

Homage to Catalonia: The Relief of Barcelona, December 1808

The French invasion of Spain in 1808 presents some interesting scenarios for historical wargames, involving a great variety of available forces and plenty of strategic and tactical terrain and supply issues. In this scenario by Elliott James, St. Cyr's Corps faces a thorny problem in their attempt to relieve Barcelona.

Terrain and 10mm figures (Minifigs, Pendraken and Magister Militum) by Elliott James. Rules were Napoleonic Command, 2nd Edition.

Background:

The scenario is based on the Battle of Cardedeu, which took place on the 16th of December, 1808. In the original event, the Spanish General Juan Miguel de Vives y Feliu (whom David Chandler described as "an aged, overcautious, Anglophobic booby") vacillated at first, and then chose to face St. Cyr with only a force of two divisions, some militia, and a hussar regiment. Being faced by one of the most able of the commanders of the napoleonic era, he was soundly beaten and forced to flee the field, and, much to his chagrin, was rescued by the Royal Navy.

This action assumes that Vives actually decided to call up additional reinforcements, leaving a small force to cover Barcelona. The reinforcements will arrive when the total of D6s, rolled each turn, reaches a total of 12 (i.e., somewhere between 2 and 12 turns, the most likely arrival being on Turn 4).

French Briefing.

The French invasion of Catalonia has suffered a setback. The French under General Duhesme took the city of Barcelona but now find themselves besieged by the Spanish under Vives. To relieve the most important city in Catalonia Napoleon dispatched général de division Laurant Gouvion St. Cyr to stabilize the situation. There is no love lost between the Emperor and his general; St. Cyr had served in the Army of the Rhine under that dangerous traitor Moreau. Short of supplies and with inferior troops it's obvious Napoleon intends to humiliate his commander with an impossible situation.

The first obstacle is the town of Gerona, held by the Spanish. Without an adequate siege train it is obvious that this town could not be taken by the end of the month. St. Cyr therefore leaves a covering force to contain the garrison and march on with the balance of his force.

In theory there are two routes available to reach Barcelona. In practice the British Navy has made the coastal road untenable. That leaves on the inland route. Unfortunately, this road is narrow and difficult to traverse which will result in leaving all the artillery behind.

The march was undertaken with only such supplies as the troops may carry or be brought up

on pack animals. St. Cyr has four days' worth of supplies. If Barcelona is not reached within six days, the army will starve.

Progress was slow and the only opposition encountered were a brigade of militia at San Celoni. Having taken the town St. Cyr pushed his tired troops onward through the defile of Trentopassos since he feared the possibility of stopping and then having to force an excellent defensive position. In this he was corrected because having entered into the valley of the Besos he saw in the distance the campfires of the Spanish. Speed was now of the essence. In the morning the last of the food will be eaten and the army has only enough ammunition for one action. If road to Barcelona is not cleared the army will starve and disintegrate.

Objective:

Clear the road to Barcelona.

French and Allied Forces:

Général de division Laurant Gouvion St. Cyr

Infantry

1st Division – General Souham Line +1

 1st Brigade 4 Legere Battalions

 2nd Brigade 3 Line Battalions

2nd Division – General Chabot Line +1

 1st Brigade 4 Line Battalions

 2nd Brigade 3 Line Battalions

5th Division – General Pino (Italian) Veteran

 1st Brigade 2 Legere Battalions, 2 Line Battalions

 2nd Brigade 3 Line Battalions

6th Division - General Lechi (Italian) Veteran

 1st Brigade 4 Line Battalions

 2nd Brigade 4 Line Battalions

Cavalry – General Balabio

4 Squadrons - French Dragoons Line

4 Squadrons – Neapolitan Chasseurs Line -1

Spanish Briefing.

French invasions of Spain have always moved down the Mediterranean coast as one of their easiest invasion routes, with the objective of securing the city of Barcelona. The invasion at the beginning of 1808 was no exception. While the main French forces have secured Madrid, the popular uprising that followed it has fought back and has now besieged the French garrison at Barcelona as well as seizing a number of strategically important towns. The French are now moving more troops into Catalonia. Assistance from the British means that use of the coast road has been denied to the French which has forced them to use the inland route.

Initially General Vives sent a two divisions and some cavalry to toward the Trentopassos to hold this choke point. Worrying that this would not be sufficient to hold the position if French moved faster than anticipated he has ordered General Caldagues leave a token force covering the garrison of Barcelona and move with all speed to join him at Cardedeu.

