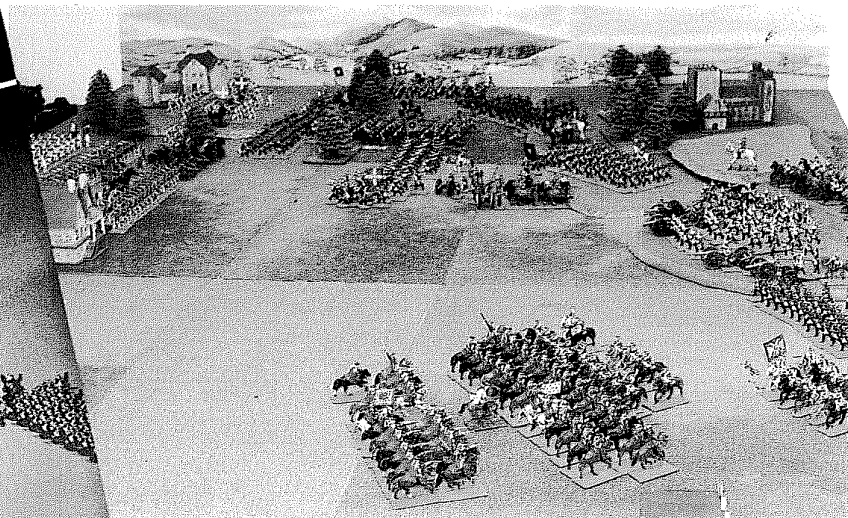


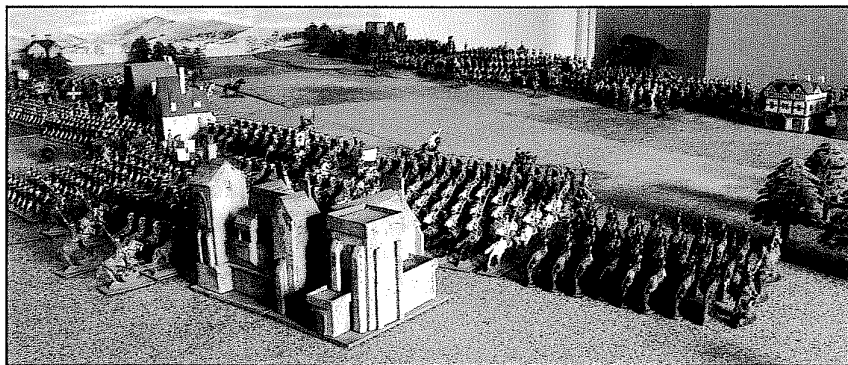
*The front cover of the The War Game, depicting the original Mollwitz wargame acts as a background to the figures of the two commanders-in-chief. Photo: Charles Grant.*

