

After Action Report, Ocaña

Final Playtest, December 26th, 2015

The following is an after action report of the Battle of Ocaña, played at TBS Comics in Fort Walton Beach, FL using the rules *Commit the Garde!* available on WargameVault.com. (Note: all photographs were taken from the Southeastern side of the battlefield.)

Scenario Background

Following moderate successes against the French in 1809, the various Spanish armies (Army of La Mancha under General Juan Carlos de Areizaga, the Army of Estremadura under the Duke of Albuquerque, the Army of Galicia under La Romana, and the Army of the Asturias under Ballastero) decided to march on Madrid from their various locations to effect its liberation. (The British commander, Arthur Wellesley, thought the plan too reckless and decided to withdraw his forces into Portugal.)

General de Areizaga rapidly approached from the south, stopping just 35 miles short of Madrid on November 9th to rest his army and allow the other armies to complete their approach marches. Resuming his advance on November 12th, Areizaga discovered French forces blocking his path. If he could occupy the French army south of Madrid the path would be clear for another army to liberate Madrid and trap the French interlopers.

Current Situation

Yesterday (November 18th) opposing cavalry clashed with the French besting the Spanish, driving them back to the town of Ocaña. Areizaga's army now stands to defend the town while the French under Marshal Soult are desperate to quickly disperse at least one Spanish army.

Objectives

The Spanish army wins if it survives the day intact. The French must break the morale of the Spanish force before the end of the battle. Twilight is at 1700 hours, nightfall at 1800 and the fighting will end at 1900. [In *Commit the Garde!* an army morale check is made at the beginning of each army's turn with a number of dice being rolled for each broken/destroyed brigade, each fallen general, and each key terrain hex lost (villages, hills, key road junctions, and in this scenario entrenchments). If the army rolls three "6s" their morale breaks.]

Deployment

The Spanish army deployed with its infantry brigades behind fieldworks along the gully (treated as a stream for rule purposes) just north of the town. Most of the cavalry from both armies was deployed in the open terrain to the west, and olive groves (light woods) dominated the area east of the town.

The Battle

The battle commenced at 0800 with the French cavalry quickly crossing the gully to prevent the Spanish cavalry from actively opposing their crossing.



French cavalry crossing the gully

The French infantry then advanced to contact with the Spanish infantry deployed behind the gully.



French infantry brigades approach Ocaña

At 0830 General Zayas joined the Spanish cavalry in the West and led them forward to oppose the crossing of the French cavalry. He proceeded to lead Rivas' brigade in an assault against the brigade of General Beuaregard which caused moderate casualties to each unit. Unfortunately General Zayas fell from his saddle, shot through the lungs with a pistol wielded by a trooper of the 10th Hussars. He died in the arms of one of his ADCs.

At the same time, two other Spanish brigades launched themselves into the French cavalry which was better led and more experienced. All three Spanish brigades lost their fights against their French counterparts and ended up “Shaken,” however the French cavalry took some horrendous casualties in the process.



*Spanish cavalry brigades recoil and are Shaken
(both sides are disordered as cavalry are always disordered after close combat)*

The French IV Corps cavalry brigade (consisting of the 3rd Dutch Hussars and the Polish Vistula Lancers) took an especially heavy beating (the unit lost 2 of its 3 stands).



The depleted cavalry brigade of IV Corps

For the next couple of hours infantry brigades fought inconclusively across the gully. The Spanish infantry were bolstered by their earthworks and the support of friendly units behind them (a scenario special rule allowed Spanish infantry, normally morale 3, to be treated as morale 4 if they were in fieldworks or in the front hex of a friendly brigade).

The bulk of the action during this time was in the west with the cavalry fighting back and forth with the Spanish losing nearly every close combat, but somehow killing more French than they were losing. (Kudos to Eric who managed to roll a large number of “1s” while simultaneously losing fight after fight. In *Commit the Garde!* players always want to roll low numbers, rolls of 1-3 are usually hits while rolls of 1 are also kills; in combat victory is determined by the number of hits, not the number of kills.) The Spanish brigades kept losing, either Shaken or Broken, but somehow kept rallying in the face of the onslaught. Finally around 1000 hours the situation began to look hopeless for the Spanish in the west. After several army morale checks with increasing numbers of dice, it was only a matter of time before the army morale would break! (Eric, also playing the part of the Spanish army commander managed to never roll a single six in several morale checks, including two checks with 11 dice each. Better lucky than good?!?)