Vives had intended to camp around the village of Cardedeu and move in the morning through the Tentopassos defile. The first intimation of trouble was the garrison of San Celoni retreating back up the road followed by the main French army.

Vives must now attempt to hold of the French with his inferior force and hoping that the additional troops sent from Barcelona will be sufficient to hold the French.

Obective:

Prevent the French from moving on to Barcelona.

Spanish Forces:

General Juan Miguel de Vives y Feliu

Infantry - deployed

1st Division – General von Reding Line -1

1st Brigade 3 line Battalions, 1 light Battalion

2nd Brigade 3 line Battalions, 1 light Battalion

Divisional artillery, 1 heavy battery.

2nd Division - Conde de Caldagues Line -1

1st Brigade 3 Line Battalions, 1 Light Battalion

2nd Brigade 3 Line Battalions, 1 Light Battalion

Divisional artillery, 1 light battery.

Miqueletes – General Juan Clarós Conscript -1

3 Line Battalions, 1 Light Battalion

Cavalry – deployed

4 Squadons Hussars Espagnols Line -1

Relief Force (arriving late on a cumulative die roll):

General del Palacio

3rd Division – General La Serna

1st Brigade 4 Line Battalions Line

2nd Brigade 3 Line Battalions Line

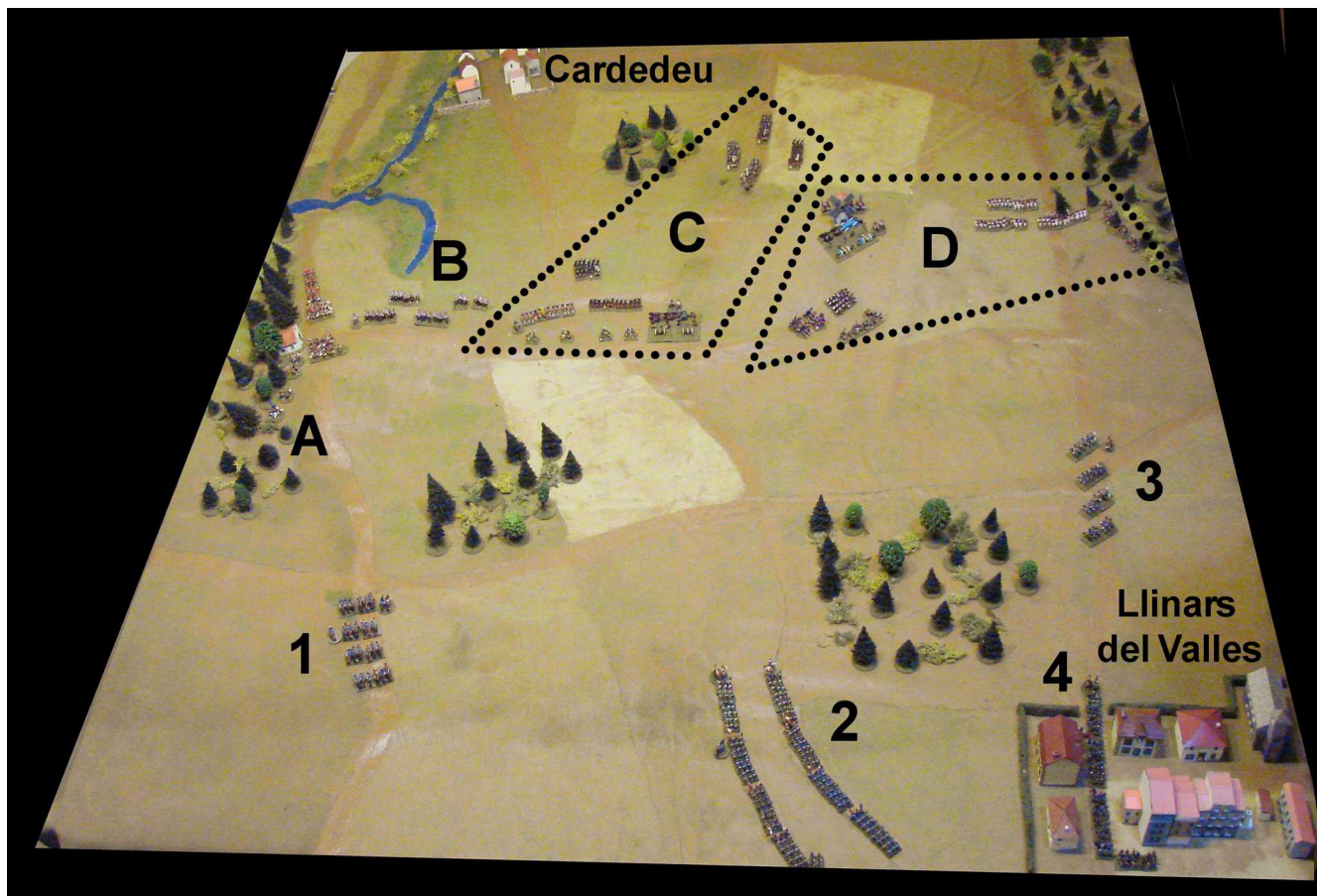
3rd Brigade 3 Line Battalions Conscript

Divisional artillery, 1 light battery

Cavalry

10 Squadrons lancers Conscript