**Charles Grant and Stuart Asquith describe how they re-fought the wargame based on the Battle of Mollwitz 1741...**

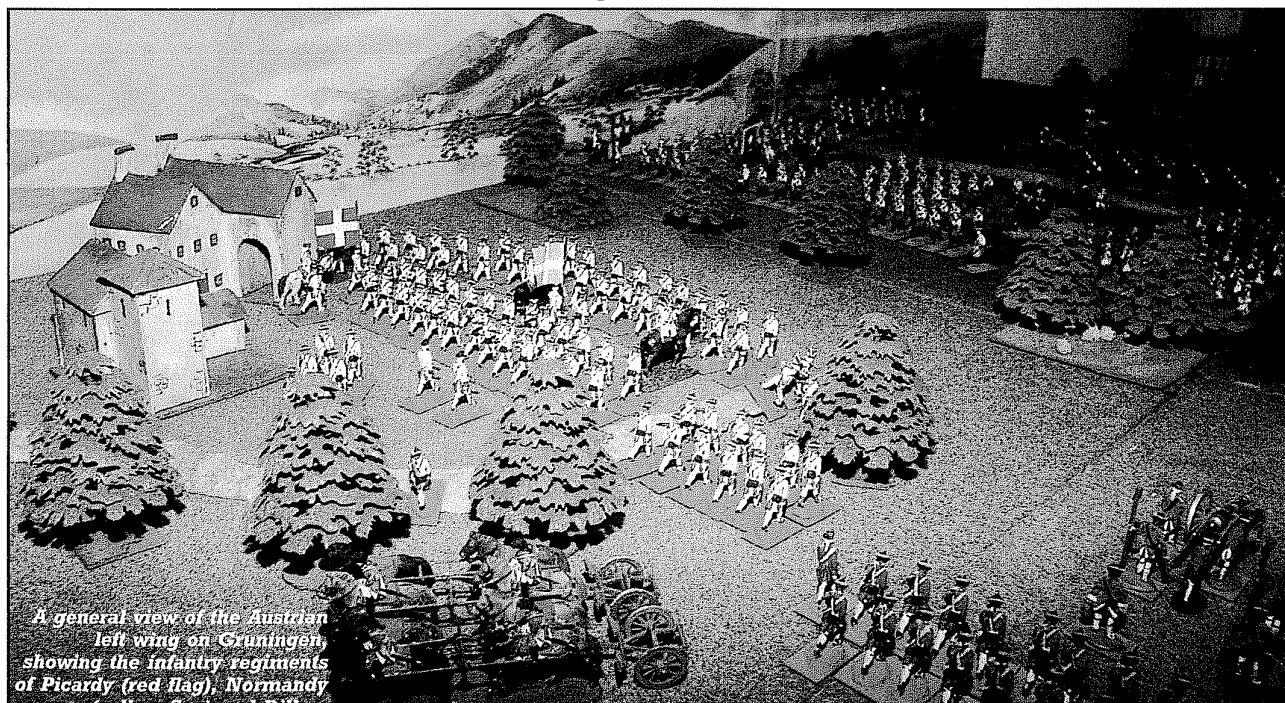


*The cavalry melee has reached stalemate, but in the distance the massed ranks of the Prussian infantry can be seen pressing home their attack. Photo: Charles Grant.*

# MOLLWITZ



*The ranks of the Austrian cavalry, massed in the vicinity of Langwitz. Photo: Stuart Asquith.*



*A general view of the Austrian left wing on Gruningen, showing the infantry regiments of Picardy (red flag), Normandy (blue flag), and...*

**"T**he first occasion on which Frederick the Great commanded an army in battle, at Mollwitz on 10th April 1741, at the beginning of the war of the Austrian Succession, was not a happy one for him, and indeed it had a certain opera bouffe quality about it which in later life he was glad to erase from his memory. This was for a commander the dreadful situation when, early in the fight, he decides that the day is lost and flees the field, leaving a subordinate, in this case Marshal Schwerin, to win the battle in his absence. Historically, though, the engagement is an interesting one, not by reason of its Frederician tactics (they were non-existent) but as being the first demonstration of the fighting power of the Prussian infantry, a power which was to have a profound effect on the battles of the succeeding twenty years or so. Mollwitz was, in fact, a good ding dong sort of affair, and is particularly suitable for refighting on the war game table, this being obviously the reason for my choosing it as an example of what I call a "big battle"...

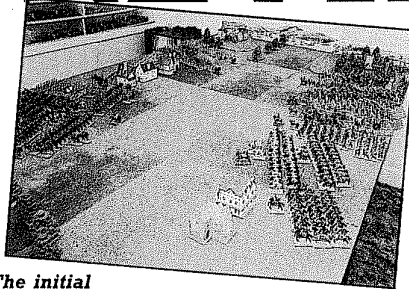
outlining the historical background and details of the battle it will suffice to say that Frederick with some 21,000 surprised the Austrians who had about 19,000. However, the Austrians were able to turn to meet the threat. For those who would know more of the real battle then the works of Christopher Duffy, referred to in the bibliography, are recommended as the best place to start. What is of particular interest in this battle, despite the apparent numerical balance of forces, is the composition of the two armies.

