and ravelins so that gunfire would do the least amount of damage to both material and personnel.

It was here that I ran into the first major problem; what on paper had seemed to be a reasonable proposition was somewhat different when built up. Unless I owned a castle of my own, the model just would not fit! In vain I pleaded with my family to live in a tent in the garden, but this was not received with any marked enthusiasm...

The compromise was for me to cut the town in half, for one side would be the same as the other, I reasoned. Provided a map was used to control and record all movement, the sapping,

laying out of batteries, etc., could still be carried out, for even if the attacker was to split his force and try to breach from both sides, then it could be recorded on the map, whilst only one set of saps and parallels need be cut and used for both assaults. In the unlikely event of an asymmetrical assault this could still be accomplished by just continuing the saps and parallels on the table, provided it was properly recorded on the map.

A cardboard mockup was used as a template to make the final item which was hardboard cut to shape of the bastions and nailed and glued to a wooden frame. This gave a good firm base to work on (see sketch). The whole outside was covered with polystyrene ceiling tiles (begged,

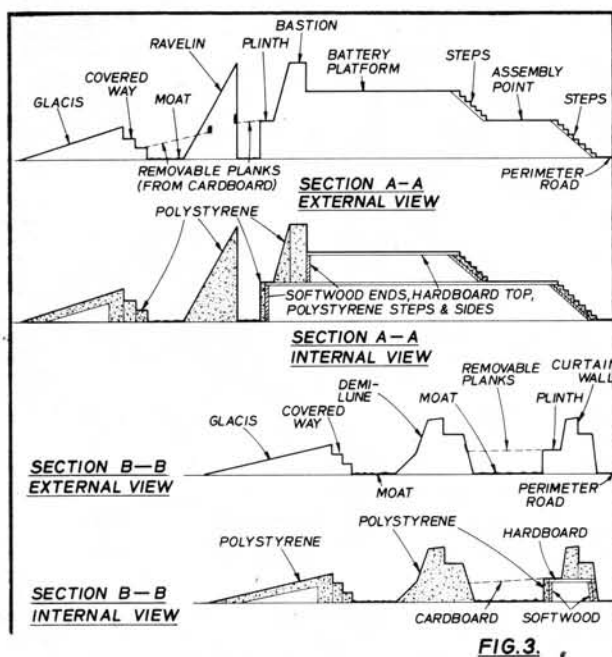


FIG. 3.



Above, view of two bastions with ravelins, part of the city defenses complete with infantrymen and artillery in position; note also the demi-lune. Carved-up polystyrene block gives quite a convincing rough textured finish which looks equally well when painted in shades of green and brown as grass and earth etc., or in grey tones for stonework and masonry. Below, a view of the north-west corner of the city.

bought, and acquired).

Using small strips of paper tape to hold them, the polystyrene tiles were glued in position; when set, the strips were removed. Gun battery position platforms were fitted to the bastions complete with steps and access points. The outside walls, having been set at an angle earlier, were now trimmed off to correct height, sloping outwards to give maximum protection and musket support. Each bastion was 160yds. across (16") giving a platform of 130yds x 100yds, or 13"x10" over the widest points (see sketch). 120yd or 12" curtain walls joined the bastions; two of them, i.e. one each side of the town, were pierced for main gates, protected by demi-lunes. The road descended across the ditch to the demi-lune and ascended to the main gate.

Each curtain wall and point of bastion was protected by a demi-lune or ravelin. Sally ports were provided at each corner of curtain walls and bastions, access to the covered way was obtained by single width planks from point of bastion to ravelin through the ravelin to the covered way.

The ditch was dry, but could be flooded through the sluice-gates at the river end. The citadel, which dominated the walls and the town, was constructed in a similar fashion.

The covered way was made integral with the glacis, constructed in polystyrene, cut and shaped to suit, glued, and held together by, paper tape until set. Generally, the glacis was 10" or 100yds wide, or maximum effective musket range.

The whole was then set on a 2" thick polystyrene base. Removable panels were set in the base just outside of the glacis to enable me to move about to reach the troops, to move and fight them. The painting of the whole was not such a difficult job as might have been expected. The area was rather large, but a fair sized brush was the answer to that and, by using water based Rowney P.V.A. colours, and mixing to suit, even I could cope and produce a finish which was acceptable.

The buildings and town interior were next on the list; the street plan had been drawn up earlier when designing. The main trouble was tracking down a suitable number of buildings and types to represent an early 18th century Belgian/Flemish town. I found that Seagull Model had the best selection which, together with a couple of Minifigs, and one or two other

odd buildings scratch built, gave all I required. The main difficulty was to arrange them to give a reasonably realistic appearance, and still give me the space to pop up rabbit fashion in between, to move troops etc.

There still remained one other problem to be solved. The fortress now filled the whole room from end to end, leaving no room for approach work or actions!

I still had to leave enough of the fortress to give fire support to the defenders, as well as to give enough room for the attackers to form up and for their fire support. So selecting a line across the join of the 3rd bastion and curtain wall and across the line of the glacis, by dovetailing the walls, I managed to disguise the cut as well as being able to put it all back again, if required.

This then was the construction which in itself proved to be absorbing and rewarding, but the intricacies of the siege itself were to prove even more so.

One point however must be remembered when using polystyrene in large quantities; the finished model *must* constitute a strict NO SMOKING OR NAKED LIGHTS AREA. A variation using other material such as hard-board and wood covered with lint or flock to give the earth is an alternative; use a sand base so as to be able to cut the saps and parallels, and dig in the battery positions and redoubts.

The Siege

The wargame itself was organised by the writer, to instructions by the main commanders:- Tony Bath commanded the French and the besieged, while Ken Brooks commanded the British, the Besiegers.

Both main commanders were given tactical maps of the town and local areas, plus another strategic map of the whole countryside taking in the Allied magazine. Naturally the Besieger's map of the town did not contain details other than could be seen or were already known by intelligence.

The French were given their maps first so that the Governor could write standing orders; a trap here, for the previous Governor was a slack fellow who allowed vineyards to encroach right up the Glacis, and even built houses on the approach roads. The grass in the covered way wasn't cut, and the flood gates to the ditch or moat were not properly maintained. Dendermonde was usually surrounded by marshy ground and was considered almost impreg-

nable. However, recent dry weather made approach possible, despite the fact that on the citadel side, the marsh was still a barrier making attack on that side impossible.

Both commanders then sent the writer their orders and instructions; each sortie or skirmish was carried out by experienced wargamers and the results were then sent to the Commanders to await their further orders. Charts of wounded, sick, killed, powder, shot etc., were kept and deserters were checked for information; further to this was the fact that neither Commander knew just how long the siege was to last!

Mathematically, and in keeping with traditions and rules of the period, a breach should be achieved in a maximum of 42 days, from the opening of the trenches, which then obliges the Garrison to retire to the citadel and start again. However, it is essential for the British plan to take the place sooner, rather than later. We placed a limit of December 15th on the whole operation, which was an all round total of 154 days and every 7 days, unknown to either side, the siege was shortened by the number of days to be decided at that time, presumably being (a) the length of time it will take the French to retrain and re-equip their army to sufficient standard; (b) lack of food, fodder, and deteriorating weather conditions, forcing them into winter quarters (the usual reason).

continued on page 475



DENDERMONDEcontinued
from page 461**The Situation**

Set in the year 1708 following the defeat of the French at Oudenarde, the Duke of Marlborough wishes to drive through to Ostend which is already in Allied hands, preparatory to driving along the coast, being supplied by the navy, before aiming for Paris. However, the town of Dendermonde is in French hands and controls the first part of the route.

From Oudenarde to Ostend it is the only fortress town standing in the way of the success of this plan, for speed is essential. The French field army having been virtually destroyed, it will take a minimum of 90 days to raise an army capable of resisting this drive; add to this 20 days to staff and co-ordinate sufficiently well to fight a battle. Thus it is essential for Dendermonde to be held for a minimum period of 110 days. It is essential to the Allied plan that they

take the town in as short a time as possible, bearing in mind the cost of lives of course!

The allied magazine and siege train is at Maestricht 72 miles away. The date of Oudenarde was July 11th, so that the allies would have an advance party at Dendermonde on July 14th; after that date it will be up to the Besieger when he invests the town.

There is a French army of 40,000 men under the Duke of Berwick moving up from the Moselle area; they are not a big enough force to risk a battle but will have to be watched, for obvious reasons. Various other bodies' troops occupy other towns and cities, including Bruges, Ghent, Antwerp, Tournai and Lille etc., so communications can be maintained, at least until the investment is complete, even longer if the Besieger is lax or his standing orders leave loopholes.

The town

Dendermonde is a small town of some 2,150

souls; it is an 8 Bastioned Vauban type fortress, complete with a small citadel. It controls the only practical route between Ostend, Bruges, etc. and Brussels. Generally the country, to the east and north is fen type country which can get very marshy. In other directions is fairly fertile farming land, woody and some small hills. Roads are not very good. There are two main gates, 1 each side of the town, plus a sally port of course; 2 demi-lunes cover gates and 3 demi-lunes cover vulnerable parts of walls.

Buildings and dwellings comprise a town hall, 3 churches, a convent and hospital, 3 hotels and 2 bars, 3 blacksmiths, 1 saddle maker, 2 leather works, 1 tannery, 3 basket makers, 2 joiners, 2 cabinet and furniture makers, 1 wagon works, 2 wheel wrights, 2 carpentry works, 1 brewery, 3 candle makers.

