War of Liberation: Introduction to a Napoleonic Adaptation of ASE&A

War of Liberation simulates the struggle between Napoleon's French Empire and the Anglo-Portuguese / Spanish alliance in 1808-1814. The first in a series of playtest reports, this issue will introduce the map, components and mechanisms of the game.

Finally we are up and running …

I started on this game in 1994, inspired by a little hand-drawn Peninsula War game on a hex map in *Wargames Illustrated* magazine. Learning about the war made me ask why each side didn't use X or Y strategy to win more easily. They never seemed to do the things that any wargamer would do, like concentrate his forces or march directly on the enemy's main force. And victory clearly wasn't all about control of terrain, or the French would have won easily. This led to a decade and a half of research that resulted in the game we see today.

The map, the rules accurately represent the challenges of fighting war in the pre-industrial era, when staying concentrated and static is logistically more challenging than spreading out and moving – precisely the opposite challenges to motorized warfare. And the map really answers the questions about why more obvious strategies were not pursued: because routes did not exist, or dissolved at certain times of year, or were too barren to support armies.
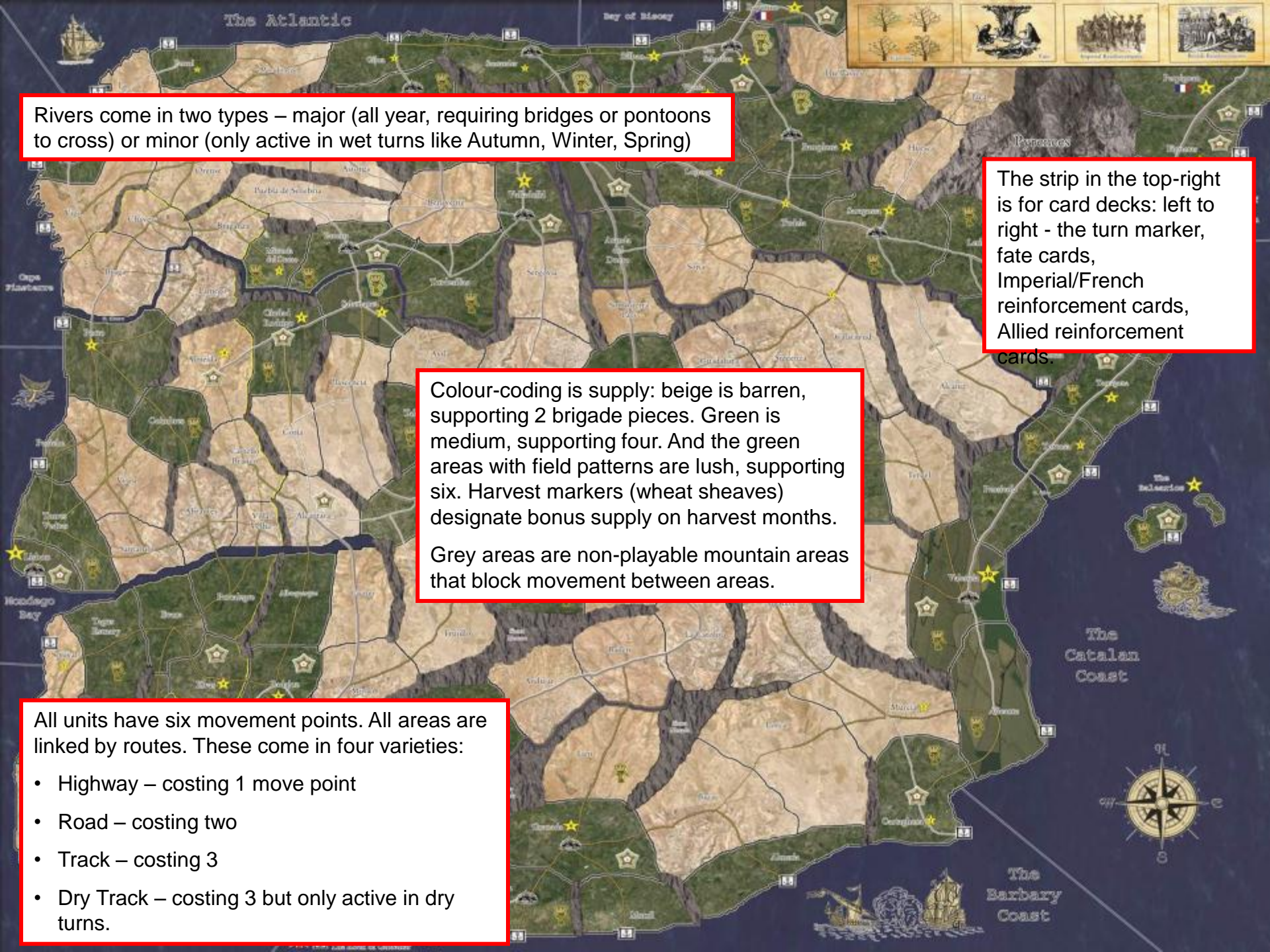