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| Prussia | 31 infantry battalions<br>(including 8 grenadiers)<br>30 avarly squadrons<br>3 hussar squadrons<br>37 field and 16 heavy guns |
| Austria | 16 infantry battalions<br>14 grenadier companies<br>11 calvary regiments  |

2 regiments of light cavalry  
1.1/2 batteries (2 guns, 1 howitzer)

The two armies were deployed as they had been at the start of the refight in *The War Game*. It should be noted that these were not the real battle field dispositions. It had originally been decided that rather than constrain each side to fight as the real battle had gone, the commanders could determine their own dispositions within the ground occupied by each respective side. The end result was the deployment show in Map One. Of particular significance was the shift of the cavalry on both sides to the other side of the battlefield, but still facing each other. A certain amount of adjustment was needed to translate the original Grant 9 x 7 foot playing surface to Stuart's 8 x 5 war game table. The rules to be used were the original Grant rules and the unit organisations were therefore the large ones from the book with infantry regiments of 48 men + 5 officers and cavalry of 24 troopers and 4 officers. Not surprisingly therefore, the deployment took some two hours

# REVISITED



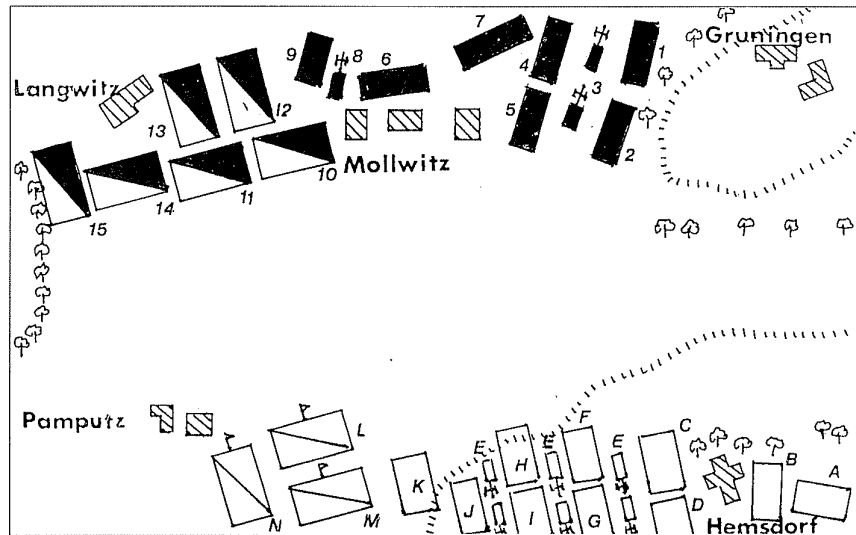
The initial dispositions with the Prussians on the right of the picture.  
Photo: Charles Grant.

This introductory paragraph from the appropriate chapter of *The War Game*, by the late Charles Grant and published in 1971, is the start point for this article. No apology is made for repeating it *verbatim*.

Among the joint war game meetings planned by the authors for 1992 it was decided that the battle of Mollwitz, as described in *The War Game*, would feature as "a big game". (In addition Minden, Lobositz and Fontenoy are on the agenda for the future.) After further deliberation it was agreed that the venue would be Stuart's house, but that Charles would bring the original Spencer-Smith 30mm armies, now almost 30 years old and the original balsa wood houses used at that time. The Austrian Army would be provided by those of the Grand Duchy of Lorraine while the Prussians would be found from the regiments of the Vereinigte Freie Stadte (the two notional countries which had formed the basis of so many Grant wargames). Indeed we would refight the refight of Mollwitz.

## The Setting

Without spending a great deal of time



2 hussar regiments  
19 field guns

In short the Prussian infantry and artillery superiority was counter balanced by the cavalry superiority of the Austrians; these factors would inevitably influence the plans of both sides.

