

The Assault on Fort Mulgrave, Siege of Toulon, 16–17 December 1793

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At Salute 51, I ran a participation game featuring the French attack on the Caire Peninsula which broke the Allied hold on the important Mediterranean port of Toulon. This game in 15mm managed to get the whole operation on a 6x4 feet table. The Editor asked me to consider a smaller scenario focussed on the capture of Fort Mulgrave itself, so that the game would fit on the same sized table with 28mm figures.

Background

This scenario is a battalion level action using Black Powder™ II rules, pitching French republicans against a mixed force of British, Spanish, Neapolitans and Sardinians.

By the end of November, the 28,000 inhabitants of the port of Toulon, who had rebelled against the government in Paris, had been joined by a truly multinational force under British command. The initial 1,500 French Federalist troops had been joined by 2,100 British soldiers, seamen and marines, almost 1,600 Sardinians, 4,800 men from the Kingdom of Naples, and 6,800 Spaniards, a total of 16,900 men. The Republican forces besieging Toulon comprised elements of both the Armée d'Italie and the Armée des Alpes and were initially under the command of Carteaux, whose command rose from 7,900 men (9 September) to more than 38,000 men (11 December). Capitaine Buonaparte, having arrived from Marseilles (16 September), took command of Carteaux's artillery. The Représentants then proposed the promotion of Buonaparte to chef de bataillon, which was confirmed 18 October.

The siege made slow progress, hampered by an active defence commanded by Lieutenant-General Charles O'Hara, the Governor of Toulon. Consequently, Carteaux was replaced by Doppet (10 November), who brought with him Du Teil to command the artillery. However, Buonaparte is credited with proposing, to Carteaux and his successors, the plan to take Toulon via the capture of Fort Mulgrave, to the southeast of the harbour guarding the entrance, fire from which would force the Allied fleet to leave the port (see Inset Map One). Following an abortive assault on Fort Mulgrave (15 November), Doppet was replaced by Dugommier (16 November). Buonaparte showed great energy in creating a series of batteries from which Fort Mulgrave and the Allied shipping could be targeted. When all was ready Dugommier launched a night assault on both Fort Mulgrave and Mount Faron (to the northeast of the port), which were successful (17 December). The French assault on the Caire Peninsula was led by two columns, Victor led 2,000 men towards the Redoute Saint Louis on the left and Brûlé led another 2,000 men against the right of Fort Mulgrave itself (see Map One).

The Redoute Saint Louis was assailed three times by Victor's column before it fell after losing a third of the garrison. Dugommier had to commit both of his reserve columns to take Fort Mulgrave. Buonaparte took part in the assault with these reserves and was wounded in the thigh. A counterattack was organised from the Redoute Saint Charles but was called off. In this final assault the British lost 292 men, while their Spanish allies lost 365 men, and the French casualties were reported as 80 dead and 200 wounded. The next day, as predicted by Buonaparte, the allies held a council of war and Vice Admiral Hood decided to withdraw his fleet together with 15,000 inhabitants of Toulon, keen to distance themselves from the vengeful Représentants (19 December). In the aftermath nearly 300 citizens of Toulon were either shot or guillotined, overseen by Représentant Fréron, but the total number killed in the chaos may have been as high as 2,000. Also involved in the siege were names that would later become famous, Junot, Marmont, Masséna, Suchet and Victor. Amongst the rewards handed out by a grateful republic, Buonaparte was promoted to Général de Brigade (22 December, confirmed 6 February 1794).

The Game

Although Vice Admiral Hood held overall command of the Allied forces in Toulon, the Caire Peninsula, and the Hauteur de Grasse, the site of Fort Mulgrave, was predominantly garrisoned by Spanish troops, with British, Sardinian, and Neapolitan contingents in support. Consequently Marescal de Campo (Major-General) Don Domingo Izquierdo García was the senior officer present during the French assault.

The Caire Peninsula was fortified by a series of works, some permanent and some temporary, Fort Mulgrave (also known as the Redoute Anglaise), Redoute Saint Charles, Redoute Saint Louis, Fort de Balaguier and Fort de l'Éguillette. The Redoute Saint Philippe, which was designed to hold five guns, was unfinished at the time of the action and remained ungarrisoned. This scenario refights the night attack on Fort Mulgrave itself that culminated in the end of the siege and the evacuation of Toulon by the allies.

On 7 November the garrisons of the Caire Peninsula comprised 1,443 Spaniards of all ranks, 265 British, 685 from Naples and 176 from Sardinia-Piedmont, a total of 2,569 men of all ranks.

Fort Mulgrave

The French also called Fort Mulgrave 'Little Gibraltar' implying that it was stronger than it was. However, Dundas admits that it was a temporary position, which could not sustain lasting resistance to determined men. Its profile was weak and its layout defective. 150 metres long, it had parapets clad inside and out with pine trunks placed horizontally, embrasures with openings lined with boards, 20 cannons and four mortars of large calibre formed several batteries separated by numerous traverses [internal barriers], a ditch three metres deep by five metres wide, and, in front of this ditch, a double line of chevaux-de-frise and a row of abatis.

