

# A Scuffle in the Rain

by Ben Fiene

## Editor's Introduction

I was particularly impressed by this scenario submission by Ben Fiene from New South Wales, Australia, as it serves as a great example of what can be done with Sharp Practice. Ben was somewhat apologetic about the lack of fair Spanish ladies and dashing Riflemen in his scenario, for what he has produced is straight from the pages of history rather than fiction, and more power to him for doing so. I know that many gamers use Sharp Practice with a man to figure scale rather than as a pure one man = one figure skirmish, and that for many the rules are used without any of the optional derring-do to re-fight historical encounters, and that is great to see. I intend to do much the same with my AWI collection and get some really big battalions on the tabletop. Well done to Ben for showing us just what can be achieved with the rules.

## Historical Background

The Royal and Imperial Army of Austria, commanded by the able *Generalissimus* Archduke Charles, invaded Bavaria with the goal of defeating the French while they are caught up in Spain. The politicians hoped to reduce the influence of France on 'German affairs' and some even dreamt of re-establishing the Holy Roman Empire on the bones of Napoleon's upstart Confederation of the Rhine.

Archduke Charles, somewhat more of a realist, understanding that it was only a matter of time until an inevitable Austrian defeat. Despite this, he did his duty and invaded Bavaria on 11<sup>th</sup> April, hoping to secure a few victories before Napoleon arrived and so secure a better position to negotiate a peace. His main goal was the preservation of an intact Austrian army, thereby preserving the Habsburg monarchy.

The invasion was initially successful, and the white-coated columns of Austria struck into Bavarian lands, the Confederation allies falling back in an effort to regroup and await the arrival of Napoleon. The French army of Germany was commanded by Marshal Berthier - an able chief of staff, but with a very limited ability for independent command. Thanks in part to a failure in communication the French army, along with their Bavarian and Württemberg allies, found themselves in a series of demoralising marches and counter-marches in conditions of almost constant rain. The elite Corps of Marshal Davout was ordered to march eastwards alone, and as a consequence found itself nearly surrounded. Only quick thinking on the part of the Marshal saved the Corps from total envelopment and destruction.

Finally, on the evening of the 19<sup>th</sup> of April, Napoleon arrived. He quickly appraised himself of the situation and travelled to the Bavarian VII Corps, located near Abensberg. Close behind him was Marshal Lannes and his provisional Corps. Napoleon immediately ordered an attack. He gathered the Bavarian officers on a hill outside of Abensberg, and addressed them.

*Bavarian soldiers! I stand before you today not as the Emperor of France but as protector of your country and of the Confederation of the Rhine. Bavarians! I trust you to fight alone against the Austrians. Not a single Frenchman is in the first line, they are in reserve and the enemy is unaware of their presence. I have complete faith in your bravery. I have already expanded the borders of your land; I see now that I have not yet gone far enough. I will make you so great that you will not need my protection in any future war with Austria. For 200 years, the Bavarian army, supported by France, has fought heroically against Austria. We march to Vienna, where we will punish it for all the evil it has caused your fatherland. They want to divide your nation and enroll you in Austrian regiments. Bavarians! This war shall be the last you fight against your enemies. Attack them with the bayonet and destroy them!*

## Scenario Design Notes

This scenario is a stylized version of events during the Battle of Abensberg. The battle consisted of a number of small engagements, many suitable to be gamed with Sharp Practice. Please note that groups represent companies. As there are a number of unknowns in this scenario, it is advised that there be an umpire, and that the players read their own briefings separately. If no umpire is available the Austrian player should read the Umpire's Notes. The Bavarians should use either the French bonus cards or Bavarian ones available on the Sharp Practice Forum.

# Austrian Briefing

*Near Abensberg, Bavaria. 20<sup>th</sup> April 1809, 1000hrs*

Hauptmann Walter Biedermeier of the Royal and Imperial Austrian Army was worried. It had been over an hour since he had dispatched the scouting party to the woods below his little bastion. He nervously checked his pocket watch for what felt like the hundredth time. He glanced over at the sentry. It shouldn't be taking so long. He decided to take a look for himself.

