

The Battle Of Talavera

28 July, 1809

In April 1809, a year after his small but morale-boosting victory at Vimiero, Sir Arthur Wellesley returned to Portugal. Thus far he was one of the few British commanders in the Napoleonic wars to have retained both his reputation and his life. The year had been a dismal one for the British, with Sir John Moore's death and the desperate extraction of his army from Corunna. The majority of Portugal was still in French hands, and the Spanish – despite their own surprising victory at Bailen - seemed unable to organize any sort of coherent opposition to the French occupation.

Wellington has often been considered a “defensive general,” but his career included a number of daring and aggressive maneuvers, and the spring of 1809 witnessed one of them. With his very small and relatively untested army, Wellesley immediately began to press Marshal Soult's flanks and lines of communication, forcing the French back toward the River Douro in what became a miserable and confused retreat. Wellesley felt confident enough to cross the Douro in May, against uncoordinated resistance from Soult's forces. (Wellesley crossed so swiftly that he actually ate Soult's supper that evening in the Frenchman's recently-evacuated headquarters!)

One of the ostensible reasons for a British force in Portugal was to cooperate with the Spanish, and Wellesley was always in danger of appearing “too successful” and thus encouraging both British and Spanish leadership to press him for some dramatic showdown with the enemy. This happened in late May, as Wellesley made contact with General Cuesta. The allied leadership wanted to crown their recent successes with a triumphant advance to Madrid, but by this point Joseph Bonaparte had assembled a sizable army and was moving West to meet them.

Joseph thought that his army was closing on the Spaniards for a knockout blow. The French seemed unaware that Wellesley had united with Cuesta, and for that reason Soult's corps remained nearby but resting, out of immediate reach and looking for an enemy that had already given him the slip. (Had Soult been present at Talavera, the French superiority would have been overwhelming.)

While the combined Allied force outnumbered their enemy by at least 5,000 men, the Spanish army was in no condition to maneuver in the open against the French. Wellesley thus prevailed upon Cuesta to dig the Spaniards in, on the most easily-defended sector of the line, anchoring their flank on the river Tagus. As it turned out, the French largely ignored the Spanish (except for a sortie that evening by two squadrons of French dragoons who panicked an entire Spanish division. They plundered the British baggage train as they fled.)

In the French camp, Joseph Bonaparte's lack of authority was a crucial problem. While theoretically in charge (by virtue of being the king's advisor), Marshal Jourdan could not bring Marshal Victor to heel. Victor, in an unusual fit of aggression, repeatedly demanded immediate attacks that were unwise and hastily-organized.

There were three main French attacks at Talavera, all against the British positions. The first two were held with difficulty and heavy casualties, and the third was a half-hearted affair that did, however, manage to draw the impulsive British cavalry into a trap where they were cut to pieces by French *chasseurs*. The British and French each suffered about 25% casualties and ended exhausted, but the Allied positions held. Knowing that Joseph could count on imminent reinforcements, Wellesley withdrew. British historians accord Talavera the status of a “victory,” but it is more fairly judged a draw.

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The Scenario:

The weather is Sunny, with no variation. The ground is Hard. The game's Basic Length is 6 turns.

All bases for the city of Talavera are hard cover. The Spanish entrenchments are soft cover. The Tagus river is unfordable.

The Allies set up first, then the French. The Spanish army may set up anywhere in its area, plus in the city of Talavera. The British army may set up anywhere in its area. The French must set up according to Force boundaries, as shown on the map.

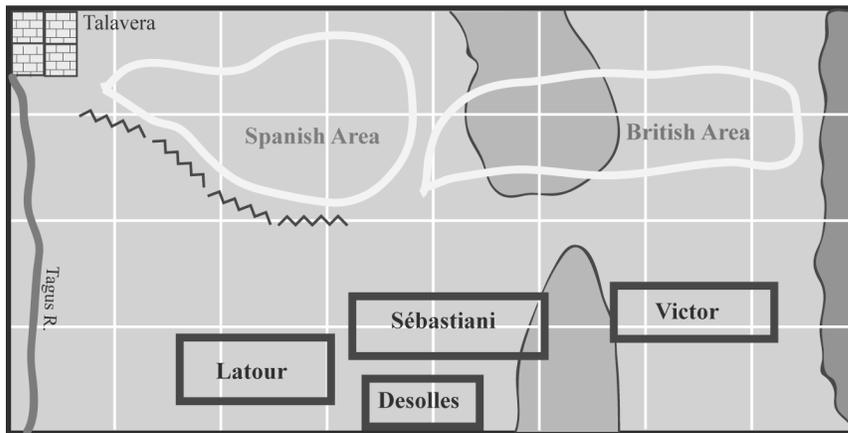
The morale of the French army is Fair. Its Break Point is 8.