These force levels were translated into the following war game units in the original refight and were used again on this occasion:

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| Prussia | 8 regiments of line infantry<br>2 regiments of grenadiers<br>2 regiments of heavy cavalry<br>1 regiments of light cavalry<br>3 batteries (6 guns in all) |
| Austria | 6 regiments of line infantry<br>1 regiment of grenadiers<br>4 regiments of heavy cavalry   |

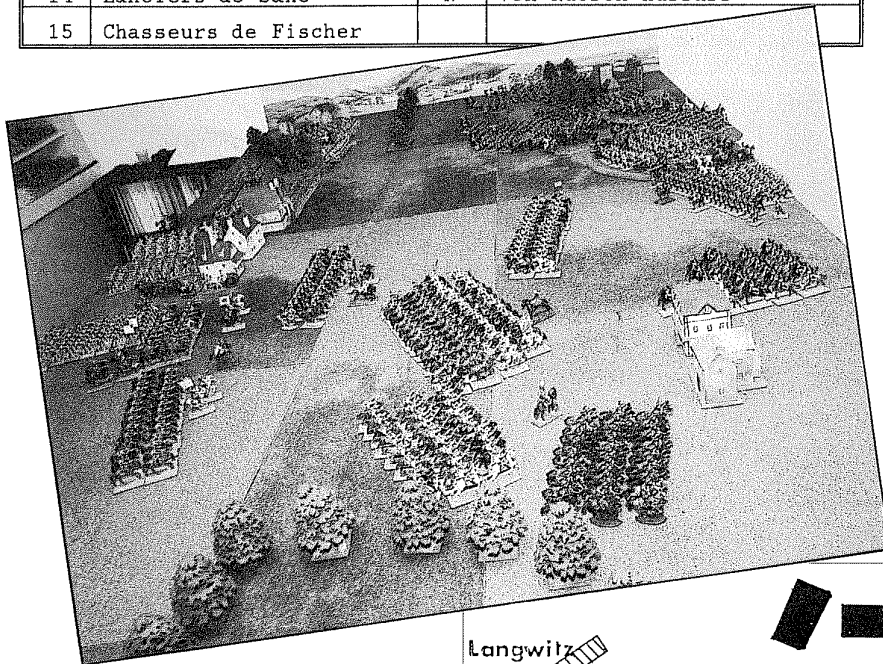
on the Friday evening and the end result really did look like two large armies about to do battle. Charles with the Prussians took the part of General Graf von Grunt, while Stuart adopted the mantle of Marshal General Fritz von Tarlenheim with the Austrians, the two generals from the original account. After declaring mutual satisfaction with the deployment, the two generals retired downstairs to review the forthcoming battle over a glass or two. Some time later after much wargame talk the two generals retired for the night.

## The Opening Shots

**The Austrian Plan.** In order to beat the Prussians it would be necessary to take the initiative and make the best use of the cavalry superiority. The Austrian horse would defeat the Prussian cavalry

TABLE OF FORCES

|    | AUSTRIA              |   | PRUSSIA                 |
|----|----------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1  | Normandy Infantry    | A | Vastmanland Infantry    |
| 2  | Picardy Infantry     | B | Livgarden Infantry      |
| 3  | Field Gun Battery    | C | Schaumburger-Lippe Inf  |
| 4  | Bulkeley Infantry    | D | Oldenburg Infantry      |
| 5  | Dillon Infantry      | E | 3 Field Gun Batteries   |
| 6  | Royal Eccossais Inf  | F | Ostergotland Infantry   |
| 7  | Navarre Infantry     | G | Pfalz - Sonderheim Inf  |
| 8  | Howitzer             | H | Lowenstein - Oels Grens |
| 9  | Grenadiers de France | I | Knyphausen Grenadiers   |
| 10 | Bourbon Cavalry      | J | Butyrsky Infantry       |
| 11 | Cuirassiers du Roi   | K | Sobieski Infantry       |
| 12 | Les Mousquetaires    | L | Hohenzollern Kurassiere |
| 13 | Gendarmerie du Roi   | M | Ahlefeldt Kurassiere    |
| 14 | Lanciers de Saxe     | N | Von Ruesch Hussars      |
| 15 | Chasseurs de Fischer |   |                         |

