Concealed Forces: A Variant for NBS/CWB

Anders Fager, featuring P-O Jönsson

Introduction
These rules came up while discussing a Salamanca scenario for NBS. The problem with that battle is that it would never had taken place had Wellington and Marmont had the same bird's-eye view of the battlefield a wargamer has. The two generals based their decisions on what could be seen and heard from were they stood, and since the battle was fought over very broken ground they accordingly suffered a lot from what wargame jargon calls "limited intelligence." The same problem exists with Austerlitz, Gettysburg, and several other battles where crest lines and bad weather messes up visibility. And this problem is most apparent in low-level games, because in a operational/strategic game such as an OCS scenario we work with half-week turns, ample time for intelligence to come up with fair ideas of what the enemy is up to, while in the twenty to thirty minutes of a NBS/TCS/CWB scenario, all this time might be spent staring at a pillar of dust and trying to figure out if it is Grouchy's or someone else's dust.

But we are talking about "limited Intelligence" here, not "no intelligence." Most commanders have an idea of what is going on but lack the details. Or misinterpret them. But a lot of attempts to simulate these problems have gone too far into the other corner, making the players effectively blind. Instead of hovering around in the sky, the players are suddenly perceiving the world in snapshots every twentieth minute. Perhaps that approach would make a good simulation of a WW2 submarine captain's war, but few other commanders ever rode around battlefield with their eyes closed.

The following rules are hopefully a happy compromise. They are meant to keep you guessing and bluffing. You can guess what is on the other side of the hill, but the only way to really find out is to get to the crest. Conversely you can behave very threateningly with very few troops and embarrass your opponent after the game. These rules also have the nice side-effect of reducing the number of counters you handle to about a sixth, so they speed up play considerably.

The rules are based on two concepts:
First, all formations that are out of enemy LOS can be replaced by single "concealed force markers"—"CF"'s for short—and these forces in turn can "breed" dummy CF's.
Second, it takes an unconcealed unit to reveal what is hidden in a CF.

Cf 1.0 Marking Concealed Forces

Cf 1.1 Extra Counters Needed
For these rules one will need two sets of "Concealment Markers." Basically any counter will do, but two different generation smoke markers from TCS will be perfect. Also, each side needs a number of Decoy counters equal to the number of divisions plus the number of independent cavalry brigades in his army. Any kind of counter can be used a Decoy.

Cf 1.2 Concealed Forces
A Concealed Force (CF) is represented on the map by a Concealment Marker with either a divisional commander, independent cavalry brigade or Decoy counter hidden under it.

Cf 1.3 Creating Concealed Forces

At the start of any friendly Movement Phase, a player may place a Concealment Marker on any divisional commander and remove all of his combat units from the map provided that all of the units are a) in command and b) outside of enemy LOS. The combat units are stacked somewhere off-map. Units directly subordinated to the concealed division's corps (artillery units and such, including the corps HQ and commander) may conceal themselves in a division's off-map stack at the same time, provided they too were within command range of the divisional commander and outside of enemy LOS. Independent cavalry brigades or cavalry brigades on brigade goals may also be concealed in this manner. If part of a division is on a brigade goal, that part remains on the map, ignoring the fact that the rest of the division has concealed itself.

Cf 1.4 Moving Concealed Forces

A CF may not move on the turn it is created. Otherwise a CF moves at the speed of the slowest unit in the concealed division paying MP's for direction changes and so on.. (A Decoy CF may move at any speed the owning player chooses.) A CF may never enter the LOS of a non-CF enemy unit and must always maintain a three-hex distance between itself and any enemy CF or "real" enemy unit, regardless of LOS considerations. CF's may never stack with other friendly units or CF's except for leaders and HQ's.

Cf 1.5 Creating Decoy Concealed Forces

At the start of any friendly Movement Phase, before creating new CF's, the player may have his already existing CF's "breed" new Decoy CF's. A Decoy counter hidden under a Concealment Marker may be placed in each hex with a CF in and in the Movement Phase the dummy CF may immediately start to behave as any other CF. It may in turn breed new Decoy CF's in the next turn. As stated in Cf 1.0 a player is limited to the number Decoys counters he may use and the number available at any given turn should of course reflect how may divisions the player has on the table at the moment.

