TABLE CREATION

After decades of using some polystyrene tiles, painted, flocked op top, plus hills to put over, I saw the light. True it was not in one miraculous conversion as I was already using a felt mat when things did not fit. Mat plus rough polystyrene , and my old geohex too, underneath is the best way to create a good terrain, with enough flexibility and not too many storage problems (it can be stacked without trouble).

Nowadays I only use that felt mat (which does not exist as such for sale anymore las las) and readymade commercial mats (few) and two purposedly made ones (actually so far 3 as one has two sides the other side of the third is somewhat desert compatible in case.)

One mat side has the terrain for Wagram, another has Leipzig (only small stuff hey😉) and the third one the semi fictious battle of **Gjatsk for 1812. I will use this as an example.**

Gjatsk 1813 massive defensive battle, alternate Borodino on a wider better battlefield, in 1813. What if!!! The place was considered by Barclay as the stop in front of Moscow. It is told so by Clausewitz in his little book on 1812 where he was on the Russian staff. It was better than Borodino (and further west-**(today Gagarin in Smolensk oblast)**but given up after works had started as too wide and maybe by Kutusov who, upon taking command did not want to inherit from the decisions of his predecessor (and not get the full honours of victory).

It will take the whole available space 4.5m long on three tables, totalling 2.95 m deep. 18km by nearly 12! The research to arrive to this mat is in the AAR of the battle itself.

The main problem: I had to find the proper map**.** I asked and we found Russian sources on line. I did not go to the central library to ferret into the map room and maybe find period sketches and maps, maybe even the report on installing this battlefield! Though whenever I go again I might look.

Using this site I had a map of the place with everything you want from 1871. Other older maps lacking details would be only checked for the villages and extend of the town, just in case it would have changed significantly. Then it has maps from post WW1 and especially a very detailed topographical map from 1941 . Another site which I forgot to bookmark (!) some nowadays flood map that has heights shown in coloured contrasted clear layouts was quite useful to figure out faster the main heights. It also had the feature of measuring things and having local heights with passing the mouse over.

Even if I started full of elan, I soon realized that the place was complicated and short of doing a huge job of surveying and detailed special 3D full set of polystyrene tiles which I hardly can store (I have a 3x 4.5m surface tables) the main useful features will have to be enough. I am no Bruce Weigl;). Hours of trial and errors using as a bottom layer the 1871 map (after starting with the 1941- but will say further why) I ended up with a not so nice project (as the stuff was after all taken from the internet low rez) but good enough. The choice of the rectangle that would be the battlefield was also a subject of errors and multiple re doing. Studying the stuff as to how would they set up , and how to attack was very important, for all my space I cannot screw up too much. And actually I did, allowing a bit not enough space for the French, which I realized typically once every single tree and Russian was installed! obviously I did not redo it.

I was very careful about the orientation, not to use a simple North East South as on the internet maps. The Russian defenses as described by Carl Von would mainly follow the crests along the main river and the map showed it makes sense. The French need enough to deploy, the Russians too plus recoiling without falling into that ridiculous end of the world, and the flanks put where they make more sense, keeping in mind it had to fit in 18km by 11.5.

There was one striking difference between the 1871 map(s) and the 1941 map. In 1941 the woods seemed bigger, and there was a lot of water, what looed like ponds, marshes etc . along the river. I guess having been along The Volga, the Don, the Dniepr and many smaller ones (notable at Maloyaroslavets) one bank would higher than the other, and a more or less wide expense of low ground would flat and able to be flooded in spring on both sides. Villages and cultures be on the starting elevation and up. The soviets in their 1920s mess and their innate socialist belief that even Nature (not just human nature) will bend to their will, probably messed up the 1000 years proven local ways. So the floods that were contained or kept harmless would have destroyed newly forced upon agriculture, the collectivisation and industries nearby made these quite numerous villages caring no more about the land around them (I was surprised at the number of villages on this map as one striking Russian feature is- emptiness- in France and Germany you easily have a village every 2km- hence the range of the Milan ATGM-) in European Russia you can go 20 km without one. Maybe more nowadays than then, surely but still... and had a bad feeling about "shall I not have enough "eastern houses" (prompting Timecast and Kerr and King orders!). They also had a railway and a motorway built in 1941, the soviet way, not necessarily caring about water extraction-a standard feature of Moscow streets with heavy rain;).