There are 810 men of working age i.e. 14yrs to 70yrs and about 90 boys 10 to 14 years.

Continued next month**KENT
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French Commander's briefing

The civilian population will co-operate quite happily with your forces provided they are adequately compensated and although they will not actively fight the enemy, they will accept any other job, firefighting, moving guns, supply gun positions with powder and shot, manufacturing, etc. However, should there be any attempt to put them out of the town and their houses, there will be a revolt. Similarly, if rations are cut to a low limit, there is sure to be much muttering, and black looks!

The Garrison

Staff:- G.O.C. King's Lieut. Art'y Engineer, Magazine Intendant, Commissioner, Treasurer, Provisioner, Hospital Director.

Infantry

6 Battalions total	3,080 Officers and Men
3 Coys Dragoons	240 " "
Gunners	120 " "
Engineers	90 " "

Plus additional troops who have found their way from Oudenarde:- 1 cut-up battalion, good order but only 300 Officers and Men.

1 - Dragoon Regt.

1 - Cavalry Sqn. - 300 Officers and Men.

These additions may be kept or sent on.

The Magazine and a workshop to repair guns and carriages are situated in the citadel, under ground.

Storage

308,000lb of powder

50,000lb of fuse

600-24lb balls

600-18lb balls

750-12lb balls

800-9lb balls

1400-Arquebus balls

16000-Lead for musket balls at 18 to the lb

5 tons Iron.

Daily consumption of powder - max average 3,600lb, but may be used at your discretion. Allow powder, at $\frac{1}{2}$ the weight of ball fired. However, should use of powder and shot fall below an accepted minimum, enemy sappers etc. may advance saps at an increased rate, or take any other action with an enhanced chance of success.

Rations

Allowance - 2lb bread per person per day

1lb meat per person per day

and any vegetables or fruit, which is personal.

Total rations in fortress:-

550,000 rations of bread (or flour)

272,000 rations of meat.

Additional live animals within the fortress:-

15 cows, 30 sheep, 250 chickens, 20 pigs, 60 dogs, 150 cats, 300 horses, including those of dragoons and staff; feed off grass on reverse slopes of walls, plus fodder rations - 6,300.

Additional rations obtained from animals:-

1,000 per cow

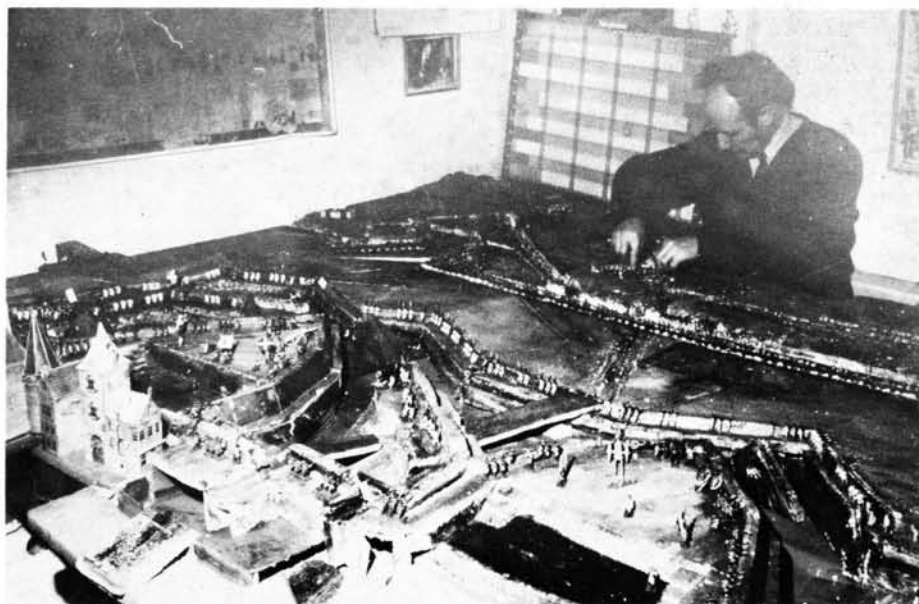
80 per sheep

60 per pig

900 per horse

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ per cat

3 per dog.



THE SIEGE OF DENDERMONDE

The preparations begin and the siege itself gets under way in Part 2 of this interesting wargame project, organised and played by Ron Miles and friends.

Firepower

The number of guns defending the fortress is as follows:-

24 Pdr guns	- 4
18 Pdr	" - 4
12 Pdr	" - 6
9 Pdr	" - 10
6 Pdr	" - 6
Swivel	" - 4
Rampart arquebus	- 6
13" Mortars	- 4

Personal orders

You are appointed Governor of the town of Dendermonde, as from 1st June, 1708. You are to regard the town and people as French, and of a friendly disposition, which they are unless provoked, a situation you must avoid at all costs. As bigger things are in the offing, you are to give Marshall Vendome and the Duke of Burgundy every assistance, to carry out their orders.

No trouble is anticipated, but should plans miscarry, it is expected that Marlborough will head directly for Ostend - you will be in the line of march, and the only real obstacle; it would be up to you to buy time.

Good Luck.

Louis XIV Rois.

Will you draw up plans, standing orders etc., and any other relevant details you may think necessary for the town, and for the siege.

I intend to keep a diary of events and will keep you informed of every incident for you to

draw your own conclusions, and issue your instructions and orders. These orders will be carried out to the letter - or at least as near as possible! Any actions that take place will be handled by competent commanders working to your instructions.

I shall keep records of sick, wounded, powder and shot etc. Initially you should plan for a 110 day siege; this may well be shortened according to circumstances, unless of course it falls first.

You will of course be expected to abide by the code of Honour and Rules of the period concerning sieges.

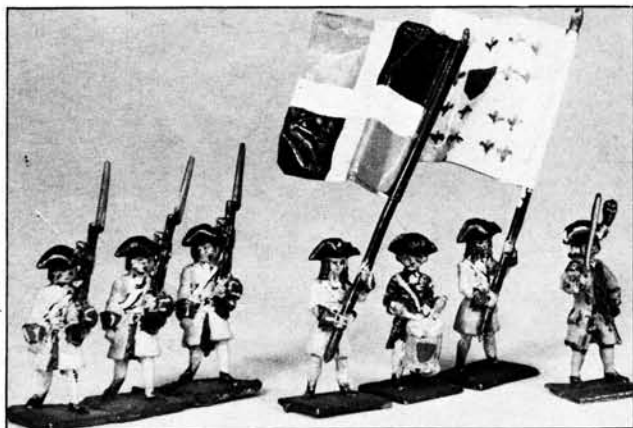
Ron.

Similar information was given to Ken Brooks, concerning his own position and forces. This is where differences between them began to show. Whilst Tony as the Besieged only had to get his fortress in order, and issue standing orders, Ken, however, had to split his force into a covering force to watch Berwick to the South West, further forces to cover Ghent, Antwerp, and yet a further force to cover the siege train, besides investing Dendermonde, setting up his lines, camps and batteries, all the time arranging to feed his force, and prevent disease and epidemic ravishing his army.

The depth of detail we went into was considerable, covering wagon rates, road allowances, rate of travel, sick and wounded, desertion, work rate, provost, duty rosters, drinking priorities at the river, latrines, etc. Foraging posed a problem but Ken was equal to this one as well; checking back old records he found out the average fodder yield per acre, and so he based his forage parties in the most efficient manner.

It was during these planning sessions that

Heading, Ron Miles "dresses ranks" amongst the British besieging forces in the fields before Dendermonde. Left, a section of the town formed from inexpensive card buildings.



Contingents of the 25mm armies involved in this mammoth wargame project; at left, a French colour party with officer, guard, drummer and colour bearer and their British counterparts at bottom left. At bottom right, a British gun and its crew; in Part 3 of this series next month such a gun becomes the centre of an exciting night-time raid and counter raid! All the models are Miniature Figurines.

Ken and I enjoyed a ritual that I fully recommend. Whilst we were planning one evening Ken said to me, "Do you know, I can't seem to get into the spirit of the period. What do you say to a little noggin?" I hastily agreed, whereupon Ken procured a bottle of the most delicious and potent wine and two silver goblets; we had no further trouble getting into the feel of the period...

Here in Southampton we are fortunate to have a port operating company of the Royal Engineers – fortunate for Ken for he found an old map of the area showing a link up of rivers and canals from Maestricht to Boom, a mere 12 miles from Dendermonde. But how long would it take to load and unload siege guns of the period? The Royal Engineers, bless 'em, supplied me with the information, to the minute!

As D Day approached I had the first orders in from Tony; he had seen the trap and had given orders to clear the whole area for the distance of a long cannon shot, cut all the grass on the outside of the walls, and put in hand repairs to sluice gates, and all other fabric work. He dismounted the 24 pdr and 18 pdr guns that were mounted in the citadel, to hold in reserve. Tony is, as most people know, an authority on the ancient period, so what more natural when he considered that he was short of guns, than to get his engineers to make 2 catapults, to subsidise his fire power?

The work of putting the fortress in order continued through June. The Sluice Gates were being repaired, grass cut, vegetation cleared back to allow a clear field of fire. Fire points were established within the town. Assembly points and drills were carried out, routines established, and standing orders issued.

