

MILSketch Review By Steve Dixon

According to Historical Software's web site MILSketch is a sketching software program "that makes it easy to create operational diagrams and order of battle hierarchies. Over 2,500 standard NATO unit symbols, line graphics, and tactical mission graphics are included with the program installation. In addition to creating high quality unit symbols over a map or other background graphic, you can create unit boundaries, text annotations, and freehand lines of many standard types. Probably the greatest benefit of the program is its ease of use."

It does indeed live up to its claim.

MILSketch is a Windows program – approximately 35 megs in size. I downloaded and installed it without any problems. I am using a PC with Windows XP2 with the latest updates with 512 megs of Ram and a 1.2 GHz cpu.

When first starting MILSketch you will first go to the file menu and create a new sketch. A window pops open – allowing you to import your background for the map. It accepts jpeg, bmp or gif files. See figure 1.

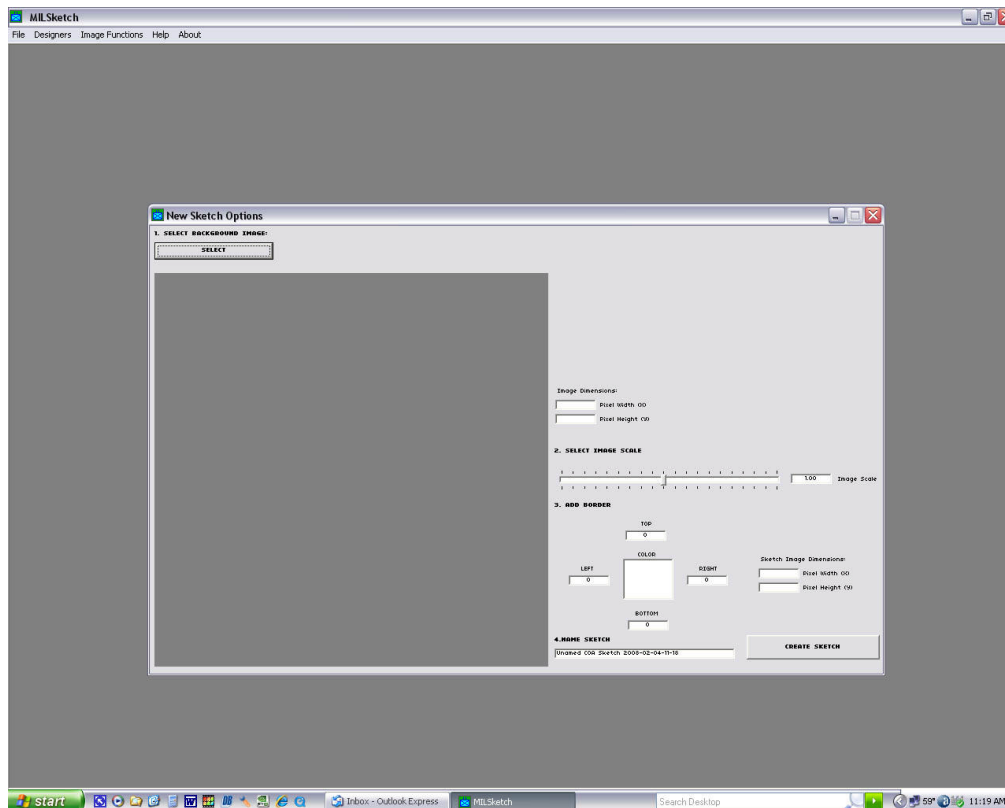


Figure 1

In the example below I imported a bmp file. It is of Wingen-sur-Moder, France. The map is from Google maps and was edited and cropped prior to importing the picture. Once you import the background you can do several things.