While doing the order of battle of the 1812 in 1813, more funny things in, as French guards of 1813, the Russian volunteer cavalry from the nobles, who never had time to be fully raised (I have a full division of them with funny dresses, most accurate) could be put in play. And then I discovered I need more Russian generals, and Prussian batteries...
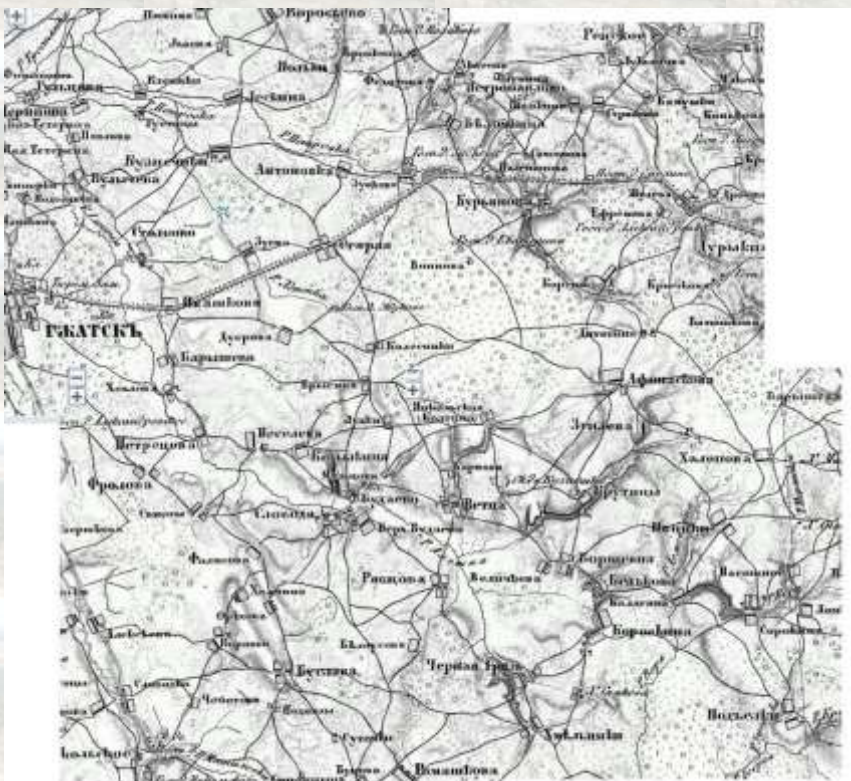
One of the things that would be of importance, most but not all the eastern bank of the river is higher than the "French" bank, This one often not significant for the game. I decided the higher bank would be 2 levels high, the higher steep (a common feature of Russian rivers) one marked with "crests". some of the highest places were put as hills as featured on the modern height map. Most of the rest of the banks as crests, being level 1;

one inch from the river is level -1 in case. Some level 3 crop up south mostly and I curtailed the woods that otherwise bisect too much the Russian position. Clauzewitz says they were on the rear nicely covering the path of retreat. the bigger forested area maybe modern (even 19th century modern) effect of better agriculture and less cultivated land further from villages. Russian woods normally are high trees with not so much brush underneath, only at the edges. So dark and relatively easy to move in, but still surely not in close order formations.