The morale of the British army is Confident. Its Break Point is 6. The Spanish army is Shaky. Its Break Point is 5.

Special Rules:

General Cuesta, elderly and ponderous, moved slowly in a large mule-drawn carriage. To move his command stand requires 4 SPs, rather than the normal 3.

Map of the Talavera Battlefield:



Roster for the French Army

Commander: Marshal Jourdan (*Average*)

Weather: _____

Army's Break Point: 8 _____

Generals Available: 2 _____

This is a Napoleonic Army of 4 Forces.

I Corps: Victor 4 / 14" Aggressive

1st Division: Ruffin

I/1/1 Légère Veteran 7SP _____

I/1/2 Barrois Trained 8SP _____

2nd Division: Lapisse

I/2/1 Laplannes (Légère) Veteran 8 SP _____

I/2/2 Solignac Trained 8 SP _____

3rd Division: Villatte

I/3/1 Cassagne (Légère) Veteran 7 SP _____

I/3/2 Puthod Trained 8 SP _____

Cavalry:

I/C Beaumont (Hussars & Chass.) Veteran 4 SP _____

I: 8-pdr Foot BTY ____

I: 4-pdr Horse BTY ____

IV Corps: Sébastiani 3 / 11"

1st Division: Sébastiani

IV/1/1 Rey Trained 8SP _____

IV/1/2 Ligier Trained 8SP _____

2nd Division: Valance

IV/2/1 (Vistula Legion) Inf. Elite 6 SP _____

3rd Division: Leval

IV/3/1 Confederation Inf. Trained 5 SP _____

IV/3/2 Baden & Hessian Inf Veteran 7 SP _____

Cavalry:

IV/C Merlin (Chasseurs) Trained 5 SP _____

IV: 4-pdr Horse BTY ____

Cavalry Reserve: Latour-Maubourg (V) 1 / 6" Aggressive

1st Dragoon Division: Latour-Maubourg

C/1/1 Dragoons Veteran 6 SP _____

C/1/2 Dragoons Veteran 6 SP _____

2nd Dragoon Division: Milhaud

C/2/1 Dragoons Veteran 5 SP _____

C/2/2 Dragoons Veteran 4 SP _____

Madrid Reserves: Dessolles 3 / 4"

R/1 French Légère Veteran 8 SP _____

R/2 Spanish Royal Guard Inf. Trained 6 SP _____

R/3 French & Spanish Lt. Cav Trained 4 SP _____

R: Spanish 4-pdr Horse BTY ____

Roster for the British Army

Commander: Wellesley (*Great*)

Weather: _____

Army's Break Point: 6 _____

This is a Traditional Army of 5 Forces.

1st Division: Sherbrooke 3 / 6"

1/1 Campbell (Guards) Guard 11 SP _____

1/2 Cameron Veteran 4 SP _____

1/3 KGL Veteran 7 SP _____

1: 6-pdr Foot BTY _____

2nd Division: Hill 2 / 5"

2/1 Tilson Veteran 5 SP _____

2/2 Stewart Trained 5 SP _____

2: 6-pdr Foot BTY _____

3rd Division: Mackenzie 3 / 3"

3/1 Mackenzie Veteran 6 SP _____

3/2 Donkin Veteran 5 SP _____

4th Division: Campbell 3 / 3"

4/1 Campbell Veteran 5 SP _____

4/2 Kemmis Veteran 7 SP _____

Cavalry: Payne 3 / 3"

C/1 Fane (Hvy. Dragoons) Elite 7 SP _____

C/2 Cotton & Anson (Lt. Dragoons) Veteran 7 SP _____

Roster for the Spanish Army

Commander: Cuesta (*Poor*)

Weather: _____

Army's Break Point: 5 _____

This is a Traditional Army of 7 Forces.