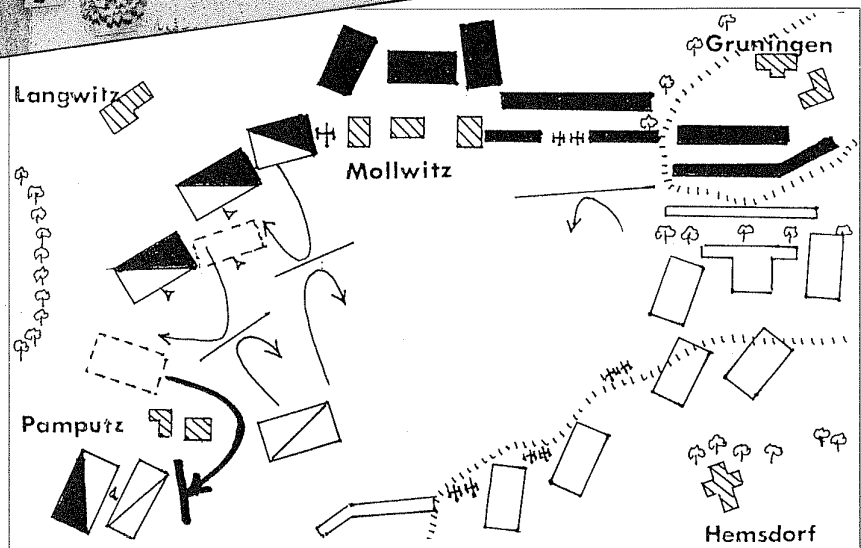


The cavalry action begins. Note the Lanciers de Saxe (Austrian) starting to move around to take the von Ruesch Hussars (Prussian) in the flank. Photo: Charles Grant.

and drive them from the field (as indeed had happened in reality). Once this was achieved the Prussians would be powerless to advance with their foot and would fear for the security of their left flank, having created these conditions the Austrians would then exploit them to destroy the less mobile Prussian foot.

**The Prussian Plan.** The Prussian plan rested heavily on their ability to hold the Austrian horse. The Austrian cavalry superiority had to be neutralised on the left while the infantry would deliver a concentrated hammer blow on the right through Gruningen. This would be supported by the massed artillery on the forward slopes of the Hemsdorf feature. The question was, could the Prussian cavalry on the left hold the numerically superior Austrian horse?

**Opening Moves.** The battle



commenced shortly after 9 o'clock on the Saturday morning. At the outset it was a pretty grim affair, the silence broken from time to time by a laconic 'finished? right, next move then. The Austrian horse, though hard pressed to move forward in the limited space, advanced with much jingling of harness and thunder of hooves. It was an

awesome sight. A prolonged and widespread cavalry melee followed and fortunes ebbed and flowed with a sea of milling horsemen. Meanwhile the Austrian infantry were content to form a defensive line from Mollwitz to Gruningen on their right. The single artillery battery took up an important position in the centre of this line and their fire began to rake the Prussian infantry who were now moving ominously off the Hemsdorf feature towards Gruningen. Move after move the fortunes changed as the cavalry action continued, but still without a clear result.

Around lunch time the two generals took advantage of a lull in the battle to retire downstairs to quaff an ale and enjoy bread, cheese and cold meats provided by what must be the best wargame *cantiniere* in the hobby. Restored and nourished it was back to the battle field - nothing so far was decided and there was all to play for.