A factor that reawakened my interest in what was essentially a dormant game concept was my new contact with the Advanced Struggle for Europe and Asia (ASE&A) crowd, most notably game creator Mark Melenovsky, stalwart co-obsessionist John Dicicco, and the rest of the gang – Joe, Mike C, Craig, Brian K, and so on. Watching ASE&A games unfold, I saw a model that could bring my Peninsula War game to life. So many elegant game concepts and so much visual appeal. Thank you guys!

First savour the map …

Rivers come in two types – major (all year, requiring bridges or pontoons to cross) or minor (only active in wet turns like Autumn, Winter, Spring)

The strip in the top-right is for card decks: left to right - the turn marker, fate cards, Imperial/French reinforcement cards, Allied reinforcement cards.

Colour-coding is supply: beige is barren, supporting 2 brigade pieces. Green is medium, supporting four. And the green areas with field patterns are lush, supporting six. Harvest markers (wheat sheaves) designate bonus supply on harvest months.

Grey areas are non-playable mountain areas that block movement between areas.

All units have six movement points. All areas are linked by routes. These come in four varieties:

• Highway – costing 1 move point

• Road – costing two

• Track – costing 3

• Dry Track – costing 3 but only active in dry turns.

Naval and land battle-boards are modelled very closely on ASE&A. They function almost exactly the same, but with Napoleonic twists.