On July 11th, Oudenarde was fought, resulting in the defeat of the French Field Army; as the battle did not finish until dark, there was no traditional pursuit. In fact the allied army was rather tardy in setting out on the next stage, consequently the first French dragoons and cavalry arrived in Dendermonde on the 12th July, spreading initially alarm, and panic. A little

later the infantry unit came into the town, and calmed things down.

There was still no real evidence that Dendermonde was to be invested, so that I would not allow some actions to take place. However, a council of war took place where some decisions were taken, one of which was to get four young officers, who had a knowledge of explosives, to leave the fortress, infiltrate the enemy camp, and sabotage the magazines when they were established. The first allied cavalry and dragoons reached Dendermonde late on the 13th and by early morning were patrolling outside of the town preventing any more from going in, and arresting any that tried to leave. As soon as it was realised that an investment was possible the first of the officers, in uniform but with a cloak around, slipped out from the town and got clean through the as yet imperfect allied patrols. Shortly after, about fifty refugees left the town, so the second of the officers went out with them who, although arrested with the other refugees and kept in a compound with them, was not detected.

The third officer was also successful in eluding patrols and getting away. However, the fourth officer was spotted by an allied patrol but he was able to scramble back and, with the aid of the Standing Guard, got back to the fortress. More and more allied troops arrived, thickening up the patrols, making it difficult to get through, so any further attempt to get out was abandoned. Gradually the ring around the town tightened as more troops arrived; first the grenadiers of various units, then further infantry together with light artillery pieces. No attempt was made to assault and as darkness fell, so quietness closed over the area, and the tenseness of the defenders relaxed as they realised there was to be no immediate attack.

At 0.300 hours on the 15th, an allied force was quietly aroused; part of the two assault groups were equipped with sledgehammers and crowbars with a close support of grenadiers. The assault was led by 50 grenadiers, followed by a further 50 grenadiers to clear the way; the pioneers supervised by

officers were to be next, whilst a further force was to cover the withdrawal. Line infantry covered the flanks and the light battalion guns were to give as much fire support to the raiding party as possible.

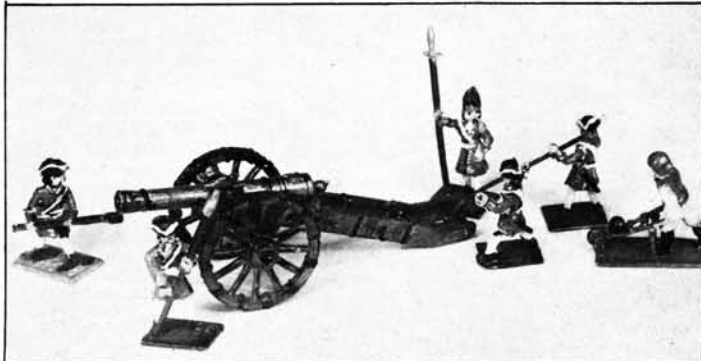
At 0.430 hours the allied troops mustered and quietly and carefully moved into position and lay down; although challenged there was no firing, neither were the defenders alerted. As was hoped there was a dawn mist as the French stood down from the dawn stand to at 0.545. At 0.550 simultaneously with the guns opening fire the assault grenadiers rushed the Sluice Gates on both sides of the town.

On the North side, despite the surprise, the French troops held their fire until the assaulting troops were halfway across the glacis. The first volley was devastating and the assaulting Grenadiers hesitated but their impetus, and élan carried them on to close quarters. Not so the supporting line company; they reeled back from the effect and stood uncertainly until a second and then a third volley crashed into them. They broke and fled.

Grimly the grenadiers fought their way onto the Sluice Gates where the pioneers started to smash all control gear of the gates to jam them, so that a later assault could go in dry, and without the fear of a torrent of water sweeping them away.

Soon the French reinforcements moved in and gradually the attackers withdrew. The covering force and dragoons were sufficient to prevent the French from following up too closely. At about this time a shot from one of the fortress guns, now in action, hit a light gun and smashed a wheel, so that it had to be abandoned where it was. The result of this assault was that one gate was locked, 2 were badly warped and winding gear damaged, but they could have been moved a little. The remaining two could be repaired in a short while. Nine prisoners were taken, twelve killed and twenty wounded, all for the cost of seventy-three killed, thirty-five wounded, three missing (prisoners). Simultaneously a similar attack was mounted on the south side, however the French got a little excited and shot off their volleys too early and ineffectively, thus enabling the allied force to close in. Nevertheless the fighting was fierce, but their mission was successful and all gates were jammed. At the withdrawal, however, the guns came into action firing grape into the flanking line unit which was now on the edge of the covered way; the casualties were appalling and the unit broke and ran. Steadily the grenadiers withdrew, again in the face of stiffening resistance and reinforcements. The French lost 8 killed, 12 wounded and 4 prisoners, whilst the allies lost 65 killed, 37 wounded and 4 prisoners. The fighting died down as the allies withdrew to lick their wounds.

Continued next month



THE SIEGE OF



DENDERMONDE

Ron Miles with Part 3 of this unique wargame campaign set in the time of Marlborough.

By 1400 hours on the 15th, the main bulk of the allied infantry arrived with their light battalion guns and were deployed. Swiftly the troops were allocated their stations. The next day's work started in earnest on the camp sites and lines of circumvallation, nothing more than earthen rampart with company redoubts and light battalion guns every 200 yards. Brush wood was gathered for the signal fires whilst dragoons and cavalry started foraging and reconnoitering the surrounding countryside.

The French, meanwhile, inspected the damage to the gates and, realising they had lost control of them, decided to blow the gates to make sure the attackers would not get across dry foot. Orders were also issued that powder and shot was to be used sparingly, just enough to keep investing forces at a distance; stricter control on rationing of food was to be enforced. Fire points were installed throughout the town and volunteers aquired to assist troops in a non-combative role. Orders were also issued that there was to be no major skirmish over the light gun, previously abandoned by the British.

During the afternoon a young French Lieutenant devised a plan to capture the abandoned gun and, when off duty, arranged for volunteers and put his plans in readiness, obtaining a horse, harnessing and a one-wheel trolley. At 2230 hours the horse and trolley were successfully smuggled through the gate and down to the covered way without detection by the allies. 2300 hours and the French slipped quietly over the parapet and crawled silently down the glacis toward the gun; finding all was quiet, they gave the signal for the horse and

trolley to be brought. It did not need an alert sentry to see and hear the horse being pulled and cajoled over the parapet, however the French succeeded in getting it over and down to the gun. But the sentry had raised the alarm!

As the French team reached the gun, two small bonfires were lit, exposing the whole thing. Manfully the French struggled with the gun under a fusillade of musket fire and made their way back to the fortress to the cheers of the now thoroughly wakened Garrison. With just 50 yards to go the light guns of the British opened fire and the first shot was a lucky one killing the poor horse. Hastily the French scrambled back to the covered way, leaving the gun, and so the night returned to normal.

Simultaneously with the French Officer, a young British Lieutenant was equally determined that the gun should be recovered. He also rounded up a group of volunteers, but instead of using horse power to pull the gun he was to rely on manpower. The French attempt had upset his plans a bit, but he argued it would only be a few more yards to pull the gun. So at 0300 hours, his group crept silently forward to the glacis and the gun. Once again an alert sentry raised the alarm; frantically the British team worked to cut loose the harnessed dead horse and fit their own drag ropes. There was much wild shooting from the French but the gun was successfully harnessed, turned and pulled down off the glacis and out of musket range. About 30 yards closer to the British lines a ball from a cannon careered right through the team, killing two and injuring two others; and so once again the gun was abandoned. At 1000 hours on the 17th, 20 detonations blew up the Sluice Gates on the outer ditch, thus flooding it completely.

The allies continued strengthening the lines of circumvallation, gathering materials, building bonfires, and their camps and sub camps. Duty rosters were formed, patrols carried out, sentry posts allocated and mobile 'Reserves' to deal

with any sorties were established. During the evening of the 17th there was disturbance in a compound set aside for refugees and during this time a family of 3 and the French Officer escaped. The decision was then taken that these refugees were to be escorted to Oudenarde, interrogated, and then let free.

The 18th was mainly a quiet day, both sides reappraising the situation. The French Governor, realising that he would not have all the guns he would wish, had some time previously drawn up plans to make 2 ballistas based on ancient times, a subject on which he was an expert. The main problem was where to place them when completed. This would depend largely on the direction from which the attackers would launch their assault. During the 4 days the allied engineers had surveyed the fortress and drawn up their plan for trenches, battery positions, magazines, and sub magazines, the parallels and approach trenches. All the men skilled in making baskets, woodmen, and others with similar skills were set to work making gabions and preparing timber for battery positions. One thing that they were not short of was labour, in fact it was better to get the men working than idling around. So it was that during the night of the 18th the digging started on the first battery and sub magazine positions and linking trenches.

During the day of the 19th all these works were deepened and made good. During the night these positions were occupied by allied troops but there was no reaction from the French.

19th p.m. the French commander was rather anxious to obtain more information about the allied assault plan, so he put in hand two schemes to obtain this. The first was to wine and dine a captured officer, but this back-fired, for they had chosen the hardest drinking officer in the British army who drank them all under the table in a prodigious drinking session!

The second scheme was more orthodox; noticing that some trampled grass in small patches was evident between the glacis and the prepared allied bonfires, and suspecting that these were night listening posts, the French staged what amounted to a kidnap. Quietly a patrol took a wide circle and came on two listening posts from behind, taking them by surprise and with no noise, leaving a somewhat puzzled allied commander in the morning. Under interrogation the erstwhile sentries boasted that it would not be long before the fortresses was taken and that the siege guns were expected within the week.