Now the mat will be 80% accurate and speed set up tremendously.
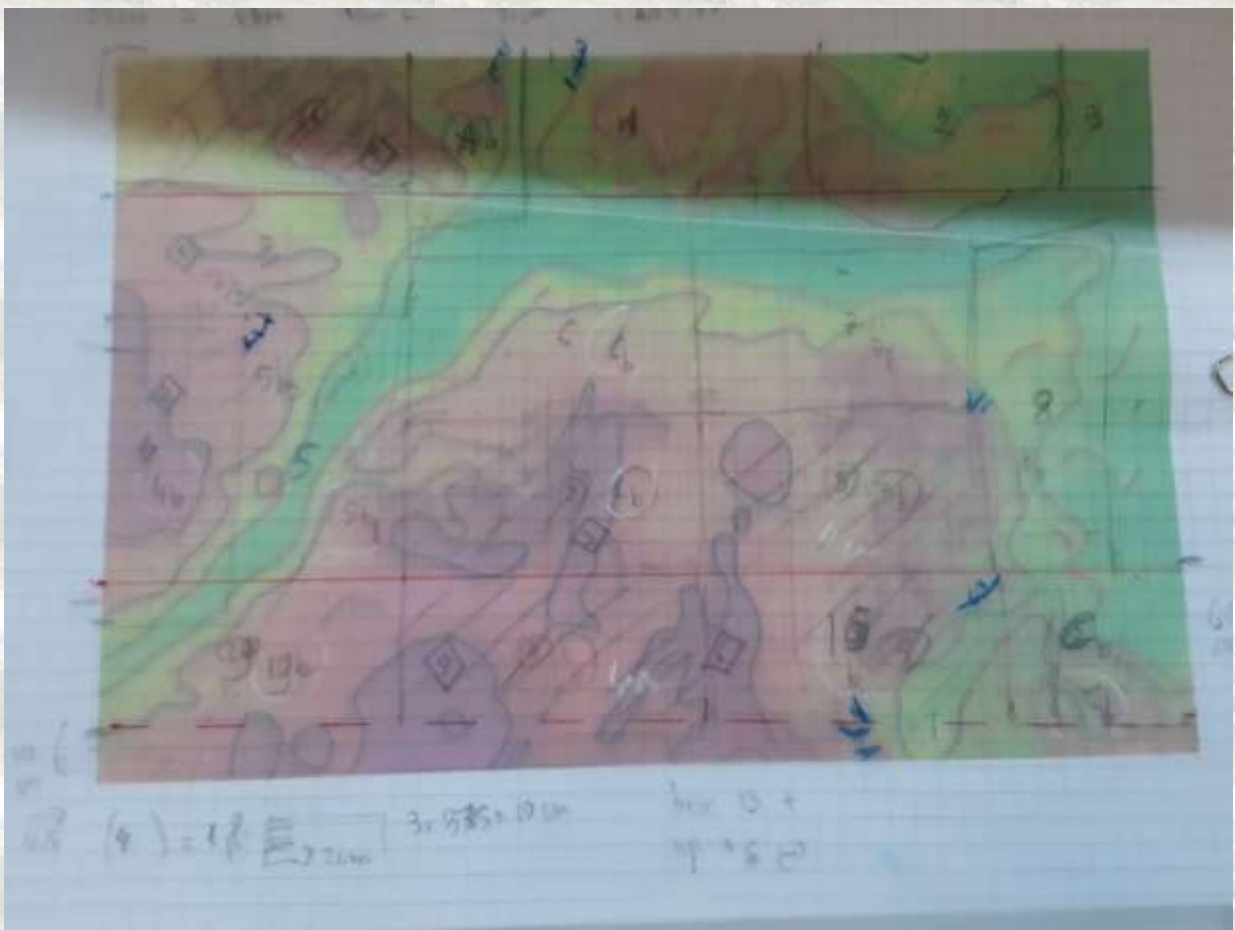
This battle warrants a set of heights, as you can see it is rather rolling terrain, though in reality the heights differences are not so great. On a battlefield they can still make the difference, hiding troops, giving some advantage. Here I used the table itself as level 0, there will be a level -1 close to the streams, marked on the map (by the greenery bordering them). I have some hilltops or variants to put over the mat. This can allow more reuse of the whole in a different setting. I also gave up digging the river bed to allow a better reuse of the polystyrene or part of it for a different terrain.

Once the 3D base is done (can be corrected on minor glitches with the "magic sand" bought from Amazon (Swedish stuff), go for the mat itself.

Then streams as they command the rest, cannot be corrected once done. First drawn (as everything else) with light white check to check.

Then roads

(the pastel and chalk tools.)

Roads and then edges of the woods, then global zone of the villages, then the zones (gardens) inside. Test with houses not to do too small; but it can be corrected somewhat, later.
If only...I had a lighter coloured background the river could have been more blue gray... think well of contrasts as pastels will tone down. When you feel safe to, start creating with pastels (or paint depending on support and aimed effects). Dumbed down pastel mistakes will disappear under the paint.

When too subdued either with age or scrubbing, you can give it a bit of refreshing. Here an example of village gardens, and river being made. They will get less striking than at this early stage. A bit of light hand brush blurs easily.

Woods can be edged with various greens, so can streams, a bit with roads.

Then comes the messy and unforgiving part. Spray paint lightly withn greens, browns, tan, yellow. Fields, meadows, wasteland etc. Also possible inside the woods. I do it outside if possible.

Beware of wind, even timid, it can ruin your work, paint your balcony, walls, trousers etc.

Let it dry overnight. Also important to check the weather, no wind, no rain! It stinks and has to stay outside!

The dark earth effect is not so bad for that part near Mozhaysk and Borodino. I even have a jar of thin earth from Borodino.

Then you can populate the thing with houses and other things. In case a village is too small; just twist it with pastels. No need of the trees unless you will play the thing right then, which is tempting. Obviously, that here when you realize that you don't have enough "Russian" houses.