Example: In Marengo the French Player starts the game with 4 Decoys, since he has four divisions on the board. When Napoleon arrives this number is increased by two, one for Monnier's Division and one for the Consular Guard cavalry.

Cf 2.0 Revealing Concealed Forces

Cf 2.1 Revealing what is in an enemy CF

If a non-CF unit moves into LOS or within two hexes of a enemy CF, the unit must stop while the CF force (if real) deploys according to Cf 1.8. If the CF contains only a Decoy, the Decoy is removed and is available for "breeding" again the next turn. Note that the revealed force may fire opportunity fire and conduct reaction charges from the instant it is placed on the map, including firing or charges against the very movement that triggered its disclosure. Remember that CF's can never cause enemy CF's to be revealed in this way.

Cf 2.2 "Unconcealing" CF's

A CF can voluntary revert to real units only at the start of a friendly movement phase, before any movement has taken place. The units are deployed according to Cf 2.3.

Cf 2.3 Deploying from a CF

When, regardless of cause, a CF is revealed, the Concealment Marker is removed and the commander remains in the hex. His division then sets up in that and any adjacent hexes while observing the following rules:

- No unit may be placed across impassable terrain.
- If the CF moved in the turn before being revealed, infantry units must be in column and artillery limbered and as far as possible placed in road hexes.
- If the CF did not move in the previous turn, its artillery may set up unlimbered.

Cf 3.0 Scouts, Stragglers and Other Activities

Cf 3.1 Releasing Scouts
At the start of any friendly movement phase a CF may release up to one cavalry unit and/or any number of skirmishers from the concealed force, while the rest of the force remains concealed. CF's containing lone cavalry brigades or just Decoys may of course not do this. The revealed units are placed on top of the CF and may then move up to two hexes away from it, if skirmishers, and four Leader MP's away if cavalry. (Players may agree to use some anonymous counter to represent a released cavalry unit in order to prevent "instant intelligence.") The cavalry unit's true identity should be revealed only if it enters the LOS of an enemy non-CF unit.

Cf 3.2 Straggler Recovery and Forced Marching
Units in CF's may recover stragglers as in any other situation, counting enemy CF's as enemy units for the purpose of series rule 21.2a (same rule number in both NBS and CWB). NBS leaders may affect up to AAA levels worth of units in the CF. If a CF force marches, either note the number of turns it does so and roll for stragglers for all the marches the moment the force is revealed, or roll for stragglers each turn. A force may not roll for stragglers the turn it conceales itself.

Cf 3.3 Commanders in CF's
Commanders in CF's can of course roll for initiative as usual. (This needs a bit of trust, so be sure to keep track of your actions.) A CF that suffers out a "loose cannon" result is revealed regardless of were it is on the map, but the enemy player must write the loose cannon order before the actual revealing takes place.

Cf 4.0 Visibility Conditions

Cf 4.1 Visibility Changes
When when visibility changes for the better at dawn the player who moves first has an obvious advantage as he will be be able to react first to those units that has been revealed. Therefore I suggest that the mutual revealing should take place after the First Player's Command Phase in order to cancel the First Player's advantage a bit.

Cf 4.2 Who goes there?
At a certain range a commander can not longer make out what is moving about in the distance. But while he would not have a chance to make out what was moving he would be quite sure there was something there as rumors don't stir up dust the way 3000 marching troops do. Therefore CF's moving in enemy LOS beyond 15 hexes (2700 meters or 3000 yards) are revealed only if they are dummy CF's. CF's with real troops in them are not revealed. It should then be obvious to the Enemy Player that that particular CF is indeed something real and hostile.

CWB Addenda

In some scenarios players may be woefully short of cavalry and therefore quite blind, but we do not think there is a need for any extra scout markers or such. Those of you who do not agree are free to come up with any reasonable solution for scouting. You might want to use the CWB scout counters from the 1995 Errata and Variants counter sheet. Anyhow, those up till now quite useless D morale, C size cavalry units are now very, very important. Also note that units wandering up to within two hexes of a CF in a forest are very likely to get struck on a number of ZOC's because the just-revealed force is free to deploy in the ZOC of the unit that just revealed it.