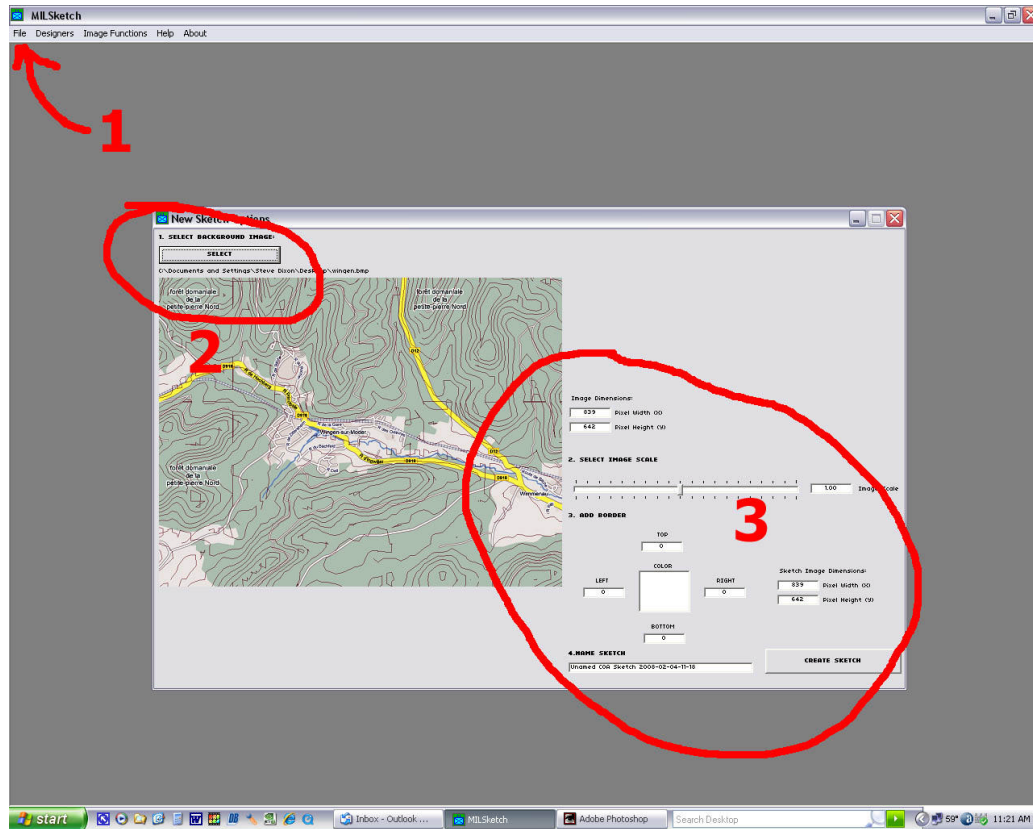


Figure 2

In figure 2 above – number 1 is the menu area. This where you click to start a new sketch, open a saved sketch, or save a sketch. Number 2 is the button you hit to actually to select your background. Number 3 represents the option area. It's here you can change the size, give it a border and name your sketch. Once done you click create sketch. Now it's time to create your units (See figure 3).

