

THIS BATTLE IS LOST. HOWEVER, THERE IS TIME TO WIN ANOTHER

THE CONSULAR GUARD'S DEBUT AT MARENGO

The situation in May 1800 in Italy was dire. Some 50,000 French troops faced twice their number of Austrians with many trapped inside the walls of Genoa. In a bold move, the new First Consul Napoleon Bonaparte dispatched the Army of the Reserve across the Alps in an attempt to relieve the siege. He was successful in cutting Austrian supply lines but Genoa fell on the 4th of June. The Austrian armies were now able to strike westwards and, if not stopped, into southern France.

By Derek Bruce

Bonaparte was with his Consular Guard. His men, veterans of many campaigns, were a model for the army. Proven bravery, patriotism, discipline, and exemplary conduct were called for. This new force was loyal to him, enabling him to maintain order. After all, it was these guardsmen, now rewarded richly by Napoleon himself, that had enabled the coup d'état of 10 November 1799.

After the coup, a new corps was constituted, comprising over 2000 men to be raised from units loyal to the new First Consul. Divided between infantry, cavalry, and artillery, it incorporated two battalions of grenadiers, a company of light infantry, two units of cavalry – comprising one company of grenadiers à cheval and one of chasseurs à cheval – and a horse artillery battery. The small size of the guard reflected the eco-

conomic restrictions of the country rather than the desire of its new leader.

Bonaparte realised the urgency of the situation in Italy. He intended to support the army of Italy under Massena, which was being forced back towards the French border by overwhelming Austrian forces. A decisive victory would secure the French position, take the pressure off the war-weary French nation and guarantee Napoleon's position as First Consul.

The French army camped out in front of Alessandria to cut the supply line of the Allies. Aware the French reinforcements were imminently expected, the Austrian General Melas decided to launch a surprise attack and drive the French off.

As the Austrians advanced, all along the line the hard-pressed French



were forced back. The initial Austrian assaults around 8 am had succeeded in crossing the Bormida river, and the flat terrain on the eastern side was suitable for rapid breakout. As the day moved on, more and more Austrian troops crossed the river, the French giving ground. By 12:30 pm they were in retreat. Lannes' and Victor's divisions were falling back. By 3 pm the Austrians believed that victory had been achieved. It was time to put in the Consular Guard.

BATTLE OF MARENGO SCENARIO

I have concentrated this scenario from the perspective of the Consular Guard at Marengo, starting with the Guard's movement forward and towards Castel Ceriolo until the charge of the Guard cavalry.

It is the afternoon of 14 June. The infantry Guard have been called forward. The time is approximately 3 pm and the situation is desperate for the French. On the French left, the

A hand-coloured etching by Carle Vernet depicting the Battle of Marengo on 14 June 1800.

© Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection



The victorious Austrian grenadiers advance.



The newly formed Consular Guard are keen to prove their worth to the First Consul. Will they turn the tide of battle?



An Austrian command group. The fighting must be over.



The Consular artillery supports the Guard's advance.

divisions of Lannes and Victor are retreating with the Austrian breakout in full swing. General Melas has just returned to Alessandria as he feels that he has won the battle, handing over command to General Ott to finish the job.

Special rules

- General Ott took over command at around 3 pm. To reflect his lack of awareness of what was going on, he has to remain at the Austrian point A for the whole game.
- Vialannes' dragoons are at a reduced level due to fighting in the earlier stages of the battle.
- All brigades on both sides are on engage orders, apart from Carra St Cyr who is on a hold order.
- The game ends at nightfall, after fifteen moves.

Terrain

The dense woods at the top and right are counted as difficult terrain, slowing speed to half and disorganizing the unit while in the feature.

Cavalry cannot charge into or from it. Artillery are not allowed to enter at all. Visibility through such woods is reduced to 5 cm. The vineyards near the farm and the open woods in the centre are counted as difficult. Troops passing through are unformed. Cavalry and artillery cannot deploy in them or charge out of them. Visibility is reduced to 20 cm through these features.