1st Division: Zayas (V) 2 / 5" Cautious

1/1 Vanguard (Lt. Inf) Trained 7 SP _____

1/2 Line inf. Conscript 4 SP _____

1/3 "Provincials" Raw 3 SP _____

1: 12-pdr Foot BTY ____

2nd Division: Iglesias 4 / 3" Cautious

2/1 Line Inf. Conscript 4 SP _____

2/2 Militia Raw 3 SP _____

3rd Division: Portago 4 / 3" Cautious

3/1 Line Inf. Conscript 5 SP _____

3/2 "Provincials" Raw 4 SP _____

4th Division: Manglano 4 / 3" Cautious

4/1 Foreign & Line Inf. Trained 6 SP _____

4/2 Voluntarios Raw 3 SP _____

5th Division: Bassecourt 3 / 3" Cautious

5/1 Foreign & Line Inf. Trained 6 SP _____

5/2 Colonial & Line Inf. Conscript 5 SP _____

5: 6-pdr Foot BTY ____

1st Cavalry: Henestrosa (V) 3 / 3" Cautious

1C/1 Lt. Cav. Conscript 4 SP _____

1C/2 Lt. Cav. Conscript 4 SP _____

2nd Cavalry: Albuquerque (V) 2 / 3" Cautious

2C/1 Lt. Cav. Conscript 4 SP _____

2C/2 Lt. Cav. Conscript 4 SP _____

All Spanish generals are rated "Cautious" to reflect the great unwillingness of their men to leave their entrenchments.

Labels for the Talavera Scenario:

Jourdan (Average)

I: Victor 4/14" Agg

I/1/1 Légère SK2
I/1/2 Barrois SK2
I/2/1 Laplannes (Légère) SK2
I/2/2 Solignac SK2
I/3/1 Cassagne (Légère) SK2
I/3/2 Puthod SK2
I/C Beaumont (Hussars & Chass.)

I: 8-pdr Foot

I: 4-pdr Horse

IV: Sébastiani 3/11"

IV/1/1 Rey SK2
IV/1/2 Ligier SK2
IV/2/1 (Vistula Legion) SK2
IV/3/1 Confederation Inf. SK1
IV/3/2 Baden & Hessian SK1
IV/C Merlin (Chasseurs)

IV: 4-pdr Horse

C: Latour (V) 1/6" Agg

C/1/1 Dragoons
C/1/2 Dragoons
C/2/1 Dragoons
C/2/2 Dragoons

R: Dessolles 3/4"

R/1 French Légère SK2
R/2 Spanish Royal Guard SK1
R/3 French & Spanish Lt. Cav

R: Sp. 4-pdr Horse

Wellesley (Great)

1: Sherbrooke 3 / 6"

1/1 Campbell (Guards) SK2
1/2 Cameron SK2
1/3 KGL SK2

1: 6-pdr Foot

2: Hill 2 / 5"

2/1 Tilson SK2

2/2 Stewart SK2

2: 6-pdr Foot

3: Mackenzie 3 / 3"

3/1 Mackenzie SK2

3/2 Donkin SK2

4: Campbell 3 / 3"

4/1 Campbell SK2

4/2 Kemmis SK2

C: Payne 3 / 3"

C/1 Fane (Hvy. Dragoons)

C/2 Cotton & Anson (Lt. Dragoons)

Cuesta (Poor)

1: Zayas (V) 2 / 5" Cau

1/1 Vanguard (Lt. Inf) SK1

1/2 Line inf.

1/3 "Provincials" SK1

1: 12-pdr Foot

2: Iglesias 4 / 3" Cau

2/1 Line Inf.

2/2 Militia

3: Portago 4 / 3" Cau

3/1 Line Inf.

3/2 "Provincials" SK1

4: Manglano 4 / 3" Cau

4/1 Foreign & Line Inf. SK1

4/2 Voluntarios

5: Bassecourt 3 / 3" Cau

5/1 Foreign & Line Inf. SK1

5/2 Colonial & Line Inf. SK1

5: 6-pdr Foot

1C: Henestrosa (V) 3/3" Cau

1C/1 Lt. Cav.

1C/2 Lt. Cav

2C: Albuquerque (V) 2/3" Cau

2C/1 Lt. Cav

2C/2 Lt. Cav