Captain William Conolly (18th Foot) was the senior officer, commanding an estimated 635 men. However when the French attack began, Conolly left the redoubt and Captain Philip Vaumorel (30th Foot) took command. These men commanded a British infantry contingent of three companies, 2nd battalion, 1st Foot, a detachment of the 1st battalion 18th Foot and of the 1st battalion, 30th Foot, as well as a detachment of His Majesty's Marine Force. Supporting the British infantry were two companies, 2° Battaglione del Reggimento De Courten (Sardinia-Piedmont). The redoubt's 22 guns which were manned by a mixed detachment comprising, seamen of the Royal Navy, 2nd battalion, Royal Artillery and the Royal Artificers. The senior gunner was Lieutenant John Duncan (Thomson's Company, 2nd Battalion, Royal Artillery). However, there were several Royal Navy officers associated with the defence, recorded as either wounded or missing during the French assault, namely Lieutenant Goddard and Midshipman John W. Loring (HMS Victory) together with Midshipman Algernon Wilkie (HMS Princess Royal).

The artillery comprised ten 36-pdrs, two 24-pdrs or two additional 36-pdrs in the sandbag turret, two 12-pdrs, two 8-pdrs, three mortars and three howitzers.

Piquet Line

The garrisons maintained a line of outposts to give early warning the French attack. This force has been estimated at 300 men, comprising 1° Batallón del Regimiento Málaga (Spain), Reggimento Fanteria di Linea di Borgogna (Naples) and 1st Battalion, 30th Foot (Britain).

The French

Dugommier gathered his best troops to lead the attack on Fort Mulgrave. The French force was organised into three columns and a reserve. The first column was commanded by Chef de Brigade Claude-Victor-Perrin, the future Maréchal de France with approximately 2,000 men. Victor's column was accompanied by the Représentants Saliceti and Augustin Robespierre. This column was directed against Redoute St. Louis so need not concern us further.

Chef de Brigade Nicolas Brûlé commanded the second column, also of 2,000 men, was accompanied by the Représentants Fréron and Ricord. Général de Division Henri François Delaborde commanded the third column of 1,500 men. Another future maréchal, Marmont, advanced with Delaborde's column. Finally Chef de Bataillon Napoleone di Buonaparte commanded the reserve of 1,700 men.

Around the Allied positions was a ring of French batteries, established by Buonaparte, which had bombarded Fort Mulgrave in the days before the assault, but which took no part in the assault itself.

Deployment

Map Two is designed for a table of six feet by four feet using a ground scale of one inch represents 25 yards. Both sides should be deployed in the area shown on the map.

In the historical deployment Victor's column was on the French left and Brûlé's column was on the French right, with Delaborde's column held back in the centre with the intention of supporting either of the leading columns as required. Buonaparte's reserve force was deployed in the rear.

Scenario Specific Rules for Black Powder™.

The effect of night on the French attack can be represented by increasing the likelihood of a blunder result in the command tests together with some increased limitations on visibility.

Visibility: The night of the 16–17 December 1793 was marked by a full moon; however, the weather was stormy and when Dugommier led the French assault at 1:00 a.m. (17 December) he did so under the cover of a violent rainstorm followed by a misty fog.

Given these conditions it is likely that visibility would have been continually variable and different in individual parts of the battlefield. In this scenario the range of visibility is determined by the score of three D6 measured in inches. This is determined separately for each command on both sides before they move or shoot, in each turn. D20 die can be used to mark these scores.

Orders: During the night assault Victor's and Brûlé's columns actually ran into one another during the assault, despite being ordered to different flanks of the position. Consequently, in our game, 'Blunders' will be of increased frequency, resulting from command rolls of 2, 3, 11 and 12, thereby increasing blunders at the expense of the 'three move' results. Blunder results are then determined using the score of an Average die (2, 3, 3, 4, 4, 5) on the standard results table.

To reflect the uncertainty as to whether an attack was being launched, the Allied commander, who was in Redoute St. Charles, cannot issue orders until after the first shooting takes place. Once that happens, Izquierdo can order his off-table reserves onto the table, from any point directly behind Fort Mulgrave. After a successful order he can move onto the table himself.

Hills: the slopes on the hills approaching Fort Mulgrave have a gradient of approximately 15 percent. To reflect this, the ground above the 30m contour should be considered rough ground, halving movement.

Redoubts: All redoubts are governed by the rules for obstacles, the attackers needing 6 inches in addition to the movement to make contact. The defenders can claim the protection of the redoubt until they lose a round of combat. Fort Mulgrave can accommodate three or four artillery models plus one infantry unit. At the point of being charged a redoubt's defenders can choose whether the infantry or the artillery will receive the charge. The chosen unit will then conduct both the closing fire and combat. The redoubt counts as a defensible position and therefore the Allied brigade is not required to abandon it when they become broken.