The built-up areas count as having the same disadvantages as woods. Castel Ceriolo, at the top, was fortified, giving protection of +2 for up to 40 figures. The farm complex of Cascina Grossa counts as the same disadvantage as woods with +1 protection. Roads give a 5 cm movement bonus for artillery and generals moving along them. The marsh by the stream is severe terrain,



© Roda Espin



reducing infantry movement to quarter speed, but the marsh area between the roads only prevents artillery entering and cavalry charging through.

Victory Conditions

The French have to hold against the Austrian advance and blunt it. If they can break two of the Austrian brigades,

they can claim a minor victory. If they can break all three of the Austrian Brigades, they can claim a major victory.



ORDER OF BATTLE (the ratings and grades are for the *General de Brigade* rules)

French – All three brigades deploy behind the French DZ line.

NAME	SIZE	TYPE
DIVISION MONNIER		
Brigade Saint Cyr		
19th Demi-brigade Légère	2 x 30-figure battalions	Line
70th Demi-brigade de Ligne	2 x 30-figure battalions	Line
Brigade Schilt		
72nd Demi-brigade de Ligne	2 x 30-figure battalions	Second line
Foot artillery battery	3 x four-pounder guns	Line
Brigade Vialannes		
1st Dragoons	12 dragoons	Second line
8th and 9th dragoons	12 dragoons	Second line
ARRIVING AT POINT F ON TURN 1		
Brigade Soules		
Consular Guard infantry	2 x 32-figure battalions	Guard
Consular Guard skirmishers	18 skirmishers	Guard
Horse artillery battery	2 x four-pounder guns	Elite
Consular Guard cavalry	12 horse grenadiers 12 chasseurs	Guard

Austrian

NAME	SIZE	TYPE
COMMANDER FELDMARSCHALL-LEUTNANT OTT		
General-Major Sticker		
51st Infantry Regiment	2 x 32-figure battalions	Line
57th Infantry Regiment	2 x 32-figure battalions	Line
10th Light Dragoons	2 x 12-figure squadrons	Line
General-Major Retz		
28th Infantry Regiment	1 x 32-figure battalion	Line
40th Infantry Regiment	1 x 48-figure battalion	Second line
Light artillery	3 x three-pounder guns	Line
General-Major Gottesheim		
28th Infantry Regiment	1 x 32-figure battalion	Line
Jäger	18 skirmish figures	Line
10th Light Dragoons	1 x 12-figure squadron	Line
Artillery battery	4 x gun models	Line

The Austrians have to break the French line and break the Guard deployment. If they can break two of the French brigades (Brigade Schilt and Vialannes count as one brigade together for these purposes, so both must be broken), they can claim a minor victory. If they can break all three of the French Brigades, which includes the Consular Guard, they can claim a major victory.

USING BLACK POWDER

To adapt to *Black Powder*, treat all units as standard sized units. French command should be leadership 8 and Austrian Leadership 7. Infantry and cavalry ratings can be found on page 160 of the *Black Powder 2* rulebook. Guard units should use the stats for Guard Infantry (no, they aren't as good as the Imperial Guard yet!). Line should be standard line infantry, skirmishers as light infantry. Troops listed as second line should be given the Unreliable trait.

CONCLUSION

Battle of Marengo had been raging all day, with an Austrian victory in sight. The intervention of Napoleon and the Consular Guard saved the day, rescuing the French Army from defeat. Their actions and deeds began the myth of the invincibility of the French Guard. While accounts may vary in the detail of the day's events, the change in fortune has gone down in history as one of the greatest "victory from the jaws of defeat" moments.

The victory at Marengo allowed Napoleon to secure his power base and silence the French generals who still viewed him with suspicion. Now the First Consul could shape France to his design... **WS&S**

Ridley Scott's latest film Napoleon is rumoured to feature the battle of Marengo.