Biedermeier climbed the wall and peered out to the west over the plain towards the woods beyond. Under the heavy April sky, the woods were a black impenetrable mass. In the distance, thunder rumbled menacingly. More rain was on the way. One of the sentries suddenly cried out, the shout breaking the silence.

"Herr Hauptmann, the scouts, they're back"

"Open the gate"

Biedermeier leapt down from the makeshift firing platform and made his way brusquely towards the gate at the rear of the farmyard. Three bedraggled looking figures in mud-spattered white uniforms came through the gate at the double. The leader of the group, the battalion's senior NCO, Feldwebel Rauch ran straight over to Biedermeier halted and saluted as crisply as if on a Viennese parade ground.

"It's the Bavarians sir, they're in the woods. Loads of them, at least a regiment but I'd say more likely a whole division. Looks like you were right sir; they're massing for a major attack. They're already in the town."

"The Bavarians? In Offenstetten? Are you certain?"

"Yes sir, I saw them with my own eyes. Only infantry but surely the artillery and cavalry can't be far behind."

"Well done Feldwebel, that will be all. You and your men may take a double ration of beer."

"Yes sir, thank you sir" Rauch and the other two turned and made off towards the farm's well-stocked cellar. Rauch hesitated and turned, now speaking in a lowered voice. "Sir, there was one more thing. The Bavarians, sir. I overheard them talking of... well, talking of Napoleon sir"

"Napoleon?"

"Yes sir, we heard them say that now Napoleon was here they could stop running and start winning" Biedermeier frowned.

"Idle talk no doubt Feldwebel, I shouldn't worry about it. Now go join your men before they drink your share"

"Very good sir"

Biedermeier's mind was reeling. The Bavarians in Offenstetten already. And Napoleon, here? Wasn't the Corsican supposed to be in Paris? Biedermeier's commander, Generalmajor Thierry of the army's advance guard, had personally given him his orders. Take two companies and hold the walled farm above Offenstetten. Thierry had said that no major enemy action was to be expected in this sector. Now a Bavarian division was massing for attack, and more ominous than that, there were rumors that Napoleon himself was here.

Biedermeier took control of his brief moment of panic. Thierry's command was scattered all around the area, and surely once the firing started help would come. Archduke Charles himself was only a short distance away with the army reserve. A shout interrupted the Hauptmann's train of thought.

"Sir, movement in the woods". It was the sentry.

Biedermeier rushed across the muddy farmyard and once more climbed the wall, squinting across the field in the gloomy light. The woods, previously so still, were now alive with the unmistakable movement of soldiers. They were coming.

Biedermeier turned and bellowed out a command for his men to prepare to receive an attack. His command was echoed by NCOs and junior officers as men poured out of the farm buildings and towards the walls, hurriedly adjusting kit as they ran. The two companies took their positions along the farmyard's thick stonewalls. The men had hollowed out firing holes, and the walls were excellent defense against everything except artillery. If they could just hold out for long enough, Thierry would surely send help. Napoleon or no, Hauptmann Biedermeier was going to give these Bavarians a morning to remember.

## **Austrian Forces**

- **Hauptmann Walter Biedermeier (Status III)**  
(Honourable, Lion Hearted, To The Manor Born, Accomplished Swordsman)
- **Leutnant Franz Schiegel (Status I)**  
(Honourable, Avaricious)
- **Feldwebel Hans Rauch (Status I)**  
(Honourable, Athlete, Lush - he has just had a bellyful of beer!
- **Two twelve figure companies of Fusiliers (Good troops, Musket armed)**

# Bavarian Briefing

Near Abensberg, Bavaria. 20<sup>th</sup> April 1809, 1000hrs

Water dripped from the leaves of the forest canopy, falling heavily onto the shoulders of the men moving almost silently through the gloom below.

Crouched in the wet undergrowth, Major Ludwig Weber of the Royal Bavarian Army was in his element. Weber was the commander of the combined Schützen, the elite light infantrymen who formed the vanguard of the division's advance.