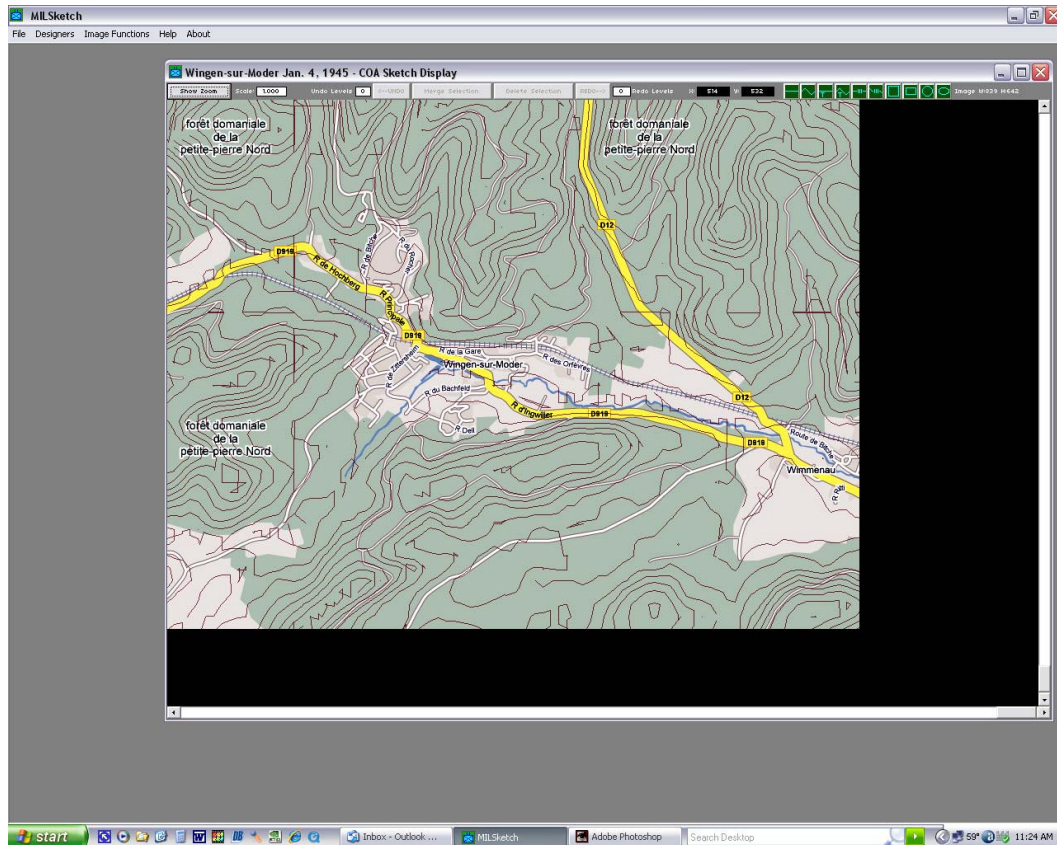


Figure 3

Creating units and lines is where you will spend most of your time in MILSketch. The procedure is the same no matter what you are creating. In the example below I will be creating a unit.

Under designers (1 – figure 4) you will find the designer tools needed to create your elements. These are symbol designer – line designer – line with text designer – unit boundary designer and text annotation designer. One tip you will find useful is that you can have more than one designer open. You can have two symbol designers open – one for your friendly units and one for your enemy units (See figure 4).

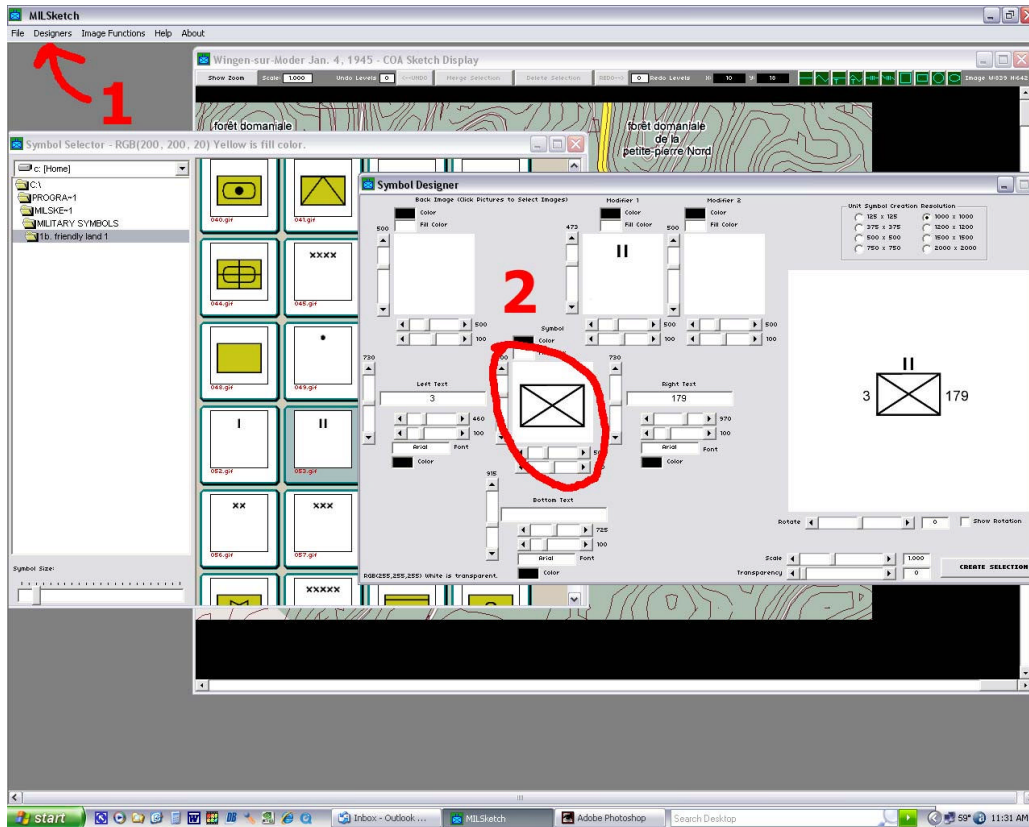


Figure 4

Number 2 above is where you will click to select your unit symbol. It will open up a folder pane which will list the types of units and symbols available. Select the folder you need and double click it. Depending on the number of unit sin the folder and the speed of the system you are using, it may take a bit of time to open up. Once you see the icons select the one you need. In my case I chose infantry. The boxes above, below and to the right and left allow one to customize the unit – change fonts – colors – size and transparency -- of the unit you are creating. Changes will be seen in the large box on the right. In my case I have created a unit – 3rd Battalion, 179th Infantry Regiment. When you are finished creating your unit select create selection. This places the unit you just created on the background.