The plans of General Vives to advance through the Trentopassos defile having been interrupted by the sudden arrival of St. Cyr's Corps, the Spanish deploy to block the French advance. A view from the east:



A: Claros' militia brigade. B: Hussars Espagnols. C: Conde de Caldeagues' 2nd Division D: Von Reding's 1st Division. 1: Neapolitan Chasseurs a Cheval. 2: Pino and Lechi's Italian Divisions. 3: French Dragoons. 4: Souham and Chabot's French Divisions



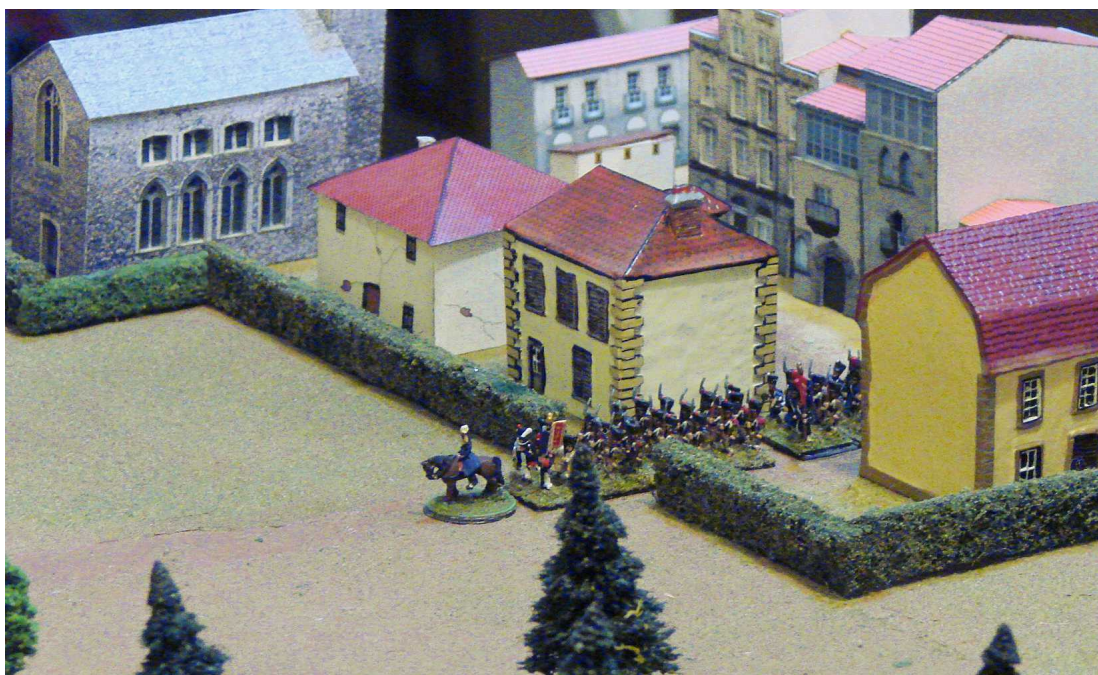
The Spanish deployment, as seen from the direction of the advancing French.



General von Reding deploys his 12 pounder battery on the windmill hill.



Conde de Caldagues' 2nd brigade, in reserve.



General Souham's column passes through Llinars des Valles.



The Neapolitan Chasseurs a Cheval advance on St. Cyr's left.

As most of Vives' force watched St. Cyr's columns approaching, the miquelets of Claros' brigade edged forward on the Spanish right flank. Claros' men had been roughly handled the day before as the French drove them back from their previous position at San Celoni, and had

been deployed in the wooded hills by the Conde de Caldagues in the hopes that the cover would keep them from being seriously threatened. As they moved along the edge of the woods they presented an irresistible target to the Neapolitan chasseurs, who promptly charged. The Spanish militia took significant casualties and fled back up the hill.