20th. Quiet day, allies making good all diggings and preparing for a night-time dig forward to start the first parallel. Meanwhile, the French had decided to mount their heavy guns on the bastions to give cross fire on the expected position of the allied approach. These were to be placed after nightfall also. In the p.m. the French guns were positioned, and many patrols sent out to slow down allied digging and to cover noise of guns being positioned.

21st. Quiet day. British spent most of the day deepening and establishing the trenches and it was also noted that there would not be enough material to make sufficient gabions. Tests also revealed that the ground was unsuitable for mining east of the centre bastion. The French started counter mine listening posts. During the night the allies finished digging out of the first parallel.

22nd. Allies make good all trenches and continue preparing battery position. The French try a few ranging shots with their newly placed heavy guns.

23rd. As 22nd.

24th. Magazines and battery positions for

allies are now ready, otherwise a quiet day. Siege guns had arrived by boat on the canals at Boom some eight to nine miles from Dendermonde and powder had already been dispatched and arrived in the Magazines. The French officer who escaped the detention camp, and had been living rough, decided that he would attempt to blow a magazine on the night of the 25th.

25th. Siege guns of the allies arrived at the site and some were positioned. Otherwise, a quiet day. In the p.m. of the 25th, the French officer who was to attempt to blow a magazine moved in after nightfall, evaded the sentry posts, skirted the camp and dodged the roving patrols. Arriving outside of the magazine, he settled down to wait for an opportunity to slip inside. After observing for 30 minutes he decided that there would be no chance of this and that he would have to kill the sentry to gain admittance. The sentry, however, was too vigilant and the Frenchman's attempt failed; he was captured and, under interrogation, claimed that he had been staying with a lady friend when the allied force arrived, cutting him off from the fortress. Since then he had lived rough attempting to return to the fortress each night, but had been frustrated by sentries and patrols. Asked why he had attacked the sentry, he said he was getting desperate. His story was accepted and he was made a prisoner. However, the sentries were doubled.

26th. Allied guns start ranging on bastions and covered way; mortar battery positions were started.

The French returned shot for shot and at dusk tried a few ranging shots with the ballistas, mixed with orthodox gunfire so that the allies would not notice. In the p.m., the second attempt on the magazines by the French officers

was cancelled owing to the previous night's happenings. The officer had free access to the camp, for he was acting as a local peasant bringing in farm produce to sell, so that he became an accepted part of the scene. The third man had remained concealed at the same farm, and so was kept informed. During the night the ballistas fired four shots, three of them missed, but one of the shots dismounted a 9pdr. gun and caused consternation in the allied camp. A special watching party was allocated to find out how and why.

27th. Mortar battery positions had completed digging and were being prepared. Gabions and other preparations were made to start the next approach trenches and parallel. The initial plan was too ambitious, however, and had to be modified to four approach, halfway to the covered way, and link up parallel in pairs, leaving a gap between. Desultory fire from both sides inflicted a few casualties, and less damage. In the evening teams of diggers set to work as soon as it was dark enough and worked right through the night to complete at least a shallow trench. French patrols were held off, but gained enough information to know that a sally must be made that night. The main planning was to be made after daylight, when a good view could be had. But a pigeon was sent out at dawn to the 'saboteurs' to arrange to attack the magazines.

28th. The allied forces in the now forward trenches spent the day trying to deepen and improve their homes under a fairly brisk fire from French artillery; they suffered several casualties.

Due to the extended line, the allies brought in an extra battalion on each side. The French artillerymen painted lines in white on the gun positions so that they could lay on their in-

tended targets, for the preliminary bombardment. In the afternoon, the Major-gen. of the day positioned the four batts. of the mobile reserve on the west side of the fortress, two battalions at the ready with the other two at 30 minutes' readiness. Cavalry was stood down, except for perimeter patrols. After dusk stand to the French concentrated even more troops in the assault areas. At 2300 hours the guns and ballistas on the south side opened up a cannonade on the forward trenches for forty-five minutes and then lifted for five minutes onto what was hoped was the battery positions.

The allied guns replied to the bombardment, though neither were very effective. One allied gun was dismounted, the trenches were partly filled in in two or three places and only a few casualties were caused. At 23.45 hours the French assaulted the south side only led by grenadiers; the second parallel and the four approach trenches were overrun after some bitter fighting and the French then passed on to the first parallel between the approach trenches. After more stiff fighting had carried this, some of the French over-enthusiastically rushed the battery positions. The gunners abandoned their guns, whilst the fusiliers formed together to defend the guns and ready use magazines.

Combined fire broke the allied company holding the west end of the 1st parallel, however the support trenches were held. The allied reserve battalion had by now formed up and approached, the grenadier company having been detached to recapture the batteries. So far only eight companies had been used by the French assault, the remaining two companies of the battalion formed up and advanced through the centre to exploit the situation.

Continued next month



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THE SIEGE OF DENDERMONDE

Ron Miles and friends continue their exciting wargames campaign with a difference set in the time of Marlborough; this month, the initial British attack gains momentum but is repulsed!

This information (see Part 3 last month), slightly exaggerated, due to darkness and confusion, was sent to the allied major-general commanding and twenty-five minutes after the start of the assault, he ordered in the first two battalions of the mobile reserve. At the same time he brought to instant readiness a further two battalions, whilst bringing yet two more to thirty minutes' readiness.

The French continued to press, and one officer with a dozen men who had captured a battery found powder charges ready for the guns; clamping one to the wheel of one gun they laid a trail of powder and, when forced out, blew the charge and the wheel off the gun.

Gradually the allied reserves stabilised the position and started to counter-attack. Slowly the French withdrew, having filled in all the trenches they had taken, and took away all the picks and shovels they could. Within the hour all French troops on the south side were back in the positions they had started from. Their total casualties were fourteen officers, one hundred and eighty three men killed, wounded and missing, whilst the allied casualties were twenty seven officers, two hundred and seventeen killed, wounded and missing. Meanwhile, both the saboteur officers were at work trying to take advantage of the situation to blow a magazine; the first evaded all sentries and patrols and reached the main magazine and tried to get inside. But the sentries were alert and although he got away – the sentry not being able to leave his post – he ran into a mobile patrol and was taken.

The second officer, however, went to a small sub-magazine and pretending to be a powder monkey bluffed his way in, prepared a trail carrying a bucket of powder, got out, and lit and blew the magazine. Unfortunately for him he was hit by a baulk of timber from the explosion and was killed.

Exactly thirty minutes after zero hour on the South side, Grenadiers on the North side leapt on to the glacis, ran within twenty-five yards of the allied trenches and hurled grenades. Quickly followed up by the rest, they then assaulted the parallels hoping to gain a quick foot-hold and then thrust the allied troops back down the approach lines.

In this they were thwarted, for the Prussian and Dutch units fought back stubbornly, holding up the French units, waiting to pass through to attack the first parallel. The allied Commander wasted no time on receipt of the news of this fresh assault and ordered in both battalions of the immediate reserve and the two battalions of the mobile reserve from the West side. Further units were brought to readiness.

Gradually the French forced back the allied troops opening up gaps in the line and, by-passing pockets of resistance, the second wave

Part IV

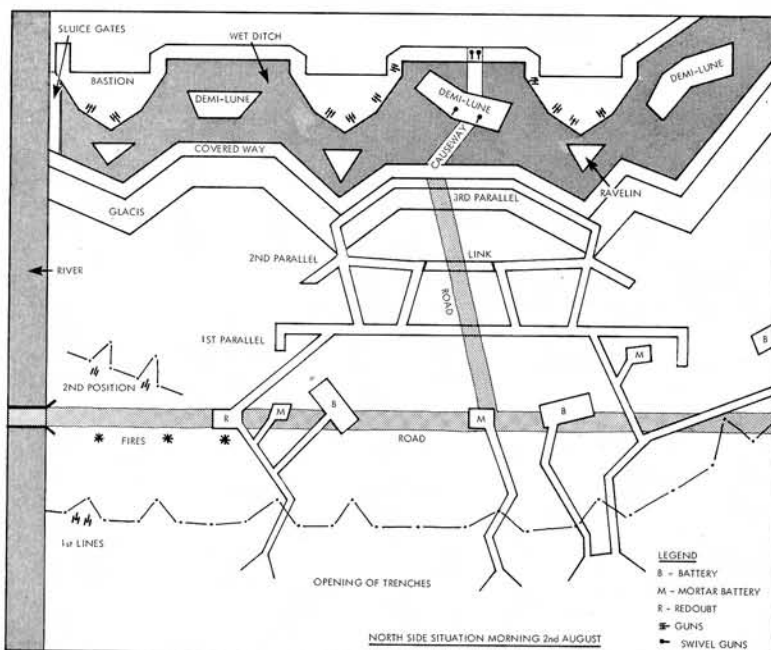
of sallying troops moved on to attack the entire part of the first parallel, whilst other companies formed on the flanks. The second battalion formed in columns and fretted impatiently at the delay imposed by the still stubborn resistance of the allied units. The French were now well behind schedule, but they kept on. The men detailed for filling in and wrecking started on the second parallel, giving a pathway for the waiting second battalion. As they moved forward so the last of the allied troops in the second parallel were surrounded and were taken prisoner.