The ability to see the map as a background when working on the unit in the symbol unit pane rather than a white box would be nice. It would give a more accurate representation of how the unit will look on the map. This is a minor issue and does not detract from the use of the program.

The unit you just created will be surrounded by a red bounding box and is visible in the sketch display. If you are using a single monitor and it is not widescreen, you may have to bring the window to the top to see it if it is underneath several

windows. You can now drag the unit and place it where you want it on the map. If you find that your unit doesn't look quite right – you can go back to the symbol designer and tweak it. Select create selection and your changes will be seen and you can move the unit where you want it. Once you are satisfied with the unit you select merge selection. This merges the unit with the map. If you still do not like what you see – select undo and go back to the symbol creator to tweak your unit and repeat until satisfied (see figure 5). Here I merged my unit to the north and west of Wingen-sur-Moder.

Follow the above procedure for each unit you want to create and place.

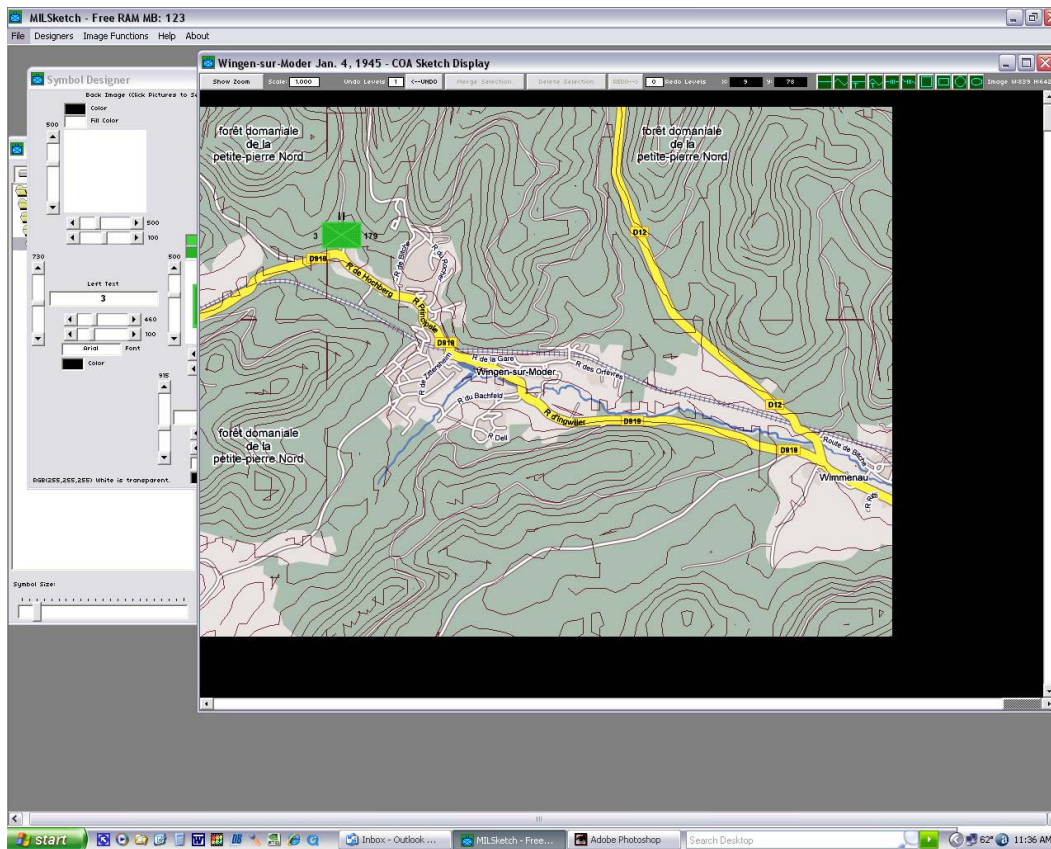


Figure 5

In the upper right corner of the designer box you will see several icons:



These represent the types of lines you can to place. Once you create a line you select the appropriate box to place it. From left to right: straight line – freehand line – straight line with text – freehand line with text – straight line unit boundary – freehand line unit boundary – square – rectangle – circle and oval. Also available is a text annotation designer which allows you to place text on your map in either single line or multi-line.