### A Turning Point

**The Austrian View at Midday.** Despite some individual successes the cavalry melee was not going well; the attrition rates were heavy and little headway was being made. The longer it continued the worse things became for the Austrians and it would be necessary to commit the cavalry reserve to decide the outcome. However this was a reverse for the Austrians who had hoped to hold the cavalry reserve uncommitted for exploitation later in the battle. It was clearly disappointing, but by no means critical - at least so von

Tarlenheim thought. There was some good news - the light cavalry had also joined the action with disastrous consequences for the Prussian Von Ruesch Hussars who were caught between the Chasseur de Fischer and the Lancier de Saxe. However, the Austrian cavalry rallying back between melees were caught in the murderous

fire of the Prussian batteries and further weakened.

Elsewhere, the Austrian infantry on the left and towards the centre at Mollwitz could see the blue coated columns now pouring off the hill and crossing the gap before mounting the slopes to Groningen. The Dillon infantry sent a crashing first volley into Vastmanland who recoiled leaving many casualties. Out on the far left, however, the Picardy infantry were also suffering. Wave after wave of Prussian infantry now assailed the left. The well sited Austrian artillery continued to perform gallantly as the gunners (and the Austrian General!) sweated over the cannon. Finally, Picardy could take no more punishment and withdrew leaving the defence to the Normandy Regiment. Now there were some six Prussian regiments facing four Austrians. The pressure was considerable, but it could be matched, particularly with another regiment moving left from Mollwitz – provided that the Austrian cavalry did their stuff. (See Map Two).

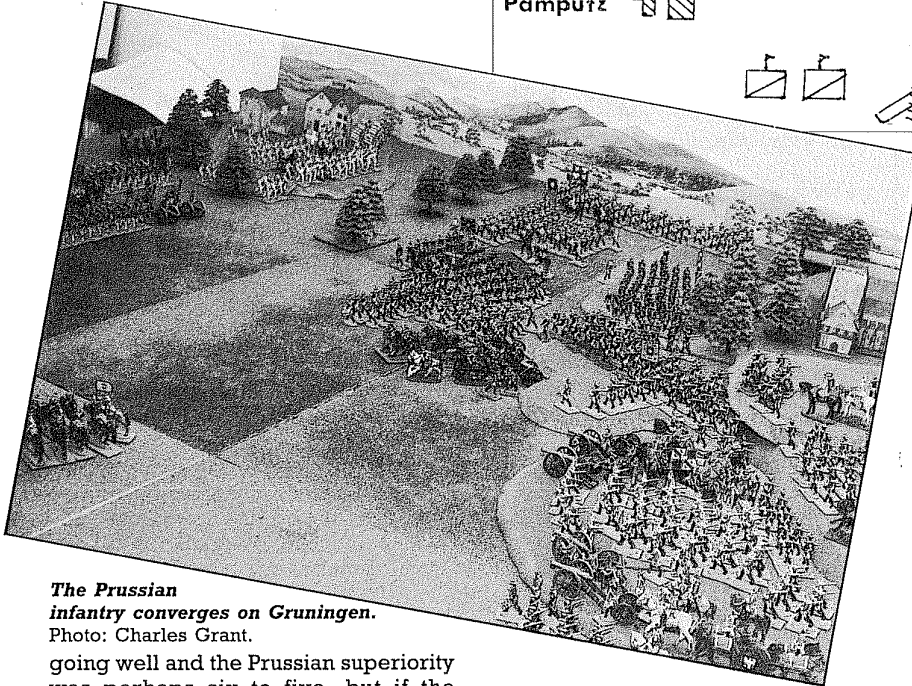
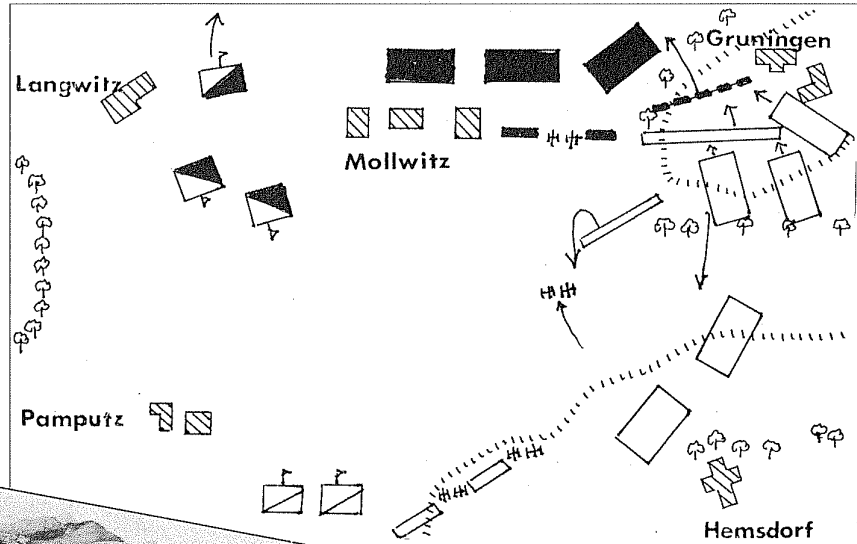
**The Prussian View at three o'clock.**  
By mid afternoon the main attack was

