



## Arquebusier

### Selected Articles from Previous Editions: Vol XXII/II

#### THE BATTLE OF FORNOVO AT ROLL CALL '96

By Steve Ayers

##### Introduction

This is going to be one of those old fashioned battle reports apparently much missed by some of our members. The Demonstration Team has been taking this, the first major battle of the Italian Wars, to a few shows as part of the Society's current repertoire of games. At time of writing it has appeared (in a previous guise) at Fiasco '94 (Leeds) and then (more or less in the form described below) at Colours '95 Reading), Action '96 (Rheindahlen) and, most recently, at Roll Call '96 Dunstable).



## **Brief Historical Background to the Battle**

The French under King Charles VIII had invaded Italy early in 1494 to secure their claim to the Kingdom of Naples. The divided loyalties of the Italian states had allowed them to succeed in this aim. However by late spring of 1495 the Italian states had begun to line up against the common foe and so the French king led the core of his army (about 10,000 men) back towards France.

The march was initially unopposed but as the French army was descending from crossing the Apennines it found the combined forces from Venice, Milan, the Papal States and Mantua (about 15,000 strong) camped in the valley of the River Taro near the village of Fornovo. The Italian Allied army was led by Giovanni Francesco Gonzaga (the Marquis of Mantua) who was in turn advised by his uncle, Ridolfo Gonzaga, a veteran of the French-Burgundian wars and well versed in French tactics (allegedly).

The Italians were on the right side of the river so, on 6th July, the French advanced along the left bank ready to deploy to face the Italians, but with a very strong vanguard should they be attacked frontally.

Normally the River Taro is a fairly insignificant sluggish, shallow watercourse easy to cross at any point in this region. Unfortunately for the Italians there was heavy rain which caused the river to become swollen, deep and fast flowing. This rain had also dampened the gunpowder of both sides, so the opening artillery exchanges were ineffectual.

The Italians had sent their light horse to attack the head of the column frontally while the rest of their forces were to advance across the river and attack the column all along its right flank. The swollen River Taro now had its devastating effect on the deployment of the advancing Italians who could only gain the French bank at certain parts of its course. Furthermore the Italian reserves were only to advance when personally ordered to do so by Ridolfo Gonzaga, but since he had been killed they never joined battle.

The Italian light horse were repulsed with the loss of their leaders and went off to loot the French baggage train. The disordered Italian flank attack was also defeated with heavy losses. The forces gradually disengaged and the French army marched on that night.

Both sides claimed victory. Certainly the Italians held the battlefield and had captured the French baggage and more prisoners. However they had lost over 300 men-at-arms and 3000 infantry against French losses of only about 200 and the French king had extracted his army intact.

## **The Rules**

The rules currently used are based on Dan Johnson's "Maximilian" set which use a "De Bellis Antiquitatis" (DBA) style mechanism. However the elements are assembled into units (of between 3 and 6 elements). Thus in the Order of Battle (see later) a unit of 4 elements of gendarmes will fight together as one body and cannot be spread out as individual elements through the battleline to bolster other troop types or whatever. Hopefully the rules themselves will form the basis of another article.

## **The Terrain.**

The battlefield is a broad valley with the River Taro flowing down the centre. The valley is bounded on each side by a range of hills. At one end of the valley, on the right bank of the river, lies Fornovo with its nearby bridge over the Taro. At the other end of the valley and also on the right bank is the fortified camp of the Allied Italian States army. A few hillocks dot the valley floor and some trees add interest to the scene. NB Though based on the main features of the battle, the terrain is not meant to be an accurate portrayal of the local geography of Fornovo in the late fifteenth century. See the accompanying maps for more details of the layout. Originally the terrain was assembled from that good old wargamers standby, a large green cloth, the hills used for the Mikata-Ga-Hara (samurai) game with a river of resin between carpet tile banks laid on top. The terrain used at Dunstable was actually constructed using two doors as the baseboard. The hills were made of polystyrene fixed to the baseboards which was then overlaid with paper towel and filler and painted matt green. Roads were another layer of filler applied with a stiff brush and painted brown. The river was a polystyrene trough lined with filler, painted a brownish-grey and filled with resin then inserted between the doors. Holes were drilled into the hills and baseboards for trees to be inserted. The Italian camp was made of Gallia stockade walls drilled and then pegged to the baseboard with thin wooden dowels, and the village of Fornovo was represented by some suitably south European looking plaster buildings originally produced by Gladiator (who now make rather more detailed resin ones). The bridge was in resin from Mainly Military. The village and bridge were in fact survivors from the original terrain. The whole lot measured 80 inches by 70 inches and had to be carried by roof rack to Dunstable, fortunately on a warm dry day.