The French caught their breath before pushing on to broaden the assault, and take on the wings of the first parallel, whilst all the time the working parties were filling in and wrecking anything they could. By the time the first parallel was pierced and the second battalion was trying to get through and form up on the far side, the two allied reserve battalions had arrived and positioned themselves across the line of the French advance between the reserve and approach trenches thus sealing off the French attack.

The French second battalion struggled through the first parallel between pockets of allied resistance which were now slowly being subdued. Forming up they detached two Companies to deal with the two battery positions, and then marched forward in line to within twenty yards of the British contingents.

Meanwhile the Companies detached to carry the batteries had an easy time; the Gunners ran down the approach trenches, whilst the Fusiliers guarding them were too few to seriously oppose them. There were too many in the position to wield their weapons effectively or to wreak any serious damage. No nails had been brought to spike the guns, so bayonets were inserted in the touch holes and broken off. Further back in the first parallel the centre had at last been cleared and the attack broadened by assaulting the wings of the parallel from the front and along the trench. It was then that the French Commander found that allied reserves were now closing in on his flank. Anxiously he awaited word from the second battalion that they had broken through, but finding that they had had the worst of a fire fight, wisely called off the sally and withdrew his men skilfully without any further loss.

Slowly and steadily the allies moved back to their positions to ascertain the damage and



casualties.

The French suffered fairly light casualties, considering:

Five officers, seventy-six men killed

Seven officers, one hundred and sixteen men wounded

Four officers, fifteen men missing

The allies casualties were also light:

Four officers, sixty-eight men killed

Five officers, one hundred and fourteen men wounded

Two officers, twenty men missing

On top of this the allies had had a certain amount of material damage i.e. trenches filled in, and the subsequent delay. Both sides claimed to have been successful in this sortie, the French claiming that the delay is all they wished to impose whilst the allies boasted of the way that they had sealed off the sally and driven it back with such ease and little loss.

29th. Both sides stood on the defensive surveying the damage and licking their wounds. The French beat a parley in the morning to exchange prisoners but this was refused by the allied Commander. Work commenced immediately by the allies to put their batteries and trenches back in order. The French stepped up harassing fire slowing down the work so that at night fall only the first parallel had been re-established and the four approach trenches had been redug up to a distance of fifteen feet on each. All the batteries had been reserved and the mortar pits completed. Flank positions between the end of the parallels and the river, involving the two nine pdr. guns on each side were prepared to move forward during the night. Digging parties were also prepared for re-establishing the second parallel. The soil being loose indicated that this would be an easy task.

During the night the digging recommenced; on the North side the work proceeded fairly well with the redigging of the whole of the approach trenches, and the second parallel, plus a few more yards sideways linking the two pairs. Meanwhile on the South side, digging started on the approach trenches, however the French kept making forays in company strength, striking first on one, then another. When the allies formed up to counter, the French withdrew, thus slowing up the work, so that by daybreak only the approach trenches had been done leaving them rather vulnerable. A few well-aimed shots destroyed the mobile gabions,

continued on page 114

THE SIEGE OF DENDERMONDE

from
page 105

causing more problems for there was a grave shortage of these; so much so that, at a conference (in which more wine was consumed), it was decided that all the efforts would go to one side, until sufficient were ready.

30th. The allied working parties had been trying to link the second parallel on the North side all day but, due to the harassing fire of the French guns, had succeeded only in gaining a few feet and had suffered a number of casualties to gain this small amount. At mid-day the French beat a parley and released the prisoners they had, after giving them a meal, and a lecture on the morals of a Commander who abandoned any unfortunate under his command, hoping no doubt to encourage desertions!

Came darkness and the effort began in earnest. Covered by two Companies each side, work proceeded apace. The French switched their Company harassing sorties to the North side but, finding themselves opposed, immediately withdrew to try again from another direction. Despite their efforts the parallel was linked and formed. Due to the various alarms caused by the French to disrupt operations the intention to widen the parallel during the night was shelved as was the intention to link back to form a flank.

Meanwhile on the South side, the work to form a parallel went ahead, strangely almost

unmolested by the French. Although no gabions were available the parallel was formed, and although similarly with the North side, there were as yet no refinements as ordered by the Commander. The stage was now almost set for the next bout for, at daylight on the 31st, the mortar batteries were ready to range in on the vulnerable bastion platforms and horn works.

31st. The day opened quietly enough with everyone in position behind cover or out of range. Just at breakfast time, the French had an unpleasant surprise as all the mortars opened fire on the demi-lunes covering the gates. Not many casualties were caused for, at first, most of the shells missed or did not explode . . . but it was another misery they had to suffer.

With persistence the mortars kept on until they were regularly hitting their target now causing more casualties but at a very low rate of fire. The main batteries kept up a slow fire rate also but on the French batteries, who in turn replied and gradually the whole orchestra joined in – the muskets and the wall guns – until a cacophony of sound filled the air and all the time the clunk and thump of pick and shovel as the digging went remorselessly on.

This time though, the digging was concentrated in the already dug second parallel, widening it so as to hold more men ready for the assault on the covered way. During the afternoon, the mortars switched their bombardment to the bastions and battery positions. This was to be a much more serious threat to the beleaguered, for the loss of gunners would slow down their rate of fire. So, for a time, they

withdrew the gunners. Meanwhile, in the rear areas preparations were being made for the attempt to gain a lodgement on the covered way. The attempt was to be made at night initially by two battalions on each side. A further battalion was equipped with picks and shovels to start digging in on the front face of the glacis as soon as possible. Further battalions were standing by to follow up any success and to fill in behind. Once again, though, the shortage of gabions, together with the French delaying tactics, was to cause the attempt to be put off for twenty-four hours. In the afternoon and evening the French continued their policy of company sized raids on the South side but these were abortive for the allies were too strongly posted for much damage to be done. The French took a number of casualties, and inflicted only a few, whilst tidying up and building flank redoubts.

1st Aug. Both sides carried on as the previous day. Allied mortars kept a steady fire on gun batteries supported by siege guns, whilst the smaller guns fired on the covered way – all intended to keep the French heads down whilst completing widening the second parallel.

The French, for their part, mainly complied with this, now and again showing their teeth and defying the allies to do their worst. As dusk approached the allies decided to attempt to assault the covered way that night following up a withdrawal of an anticipated French raid. As dark fell the allied battalions moved into position, the second parallel now holding twice as many men as previously.

THE SIEGE OF DENDERMONDE

More siegecraft in miniature from Ron Miles and colleagues in Part 5 of the wargame series. This month the assaults and repulses continue but breaching battery positions are prepared for a major attack on the walls . . .



Knowing that an attempt to gain a lodgement in the covered way was imminent, the French Commander moved 3 Light Field Guns onto the Bastions so as to sweep the causeway; he also made a mobile reserve of 100 men on duty all the time, to rush to any threatened point.

At 23.15 hours, the French launched another of their company strength harassing attacks on the North side. This was easily repulsed by the Allies, and was also the signal for general assault, both on the North and South sides. This assault had the limited objective of a lodgement on the covered way, between the points of the Bastions covering the causeway. The South side assault took several volleys from the alerted French troops, but closing to close quarters, broke through on to the causeway. A Captain, seeing an opportunity to gain glory, led his Company down the causeway to attack the Demilune. They were severely cut up by the charges of grape from the guns placed on the Bastions precisely for this purpose. They were then counter attacked by the French Mobile Reserve and annihilated. The Reserve pushed on and assisted in driving back the Allied assault, after severe fighting.

On the North side, the Allied assault troops followed hard on the heels of the retreating French sally force, the main line unable to fire for fear of hitting their own men, and being unable to regroup the French troops where driven off and away from the centre portion of the covered way. The Allied troops did not attempt to rush the causeway on this side, but held on to what they had. Immediately the second Battalion started to dig in, just on the lip of the glacis; the feed trenches had been started the minute the assault troops had left the second parallel. By dawn the lodgement was securely in Allied hands, with all necessary back-up forces. A counter attack ordered by the French Commander was cancelled when he realised how strong the Allied position now was.

Knowing that the Allies would have to sit tight whilst they brought up breaching batteries to a suitable position, the French Commander put in hand the next phase of his defence, as well as looking for a weak spot in the besieging force's layout so that he could show some aggression. These measures included evacuating the top floor of the hotel opposite the gate and strengthening the first floor, applying wetted turves to reduce fire risk, blacking windows and doors and loopholed walls, thus turning the building into a strong point. Mobile Chevaux de Frise were to be con-

structed, and mortars brought to such a position as to cover the ground where the breaching batteries were likely to be sited. He further gave instructions that any breach would be fought for. When hearing of this some of the civilian population began to get uneasy for, by custom, any town which had to be taken by storm, was liable to pillage. Although they had co-operated quite happily with the French up to this time and had even actively assisted in the defence, it would be a different matter if it came to risking their own lives and possessions to a conqueror. A deputation was formed, headed by the Mayor, to try to persuade the Governor to surrender the town and retire to the Citadel when a breach had been made. From now on, the pressures on the Governor from both the military and political sides would increase. . . .

Preparations went on to mount a sally on the now exposed battery 3. The sally was to be made at dawn on the 3rd August, allowing the darkness to cover the build-up, whilst at dawn there would be sufficient light to enable them to see the objective, for it was a longer than usual approach march.

A.M. 3rd August. It was about 0300 hours when the French began ostentatiously to make preparations to sally forth and attack the now exposed battery on the N.W. end. Simultaneously they surreptitiously began to make similar preparations for an attack on the same battery from further west. The local Allied Commander alerted his men and aligned his now loaded guns on to the expected line of approach of the French, told all his reserves to be ready to move, and then waited.

