The Battle Of
Piave
8 May 1809
by Chuck Hamack

Orders for the replacement of Prince Eugene had already been sent by Messenger from Napoleon. Eugene was about to start the battle of Piave when he received the orders to hand over his command of the Army of Italy to Murat the King of Naples. Eugene ignored the orders and launched his battle across the Piave river against Archduke John who had unwisely left the river fords weakly guarded and most of his troops to distant to oppose a crossing. If Eugene won this battle decisively he felt Napoleon might ignore his loss at the battle of Sacile and he would remain in command of the Army of Italy. Archduke John was continuing his retreat out of Italy due to the Archduke Charles's loses in the north and was waiting for his transports to withdraw before his Army. John gave battle because his baggage train would have to be abandoned to the Army of Italy if his troops were to continue their withdrawal.

   With his army finally concentrated, Prince Eugene de Beauharnais moved to redress his earlier defeat by the Archduke Johann at Sacile. Outnumbering the Austrians three to two, Eugene planned to rapidly cross the Piave before melting Alpine snows caused the river to rise creating an insurmountable obstacle. Eugene's plan called for speed and numbers. He already had the latter.

Historical Piave:

   The Archduke Johann had begun his withdrawal from Italy following his receipt of news regarding his brother's defeats at Abensberg and Echmuhl. Prince Eugene had pursued Johann as quickly as possible. Due to the necessity of repairing several bridges, Eugene only caught up to Johann on 7 May. He spent the rest of the day reconnoitering and developing plans to attack Johann the next morning. There were three fords across the Piave near Johann's position. One at Narvose, Priula, and San Nichiol. As the Austrians were poorly placed to defend the last two crossings points, it was decided to cross at both during the early hours of May 8th.

   Seras was to feign an attack on Narvose. Dessaix, Macdonald, Fontanelli, and the Italian Guard were to cross at Priula. Grenier along with most of the armies cavalry was to cross at San Nichiol and Maneuver to outflank IX Corps.

   On seeing the French attacking along all three crossing points, Johann's first instinct was to run for it and abandon his rearguard. Johann soon decided that this would gain him nothing while giving Eugene everything. Instead he would screw-up his courage and attack immediately, before Eugene was fully across the Piave.

   In the Austrian army nothing was immediate, so Johann personally dispatched a brigade of infantry and one of cavalry to oppose the crossing at San Nichiol. He then formed a large 24-gun battery across from the Priula bridgehead. These guns, unfortunately, were posted out of range of Dessaix's men and therefore had no real effect on his columns. Feldmarschall-Leutnant von Reichenberg (Wolfskeel) launched his cavalry at the French around the time Johann's battery opened fire. Unmolested by the Austrian Artillery, Dessaix's veterans calmly formed squares.

   Meanwhile around 0900, the brigades ordered south by Johann were approaching San Nichiol. The overwhelming numbers of French cavalry caused the Austrians to withdraw in disarray. Johann had sent to little, too late too prevent the French crossing. Grouchy now arrived and the cavalry wheeled left and advanced to support Dessaix.

   By 10am, Sahuc and Pully were in position on Dessaix's right. By 10:30 the French cavalry had routed Reichenberg's troopers and captured 14 guns of Johann's large battery. Mean while the IX Corps' infantry advanced to shelter Reichenberg, so Pully's and Sahuc's exhausted troopers slowly withdrew.

   His cavalry gone, Johann ordered established a defensive line from the river through Barco, La Mandra, and Campana. Kalnassy was ordered to hold San Michele and Cimadolmo. There was still a chance for an Austrian victory as most of Eugene's command was still on the south side of the Piave. The water was still rising.

   Having learnt his lessons at Sacile, Eugene refused to advance piecemeal against the Austrians and waited for more units to cross before renewing his assault. In consequence, Johann retired to his new position relatively unmolested.

   As the Piave continued to rise, it became impossible to ford by 1 pm. The current was so swift that Eugene's engineers were unable to deploy their pontoon bridge at Priula. The pontoons were then used to ferry more men across until around 3 o'clock. By this time the current was so rapid as to endanger further attempts

to cross the Piave. Fully one-third of Eugeme's command (Fontanelli, part of Durutte, and the Guard) had not made it across.

Eugene recommenced his attack at 4 o'clock by smashing through Kalnasssy at San Michele. By 5 pm, Macdonald had deployed all of his artillery just west of Campana. In a few minutes the whole of IX Corps was fleeing to Bocca di Strada. Some grenadiers of IX Corps attempted to stay the rout and were quickly overwhelmed. VIII Corps had no choice but to withdraw. Gajoli's Division did its best to slow down the pursuing French. Johann had reached Congliano by nightfall and Eugene called off pursuit until morning.

