CREATING THE ARMY OF
CHARLES THE BOLD

Simon Chick tells us about his army building project, researching and representing the medieval Burgundian army of Charles the Bold on the tabletop.

Building the army of Charles the Bold is a path that I have trodden before. In the 1990s I assembled a 28mm army using the Citadel range of ‘men at arms’ (now produced by Wargames Foundry), inspired by pictures of Dave Andrews of Games Workshop’s collection that I’d seen in wargame magazines. Elements of my own army then made their way to feature in Wargames Illustrated (issues 63 and 64). All that became water-under-the-bridge at the 2011 Salute show, when Perry Miniatures revealed their first Wars of the Roses plastics. Immediately I planned an ‘upgrade’, inspired by the opportunities to build and convert plastic figures. So what started out as just adding a couple of extra units, became a complete replacement of my collection, which still continues today.

THE HISTORICAL BIT

Charles was the last Valois duke of Burgundy. In 1467 he inherited a large and extremely wealthy duchy, which included estates stretching from Savoy in France to the rich trading towns of Flanders. Charles was one of the ‘mighty nobles’ of the later fifteenth century. His immense wealth enabled him to indulge in ambitious plans to extend his political influence backed by the development of a professional standing army. Its organisation was recorded in several Ordinances written between 1468 and 1473. These detail the structure, recruitment, arms, discipline and proposed tactics on the battlefield, so enabling us to replicate this army more than many others of the mediaeval period. Charles’s army was structured round the
lance – like many other European armies – with troop types of mounted men-at-arms, coustilliers, longbowmen, pikemen, crossbowmen and handgunners. These formed a paid standing Ordonnance army, recruited from professional mercenaries and organised in Companies, each made up of Squadrons and Chambres with their own permanent chefs (officers), clerks and trumpeters. In addition there was a substantial Household of men-at-arms, longbowmen and halberdiers, who were effectively a bodyguard for the duke and were to act as a reserve on the battlefield. Along with ad hoc troops raised from his feudal territories, such as pikes from Flanders, Charles could probably field a force of 8-12,000 troops.

Unfortunately for Duke Charles he was not successful on the battlefield. His nemesis proved to be the Swiss Confederation – or more specifically the city of Berne and its allied cantons – who defeated the duke at Grandson (1475), Morat (1476) and at Nancy (1477), where Bernese troops supporting the duke of Lorraine and other allies, killed Duke Charles. This defeat led to the break-up of Burgundian lands in the following years.

One of the lucky consequences of these defeats, is that the Swiss kept much of the booty stolen from the Burgundian army’s camps at the battles. So we still have fragmentary pieces of flags, pennons, artillery, etc which were taken back to Swiss cities and towns as trophies of victory. Some of these are still in Swiss museums today, whilst others were documented before the ravages of time destroyed them. Added to this we have the Swiss illustrated chronicles. Written a few years after the Burgundian Wars, they are richly illustrated and depict the history of Swiss towns, such as Berne and Zurich. They show troops, camp and battle scenes, with useful depictions of Burgundian soldiers’ clothing, weapons and flags. In the past I’d spend time searching publications for rare images from the chronicles; fortunately after I’d re-started my army several were published on-line – enabling each image to be studied in close-up.

STARTING OFF (AND A BLOG)

The first Perry Miniatures plastic set of Bills and Bows enabled me to start new units of longbowmen. As Charles employed longbowmen from England I could use most figures straight from the box. It almost goes without mention that Perry figures are always well researched, so all figures reflected the arms, armour and weapons of the period that were spot-on for Charles’s troops. Initially figures were used out of the box, reflecting Charles’s Ordinances for his soldiers to be attired in a jacket of blue and white, and...
bearing a field sign of the cross of St Andrew in red. Where the Perry figures wear brigandines or padded jacks, I added a few crosses with modelling putty.

A quick word on basing. I’m a painter/collector first and only an occasional gamer. At the time I used Impetus as an easy to understand ruleset, that worked well for medieval games. So figures are based on a 60mm frontage. I’ve assembled my army on a structure of three bases per unit. I like the look of these larger units and they provide the opportunity to add some scenic and period details to selected bases. If needed however, I could scale-down and use units made up of just two bases.

I also started a blog on building this army – Je Lay Emprins blogspot – the primary aim was to motivate myself and to put up short posts as I reached each small milestone. The unexpected consequences are that I’ve received lots of support from blog visitors, who’ve provided information and ideas and even become new friends, both virtual and actual.

**GROWING AMBITIONS**

As the Perrys continued to release more plastic Wars of the Roses sets, the opportunities grew to create more variants by mixing parts from different boxes. Looking at the contemporary images available I decided that I needed some unique additions to really ‘Burgundianise’ (not a real adjective!) my figures. So I embarked on commissioning some items and had them cast for my own use. I turned to Oliver James of Steel Fist Miniatures, who’s an excellent sculptor, with a keen interest in the medieval period.

Oliver first made me a set of plumes, which I primarily used for men-at-arms and captains – the duke’s Ordinances of 1473 declaring that men-at-arms must wear “a sallet, barbute, or armet surmounted by blue and white plumes”. For the highest status men-at-arms Oliver made an exquisitely detailed Burgundian cross and flints, from which I could make press mouldings with green stuff putty and apply to the Perry Miniatures plastic horse bards.

To complement these, I ventured into some simple conversions to create as much variety in the units as I could. This meant utilising the benefits of hard plastic figures - cutting and reattaching arms, heads and weapons - alongside the metals in the Perry range - to create a few unique figures in each unit. These included a men-at-arms falling from his wounded horse and a crossbowman leaping a wattle fence.

