

The Battle of Pordenone

15th April 1809

In the spring of 1809, Austria achieved strategic surprise in the opening moves of a new war with France. Fueled by a heady combination of eagerness to avenge past defeats, a renewed sense of national confidence, and a misplaced trust in international support, Austrian armies crossed the borders of Bavaria, Italy, and Poland intending to engage the French while they were still in disarray. Although the main campaign in Bavaria quickly unraveled, the Army of Inner Austria under the command of Archduke Johann made good progress in Italy and won back-to-back victories over the French on April 15th and 16th at Pordenone and Sacile. This scenario will be a re-imagining of the first and smaller of those battles, at Pordenone.

In actual fact the battle proved to be a very short affair, and a disastrous day for French arms. The French Army of Italy, still assembling on the march under the command of Prince Eugene, had pushed forward a small advance guard under General Sahuc into the city of Pordenone. Although the French believed that they still had time to assemble for battle over the course of the next day, the Austrian army was in fact marching towards Pordenone in search of a battle, headed by their rather more substantial advance guard under the command of the bold and capable General Frimont. As the French attempted to withdraw from Pordenone under these confusing circumstances, they were surrounded by cavalry and light infantry and mauled. After a sharp two hour engagement the French cavalry were forced from the field and their infantry was forced to surrender, thus costing Eugene one of his most veteran infantry regiments as well as half of his immediately available cavalry.

However, this need not have been the way the story unfolded! The French had in fact positioned a supporting force of additional infantry and cavalry in the nearby town of Fontanafredda, and General Grenier's 3rd Infantry Division was further to the rear along the main road to Sacile. Neither of these forces moved to support their compatriots at Pordenone on the 15th, however with a little optimism we can imagine that they did so, and that they were met by the first part of the main Austrian army advancing behind Frimont, Albert Gyulai's 8th Corps. These slight nudges to history form the basis for the following scenario and battle report.

For those who wish to recreate the actual battle, this can also easily be done with the information provided. Simply limit the French forces to Sahuc's command, and the Austrian forces to Frimont and Splenyi's commands. All other aspects of the game remain the same, except that Sahuc's objective is to retire towards Fontanafredda rather than defend Pordenone, and he must begin his withdrawal immediately. Furthermore, each turn the French must roll to see whether the 8th Chasseurs withdraw from the battle due to command confusion: there is a cumulative 1-in-6 chance per game turn (i.e. 1 on the first turn, 2 on the second turn, and so on). Bonne chance!

I should note that the map for this game, as well as the orders of battle, were derived from the second volume of John Gill's excellent (and somewhat lengthily titled!) trilogy on the 1809 Franco-Austrian War: "1809, Thunder on the Danube, Napoleon's Defeat of the Habsburgs, Volume II: The Fall of Vienna and the Battle of Aspern" (Frontline Books, London, 2008). The maps were created using the free program "Battle Chronieler" - available for download at battlechronieler.com.

The OB contains details to play this battle with the "March Attack" rules by Crusader publishing, however enough detail is given to convert to your rules set of choice.