Prototype victory point track – note the two areas. One is a running tally of how many map area victory points the French are garrisoning. The other is a VP penalty tracker – these are non-terrain VPs you can lose if you do certain things to alienate the population or encourage the enemy. An example would be French looting to gain extra supply points: good for keeping your troops fed, but it stokes Spanish loathing of the hated invader and ends up causing stronger Spanish recruitment etc.
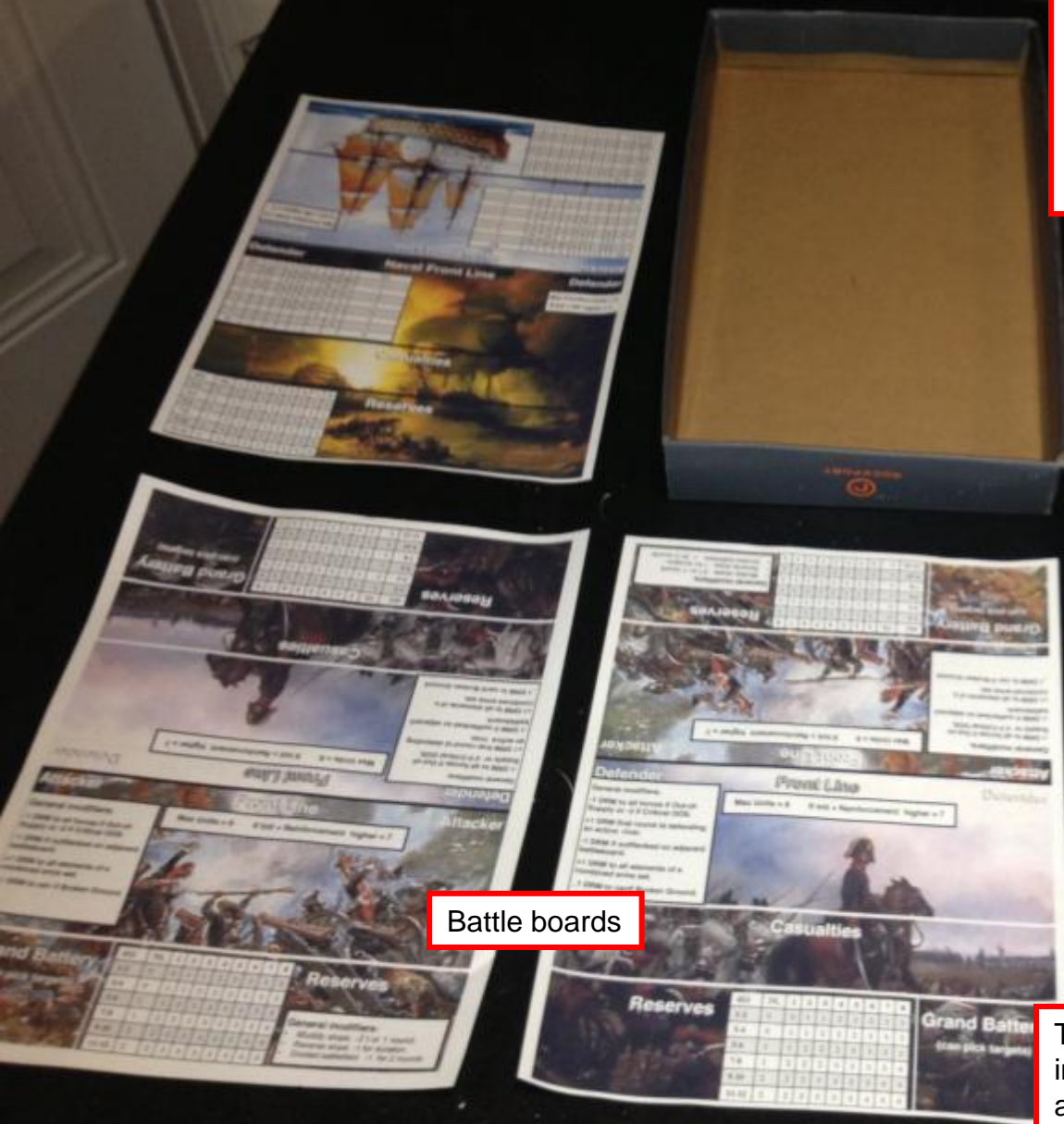
Battle boards

Siege boards

The siege battle-boards are new – they allow for investment to starve out an opponent and/or assaults to hurry it up – but at a terrible cost

A siege board up close: Note the Spanish garrison, with their fort pieces, their rations (the bread piece) and their commander. Along the bottom is a matrix for the D12 surrender roll each turn they are besieged.