Austrian losses at Piave were 2,100 killed and wounded with 3,000 casualties and Eugene had won his first real victory. Naploeon would be pleased!

The Scenario:
Weather: Normal, Ground is Hard, and the game starts with Fog.
Game length: 0800 to 2000 12 turns or 4+1D6 (Roll if no agreement. One turn advances the clock one hour to determine reinforcements. The French have the initiative the first turn. Austrians set up first, the French set up second no closer than 18" from an enemy unit.

Map notes: Campana and San Michele are Hard cover. All other towns are Soft cover.
Fording the Piave:
All units must ford or be ferried across the "Piave River" and only one unit may attempt to cross each ford each Movement segment. Fording the Piave is possible at the villages of Narvose until 1000 hours, San Nichiol until 1100 hours, and Priula until 1200 hours.
Ferries: Units may be ferried across (One at a time) at San Nichiol from 1100 hours and at Priula from 1200 hours until 1500 hours. It takes a unit one movement segment to load/cross the river and one movement segment to unload and cross back over the river.
Artillery may not cross in this manner.
Stream: The Piavisella Stream is crossable everywhere and is an obstacle to movement except at fords.
Dike: The Dike provides Hard cover and is an Obstacle.
Marsh: Are rough terrain for movement.

Alternate options:
1. Add two 12# batteries to Austrians. One to each Corps.
2. Return the batteries under General Sorbier (Artillery Commander) 1 SP to (I/I/1), 1 SP to (II/III/1), 4 SP to (III/I/1 & III/I/2 2 SP to each), and the Gd Horse 6# returns to the (RG) Division
3. Deploy Austrians directly behind the "Piavisella Stream". This places the Austrians closer to the fords.
4. Allow the Austrians to form a 24 gun battery taking 2 SP's each from VIII/1, IX/1, IX/4.

Austrian Deployment- Historically these Corps were located between Susignano and Bocca di Strata the VIII Corp on the Austrian Right and IX Corp on the Austrian left. Austrians may move during the first turn. (They were warned of the fording of the Piave River by outposts observing the fords.)

Italian Deployment: Deploy on the behind the "Piave River" (bottom portion of the map).
Ag & RS @ 5-5, V @ 5-1, CR @ 5-9
Arrival times: 0900 **I** Corps at 5-5, 1000 **II** Corps at 5-9, 1300 **III** Corps at 5-5, 1400 **RG** Division at 5-5

Optional Victory Conditions:
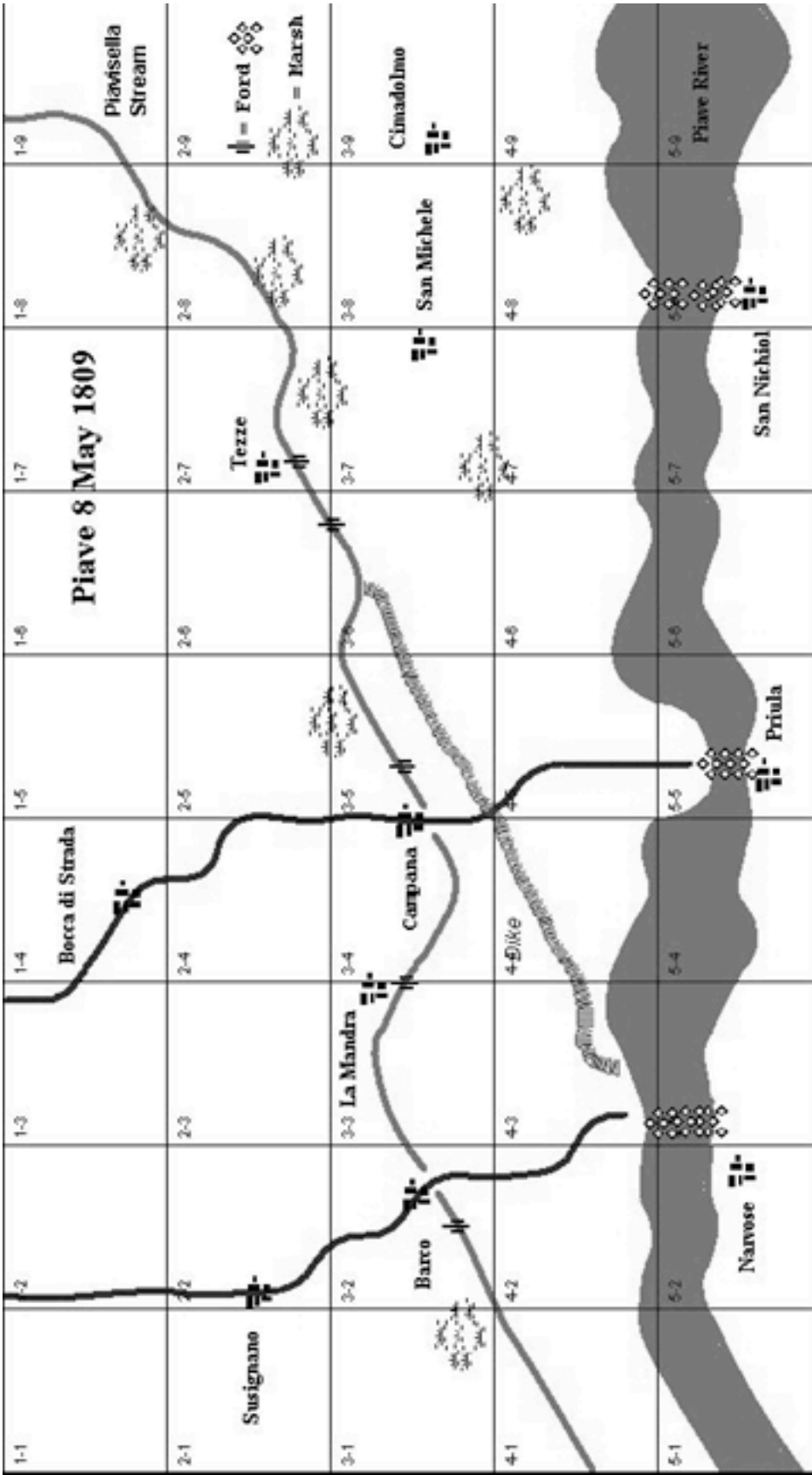Austrian / French
Campana 45/55
San Michele 40/50
La Mandra 30/35
Cimadolmo 15/20
Barco, Susignno, and Tezze 20/25
Each ford 50/-
Each north (top of map) road end -/40