Just a few hours ago, he had stood on the hill outside Abensberg and heard the words of the French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte. Weber had at first found it difficult to believe that the hunched figure in a muddy grey greatcoat and an unadorned bicorn was the Emperor of the French, the victor of Austerlitz, Jena and Friedland. The moment *le Empereur* had opened his mouth however, all doubt was removed. His speech had struck the heart of the assembled Bavarians. The Emperor of Battles himself was placing his trust in the Bavarian army to open the campaign against the Austrian aggressors; a campaign that the Emperor promised would lead to Vienna within a month. His piercing grey eyes had looked right at Weber, and the Major had known then that with this man in command, the long retreat was over and victory was assured.

Now the whole army was on the move, advancing to crush the Austrian army of Archduke Charles and to push the 'Kaiserliks' out of Bavaria. Weber's mission was to clear the way for the 10,000 men of Crown Prince Ludwig's 1<sup>st</sup> Bavarian Division. So far his men had cleared their way through the large woods northwest of the village of Offenstetten. Units from General Deroy's 3<sup>rd</sup> Bavarian division were advancing on his right flank, where they would occupy the village and then advance to the crossroads at Rohr, cutting the Austrian lines of communication.

"Major, scouts report that the enemy is holed up in the farm ahead. Major Speiss reports that he has occupied Offenstetten with General Deroy's schützen."

It was Leutnant Frederic von Röchling, commander of the first of Weber's four schützen companies. Röchling may have been young and from a wealthy noble family, but he was also a brave and skilled commander. Röchling had earned the grudging respect of both his commander and his men by sharing every hardship with them, even when his social status would have allowed him numerous privileges.

Weber and Röchling moved quietly to the edge of the woods. Ahead of them was a large field, rising gently up towards more woods. In the middle of the field stood the stout ugly forms of a walled farm compound. The movement on the walls betrayed the presence of Austrian defenders.

"Looks like our first fight of the day" Röchling flashed a grin. "I'd like to volunteer my company to advance first"

Weber remained silent, surveying the enemy strongpoint.

"Leutnant, your bravery is commendable, but I'm afraid in this case we will have to work together. The walls are going to be difficult to overcome without artillery. You take first company and see if you can skirt around to the north of the farm and get at them from behind. I'll advance straight at them with the other three companies in skirmish order and well see if we can't draw their fire".

"Jawohl, Herr Major. It would be my honour. We'll take the farm if we have to pull the wall down stone by stone."

A commotion to the rear drew the attention of the officers. A group of schützen were blocking the path of another man.

"Let me through you idiots, I must see the Major" The speaker was an officer in the dark blue and black uniform of the Bavarian Artillery.

The man hustled his way over to Weber and Röchling. He saluted and then held out his hand to Weber.

"Leutnant Vogel, Hauptmann Regnier sent me. He thought that you lads might need a bit of heavy support with the farm. I've got a 6 pounder back there, it would be my honour to 'knock on the door' for you, so to speak."

"Well, this is fortuitous Leutnant. After this is over you must send my regards to the good Hauptmann. Would you be so kind as to set your gun up over there."

"Yes sir, I'll get right on it. Give me five minutes and we'll have that wall down." Vogel smiled, saluted again and scurried off to the rear.

Weber stared out across the field again. There was activity on the walls now.

"Looks like they've spotted us. Leutnant Röchling, I think a change in plans is called for. With Vogel's help my three companies should be able to get in amongst them rather quickly. You advance to the north and cut off their line of retreat."

Röchling saluted and hurried off towards his company.

Weber turned to his hornist.

"Hans, sound the horn up" The young musician spat, then blew the signal, the harsh noise shattering the heavy silence. As if appearing from thin air the three companies of Weber's command moved forward out of the gloom and formed up on the treeline, muskets and rifles at the ready.

Weber straightened his tunic, drew his sword, and, holding it high above his head, bellowed out the order.

"Schützen, vorwärts!"