The Neapolitan chasseurs charge de Caldagues' militia.

This maneuver left the chasseurs dangerously exposed and the Hussars Espagnols promptly fell on their flank, breaking a couple squadrons and driving the rest back in disorder.



The Hussars take the Chasseurs in flank.

Meanwhile, Souham's column continues to approach via Llinars des Valles, and the Italians deploy opposite the Spanish center in preparation for their assault.



Pino's division deploys from column of march to columns of attack.



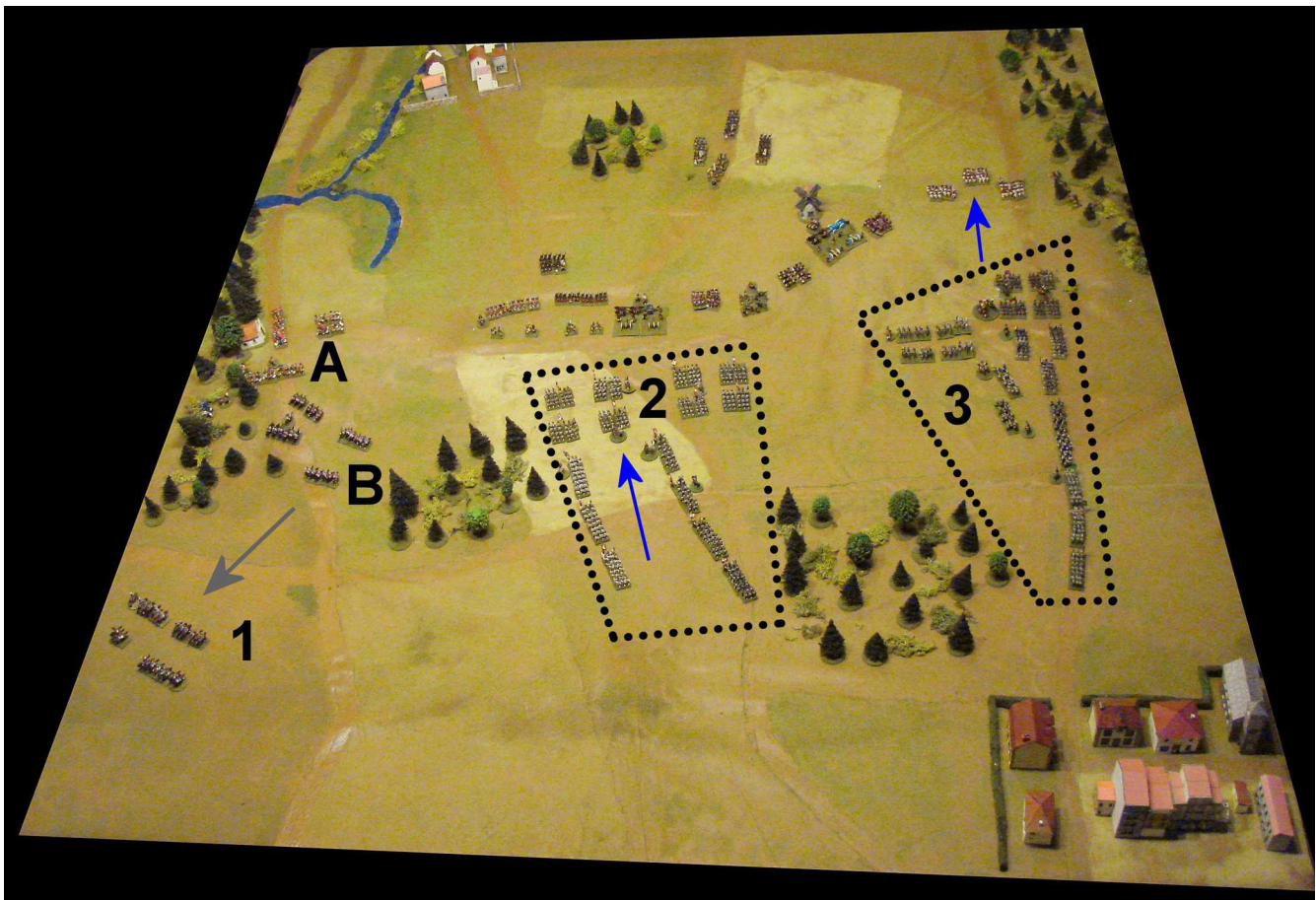
General Vives discusses the developing situation with the host and gamemaster.