At 1000 hours, the French infantry north of Ocaña decided to launch their first concerted attempt to cross the gully. In a well planned and executed attack, the Brigade of General Rey, supported by the 51st Ligne, 55th Ligne and 17th Legere regiments, assaulted across the gully into a gap in the entrenchments between the Infantry Regiments Coruna and Burgos. Regardless, the attack was repulsed by the absolutely heroic effort of the Coruna Regiment. The feat shall be remembered as one of the greatest moments in the history of the Spanish army! Their absolute refusal to be lose repelled the French brigade utterly breaking its morale!



The heroic Infantry Regiment Coruna

With the repulse of Rey’s brigade, at around 1015 the fire of the Spanish infantry began to take a toll on the French across the gully. After nearly two hours of close range fire, the Royal

Guard Infantry Brigade of Joseph Napoleon (nominally a Spanish unit serving the government of Napoleon's brother) and brigade consisting of the French 21st and 28th Legere Regiments dispersed and effectively ceased to exist as organized combatants.

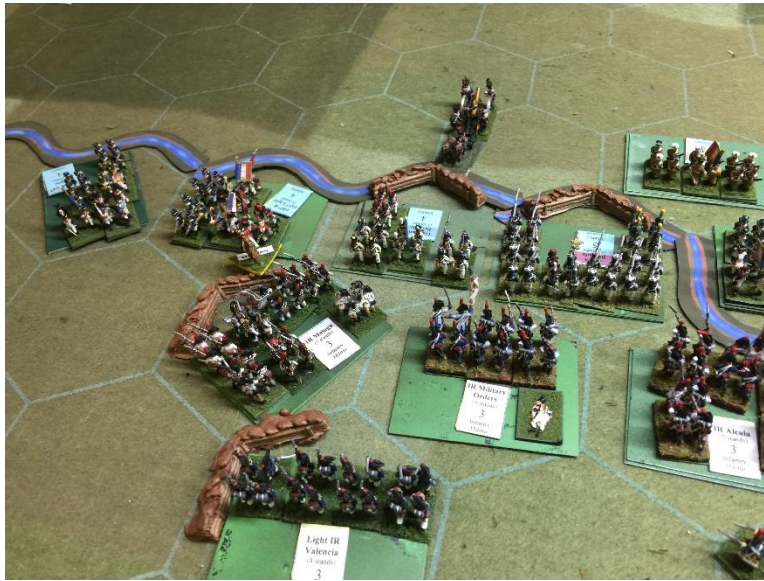
Finally, at 1100 hours the French infantry Northwest of Ocaña pushed across the gully into the Spanish Infantry regiments Majorca and Military Orders, pushing them out of their entrenchments and gaining a foot hold near the town itself.



Infantry Regiments Majorca and Military Orders holding their positions



The German brigade (top right) drives the Broken IR Majorca from their entrenchment while the western cavalry battle swirls nearby



The Polish and German brigades established on the south side of the gully with the reserve artillery preparing to cross

With the pressure from the French crumbling the Spanish left flank, the right flank crossed the gully to attack the limited French forces near the olive groves. At 1430 the most bizarre event of the battle occurred. Until this point in the battle the cavalry brigade of General Paris had held the Spanish right flank in check.



Paris' cavalry brigade holds the Spanish right flank in check

But with the Spanish crossing a gap developed in their line, through which Paris' brigade made a dash for the Spanish rear area.



Paris' brigade dashes through the Spanish line

In reaction the Spanish HQ attempted to throw reserve forces to plug the gap, and another reserve brigade headed for the embattled left flank was forced to about face to try to halt the intrepid cavalry brigade.



IR Africa and IR Cordova deploy to block the advance of Paris' cavalry

Paris' launched its assault into IR Africa breaking it, in the ensuing pursuit Paris' cavalry already crazed with the recklessness of their charge lost discipline and charged through the entire rear of the Spanish army and eventually stopping short of the Walloon Guards, which were deployed to stop the breakthrough of the French infantry on the Spanish left (west) flank.



Paris' brigade makes it to the left flank of the Spanish army

With Paris' brigade no longer holding them back, the Spanish right flank finished crossing the gully and began a grand swing around Ocaña. Their rapid advance crushed the limited French forces opposing them and even put the French Headquarters to flight.



The Spanish right flank swings into action to roll up the French flank



The French redeploy on the South side of the gully to face the oncoming Spanish flanking maneuver

As twilight approached and with casualties mounting, the French army's morale finally broke and the battle ended.

Credits

Thank you to TBS Comics (Fort Walton Beach, FL) for the game space and to my play-testers; Eric, Carl and Josh.



Eric, Carl and Josh (Note, Dora the Explorer in the background)