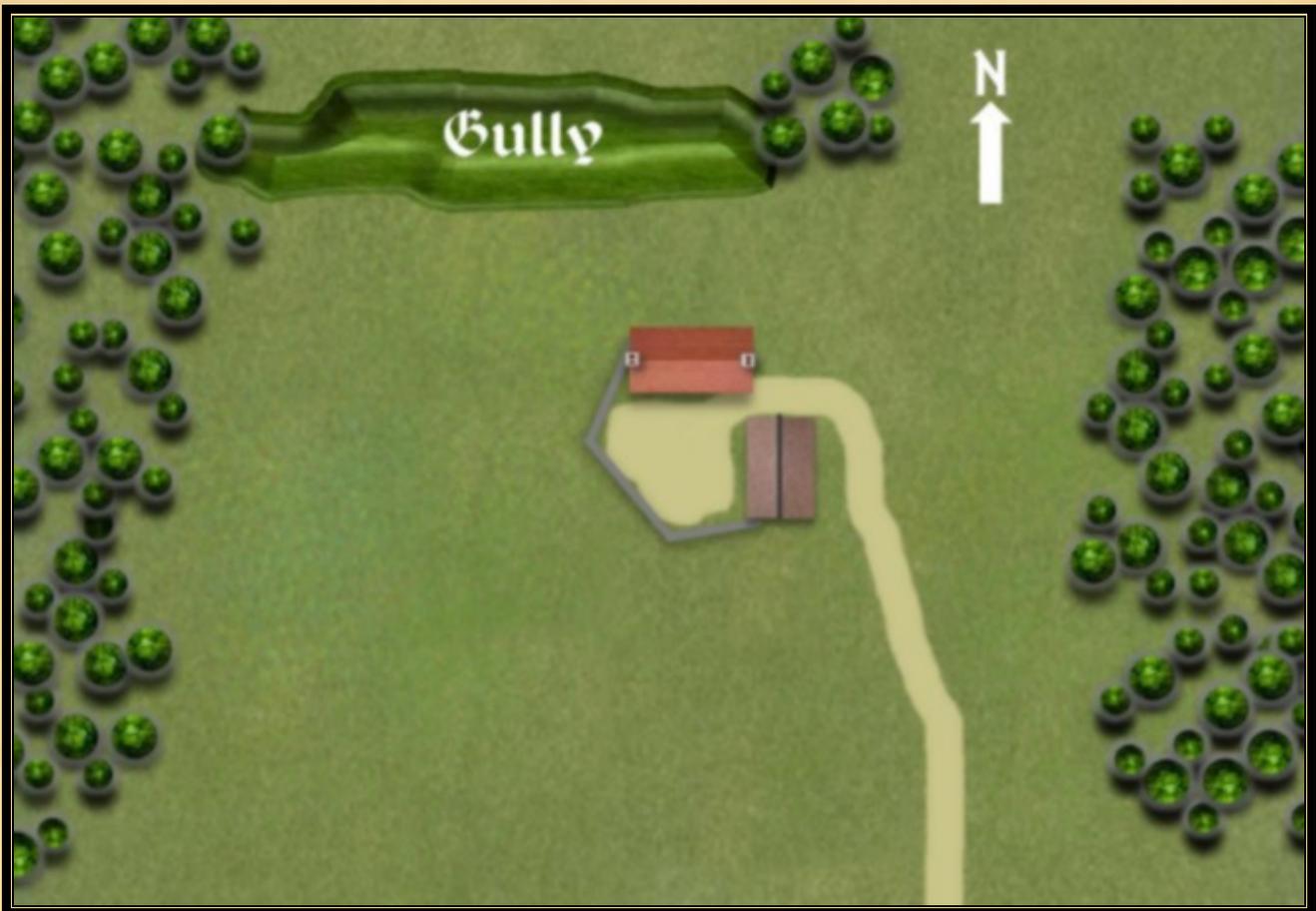
## **Bavarian Forces**

- **Schützen Major Ludwig Weber (IV) & Bugler.**  
(Chivalrous, Charismatic, Countryman, Accomplished Swordsman)
  
- **Schützen Leutnant Frederic von Röchling (III)**  
(Honourable, Lion Hearted, Athlete, Minor Royalty)
  
- **Schützen Leutnant Michael Koch (I)**  
- (Devout, Countryman)
  
- **Schützen Feldwebel Hans Klammer (I)**  
- (Honourable, Lush)
  
- **Artillery Leutnant Heinrich Vogel (I)**  
(Honourable, Man of Letters)
  
- **Four 12 figure combined schützen companies (Good w/muskets)**  
NB: four men from each company may be rifle armed.
  