General Vives is beginning to wonder where the reinforcements he requested from Barcelona are. He has no idea how far away they are, or what road they are approaching on.

Pino and Lechi are attacking the middle of the Spanish line of defence and Souham and Chabot are headed for the defile between the windmill hill and the wooded hills on the south, with the dragoon regiment covering their left flank. The Conde de Caldagues is unsure whether to commit his reserve brigade, still in columns of march behind the windmill, to the north or south of the mill. In his indecision, he decides to wait and see which attack is the most dangerous, and he does nothing.

The hussars are launching a pursuit of the beaten Neapolitan chasseurs.

De Caldagues throws his battalion of light infantry out in front, knowing they are vulnerable in the open, but hoping to disorder the oncoming columns before they can charge home. The Spanish artillery is playing havoc among the approaching formations.



A: The Spanish militia, rallying. B: The Hussars Espagnols, launching their pursuit of the chasseurs. 1: The Neapolitan Chasseurs, attempting to rally. 2: Pino and Lechi's divisions, deploying for the assault. 3: Souham and Chabot's divisions.



De Caldaques' Division stands ready to receive the onslaught.



Spanish battalions in line await the assault.

On the windmill hill, Von Reding's guns are proving to be a problem for General Souham, so he launches his dragoons in a hopeless charge up the slope, hoping to dislodge them or at least distract them from tearing up his infantry columns as they advance. The dragoons hit one of the Spanish battalions in line, but are unable to break them. They fall back down the hill in some disorder, but before the Spanish can recover he launches an entire brigade of light infantry in a headlong attack. The Spanish infantry are pushed back, but the guns stand fast and continue to pound away.

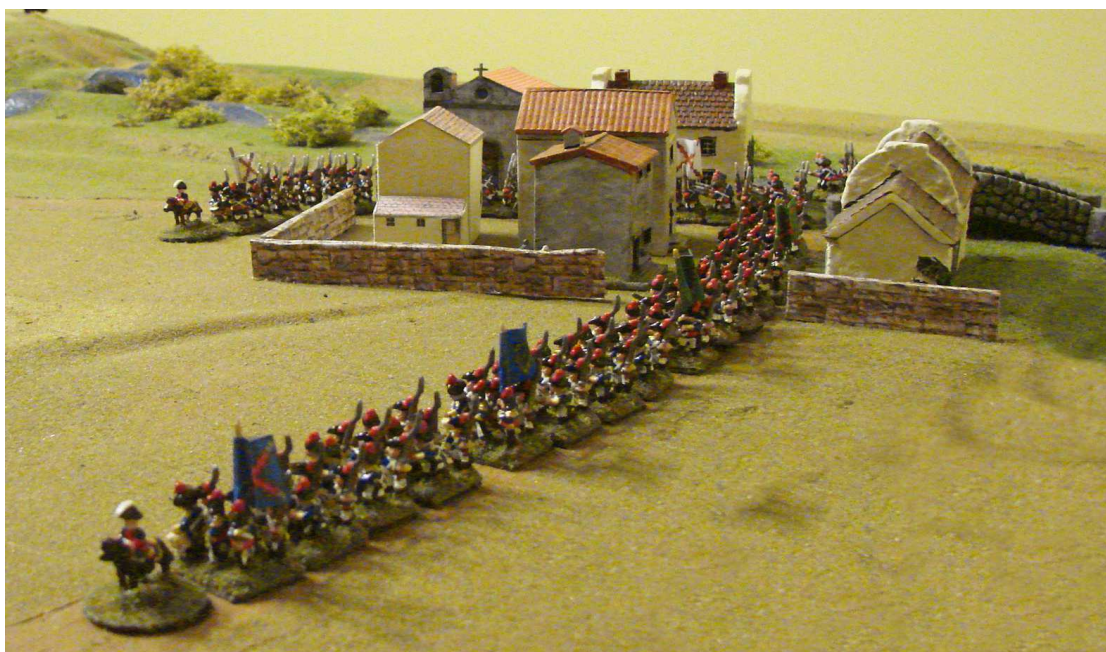
At last the relief column under General La Serna arrives! In the lead are several squadrons of irregular lancers, but they arrive well to the north at Cardedeu, making it doubtful that they can intervene before the full weight of the French attack can be felt.