In the completed example below (figure 6) I have created a map with several units and a unit boundary – all done within 15 minutes.

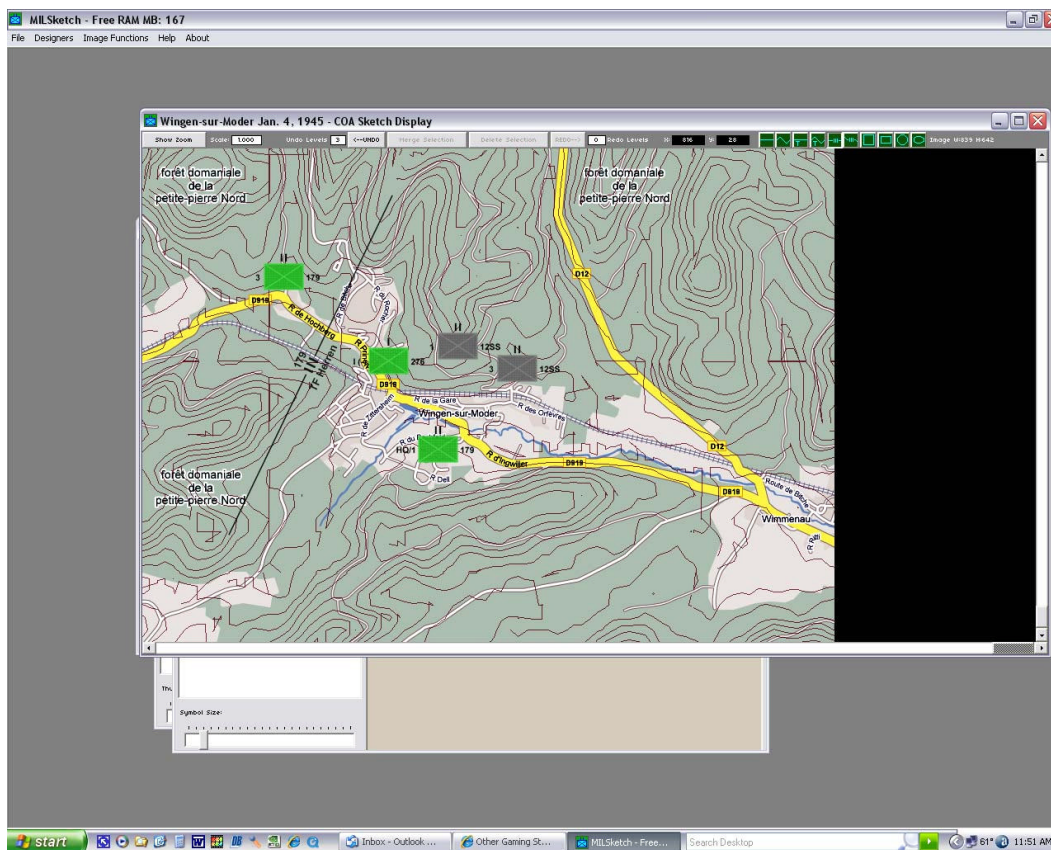


Figure 6

By selecting image functions you can tweak the map prior to saving it. Once you are satisfied with your map save the sketch. You are now ready to convert it to a jpeg file if you wish. Just select convert bmp to jpg option under image functions, select the sketch you want to convert and click convert image. Done!

The program does come with documentation to get you started with the basics. I highly recommend watching the video tutorial available on Historical Software's website. A guide to the symbols used in the program is also included. All the documentation files are in pdf format.

This program is a work in progress and is continually being updated. For those that are into war gaming it's a great tool to create maps for briefings and after action reports. Webmasters of sites dedicated to military history can use this program to create maps for their websites. It definitely fills a hole in the gaming world. I can't think of a program similar to it.

As you use the program more and more you will become comfortable with how it works and once you are familiar with it – you'll find yourself creating your own little work flow to get things done.

The program is available free of charge from Historical Software at <http://www.historicalsoftware.com> Just look for the MILSketch link in their menu. On the MILSketch page you will find more samples, a link to the video demo, and a link to download the software.

This program does all that it claims. I highly recommend it.

Steve Dixon
Webmaster and VP South
70th Infantry Division Association