A battle board up close: A big French force has attacked a smaller Spanish army in an open battle. Each piece is a brigade, and each artillery piece is 30 guns. The Spanish are "ragged" meaning the less severe of two levels of degradation caused by being Out-of-Supply or force marching.
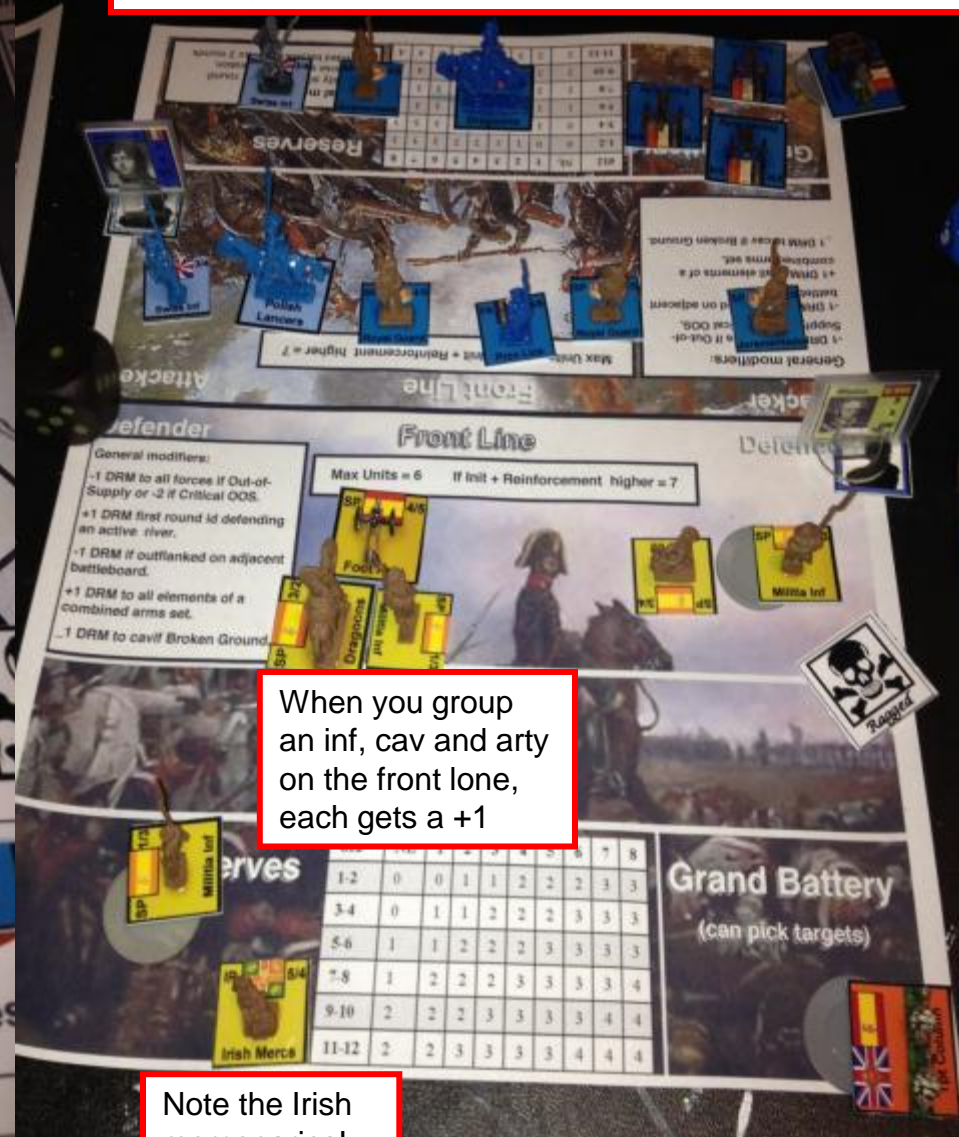
The big besieging Imperial force includes sappers and siege artillery.

When you group an inf, cav and arty on the front lone, each gets a +1

Note the Irish mercenaries!

The game has a lot of counters: top-left there are the two-sided Ragged (one level of OOS or forced march) or Starving (two levels) counters. At the end of each supply phase these counters improve by a level, so if you're Ragged the penalty is gone after movement and combat, but if you're Starving it takes an extra turn to earn its removal. Starving stacks of units also make an immediate 1-10 saving throw for each piece to survive. It is no joke: unsupplied forces or forced undertaking brutal forced marches historically suffered horrendous attrition.