Souham charges up the hill as the dragoons fall back to reform.



La Serna's relief column arrives from the direction of Cardedeu.

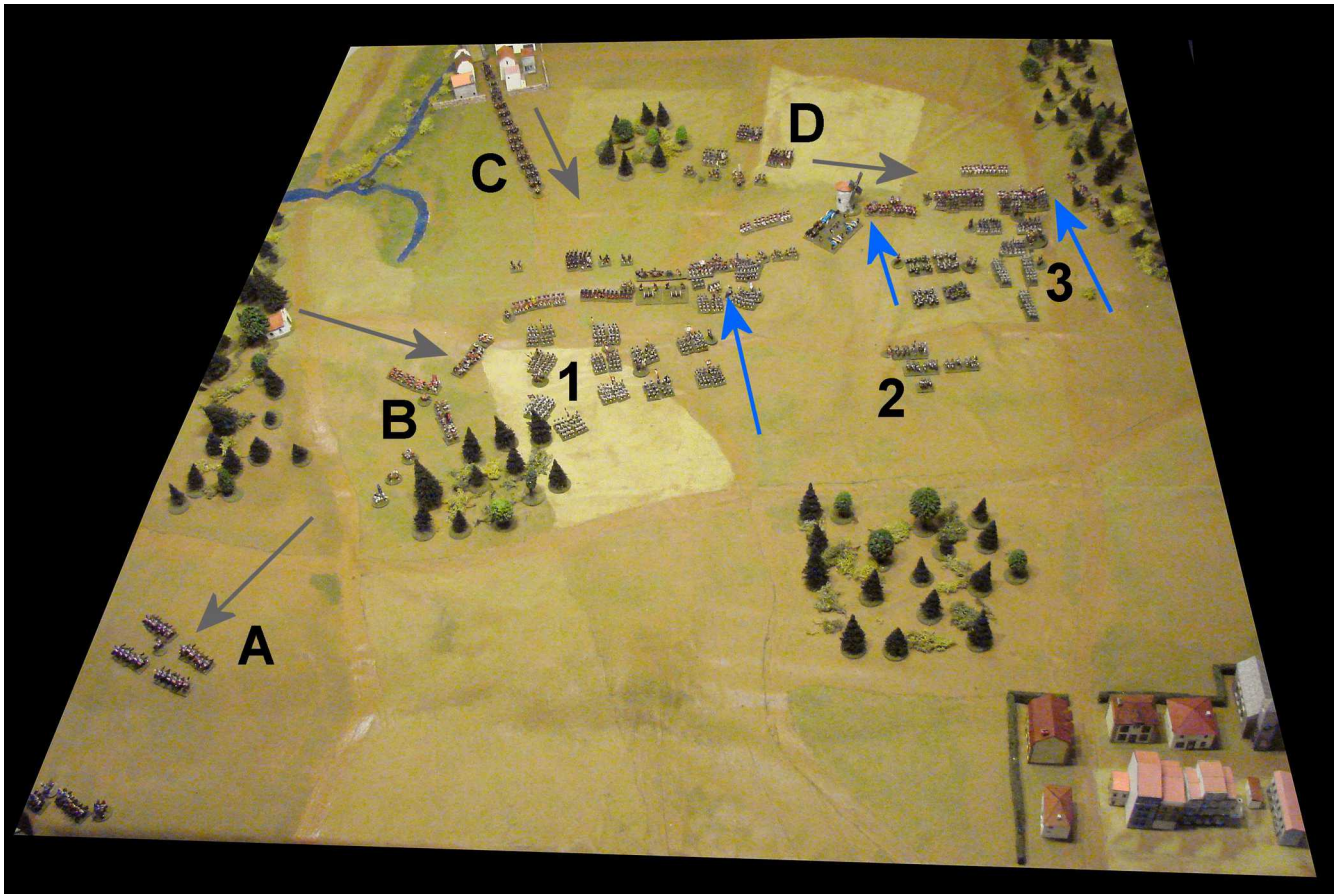


Following the cavalry, La Serna's infantry floods across the bridge, and through Cardedeu.

In the meantime, the Spanish militia have recovered from their initial setback and have launched themselves at the flank of the Italian division, forcing Pino to divert a brigade to hold them at bay.



The Spanish miquelets threatening Pino's flank.



