



The Battle

The French

The French Wars of Religion raged in France in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Here we look at one of the opening clashes between the French Catholics and the Protestant Huguenots. The battle of Dreux was fought on the 19th of December 1562 and Wargames Journal presents the scenario for the Armati rule system, but other rules can be used with the map, order of battle and deployment information given here.

BACKGROUND TO THE FRENCH WARS OF RELIGION

Between 1562 and 1598 numerous civil wars would be fought between Catholic and Protestant forces in France. During these troubled times the widow of Henry II was desperately trying to retain power in the hands of the existing Valois monarchy. To do this Catherine de Medici was quite capable of playing one faction off against the next, regardless of their alleged religious affiliation.

In 1562 the Protestant cause was championed by two men: the Prince of Conde, Louis of Bourbon and the Admiral of France, Gaspard de Coligny. In the early days the cause was seen as a way of combating the power and perceived abuse demonstrated by the Catholic Church. As the wider war dragged on and each new peace was again broken the Huguenot campaign became a fight for the survival of its exponents and the initial idealism was gradually lost.

This is illustrated in a way by the fact that Henry of Navarre, the eventual King Henry IV, became the leader of the Huguenot faction at the end of the wars but even he was eventually persuaded to undertake a pragmatic 'abjuration' which would allow him to be accepted back into the Catholic fold.

When the wars began the Catholic faction, or League as it was known, was controlled by the Guise family under Duke Francis and his brother the Cardinal of Lorraine. The Catholic League believed firmly that the only good Protestant was a dead Protestant and were determined to eradicate the Protestant heresy from France.

The catalyst that started the wars and shattered the uneasy alliance between the rival factions was when the retinue of the Duke of Guise murdered a Protestant church congregation in Vassy in March 1562.

One of the other major factors which helped ignite the tension and fuel the wars was the fact that the Italian wars so beloved by Henry II had ground to a halt in the 1540's. As a result large numbers of trained soldiers were roaming around France with no source of employment nor any state mechanisms to ensure they were looked after.

As a result when the fighting began there was a ready source of man-power available for all sides with large numbers of men with no other trade than war ready and willing to fight.

The Catholic League effectively kidnapped the French



By Simon Pittman

of Dreux

Wars of Religion

Royal family in order to gain control of its military resources and while both sides awaited reinforcements from their respective foreign supporters (German troops for the Protestants and Spanish troops from the Netherlands for the Catholics) a series of small actions and skirmishes broke out across France.

The Huguenot army contained much of the minor nobility and was always heavily reliant on its cavalry. The character of this force made its discipline very difficult to enforce with many soldiers reluctant to fight outside their home territory, their instinct was to preserve their estates from the attentions of any Catholic neighbours.

Desertion was a constant problem, with many absenting themselves and returning when they wanted. The lack of discipline and the adherence to rank was to cause severe problems in the opening campaign with many of the less glamorous duties of what was effectively a cavalry army being ignored - there's no glory in the mundane tasks like scouting after all!

Throughout the wars the Protestant German states, led mainly by the Elector Palatine would raise large numbers of armoured, pistol armed Reiters to serve the Protestant cause. Infantry was always second best in the Huguenot army until Henry of Navarre gained access to the



resources of the Royal army towards the end of the conflict and could afford to hire Swiss infantry on a large scale.

The Catholic cause, especially initially, was supported by the resources of the Royal treasury and the contents of the Paris Arsenal. This meant that they often had an advantage in artillery, although its effect on the battlefield was still limited in comparison to later eras such as the Napoleonic.

Their solid foot was further reinforced by the loan of several Spanish Tercios borrowed from the Netherlands and the purchase of Swiss mercenary bands as required. Both sides resorted to the use of paid mercenaries and both sides suffered as a result if the money was not available to pay them. In this the Catholics could generally afford to keep their armies together for longer due to their access to the French treasury.

In addition to the Gendarmes, Reiters and Light Horse cavalry Stradiots were a true light cavalry that had evolved from a force of Albanians created by the French during the Italian wars. They were armed with javelins and shields and were often used as a light cavalry screen or as scouts. Argoulets were mounted Arquebusiers who could fire, probably not very effectively given the nature of the gun, from the saddle.

After initial posturing at the start of the campaign the Huguenots marched on Paris looking for battle but the Catholics refused the fight. When the Protestant force began moving away towards the coast to await the arrival of some promised reinforcements from England Montmorency, the Constable of France and leader of the Catholic army, decided to give chase.

After moving past his opponent Montmorency cut across the Huguenot commander, the Prince of Conde's, line of advance near the town of Dreux.

For a full description of the battle and the campaign please refer to the bibliography for a list of books that will give a more comprehensive and accurate view of both.