The Piave Battlefield:

Piave 8 May 1809

The Army of Inner Austria
John-Poor
Fair Napoleonic Army of 4 Forces, Break Point @ 4

Rear Guard – (RG)-Splenyi 2/3"

Unit	SP	
RG/1 Splenyi (Line& Grenz) Veteran-Sk2	9 SP	_____
RG/2 Lt Cavalry (Hussar) Elite-LC	6 SP	_____
RG Horse 6#	2 SP	_____

8th Corps - A. Gyulai (VIII) 3/3"

Unit	SP	
VIII/1 Colleredo (Line) Trained-Sk1	9 SP	_____
VIII/2 Gajoli (line & Grenz) Trained-Sk2	7 SP	_____

9th Corps - I. Gyulai (IX) 3/4" Aggressive

Unit	SP	
IX/1 Kalnassy (Line) Trained-Sk1	10 SP	_____
IX/2 Marziani (Line) Trained-Sk1	6 SP	_____
IX/3 Gavassini (Grenz) Veteran-Sk2	6 SP	_____
IX/4 Kleinmayer(Grenadiers) Elite-Sk1	10 SP	_____

Cavalry Reserve(CR)-Wolfskeel 3/4"

Unit	SP	
CR/1 (Drag&Hussars) Veteran-LC	6 SP	_____
CR/2 (Hussars #5 "Ott") Elite-LC	4 SP	_____
CR/3 Horse 6#	2 SP	_____
CR/4 Horse 6#	2 SP	_____

Infantry units 7, Cavalry units 3, Artillery units 3 Total: 13
Infantry 57 SP, Cavalry 16 SP, and Artillery 6 SP Total: 79

Army of Italy
Eugene-Good

Fair Napoleonic Army of 6 Forces and 2 Detachents, Break Point @ 7

Advanced Guard (AG)-Dessaix 2/6"

AG/1 Nagles Elite-Mx-Sk2	8 SP	_____
(Voltigeurs & Chasseurs a Cheval)		
AG/2 Vautre Elite-Mx-Sk2	8 SP	_____
(Voltigeurs & Chasseurs a Cheval)		
AG Horse 4#	2 SP	_____

1st Corps(I)-MacDonald 3/6"

1st French Division (I/I)-Broussier

I/I/1 (Line) Veteran-Sk2	9 SP	_____
I/I/2 (Line) Veteran-Sk2	10 SP	_____

2nd French Division(I/II)-Lamarque

I/II/1 (Ln&Lt) Veteran-Sk2	9 SP	_____
I/II/2 (Line) Veteran-Sk2	9 SP	_____

2nd Corps(II)-Grenier 2/6"