Here we have forts and road improvement/reduction pieces. Your engineers can make roads cost more or less movement points to use. And they can build or demolish fort levels.
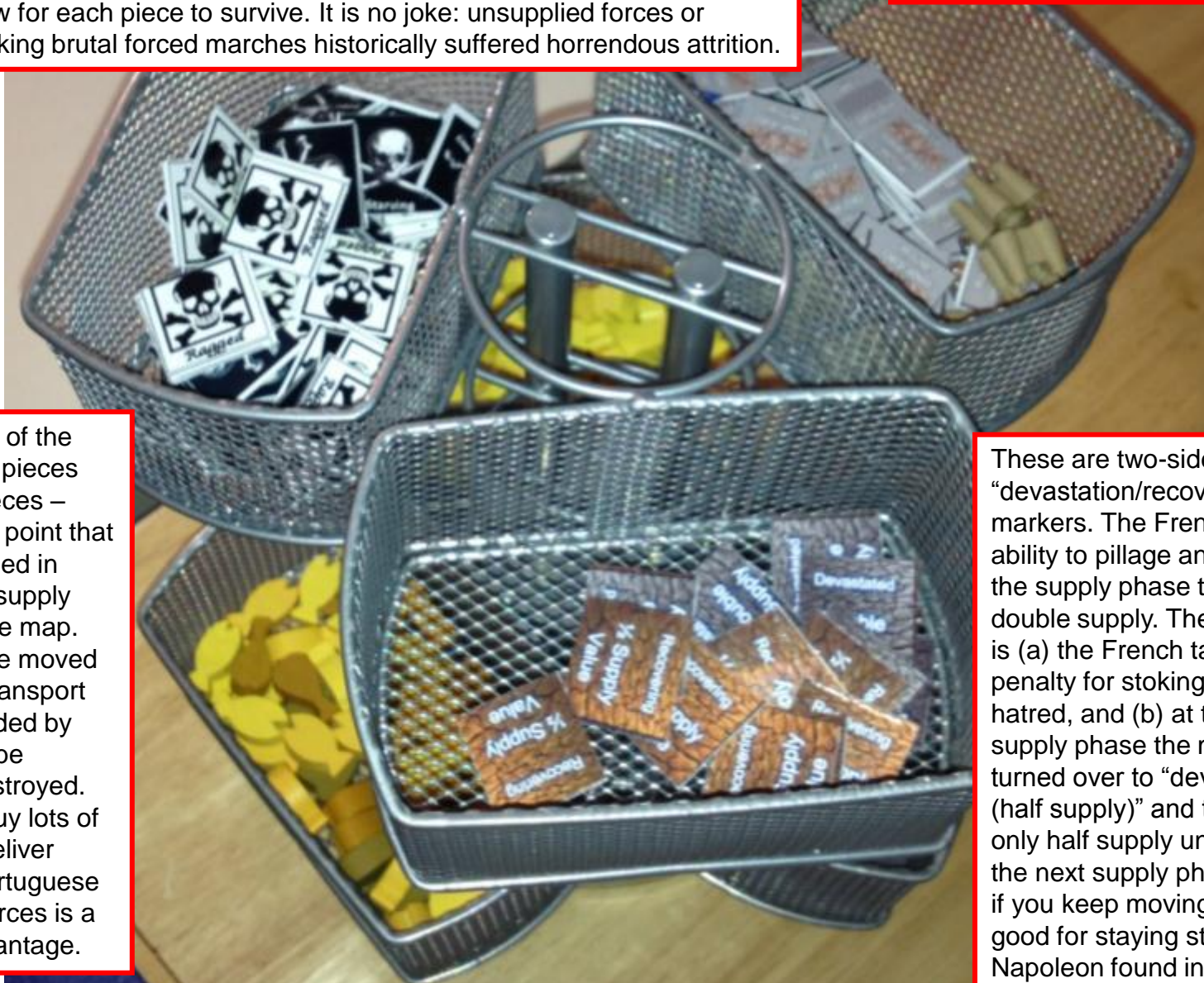
The lower level of the tray holds food pieces and harvest pieces – types of supply point that can be consumed in addition to the supply derived from the map. They have to be moved around using transport columns or landed by sea. They can be captured or destroyed. The ability to buy lots of supplies and deliver them to Brit/Portuguese and Spanish forces is a key British advantage.

These are two-sided "devastation/recovering" markers. The French have the ability to pillage an area during the supply phase to draw double supply. The cost of this is (a) the French take a VP penalty for stoking Spanish hatred, and (b) at the end of supply phase the marker is turned over to "devastated (half supply)" and the space is only half supply until the end of the next supply phase. So OK if you keep moving, but no good for staying still – as Napoleon found in Russia..