- **One 6 pound cannon (Light Gun) with five crewmen (Good)**

## Umpire's Briefing

The table is 6' by 4', the main feature being a farm consisting of two buildings, a farmhouse and a barn, and a walled enclosure. The buildings have few windows. If a player decides to garrison the farmhouse, only four men out of the group may fire. For the barn, only two may fire.

Along with the buildings, the farm wall counts as hard cover. All men behind the wall are able to fire. There is a gate on the Eastern side of the farm. If a Bavarian group tries to fight its way in, fisticuffs should proceed as normal – If the Bavarians win, the Austrians will have fallen back and vice versa. The gully counts as soft cover, as do the woods.



### Special Rules

What neither side realise is that there is a squadron of Austrian dragoons on their way. GM Thierry, panicking at the thought of his little command being swamped by the Bavarian advance, has ordered the dragoons forward to cover Hauptmann Biedermeier's withdrawal.

On the turn of the first Tiffin card, a mounted Austrian general staff officer will appear in the southeastern corner of the board. He carries new orders for Biedermeier, and news of the approaching dragoons. Once he is in contact with any Austrian Big Man's base, the Austrian Objective becomes to withdraw off the eastern edge with both groups in good condition – i.e. they have not lost their bottle and are not routing or retiring. When the ADC makes contact with an Austrian Big Man, the player will roll 1D6. On a roll of 1-4, the ADC high tails it for the eastern edge of the board. On a 5-6, he's feeling particularly heroic and will stay on as a big man with details as given below.

On the turn of the third Tiffin card, the dragoons arrive in the NE corner of the board, along with their Big Man. Their first action will be to charge the nearest Bavarian group. If the attack is successful and the Bavarian group falls back, then the Austrian player will take control of the dragoons. If not, they retire off the board at full movement.



In reality, the Austrians in the farm held up the Bavarian advance for some time before finally succumbing to greater numbers. The dragoons arrived during the action and charged the Bavarians, who calmly formed square and fought the cavalry off. The retreating dragoons suffered further casualties from the schützen who had reached the woods beyond the farm. The Bavarians took the farm and advanced east to link up with Marshal Lannes corps at Rohr, virtually annihilating GM Thierry's command.

#### **Details of the Reinforcement units:**

On First Tiffin card: *Arriving in SE Corner*

- **Staff Officer - Major Ferdinand Janosi (Status II)**  
(Sanctimonious, Glutton, Linguist, General's Son)

On Third Tiffin card: *Arriving in NE Corner*

- **Dragoon Officer - Hauptmann Albert Vranitzky (Status II)**  
(Chivalrous, Proud, Charismatic, Accomplished Horseman)
- **One squadron of 8 Dragoons (Good troops armed with carbines)**
- **Bugle Call card added to Bonus Deck**

#### **Victory Conditions**

The game ends if the following occurs:

1. The Austrians are forced from the farm and Two Bavarian Groups reach the Eastern edge of the Board
2. Two or more Bavarian groups loose their bottle and retreat off the board.

#### **Bonus Cards**

Water, Stand Fast, Ammunition, Forced March, Damnation!, 2x Pas de Charge, 2x Hop to it!, Hapsburg Hero, 2x Stoic Stalwarts

The Austrian player may start with one bonus card, the Bavarian player gets two.

#### **Bavarian Deployment notes**

All Bavarian forces must be deployed on blinds in the woods on the western side of the board. They have two dummy blinds available.

#### **Austrian Deployment notes**

All Austrian forces must be deployed within the farm compound. They may use blinds if they wish.