## The Final Act

**The Prussian View at four o'clock.**  
With the left flank secure and the Austrian cavalry threat gone further resources were slipped to the right flank with a battalion of grenadiers and one of foot. The balance of forces coupled with the artillery superiority swung now behind the Prussians. The Austrian guns were outflanked while all three Prussian batteries were now moving to rake the Austrian line. The

## Conclusion

So the refight of Mollwitz came to an end – indeed in a manner not unlike the first occasion it was refought, all those years ago. It was for both parties and regardless of the result, a most enjoyable day. The game had provided both players with some unusual problems. For Charles, the problem of creating the space to manoeuvre on the smaller table took some overcoming and caused some concern early on.



**The Prussian infantry converges on Groningen.**  
Photo: Charles Grant.

going well and the Prussian superiority was perhaps six to five, but if the Austrian Horse could be neutralised, two more regiments of foot could be released from the left flank to reinforce the assault. The balance had moved somewhat in the Prussian favour, but now the decisive point was near – three relatively fresh regiments of Austrian horse (including the reserve) were locked in combat with two weakened Prussian ones. Lady Luck was with the Prussians as one then another Austrian regiment broke to be raked with artillery fire as it withdrew. The Austrians had failed to break the Prussian cavalry on the left, both sides had fought each other to a standstill and the Prussian flank was secure.

pressure on the right was enormous and the Austrians began to give ground.

**The Austrian Decision at four thirty.**  
Despite a valiant defence the Austrian position was now untenable. The left flank was turned, Groningen was in Prussian hands and they were threatening to roll up the flank. The remains of the Austrian horse were unfit for further action. (See Map three). The Austrian General decided that the only option was to salvage what remained of his army and attempt to withdraw in some sort of order while taking advantage of the failing light. Thus bloodied but victorious the Prussians claimed the victory.

Equally there was the need to balance the boldness of the infantry attack with the outcome of the cavalry action. The exposed left of the infantry, as it crossed the low ground from Hemsdorf to Groningen, was vulnerable to the Austrian horse but thankfully they were committed elsewhere. Stuart would admit to being initially uncertain of how to operate such large battalions and being somewhat in awe of the sheer history of the occasion. It was also necessary for him to adapt to the differences between the rules being used and those of *Charge* with which he was more familiar. On the subject of the rules, they worked well and have clearly stood the test of time. Those who have enjoyed the real chaos of one to one wargame combat will appreciate the ebb and flow of the countless cavalry melees and the significance of the volley fire of the infantry battalions. Great stuff – try it and see!

All in all Mollwitz revisited was a great success. It provided a first class mid-eighteenth century "big battle" and is certainly recommended. And so to the next occasion on which we will test our steel – Minden.

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