Just after dawn, when there was just light enough to see, the French guns opened fire and the troops made a demonstration in the expected area, distracting attention from the approach of the actual assault group from the other direction. Swiftly the French assault group moved toward the Allied battery, taking fire from the light guns and troops covering that flank, but this was not sufficient to stop them storming into the battery position. Wisely the gunners fled, leaving the defence of the guns to the few Fusiliers.

The French party quickly dealt with the light resistance and proceeded to spike the guns with the soft iron nails they had been provided with this time. Within ten minutes the job was done, just as the Allied mounted their counter attack. With two companies covering, the French withdrew to their lines, suffering only 4 dead, 20 wounded, 6 prisoners and 10 missing; significantly though, 5 of these were deserters, the first from the fortress. The rest of the day

was spent with the French joyfully thumbing their noses at their besiegers, whilst the Allies settled down grimly to put to rights the damage and to cover the weak point. Further work was carried out also to establish the batteries in a breaching position.

The French Gunner Officer reported that the continuous stonking by the Allied mortars was taking a toll of his gunners, whom he could ill afford to lose. At first the Commander ordered them to take cover during bombardment and only be turned out during emergency duties. The night was quiet except for interminable digging.

A.M. 4th August. The French awoke to find that the breaching battery positions had been sited and virtually erected during the night, although it would take at least two further days to complete enough for the guns to be positioned.

To digress a bit, this caused me quite a problem, for neither of the references I consulted seemed to show that a battery position could have been raised. Firstly because the position would be so vulnerable, and secondly it was doubtful if it could withstand sustained fire power, as the fortress could. Yet fire *had* to be directed on the walls to create a breach. If the batteries were in excavated pits they would not be able to play on the walls due to the rise of the glacis. To cut fire lanes would be impractical. Quite a problem. Consulting Vauban did not really throw any light on the subject. David Chandler's book does not fully cover these details and no-one else was any help either. Various theories were advanced, but not proved. So, back to the authority again; Vauban must cover this point somewhere! Sure enough, careful reading and re-scrutiny gave the answer.

The batteries *were* raised. Much intricate, careful hard work had to be done to complete the position under constant attack and harassment from the French. The mortar batteries of both sides were now positioned so as to bring fire down on each other and on to the gun battery positions so as to silence them and gain the upper hand.

The artillery duel continued all day with the Allies with their greater numbers gaining a slight superiority. By nightfall, two French guns had been dismounted, and casualties amongst the 120 gunners now totalled 6 dead, 18 wounded, and with 5 sick, the position was approaching serious proportions.

No action was taken on the South side, except to throw forward the trenches to cover the battery, corresponding to the battery attacked on the North side the previous day.

Continued next month

THE SIEGE OF DENDERMONDE

More siegecraft in miniature from Ron Miles.

The date for the storming of the breaches was provisionally set for August 10th, but a lot would depend on there being sufficient gabions and fascines. The importance and urgency of this situation was stressed by the Engineer-in-charge and the Major-General of the day. The working parties were doubled whilst cavalry and dragoons were sent out scouring the countryside for further suitable sites and material.

The facines were heavy and cumbersome, for they had to have layers of earth to weight them down or they would float away. Small gabions would form the base of the causeway, whilst the loaded fascines would be placed so as to interlock. All the time the sappers would be under fire, so they would have to build themselves shelter and work outwards, a long and laborious business, but in the best Vauban style. Fortunately they were below the level of the fortress guns, which could not depress enough to bear.

First though, the glacis was pierced with a tunnel which emerged in the covered way; the first gabions and facines were rolled down and positioned. Slowly the causeways inched across the ditch to reach masonry from the now crumbling walls of the bastions. The big guns had been firing continuously all this time, thumping away at the wall, backed up by the original batteries and mortars. The fire was overwhelming the defenders who could do little except take cover and reserve their resources until an emergency. The guns thundered on and gradually the walls crumbled, and at last, a breach! Curiously enough the breach was made almost simultaneously in both bastions.

The final plans for the storming were drawn up and it remained only for the causeway to be completed. The assault was designed to split as much of the defending force as possible. On the south side a further attempt was to be made to

gain a lodgement in the covered way. This assault was to coincide with the main storming of the breaches, the bastions and, hopefully, the town, and was not necessarily to stop at the covered way. In fact orders were given and a force was allocated to attempt to storm the demi-lune and gateway, keeping up the pressure to extend the defenders to the limit and take the fortress with a coup-de-main.

A lot depended on the French, of course; they had not exactly co-operated up to now and there was no reason to expect them to do so at this stage! A notice was placed in the town asking for volunteers to serve with the guns, promising good pay and rewards. Two men came forward, one an ex-artilleryman.

One Fast day was ordered for each week, partly to conserve food, but mostly to convince the population of their confidence in holding the town until relief arrived. A day of prayer was also ordered. More practical steps included planting a mine in the threatened north gate demi-lune, troop dispositions were made and practised, chevaux-de-frise sealed off both the breaches and the bastions were constructed. It became clear that the defending commander, Tony, was staking everything on repulsing the attack. The very fact that he had not returned the heavy guns to the citadel was one indication, for, should the breach be carried and the town lost, he could still have retired to the citadel and the guns would have controlled the vital road. As it now stood, he would pose little threat to the road and could easily be contained, and starved out, at little cost.

Due in part to the defenders' activity and the huge numbers of facines required, the assault was put back twenty-four hours. It was at this time that I spent a fascinating (?) Sunday afternoon, making dozens of the fascines, with my wife muttering darkly about the "fools not having anything better to do on Sunday after-

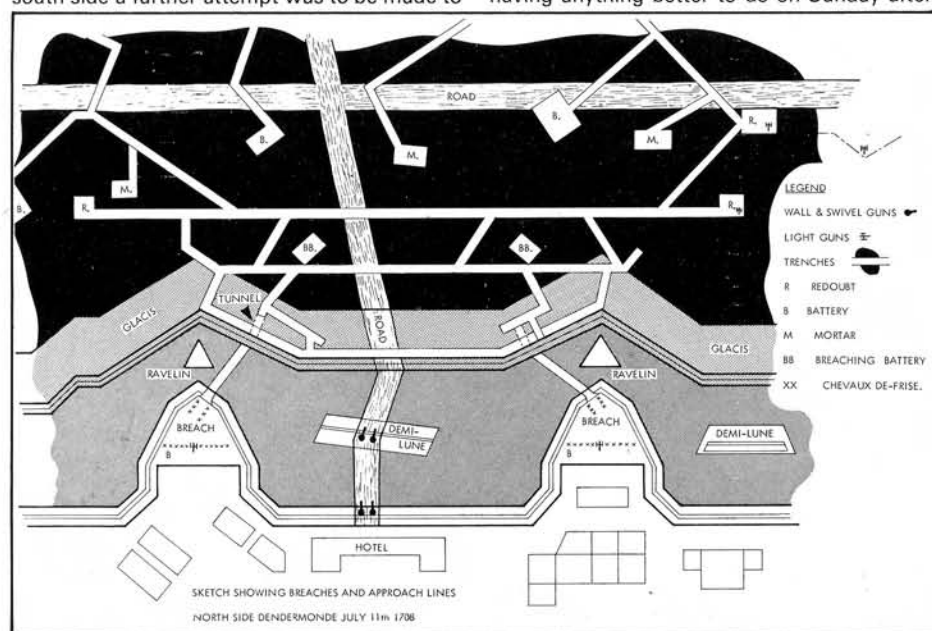
noons". . .

This was followed by another trip to Ken's house; more wine was consumed, purely in order to get into the spirit of the period, you understand! My final orders were given and it only remained for me to set everything in order and to select the commanders and the date to carry out this action. The situation at this stage on the north side is shown in the sketch. The assault on the South side was to be carried out by Dutch, German and Danish troops. There was an air of expectancy and excitement in the Allied camp and the men were moved quietly and confidently to their start line. The signal for the assault was to be the firing of the guns on the north side. It was hoped that surprise could be obtained, by not using the guns on the south side.

The same plan of assault was to be used, with the work teams following closely behind the leading troops to dig in and establish a lodgement on the covered way. That way if the main assault was repulsed, the Allies would be in a position to apply more pressure. The French, of course, realised that the main effort would take place within the next two nights and made their dispositions accordingly. The men getting the maximum amount of rest possible during the day prepared themselves for the night's work. It was now that they realised just how stretched they were, with the long perimeter which they dared not relinquish, the need to guard the citadel, and mostly the strength to hold the breached bastions, against a series of determined attacks.

The French Commander put the 300 infantrymen from Oudenarde in one bastion and the 300 dragoons in the other. The cavalrymen were relegated to the citadel, whilst the six battalions of the original garrison, now reduced to approximately 500 men per battalion, spread around the rest of the fortress. But sadly, no reserve. A reserve had to be created from somewhere, so one small company from each battalion was withdrawn and a small reserve for each side of the fortress was created, and so they waited. Late in the day, the Duke of Marlborough was called away to see Prince Eugene, who was commanding the covering force watching Berwick's relieving force. This was the opportunity for one of the Dutch deputies, a position similar to today's political Commissars, to re-examine the plan and raise objections to the use of the Dutch troops, in a fruitless and possibly expensive assault just to enable British troops to gain the honour of taking the town. This in turn led to the Prussians being unable to move to their allocated position and so the assault was put back yet once again, whilst an urgent message was sent to the Duke to return and, in his usual charming manner, smooth things out.