Troop Quality: the quality of the French troops at this time was very variable given the upheaval caused by the revolution and the rapid expansion of the army using the volunteer battalions, some of

which were raised within the last six months before the battle. To reflect these differences the less experienced battalions have been allocated a weaker morale save and the special rules 'unreliable' and 'freshly raised'.

The Représentants: The influence of these civilians can be represented by a special rule to reflect their impact on the morale of the troops. In this scenario one Représentant figure can be allocated to any of the French columns. When a unit accompanied by a Représentant either charges or is charged, a command test is taken before closing fire and the test is completed without the normal modifiers. If the unmodified dice roll (2 D6) succeeds by scoring seven or less, the accompanying unit either gets 'Terrifying Charge' when attacking or 'Stubborn' when defending. On a score of 12, the Représentant flees the field and is removed from play and the accompanying unit takes a break test immediately. A Représentant can only accompany one unit at any one time. This test gives a 42 percent chance of success but if you think the Représentants were either more or less inspiring, then use a different staff rating, for example a staff rating of six gives a 28 percent chance of success, while a staff rating of eight gives a 72 percent chance of success.

The Pre-Game Bombardment of Fort Mulgrave

It is unclear how effective Buonaparte's bombardment of the Fort in the days before the assault had been. If you wish to reflect this in the scenario, the French player should roll a D6 at the start of the game and on a score of 1 or 2, the bombardment was less effective and an extra Standard Smoothbore model is added to the redoubt (see Map Three).

Victory Conditions: The French need to take Fort Mulgrave to claim victory. All other results are an Allied victory, but breaking two of the three French columns is the direct route to victory for the Allies. The scenario will last a maximum of 24 turns, equivalent to six hours.

The following tables are the play-sheets for the two sides for the Black Powder™ rules.

Conclusion: For more detail regarding the order of battle and the research behind this scenario, readers are directed to the author's book *Throwing Thunderbolts; A Wargamer's Guide to the War of the First Coalition, 1792–1797* published by Helion and Company. Furthermore, have a look at the author's Youtube channel @garrywillswargamauthor.

<i>Black Powder</i> TM Playsheet for the Assault on Fort Mulgrave, 16–17 December 1793							
		Unit Size	Melee	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special Rules
French	<i>Général de Division</i> Dugommier (Staff Rating 8)						
Second Column	<i>Chef de Brigade</i> Nicolas Brûlé (Break Point=2)						
	2e Volontaires de la Côte D'Or	LARGE	8	4	4+	4	
	11e Volontaires de la Drôme	STANDARD	6	3	5+	3	Unreliable, Freshly raised
	4e Volontaires de la Montagne d'Aix and Carabiniers, 6e Légion de Marseilles	STANDARD	6	3	5+	3	Unreliable, Freshly raised
	<i>Chasseurs</i> , 6e Légion de Marseilles and <i>Tirailleurs</i>	STANDARD	6	3	4+	3	Skirmish
Third Column	<i>Général de Division</i> Henri François Delaborde (BP=2)						
	5e Volontaires des Haute Alpes	STANDARD	6	3	5+	3	Unreliable
	1er Volontaires de l'Ardèche	STANDARD	6	3	4+	3	
	5e Grenadier Bataillon (Armée des Alpes)	STANDARD	6	3	4+	3	
	<i>Tirailleurs</i>	SMALL	4	2	4+	2	Skirmish
Reserve	<i>Chef de Bataillon</i> Napoleone di Buonaparte (BP=2)						
	4e Volontaires de la Haute Garonne	LARGE	8	4	4+	4	
	5e Volontaires de la Haute Garonne	LARGE	8	4	4+	4	
	<i>Chasseurs</i> Allobroges and <i>Tirailleurs</i>	STANDARD	6	3	4+	3	Skirmish

*Black Powder*TM Playsheet for the Assault on Fort Mulgrave, 16–17 December 1793

	Unit Size	Armament	Melee	Shooting	Morale	Stamina	Special
Spanish and Allied							
<i>Marescal de Campo</i> Don Domingo Izquierdo (Staff rating 7, BP=2)							
Fort Mulgrave							
1/30th, 2/1st, 1/18th, Marines (GB), 2/De Courten (Sardinia)	STANDARD	Musket	6	3	4+	3	First fire
Royal Artillery/ Royal Artificers (GB)	1 MODEL	Howitzer	1	2/2/2	4+	2	
Royal Navy seamen (GB)	2/3 MODELS	Std S/bore	1	3/2/1	4+	2	
Picket Line							
1/R.I. Málaga, R.I. Borgogna, 1/30th Foot (Spain, Naples & GB)	SMALL	Musket	4	2	4+	2	Skirmish
Off Table Reserves							
Marinas (Spain)	SMALL	Musket	4	2	4+	2	
Caz. R.I. Málaga (Spain)	TINY	Musket	4	2	4+	2	Skirmish