THE BATTLE OF DREUX

The Huguenot advance towards Le Havre began on the 9th of December 1562. The advance continued towards Rouen as Montmorency left Paris and followed Conde's army north.

After crossing Conde's path undetected Montmorency set up camp near Dreux ready to block the Protestant advance between the villages of Blainville and Epinay.

Despite his superiority in cavalry Conde failed to detect the presence of the Catholic army and was totally surprised when his force marched into the prepared Catholic army deployed to his front.

On the Catholic left flank was the Bois de la Place and the Bois de la Chanteloup beyond which was the river Eure. Behind this flank was the village of Blainville and beyond this was the Catholic camp.

On the Catholic right flank was the Bois de la Marmousse backed by the River Blaise and on this flank also stood the fortified village of Epinay. Running between the two villages and heading towards Dreux was the road along which the Prince of Conde was leading his army.

Montmorency deployed his army in two distinct parts. The Vanguard was commanded by St Andre, the Marshal of France. The Main Battle was commanded by Montmorency himself and was deployed in a single line between the two villages. The Vanguard was deployed in and around the fortified village of Epinay.

Conde deployed a Vanguard under the command of Coligny and a Main Battle under his own command. Unlike Montmorency Conde deployed his force in several lines and ensured that he had sufficient reserves available should they be required. Again poor scouting was probably in evidence as Conde appears to have been unaware of the forces deployed around Epinay until the battle began and as a result he only deployed in front of the Catholic Main Battle.

Conde did not want to attack the prepared Catholic position but was also aware that he could not conduct a withdrawal safely as he was so close to the enemy line.

After a lull for the rest of the morning Conde realised that Montmorency would not leave his position to attack. Around noon he decided to move towards the left in an attempt to move around the Catholic flank.

No sooner had the Huguenots begun to move than the Catholics started to advance. Conde stopped his manoeuvre and quickly ordered his army to change



its facing again and move towards the enemy

Sensibly ignoring the fortifications in Epinay the Huguenot charge swept away the opposing cavalry on the Catholic left flank and managed to capture both the Constable of France, Montmorency and the village of Blainville. In the finest tradition of cavalry through the ages Coligny's victorious horse then continued their charge and began looting the Catholic camp located behind this flank.

Meanwhile on the Protestant left flank Conde stormed his cavalry into the mass of Swiss foot but failed to break them. St Andre sent two companies of Gendarmes to support the gallant Swiss but these

were broken by the Reiters posted by Conde to deflect them.

The Gendarmes were heavy cavalry in every sense, armed with a lance and elaborate expensive armour for both the rider and the horse. The Gendarmes considered themselves the successors to the medieval knight.

Unlike the single rank full blooded charge favoured by the Gendarmes the pistol armed Reiters operated in deep formations and often charged at the trot to maintain their close order. Favouring the 'caracole' technique they would discharge their pistols rank by rank, each successive rank trotting to the rear to



The battle lines are drawn. Figures from our 15mm collection and image taken during playtesting the scenario.

reload before moving forward again. This could be a risky technique against cavalry if the pistol fire failed to stop an enemy charge!

The refusal of the Swiss to break was more than the rash Conde could stand and he became fixated with routing the Swiss formation. Ordering his Landsknechts to attack the scene was set for a bloody confrontation between these two bitter rivals.

The infantry on both sides was armed with a mixture of both pike and shot. The Protestant armies were usually deficient in resources and so often attached French Arquebusiers to units of Swiss or Landsknecht pike. In contrast to the deficiencies with the Huguenot foot the Catholic League could call on the 'Old Bands', the veteran infantry that had served Henry II during the Italian wars, and because they could pay them on a regular basis their companies could stay together for much longer than was the case in the Huguenot army.

In the central clash between the Swiss and the German Landsknechts the Swiss emerged triumphant and it was the Landsknechts who gave way. In a fury Conde ordered his last reserve of Gendarmes into the attack but these also failed to budge the stubborn Swiss.

At this point St Andre, accompanied by the Duke of Guise, ordered his entire force to attack. The French foot was immediately routed and the Landsknechts surrendered. Conde charged at the head of a few rallied cavalry but was captured himself, making both opposing commanders prisoners in the same battle!

Meanwhile Coligny had finally succeeded in gathering some of the pillaging cavalry back together and attempted to charge St Andre's force, which was surprised and ridden down. This time it was St. Andre's turn to be captured.

Coligny's cavalry was known as 'Chevauxleger'. These so called 'light horse' were in fact heavy cavalry themselves. Descended from the retainers kept on by the Medieval Knights and later the Gendarmes they were still armoured - just less so than their expensive brethren the Gendarmes.