The night passed almost uneventfully with nerves tugging at both sides. An artillery stonk, of as yet unprecedented proportions was inflicted on the town. The next morning, many casualties were inflicted, and two of the defenders' guns were unshipped. Overs from the mortars inflicted more damage on the town and fires broke out. Although these were dealt with, the experience unnerved the civilians who demanded another hearing with the Governor to insist on his surrendering the town and retiring to the citadel. The deportation reinforced their argument by withdrawing all civilian assistance. Further they planned to smuggle out a message to the Allies, offering assistance in return for not sacking the town. The governor retaliated by seizing all foodstuffs within the town, and issued the notice that only civilians who worked would be given rations . . .

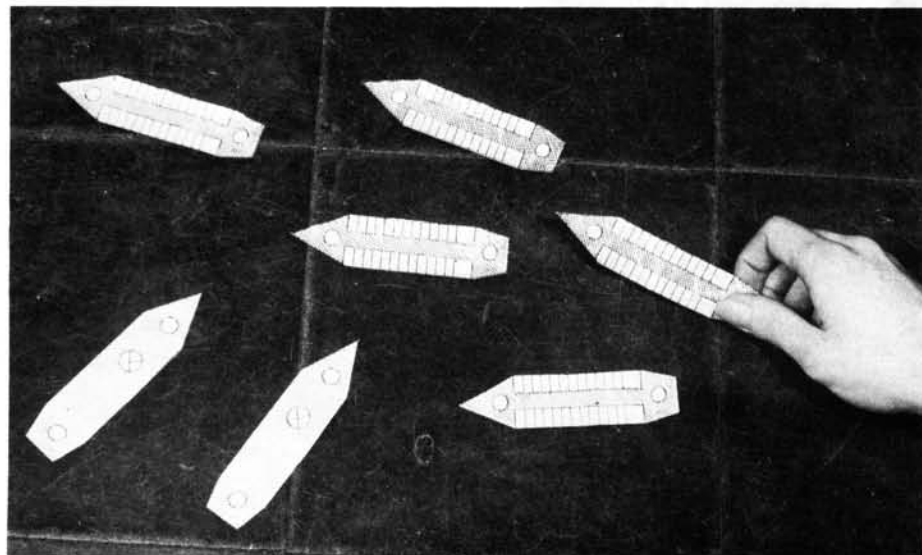


A very simple way of depicting early warships for wargames use is by means of card shapes.

Featherstone's Book *Naval Wargames*. Better still, having read what you can on the subject – other good reference works are Anderson's *Dared Fighting Ships* and Cassen's *The Ancient Mariners* – write your own rules to suit your ideas of the period.

Our second period covers the early days of sailing warships, starting with Henry VIII and ending with the Anglo-Dutch Wars of the Restoration period. This was very much a time of innovation and trial and error. In the beginning the contest lay between two schools of thought; what I will call the Spanish school, which relied on big ships with high bow and stern castles, packed with soldiers, whose tactic was to close and board, the ship's guns being in effect an auxiliary – and the English school, which built its ships for speed and manoeuvrability and put its faith in weight of cannon rather than boarding. The two schools clashed head on in the Armada battles of 1588; the English school claimed a decisive victory but the result was, in fact, a draw; the gales which wrecked the Armada concealed the fact that the English fleet, while completely outmanoeuvring and outgunning the Spaniards, had signally failed to actually destroy them, while the lumbering Spaniards had proved equally incapable of closing with and boarding the elusive English. Nevertheless, the trend which followed was to build ships as gun platforms rather than as transports for soldiers.

The Anglo-Dutch wars which culminated this period were fought by similar fleets which resembled armed mobs more than the disciplined squadrons of the Seven Years War and Napoleonic periods. The ships were of all different sizes and armaments; engagements tended to be extremely bloody but neither side lost many ships sunk though a number were captured. This was because ship ordnance was



still largely incapable of sinking well built wooden ships, especially when most of the damage was inflicted above the waterline. A far more dangerous weapon was fire, and both sides actually employed numerous fireships whose only purpose was to set fire to the enemy. Tactical use of this weapon was very difficult and, in fact, it never played a decisive part in any of the battles; but with highly combustible wooden ships using large quantities of loose gunpowder, fire was to remain an ever present danger throughout this and the following period.

Due to the lack of any real tactical doctrine it is hard to write effective rules for this particular period, while the masses of ships used in battles such as those of the Armada and the Dutch Wars means that the gamer tackling this era needs a lot more models to make a truly representative battle. Moreover, suitable commercial models are few and far between, and I

know of none in the scales we have been talking of previously. However, it is not always necessary to deal merely in large-scale actions, and this period does offer tempting opportunities for actions with two or three ships aside or even single ship duels. For the former, Airfix produced suitably sized kits of the *Santa Maria* and *Golden Hind*; for single ship work it is possible to use the larger plastic kits which include such items as the *Sovereign of the Seas*, *Revenge* etc., and actually man them with crews of suitable Elizabethan and Civil War soldiery. Even on an 8 x 4 table a very interesting single ship duel can be fought with rules for both gunnery and boarding. While this may not be attractive as a regular game it certainly offers something a bit different for the occasional evening.

Next month I will be dealing with the main sailing ship era and the later periods of steam and steel.

THE SIEGE OF DENDERMONDE



Things begin to get decidedly dodgy for the French defenders in this penultimate instalment of the series; Ron Miles relates how the bastions are overwhelmed and the French are pushed back to the citadel itself.

Once the Duke had returned feelings calmed down for, with his usual tact, he smoothed ruffled nationalistic feathers. Taking firm control of the situation he ordered that the assault should take place that night, the 12th August at 11.45p.m.

The French meanwhile had their own pro-

blems for their action of requisitioning all the food in the town and then issuing the proclamation that those who did not co-operate or work for the French would not receive any rations, incensed the population. This kept the garrison on the alert to prevent the population rioting and breaking out, as well as the

besiegers breaking in!

And so the rest of the day passed in a state of nerves for the French and tense excitement in the allied camp. As darkness fell, the guards changed and in the fortress the relieved and off-duty men sank thankfully into rest after a nerve-racking and exhausting day. Meanwhile, the assaulting units moved quietly and expectantly into their respective positions, waiting for the signal.

At 11.45p.m. the Light Battalion guns, together with many of the other guns, fired one shot each, the signal for the assault. On the south side, the Dutch and Prussians leapt from their trenches and sprinted across the glacis thinking to catch the French unprepared. In this they were disappointed, for the defenders were alert and poured their volleys into the attacking force. But it was night, sight was not good and there were not so many men as they would have wished, so the assaulting force closed in with the bayonet. In a few minutes a desperate struggle ensued in which there was only going to be one result. Soon the overwhelming ranks of the assaulting allies began to have an effect. First to reel back and break were both the French flanks thus leaving the centre with no alternative but to withdraw along the causeway to the demi-lune and gate. The allies wisely halted any tendency to chase out on the flanks, so while they prepared to defend their newly-won territory, the centre chased hard on the heels of the retreating French, thus confusing further the French gunners who had their pieces loaded and trained onto the causeway. Fearful



of hitting their own men, the French gunners held their fire enabling the assaulting Prussian troops to reach the demi-lune, where a fierce hand-to-hand struggle for the possession of this part of the fortification took place.

Meanwhile on the left flank of the attack, the senior French officer rallied the demoralised troops and, adding a few more from his own command, led a counter attack on the allied flank. It had no real chance of succeeding but it was a gallant attempt and might have achieved more had a similar attack been made from the other flank. It was just one hour after the attack started that the French survivors on the demi-lune surrendered; although the allies now had their lodgement in the covered way and the demi-lune, they were not in a position to follow up and press home an attack on the main gate, due principally to the gallant counter attack on the left flank. Incidentally, Captain Dumois who led this attack survived and has been promoted to Major! When the guns opened fire at 11.45p.m. various other minor actions were activated as holding actions, whilst the main assault on the North side was in motion.

In the fortress, one third of the men were on guard, one third off duty and resting, but at one minute's notice, while the remaining one third were sleeping and would only be called in an emergency. As the assault started, most of the resting and slumbering troops were at their posts in a minute or so; a few were a little longer, but one platoon did not move and just slept on.

The resulting damage to both morale and material when the guns opened fire was minimal; most shots missed, one man was killed and one shot struck the wheel of a French field gun knocking out a couple of spokes. The two "forlorn hopes" dashed across their respective causeways, climbed up to the breaches and found themselves in the re-entrant confined by *cheveaux-de-frise* and lines of French troops. The defending troops promptly gave them a volley. The survivors reeled but then threw themselves at the defences to engage in hand-to-hand combat. This prevented many of the defenders from reloading so that, as the second wave arrived, they were greeted with only a scattered volley. These fresh troops also engaged the defenders hand-to-hand and yet more troops crossed and forced their way through the two struggling lines to emerge only to find the main defence line protected by more *cheveaux-de-frise* and supported by light cannon, less than forty yards away.