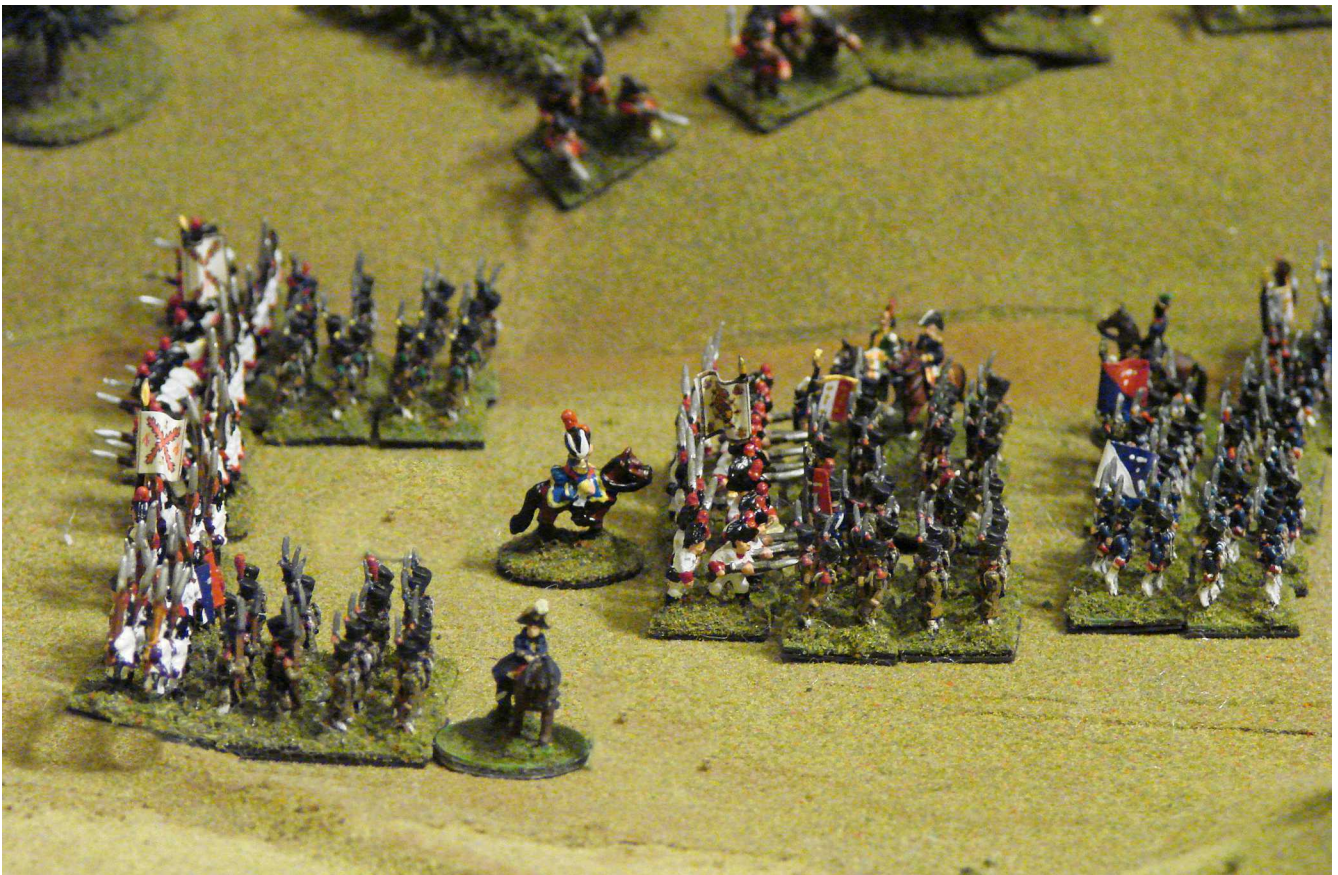
A: The Hussars Espagnol continue to harrass the retreating Neapolitans. B: The Spanish miquelets threatening the flank of Pino's attack. C: La Serna's relief column arriving via Cardedeu. D: De Caldagues commits his reserve brigade to the south of the windmill. 1: Pino uses one brigade to hold off the miquelets while the rest of the French center slams into De Caldagues' division. 2: The French dragoons, rallying. 3: Souham and Chabot assault the brigade defending the defile.

The Hussars Espagnol are continuing to push the Chasseurs, whose accumulated casualties and disorder have rendered them pretty much useless. Vives is wondering where his cavalry has gotten off to (he cannot see them from his position) since their success should have made it possible for them to swing into the French rear.