Despite this success the Huguenots could not budge the Catholic foot from the fortified Epernay and so they withdrew from the battlefield.

With no Catholic reserve to speak of the Huguenot

withdrawal was successful and unhurried. A series of sieges then ensued and with the peace of Amboise being signed in March 1563 the first of the civil wars came to an end.

THE SCENARIO

This was a battle that the Protestant leader the Prince of Conde, could have avoided if he had used the Huguenots superior cavalry advantage to good effect and performed a proper reconnaissance.

The battle was influenced by the lack of a Catholic reserve that meant they could not exploit any success properly. Another significant factor in the battle was the quality of the Swiss foot, which stoically resisted all that Conde could throw at it.

The map shows the terrain and historical deployment zones bordered by the villages of Epernay and Blainville. Only Epernay was fortified. Also shown are the woods and rivers present on both flanks. None of the woods played a part in the battle and should probably be considered as difficult terrain for both infantry and cavalry.

The orders of battle show the strengths of each of the historical types of unit present at the battle and also a guide for how these were deployed as discrete units. Each unit has been allocated a letter which corresponds to its historical deployment on the scenario map.

The orders of battle have been converted into appropriate Armati units in the download section. The download section also provides the army statistics and combat values of each of the units involved.

The army lists are based on those in the Advanced Armati supplement written by Arty Conliffe but they do not strictly follow the normal army limitations. Each division is treated as a separate army for purposes of Break point, so the Huguenot Vanguard under Coligny could break before the Main Battle under Conde, however for the purposes of movement both Huguenot or Catholic divisions will move if their side wins the initiative.

No increase has been made in the command ratings of either side which may cause a problem with un-commanded heavy divisions, particularly for the player taking on the role of St Andre.

The army breakpoint has been calculated by simply dividing the total number of key units in each division

by two. You can be more creative with this if you want to, but we find that this method works well.

If the game is to be played using other element based rules systems such as DBR then simply determine a scale by which to divide the strengths given in the order of battle to determine the number of bases to use in each unit. For example if the scale is 300 Montmorency should have a force of 3 Gendarme bases in his Main Battle.

THE CATHOLIC OBJECTIVE, ORDER OF BATTLE AND DEPLOYMENT

Montmorency must prevent the Huguenots from breaking through and continuing their advance to the coast and the waiting English reinforcements. The Catholic cause is lost if both the Vanguard and Main battle break.

Catholic Order of Battle:

Vanguard; St. Andre
1,200 Gendarmes (Units A, B and C)
3,700 French Foot (Unit D)
2,200 Spanish Foot (Unit E)
1,700 Landsknechts (Unit F)
14 Guns (Unit G)

St Andre deployed with one of the three Gendarme units, Unit B, each of which was around 400 strong.

Main Battle; Montmorency

860 Gendarmes d'Ordinance (Unit H)
300 Argoulets (Unit I)
3,700 French Foot (Unit J)
4,700 Swiss Foot (Unit K)
8 Guns (Unit L)

Montmorency deployed with the Gendarmes d'Ordinance.

THE HUGUENOT OBJECTIVE, ORDER OF BATTLE AND DEPLOYMENT

Conde must sweep away the blocking Catholic force in order to continue his advance on Le Havre. The Huguenot cause is lost if both the Vanguard and Main battle break.

Huguenot Order of Battle:

Vanguard; Coligny
600 Light Horse (Unit 1)
1,000 Reiters (Unit 2)
2,800 French Foot (Unit 3)
1,500 Landsknechts (Unit 4)

Coligny was present with the 'light horse', Unit 1.

Main Battle; Conde

500 Gendarmes (Units 5 and 6)
400 Argoulets (Unit 7)
1,500 Reiters (Unit 8)
3,100 French Foot (Unit 9)
1,500 Landsknechts (Unit 10)

Conde was with the leading unit of Gendarmes, unit 5. This was the larger of his two heavy cavalry units. The reserve unit, Unit 6, was commanded by Rochfoucault and was to be Conde's last throw of the dice in his attempt to smash the stubborn Swiss infantry.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

A History of the Art of War in the Sixteenth Century by Sir Charles Oman, Greenhill Books.

Renaissance Battles 1494-1700 by Peter Sides, Gosling Press.

The French Wars of Religion 1562 - 1598, a wargamers guide by Ray Lucas, The Battery Press

Armati and Advanced Armati - Rules and Lists for Ancient, Medieval & Renaissance Wargaming by Arty Conliffe

DOWNLOADS

The following links will take you to PDFs on the Wargames Journal web site which contain the key elements of this scenario: Orbats and Special/Scenario rules. Simply click on the one you want to view or download:

- Catholic Order of Battle
- Huguenot Order of Battle



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