

DISASTER ON THE CARATARA FRANZIA SIEGE OF AUGUSTA 2011



Elements of the 1st Bis, A Spin Off of the PCE 5th Regiment Dug In at Trijuique

This game at SIEGE OF AUGUSTA XX (2011) was again based on the struggle of the XI Republican Division under Col. Enrique Lister to hold the road to France from the Italian CTV Littorio Motor Division under General Annibale Bergonzoli. The Republicans had two infantry Brigades, the 1st Bis, based on the Partido Comunista Espagnol (PCE) militia of Madrid (prewar) and the XI International Brigade containing the Andre Marty, Thaelmann, and Edgar Andre battalions of French and German Communists respectively. These formations had limited support weapons but were fairly well trained except for some militia battalions used to bring them up to roughly four battalions each. They were to have had a couple of off the board gruppos, and their ace in the hole was a detachment of two T-26b Russian tank companies armed with 45mm AT turret guns.

Littorio had two infantry regiments of 3 rifle and one MG company, an MG battalion (whose commander had been captured eight days earlier by Italian Internationals) and an artillery regiment with one gruppo (3 batteries each) of 65mm infantry guns (also assigned to each infantry regiment), one of 75mm guns, and one of 100mm howitzers. They also had attached to them a Rapid Support Group with four light tank companies, an armored flamethrower company, a truck born flamethrower company, and a Bersaglieri motorcycle MG company. Also the only 47mm anti-tank battery in the force.



Rapid Support Group on the Brihuega Road



Andre Marty Battalion Enters the Bosque de Torija with Hotchkiss AT battery



Attack of the Rapid Support Group

To launch his attack Bergonzoli (Dr. Dunn of the Valdosta University History Department) launched the most mobile element, the Gruppo Rapidi Specializiti, down an unimproved road-at the other end of the Republican line from the dreaded Russian tanks.

The attack caught not only his opponent, but the umpire (myself) off guard. Normally the Italian Tankettes don't attack through the Bosque (woods) because among other reasons, the tankettes can't penetrate the woods. In a pre-WWII study General Hans Guderian basically said that their ability to penetrate brush-well, you got the impression they couldn't crush a rose bush. And the Lancia M17 company was worse. And since they were keeping together the column would proceed at the pace of the slowest vehicles. According to my written rules, the Lancia company, but a closer check reveals that the Lancia was actually faster on the road. Anyway for the L3/33 it was 30" by road-enough to reach the Internationals and the AT battery in one swift bound with MG blazing.

As I said, the swiftness of the attack caught me off guard. I momentarily forgot that the road was an unimproved road. Thus 15" movement. Also, since the AT battery would engage first (at up to 15") and the advancing vehicles would be firing only at point blank range as they attempted to overrun, a morale check on the leading elements of the column would occur before they closed. Moreover, while I considered that there was enough room by the side of the road to pass burning vehicles, a movement penalty would seem appropriate for not only that but the turning and retreat of discouraged crews. A case could be made that with the gun firing down a column 15" of which would be in its beaten zone would suffer column penalties. But that will have to be defined in the second edition.



So with the loss of the antique armored car company they overran the guns



At that point the reserves headed towards the breakthrough. Here a militia battalion is struck by an overshoot fired at the Russian tanks by Littorio's artillery



Tank Companies Rush to the Aid of the Internationals-Slowly

At that point not only was the umpire thrown off by the rapid moves of the CTV. The Republican players reacted badly. Instead of rushing their tanks full speed down to engage with the CTV, which would have made them hard to hit with indirect fire, and virtually impervious to the silly little Italian tankettes, they moved a half turn and halted to fire-outside of the direct fire range of their 45mm AT guns. That would leave the CTV with time to maul the XI IB before the dread Russian tanks fell on them.

In addition, while the Italian commander dismounted his infantry too far away to get into the fighting (he was well aware of my rule about double casualties on troops packed into trucks), he had moved the motorcycle MG and truck borne flamethrowers up. And the armored flamethrower company was approaching another edge of the wood to which the Thaelmanns were moving. International elements would reach the edge of the woods on move/fire orders at about the same time that the attackers did the same. And point blank fire from flame throwers and even light machineguns is more devastating than that of rifle companies.

To make matters worse, he mounted the reserve battalions on trucks and moved them in front of the CTV breakthrough. One battalion managed to dismount. But the other was raked by machinegun fire of two tank companies while crammed like sardines into trucks. Before long the XI IB became posthumous heroes of the Soviet Union and all left thinking working peoples of the world.



Tankettes Massacre A Truck Borne Battalion



Flame Thrower and MG elements Meet Internationals at the Edge of the Bosque



Charging Away From the Dread Russian Tanks, the Tankettes Break the Last Battalion of the XI Internationals

Once again the CTV had reversed history. I'm obviously going to have to tighten up the rules and pay closer attention when they next launch a Blitzkrieg with silly little tankettes. Even with the recent reverses, overall the Republicans are ahead in the series, both when it comes to the Caratarra Battle near Trujique and the storming of Brihuega down the road.

In this case it would take some doing for the CTV to storm the town. But Bergonzoli (Dr. Dunn) had clearly driven a wedge between Lister's XIth Division (now a mere brigade) and Cipriano Mera's 14th Division attacking Brihuega.