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Army of Italy	
Prince Eugene, Viceroy of Italy	Good Command (+2) / Inspiring (+1)
Advance Guard (main body)	Veteran: Steady 7 (8 Sk), Shaken 4 (5), Spent 2 (3)
General de Division Sahuc	Average Command (+1) / Inspiring (+1)
Colonel Breissand	
1 st / 35 th Ligne (764)	V 8 Sk
2 nd / 35 th Ligne (764)	V 8 Sk
3 rd / 35 th Ligne (764)	V 8 Sk
1 st / 6 th Hussars (454)	V 6 LC
2 nd / 6 th Hussars (454)	V 6 LC
1 st / 8 th Chasseurs (467)	R 5 LC
2 nd / 8 th Chasseurs (467)	R 5 LC
Horse Battery "A" (4x 4lb)	E 4 LH
Advance Guard (support)	Regular: Steady 6 (4 Sk), Shaken 4 (3), Spent 2 (1)
General de Brigade Pages	Poor Command (+0) / Inspiring (+1)
Colonel Saint-Martin	
1 st / 1 st Ligne (614)	R 6
2 nd / 1 st Ligne (614)	R 6
3 rd / 1 st Ligne (614)	R 6
4 th / 1 st Ligne (614)	C 5
1 st / 25 th Chasseurs (404)	R 4 LC
2 nd / 25 th Chasseurs (404)	R 4 LC
3 rd Division	Regular: Steady 10 (9 Sk), Shaken 6 (6), Spent 3 (3)
General de Division Grenier	Good Command (+2) / Inspiring (+1)
Brige Abbe	
Brigade Teste	
4 th / 11 th Ligne (981)	C 7
1 st / 52 nd Ligne (723)	R 6
2 nd / 52 nd Ligne (723)	R 6
3 rd / 52 nd Ligne (723)	R 6
4 th / 52 nd Ligne (723)	C 6
1 st / 102 nd Ligne (686)	R 6
2 nd / 102 nd Ligne (686)	R 6
3 rd / 102 nd Ligne (686)	R 6
4 th / 102 nd Ligne (686)	C 6
2 nd Italian Dragoons "Napoleon" (156)	E 4 MC
Foot Battery "B" (6x 8lb)	V 4 MF
Foot Battery "C" (4x 4lb)	V 3 LF

Totals: 16 infantry (102 Combat Value), 7 cavalry (34 CV), 3 artillery (11 CV) = 26 units (147 CV)

Legend

C = Conscript, R = Regular, V = Veteran, E = Elite

= Combat Value (CV) of unit

Sk = skirmish capable troops

LC = Light Cavalry, MC = Medium Cavalry

LF = Light Foot battery, MF = Medium Foot battery, HF = Heavy Foot battery, LH = Light Horse battery

Steady/Shaken/Spent ratings indicate when a force drops to the indicated morale state upon losing non-artillery units, and what Skirmish Rating the force has. *Example:* the 3rd Division starts with 10 units and skirmish rating of 9, but when it loses 4 units (drops to a total of 6 units) it also drops to Shaken morale status and its skirmish rating is reduced to 6.

Army of Inner Austria FML Archduke Johann	(with VIII Corps Main Body) Terrible Command (-1) / Uninspiring (+0)
VIII Corps Advance Guard (av. sk.) FML Frimont	Regular: Steady 9 (7 Sk), Shaken 6 (5), Spent 3 (2) Good Command (+2) / Inspiring (+1)
Brigade von Schmidt	
A - 1 st / 1 st Banal Grenz #10 (616)	C 5 Sk
B - 1 st / 1 st Banal Grenz #10 (616)	C 5 Sk
A - 2 nd / 1 st Banal Grenz #10 (616)	C 5 Sk
B - 2 nd / 1 st Banal Grenz #10 (616)	C 5 Sk
3 rd / Erzherzog Franz Karl IR #52 (900)	C 6
1 st / Franz Jellacic IR #62 (661)	R 6
Brigade von Wetzel	
1 st / Ott Hussars #5 (535)	V 6 LC
2 nd / Ott Hussars #5 (535)	V 6 LC
Hohenzollern Chevaulegers #2 (440)	R 4 LC
Combined Cavalry Battery (9x 3lb)	V 5 LH
IX Corps Light Cavalry Brigade (detached) GM von Splenyi	Veteran Average Command (+1) / Inspiring (+1)
1 st / Erzherzog Josef Hussars #2 (360)	V 5 LC
2 nd / Erzherzog Josef Hussars #2 (360)	V 5 LC
Frimont Hussars #9 (470)	V 6 LC
IX Corps Reserve Cavalry Brigade (detached) GM Hager	Regular Average Command (+1) / Inspiring (+1)
Hohenloe Dragoons #2 (714)	R 6 MC
Savoy Dragoons #5 (766)	R 6 MC
VIII Corps Main Body (poor sk.) FML Albert Gyulai	Regular: Steady 12 (9 Sk), Shaken 8 (6), Spent 4 (3) Poor Command (+0) / Inspiring (+1)
Brigade Colloredo	
1 st / Strassoldo IR #27 (1091)	R 8
2 nd / Strassoldo IR #27 (1091)	R 8
3 rd / Strassoldo IR #27 (1091)	C 7
1 st / St. Julien IR #61 (918)	R 7
2 nd / St. Julien IR #61 (918)	R 7
3 rd / St. Julien IR #61 (918)	C 6
Brigade Battery "B" (8x 3lb)	R 4 LF (regimental)
Brigade von Gajoli	
A - 2 nd / 2 nd Banal Grenz #11 (636)	C 5 Sk
B - 2 nd / 2 nd Banal Grenz #11 (636)	C 5 Sk
2 nd / Johann Jellacic IR #53 (1042)	R 8
3 rd / Johann Jellacic IR #53 (1042)	C 7
2 nd / Franz Jellacic IR #62 (661)	R 6
3 rd / Franz Jellacic IR #62 (661)	C 6
Brigade Battery "C" (8x 3lb)	R 4 LF (regimental)
Artillery Reserve	
Position Battery "D" (6x 12lb)	V 4 HF
Position Battery "E" (6x 6lb)	R 4 MF
Brigade Battery "F" (8x 3lb)	R 4 LF