For some units, I attempted more ambitious conversions, primarily to create some unique pieces. One of these was an artillery crew manhandling a wheeled gun into position. It was inspired by the battle of Grandson where the Burgundians had been surprised by the Swiss vanguard emerging from a forest and the crew needed to realign the artillery piece in haste. The figures were selected from both Perry metal and plastic - with some judicious cutting, repositioning and filling of arms and legs to get the right poses.

One of the most attractive elements of mediaeval armies is the colourful heraldry and panoply of flags and banners. The Burgundians are no exception. Charles organised his army so that each company had a distinct flag - including the image of its adopted saint and one of several mottos related to the duke - one of them being Je Lay Emprins (“I have undertaken it”) which I nabbed for my blog. The duke’s own coat of arms and his personal device, of a St Andrew’s cross surmounted with flints and sparks, also adorned flags and
banners. In addition, it appears that the company commanders, the *conducteurs*, retained their own coats of arms and personal banners too. So the army reflects its cosmopolitan composition, including Burgundian, French, Flemish, English and Italian troops, in its heraldry and so displays a unique range of flags and banners.

**COMMANDERS AND VIGNETTES**

Every army needs a resplendent commander figure and I again turned to Oliver James to create a couple of bespoke figures to depict Charles the Bold and immediate entourage. Oliver adapted Perry plastic men-at-arms, to depict Charles wearing his famous pearl encrusted hat (images of which still exist). I added a caparison to his horse, using thin metal foil, dressed with a thin layer of putty and painted with devices taken from various Burgundian illustrations.

In addition to the 20 Companies of the Ordonnance, the duke retained Household troops. Prominent among these were English archers in paid employment, who may have worn distinctive *paletots* with St Andrews cross and the letters C and M, for Charles and Mary (sister of Edward IV of England). For these I added plumes to their helmets to reflect the additional expenditure that Charles would have lavished on these troops.

Along with the main units, I love adding vignettes – often inspired by other collections and games I’ve seen. These create the flavour of the period and whilst they add nothing to a wargame itself, bases with captains, flagbearers, casualties, villagers etc help define the context of a period or campaign. However the challenge of creating unique figures is a dangerous distraction to getting on with the bulk of the army! In one of the Berne Chronicles is a great image of a startled looking Burgundian men-at-arms, being attacked by a Swiss swordsman - I used plastic components from different Perry boxes (arms from their Agincourt plastics) to replicate something similar.
ON THE TABLETOP

To date my duke Charles has only led his army on to the field twice, both of which have been large scale affairs. The first was at Partizan show at Newark - the last one at Kelham Hall in 2015. This was a collective effort by David Imrie, Dave Andrews, Darrell Hindley and myself; playing a fictional engagement against the Swiss. More recent was an outing on Michael Perry’s wargames table, where my Burgundians – and those of Dave Andrews whose collection had originally inspired me – fought alongside each other, masquerading as French against a Tudor English army provided by Stuart Mulligan. The good news is that – unlike the real duke – my army remains undefeated!

FUTURE PLANS

My most recent unit are mounted longbowmen. The Burgundian Ordinances refer to three mounted longbowmen within each lance. My understanding is that the horses were primarily for transportation. In training the pages of the Company acted as horseholders, whilst the archers dismounted to shoot. So I’ve added long riding boots (stipulated in the Ordinances) to Perry archers and I’ll create bases of standing horses, to be placed behind the longbowmen.
Another tantalising insight from the Burgundian records is the tactic of employing units of combined longbows and pikes. We don’t know if this ever happened on the battlefield, but the duke drilled his men so that “The pikemen must be made to advance in close formation in front of the said archers, kneel at a sign from them, holding their pikes lowered to the level of a horse’s back so that the archers can fire over the pikemen as if over a wall.” This will undoubtedly require amendments to wargame rules to accommodate them; it would be a great unit to put on the table!

Another element of most Burgundian battles is the siege. At the battles of Morat and Nancy, Charles was undertaking a siege of the towns when the Swiss relieving forces arrived and battle ensued. In addition the duke undertook an eleven month siege of the town of Neuss from 1474. This siege included several forays by the defenders to obtain supplies and attack siege lines, Burgundian attacks on the town gates, naval skirmishes along the Rhine and a battle against troops raised by the Holy Roman Emperor. So I’m making a Burgundian encampment, starting with bombards, tents and wagons, with an aspiration for a demo game set along the walls of the town.

### ARMY COMPOSITION

I’ve attempted to reflect the broad composition of the different types of arms in the Burgundian army. Although troops were raised by the lance structure, on the battlefield fighting units were composed by their weapon type – that is units of men-at-arms or longbowmen. This is evident from both Charles’s battle plans and eyewitness accounts of a skirmish against Cologners in 1475 at the siege of Neuss. Charles’s artillery train was enormous (the Swiss captured over 100 pieces at Grandson in 1475 and Charles could still field more than that number in the following year at Morat), so lots of guns on the table is fine. So currently my army looks like this – units comprising of a minimum of three bases, with the pikes organised as larger units.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Troop Types</th>
<th>Number of Units</th>
<th>Bases per Unit</th>
<th>Figures per Base</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men-at-arms, including coustillers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longbowmen</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pikes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossbows</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handgunners</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismounted men-at-arms &amp; coustillers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artillery</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Individual bases</td>
<td>Gun and crew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### LINKS

- Simon’s blog: https://je-lay-emprins.blogspot.com
- Free flags to download: www.krigsspil.dk/

### SOURCES

- Richard Vaughan – *Charles the Bold*
- Pat McGill, et al – *The Burgundian Army of Charles the Bold* (Freezywater Publications)

Left: A view from the encampment, as duke Charles lays siege to a walled town.

Below: Burgundian men-at-arms in full charge.