## **The Armies.**

The French had three commands while the Italian States had five. The orders of battle are based mainly on Ian Wilson's article on the battle in volume IX of "Arquebusier" as reprinted in the Compendium of that year. In that account most of the infantry was listed as crossbowmen, however I felt there ought to be more chaps with long pointy sticks present, especially with all those mounted troops roaming the battlefield. I also added in a few arquebusiers and halbardiers for a bit of variety and balance. Anyway I didn't have that many crossbowmen. The figures were 15mm from various manufacturers and were as listed below An element of mounted troops represents approximately 100 men, while an infantry element is about 125. Morale is indirectly reflected by the "Waver" and

"Panic" points for the commands. The French waver at 33% losses and panic at 50% while the Italians waver at 25% and panic at 40%.

**FRENCH VANGUARD - Marshal de Gie**

ID	N°	Type
A	4	Gendarmes
B	3	Mounted Crossbows
C	3	Foot Crossbows
D	6	Pikes
E	6	Pikes
F	6	Pikes
G	3	Halberds
H	3	Foot Crossbows

Wavers at 12 elements destroyed, Panics at 17 elements destroyed

**FRENCH MAIN BODY - King Charles VIII**

ID	No	Type
J	3	Gendarmes
K	6	Pikes
L	4	Pikes
M	6	Foot Crossbows
N	4	Crossbows
P	1	Heavy Gun
Q	1	Medium Gun

Wavers at 9 elements destroyed, Panics at 13 elements destroyed

**FRENCH REARGUARD - Count de Foix**

ID	No.	Type
R	3	Gendarmes
S	6	Pikes
T	3	Halberds
U	6	Foot Crossbows
V	5	Foot Crossbows
W	1	Light Gun
X	1	Light Gun

Wavers at 9 elements destroyed, Panics at 13 elements destroyed

The French were also encumbered with five wagons of booty and baggage. Nominally attached to the Main Body

**ITALIAN MILANESE DIVISION - Count of Cuazzo**

ID	No.	Type
1	6	Gendarmes
2	3	Cavalry
3	6	Pikes
4	6	Pikes
5	4	Halberds
6	4	Arquebusiers
7	4	Foot Crossbows

Wavers at 9 elements destroyed, Panics at 14 elements destroyed

**ITALIAN MANTUAN DIVISION - Marquis of Mantila**

ID	No.	Type
8	5	Gendarmes
9	5	Cavalry
10	6	Pikes
11	6	Pikes
12	4	Halberds
13	6	Foot Crossbows
14	6	Foot Crossbows
15	6	Foot Crossbows

Wavers at 11 elements destroyed, Panics at 18 elements destroyed

**ITALIAN PAPAL DIVISION - Antonio of Urlino**

ID	No.	Type
16	3	Gendarmes
17	4	Pikes
18	4	Foot Crossbows
19	1	Heavy Gun
20	1	Medium Gun

Wavers at 4 elements destroyed, Panics at 6 elements destroyed

**ITALIAN VENETIAN DIVISION - Fortebraccio de Montone**

ID	No.	Type
21	5	Gendarmes
22	3	Cavalry
23	6	Pikes
24	6	Pikes

25	6	Foot Crossbows
26	6	Archers
27	1	Light Gun
28	1	Light Gun

Wavers at 9 elements destroyed, Panics at 14 elements destroyed

**ITALIAN BLOCKING FORCE - Pietro Duodo**

ID	No.	Type
29	3	Stradiots (Light Cavalry)
30	3	Mounted Crossbows
31	3	Stradiots (Light Cavalry)
		Defending the camp
32	1	Heavy Gun
33	1	Medium Gun
34	1	Medium Gun

Wavers at 3 elements destroyed, Panics at 4 elements destroyed

**The Scenario**

The French start on the left bank of the river, deployed in their three commands. Each command must deploy behind (i.e. south of) the line shown on the map. The wagons must start on the road but no further forward than the front of the Main Body. The wagons get a free move each time (i.e. at no cost in Command Points) so long as they remain on the road, however taking them off-road requires one CP per wagon per move. The French have to get the wagons and most of their army off the northern edge of the battlefield (between the river and the hills).

The mounted troops of the Italian Blocking Force also start on the left bank of the river but to the north of the line shown. The heavy and medium guns nominally attached to the Blocking Force are positioned on the right bank in front of the camp, they do not move from this position for the duration of the game. All the rest of the Allied Italian States forces start on the right bank with the mounted troops of each contingent nearest the river, with their respective infantry to the rear. The start positions for the various contingents is shown on the map. To simulate the inactivity of the reserves, the infantry of each contingent cannot move until the turn after a six is thrown by their commander when dicing for Command Points.

Hills are gentle until the second contour is encountered, from there on up they are steep (i.e. bad going). The river is not known to be fordable anywhere, the first time troops arrive at a section of bank they can test to see if it is possible to cross. Each element on the bank throws a D6, a score of 1 or 2 means it is fordable for the frontage of that element, any other score means the river cannot be crossed at that point for the

remainder of the game. As fordable or uncrossable sections of river are discovered, the adjacent banks are marked with green or reddish-brown lichen respectively. Fordable sections of river count as bad going.