A squad of Grenadiers tried to work their way

Above left, commander of the French forces John Lawler in a spot of trouble this month with besieging British forces; at right, British troops cross the causeway to one of the breaches caused by the 11.45p.m. bombardment; note the use of fascines.

round the outside of the west bastion to lob grenades into the rear of the defenders. They succeeded in throwing one grenade over but fire from the demi-lune, barely thirty yards away eliminated them. As the resistance of the defenders at the re-entrants virtually ceased and the attacking troops started forward to tackle the main defence line, the French fired both volleys and guns. The attackers reeled and hesitated losing their impetus, and in the western bastion were never to regain it. The slumbering platoon slept on...

However, on the centre bastion the gun which had been struck earlier fired, collapsed, and subsided gently to the ground, unable to fire again but, worse, it was to provide a gap in the defence. Whilst the first assaulting company reeled back from the defenders' fire, the second and third companies thrust through and unerringly made for the gap. The French fire hesitated, slackened and became scattered, and so the assaulting Prussians had no problems, reaching the line and engaging hand-to-hand. The ranks nearest the French turned into line and engaged in a fire fight, whilst the rear ranks pushed on through and applied pressure on the now shaky line. Desperately the French Commander summoned up reserves and moved them toward the threatened spot. Still the sleeping platoon slumbered on and an officer was dispatched to wake them up.

Jeff Gunson taking the part of the attacking commander for this phase of the siege ... All photos: The author.



Back on the western bastion, the attacking British, having lost their impetus, formed up and advancing to within thirty yards engaged in a fire fight whilst more troops crossed the causeway, almost unaffected by fire from the demi-lune. Meanwhile, at the centre bastion, the French took the first rearward step; soon, under more and more pressure, the first step became two, then three, and then they broke and streamed away, taking with them the reserve. At first the Prussians did not pursue then, with a triumphant roar, the chase was on. Bravely, part of this collapsing French line held on, the slumbering platoon woke at last, only to find the line collapsing everywhere.

At this moment also the allies launched yet another attack, this time down the roadway on to the demi-lune, but the French did not bother to resist; a scattered volley and back to the main gate they scampered, where the captain of the Grenadier Guard lit his slow match and as the British troops swarmed on to the demi-lune, lit a prepared fuse and blew it to pieces together with most of the assaulting British.

The resulting explosion was so violent that everything came to a halt for a few seconds as the shock wave spread around. The French garrison took advantage of the moments of respite and started their withdrawal to the citadel. There were little knots of cursing, struggling men in some places but, in the main, most of the garrison, not already cut off, made it to the citadel, the triumphant allied troops being much more interested in the loot, pillage, drinking and rape, that was now certain!

For twenty-four hours the revelry continued then, gradually, order was restored and by midday on the 15th August operations against the citadel opened. The ring around the citadel was tight but mainly outside musket shot; the mortars were dismounted and resited so as to cover every part of the citadel. The two days that this took was viewed with some trepidation by the beleaguered French, for the allies were very open about their preparations, ostentatiously siting and placing their mortars and then, with great flourish, they opened fire.

All day the mortars fired; great 13" mortars throwing in 100lb projectiles, so that the citadel was under a great pall of smoke and dust for the whole time. At night-fall the besiegers beat a parley, inviting the defenders to surrender and also inviting them to see their stocks of mortar shells just waiting to be fired into their small area. After some short hesitation the French agreed to surrender, if they were granted full honours to march out with arms, bands playing and colours flying.

THE SIEGE OF DENDERMONDE

Concluding the series by Reg Miles ... this month, a summing-up.

So it was all over. At 10.00 hours on the 18th August, the French headed by their Governor marched out from the Citadel, flags flying, bands playing, through the silent population and out through South Gate, which had seen so many desperate struggles, to pile their arms and become Prisoners of War.

The Siege had taken a total of thirty-five and a half days, in terms of game days, but close on two years in actual time. Added to this must be the building and research time; it was a wargame, that was not so much a game but a way of life! Who won? Well that is not so easy to decide. It is true that the Allies under Ken Brooks took the town in under the statutory time laid down in Vauban, but even Vauban admits that this is only a guideline, and that a lot depends on circumstances, and that there was little doubt that the town would be taken.

Perhaps the French under Tony Bath won. They certainly held the town longer than was anticipated originally, and put paid to the Duke of Marlborough's strategic plans for that year. It would seem that to award a draw is unsatisfactory to both commanders – commanders who both put a great deal of thought and work into this project. Ken whose staff work was immaculate, took a tremendous amount of trouble, working out his schedule for troops, camps, movement of siege train, ammunition supply, forage and the hundred and one other details that he had to organise, besides instructions for the assault. Tony for his refusal to be intimidated, and calm marshalling of his meagre forces, and his aggressive defence, which stretched even the overwhelming force of the attacking Allies.

This being the case, I am going to be an abject coward and leave the decision to the in-



dividual who, having read the whole thing, can form his own opinion.

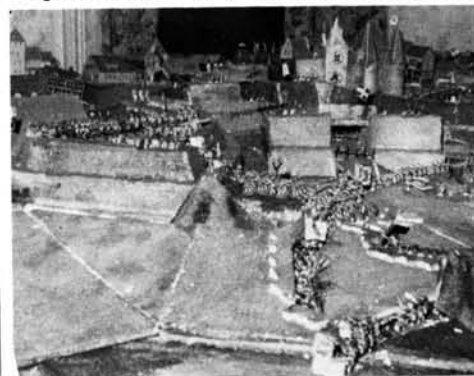
The cost of the whole operation in terms of currency of the time (not to me personally) was much less than I had thought. For the French, who of course had by far the least expenditure, the cost was 9,289 livres including rewards for gallantry, bribes, requisitioning and manufacture of various components. Two officers were promoted in the field for gallantry, one was presented with a sword. There were only four executions for dereliction of duty and eight desertions; rather a low figure. Their casualties were thirty-one officers and five hundred and thirteen men killed, forty-eight officers and seven hundred and fourteen men wounded, with sixteen officers, seventy-six men taken prisoner during operations. In all a very high percentage of just over 30%.

The cost to the Allies, however, was inevitably higher (although they recouped their losses when taking over the Town's Treasury) at a total of 190,200 Gold Crowns which included rewards made out for extra duties and bravery – a Gold Crown was roughly equivalent to a livre. The Allied total losses were ninety-eight officers and 1,065 men killed, seventy-five officers and eight hundred and ninety-three men wounded, ten officers and forty-eight men taken prisoner

(although these were released), around 6% of their force.

There were in addition some twelve executions, including the French officer, for dereliction of duty, desertion etc. About one hundred and fifty went missing (probably deserted) and only two field promotions were made; and no senior officers were injured.

Around one thousand figures were used to fight the actions at a ratio of one to one for small



Two views of Dendermonde at the height of the Allied assault.

actions, one to five for large actions. A basic set of rules was used, but most of the situations were assessed at the time, evaluated and, if necessary, percentage changes estimated and diced for. This is a little time-consuming and not recommended for normal games, although in my opinion, it is not possible to legislate for every situation which is likely to occur.

In acknowledging Ken and Tony's part in this project, I must also mention others that aided, encouraged, criticised or just took part, not really fully understanding. Richard Brooks and Ian Foley, who formed part of Ken's staff, doing much unsung research; Neville Dickinson who performed two functions of Arch Critic and espionage; Don Featherstone for his unstinting permission to use his library and his encouragement; Pete Manning for his timely advice; the Royal Engineers for their freely-given information and the Wessex Diners Club, for allowing me to bore them regularly every month. To John Lawler and Geoff Gunston for their assistance; to Gwen, for her patient typing from my awful scrawl; and, last but not least, to my wife, who has put up with all my eccentricities over the last four years.

RECCE continued from previous page

warfare in the days of sail, to say nothing of a wealth of ancillary data discussing the prelude to and after the aftermath of the engagement itself. Captain Bennett first sets the battle in the context of the world wide naval struggle against

THE BATTLE OF TRAFALGAR

GEORGE BENNETT



Napoleon and describes in very great detail the sort of lives the sailors led, what sort of food they ate, how they were commanded and how they fought etc., all the while providing an enormous amount of useful information for naval wargamers. The text is illustrated with many diagrams, plans, and tables as well as extensive quotations from contemporary sources and the author's personal naval experience makes his description of the manoeuvres in vogue at the time and during the battle quite straightforward to understand. An interesting facet of the book is its description of the aftermath of the battle which documents the fate of each ship and its crew from each of the navies involved.

"Panzer Army Africa" by James Lucas published by MacDonald and Janes Ltd., Paulton House, 8 Shepherdess Walk, London N1 7LW. 9½" x 6½", 212 pages, hard-bound. Price £6.95.

By virtue of the collection of an enormous amount of material from original German sources and interviews etc., James Lucas pro-

vides here, for the first time in the English language, a glimpse of the W.W.2 Desert War from the German viewpoint. The title is fully illustrated with photographs and maps and, apart from providing fascinating general reading, it provides, too, much valuable data for wargamers on the very special requirements which warfare in the African desert demanded. It traces the history of the whole German Army in Africa and, while making no attempt to describe the politics of command or indeed very much about the arms, equipment, and uniforms worn by the Germans in the desert, what it does do is describe each of the two main campaigns (the fighting in the desert and the fighting in Tunisia) in very great detail on almost blow-by-blow lines made all the more fascinating by being as seen through Axis eyes. There are some 39 illustrations (several of which are nicely drawn maps) and contents include sections on 'Conditions in the Desert'. The advance upon Tobruk, 'The tank battle of Sollum' and 'Army Group Africa fights in the north, west and south between March and April 1943'.