3rd French Division(II/III)-Pacthod

II/III/1 (Ln& Lt) Veteran-Sk2	10 SP	_____
II/III/2 (Ln&Drag) Trained-Mx-Sk2	10 SP	_____

4th French Division(II/IV) - Durutte

II/IV/1 (Ln&Lt) Veteran-Sk2	10 SP	_____
II/IV/2 (Line) Veteran-Sk2	10 SP	_____

3rd Corps(III)-B. d'Hilliers 4/6"

1st Italian Division(III/I) - Fontanelli

III/I/1 (It. Line) Trained-Mx-Sk2	10 SP	_____
III/I/2 (It. Line & Damlatian) Trained-Sk2	10 SP	_____

5th Division(V)-Seras 3/6"

V/1 (Line) Veteran-Sk2	10 SP	_____
V/2 (Line) Veteran-Sk2	10 SP	_____

Royal Italian Guard Division(RG)-Lecchi 2/6" V (Detachment)

RG/1 Lecchi Elite-Sk2	8 SP	_____
RG/2 Fontanelli Elite-Sk2	6 SP	_____

Cavalry Reserve Corps(CR)-Grouchy 2/8"

1st Dragoon Division-Pully

CR/1 (Drag)Trained-LC	7 SP	_____

2nd Dragoon Division-Guedin

CR/2 Veteran-LC	5 SP	_____
CR/3 Horse 4#	2 SP	_____

Light Cavalry Division-Sahuc

CR/4 (Chass & Hussar) Trained-LC	9 SP	_____
CR/5 Horse 4#	2 SP	_____

Reserve Artillery(RS)-Sorbier 3/6" (Detachment)

RS/1 Foot 8#	2 SP	_____
RS/2 Foot 8#	2 SP	_____
RS/3 Foot 6#	2 SP	_____
RS/4 Gd Horse 6#	2 SP	_____

Infantry units 16, Cavalry units 3, Artillery units 7 Total: 26
Infantry 147 SP, Cavalry 21 SP, and Artillery 14 SP Total:182

Credits:

Some of this information is taken from Brian Robinette's scenarios for *Napoleon's Battles* ® with his kind permission. If you would like information about his scenarios please contact him at: herzogbrian@earthlink.net

All changes from the original scenario are my own based on various sources.

Chuck Hamack

Ready-Made Labels for the Piave Scenario

John-Poor

RG Splenyi 2/3"

RG/1 Splenyi   Sk2

RG/2 Hussar

RG Horse 6#

VIII A. Gyulai 3/3"

VIII/1 Colleredo   Sk1

VIII/2 Gajoli   Sk2

IX I. Gyulai 3/4" Aggressive

IX/1 Kalnassy   Sk1

IX/2 Marziani   Sk1

IX/3 Gavassini   Sk2

IX/4 Kleinmayer   Sk1

CR-Wolfskeel 3/4"

CR/1 Drag&Hussars

CR/2 Hussars #5 "Ott"

CR/3 Horse 6#

CR/4 Horse 6#

Eugene-Good

AG-Dessaix 2/6"

AG/1 Nagles   Mx-Sk2

AG/2 Vautre   Mx-Sk2

AG Horse 4#

I-MacDonald 3/6"

1st French Division (I/I)-Broussier

I/I/1 Line   Sk2

I/I/2 Line   Sk2

2nd French Division(I/II)-Lamarque

I/II/1 Ln&Lt   Sk2

I/II/2 Line   Sk2

II-Grenier 3/6"

3rd French Division(II/III)-Pacthod

II/III/1 Ln& Lt   Sk2

II/III/2 Ln&Drag   Mx-Sk2

4th French Division(II/IV) - Durutte

II/IV/1 Ln&Lt   Sk2

II/IV/2 Line   Sk2

III-B. d'Hilliers 4/6"

III/I/1 It. Ln   Sk2

III/I/2 It. Ln&Damlatian   Sk2

V-Seras3/6"

V/1 Line   Sk2

V/2 Line   Sk2

RG-Lecchi 2/6" V

RG/1 Lecchi   Sk2

RG/2 Fontanelli   Sk2

CR-Grouchy 2/8"

CR/1 Dragoons

CR/2 Dragoons

CR/3 Horse 4#

CR/4Chass & Hussar

CR/5 Horse 4#

RS-Sorbier 3/6"

RS/1 Foot 8#

RS/2 Foot 8#

RS/3 Foot 6#

RS/4 Gd Horse 6#

OR

RG/3 Gd Horse 6#