Totals: 18 infantry (112 Combat Value), 8 cavalry (44 CV), 6 artillery (25 CV) = 32 units (181 CV)

(see French OB for an explanation of the abbreviations used)

Starting Time:	10:20, after the Austrians occupy Torre	
Starting Forces:	French, Sahuc	Defend Pordenone D5-7, E5-7, N of the Noncello, E of the E5 ravine
	Austrians, Frimont	Attack Pordenone A7, B7, C7
Order of Arrival:	Austrians, Splenyi	Turn 1: Support Frimont (no CV Loss roll) A1-2 dividing line or A3-4 dividing line, in column
	French, Pages	Turn 3: Support Sahuc (no CV Loss roll) C1, road from Fontanafredda, in column
	Austrians, Hager	Turn 4: Support Frimont A1-2 dividing line or A3-4 dividing line, in column
	Austrians, Gyulai	Turn 6: Orders determined by Johann on entry A7, road from Cordenone, in column
	French, Grenier	Turn 9: Orders determined by Eugene on entry C1, road from Fontanafredda, in column
	Austrians, Artillery Reserve:	Turn 9: Join Gyulai, under same orders A7, road from Cordenone, in column

Order of Battle

For the most part, translating an order of battle into March Attack (MA) units is fairly straightforward – a process of simply cross-referencing strength and quality to arrive at the base Combat Value. However, readers may note that the light cavalry units on both sides have been divided into two “wings”. MA encourages this practice, which has the positive effect of fielding cavalry in more and smaller maneuver units. I decided to field the Austrian medium cavalry in single maneuver units to differentiate them, giving them a more a concentrated “battle cavalry” CV.

Dealing with the large (1200+ man) Austrian Grenzer units proved problematic, as it does in many rules. Although they are huge battalions, they often operated with much of their strength dispersed in skirmish roles or divided into ad hoc groups of several companies. In MA terms, fielding them as single full strength battalions would also result in units with an unrealistically high CV, encouraging their unhistorical use as shock troops. I therefore chose to field them in two “wings” in a similar manner to the light cavalry. They are also rated as Conscripts so that their “Valeur et Discipline” tests (quality tests to determine their ability to maneuver under fire and in charges) would be a little more difficult. However, they are rated as Skirmish troops and thus contribute a large amount to their formation's Skirmish Rating; in addition, I determined that their presence raised their formation's skirmish capability from Poor (the Austrian standard here) to Average, also raising the overall Skirmish Rating. Overall I was happy with the compromises made, which resulted in them contributing significantly to the abstracted “skirmish screen” of their formation but relegated them to second-rate line troops.

Battle Map

The following map shows the terrain, which is hopefully self-explanatory. Houses represent a single built-up area, ravines are indicated by dry gravel courses (although part of the Noncello is flooded), and the black strip represents the main road. The ground scale is approximately 1” = 50 yards.



A1

Roveredo >>

B1

C1

<< Fontanafredda

D1

Rorai Grande

Porcia

Rorai Piccolo

E1

Cordenone >>

A7

B7

C7

D7

E7

Pordenone

R. Noncello