In the center, the miquelets have some initial success, and the irregulars occupy the woods. Pino's assault on De Caldagues' troops pushes them back, but they do not break. Souham, over on the southern flank, is more successful. One of von Reding's brigades sitting astride the chaussee from Llinar des Valles is broken, and streams away in the direction of Barcelona. La Serna's relief column is not in time to save them, and had De Caldagues been less indecisive, his reserve brigade might have partially retrieved the situation . . . but now the road to Barcelona is undefended.



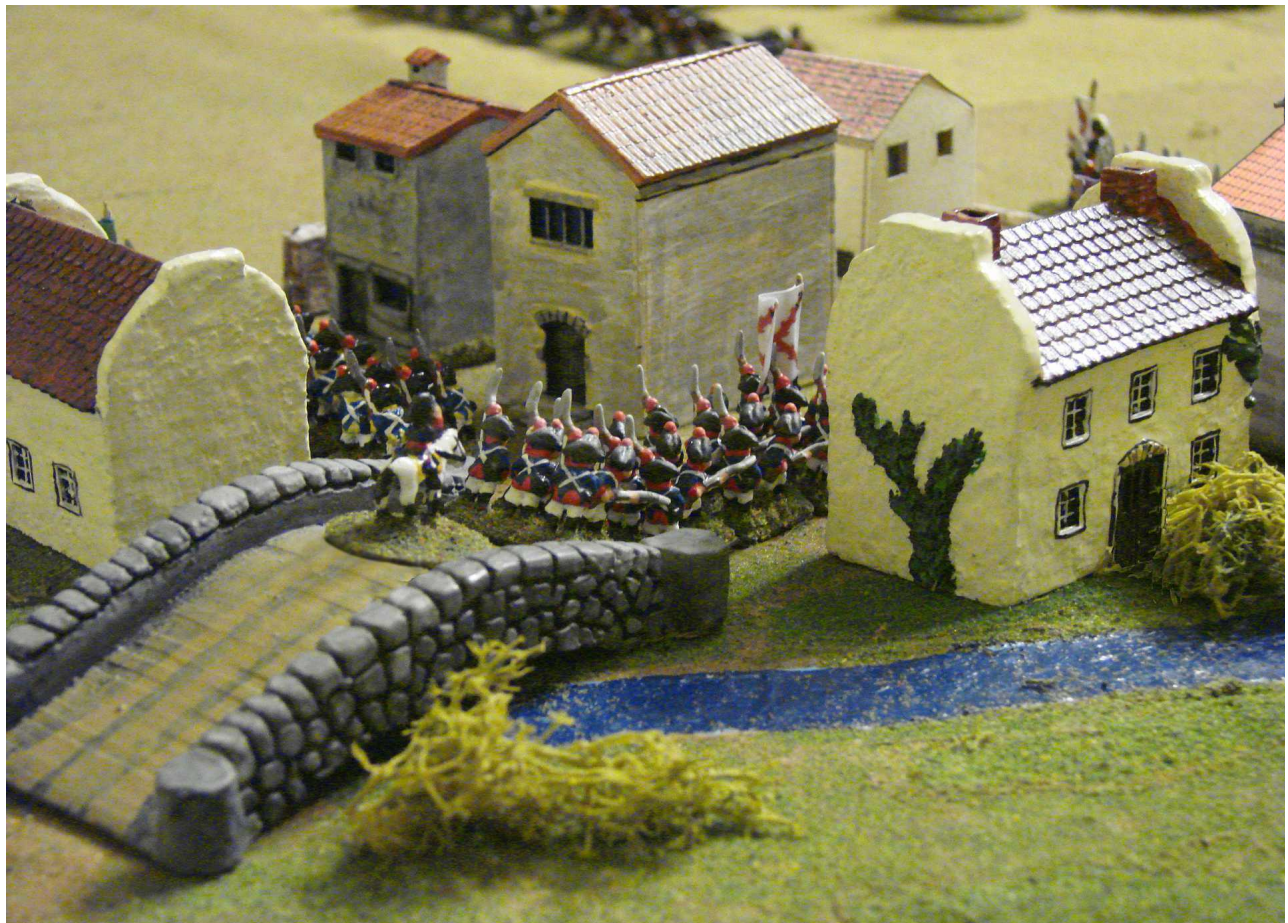
The divisions of Souham and Chabot stream into the defile, in pursuit of the broken Spaniards.



Von Reding's Spaniards are broken and flee, hotly pursued.



La Serna's cavalry, arriving just a little too late to halt the debacle.



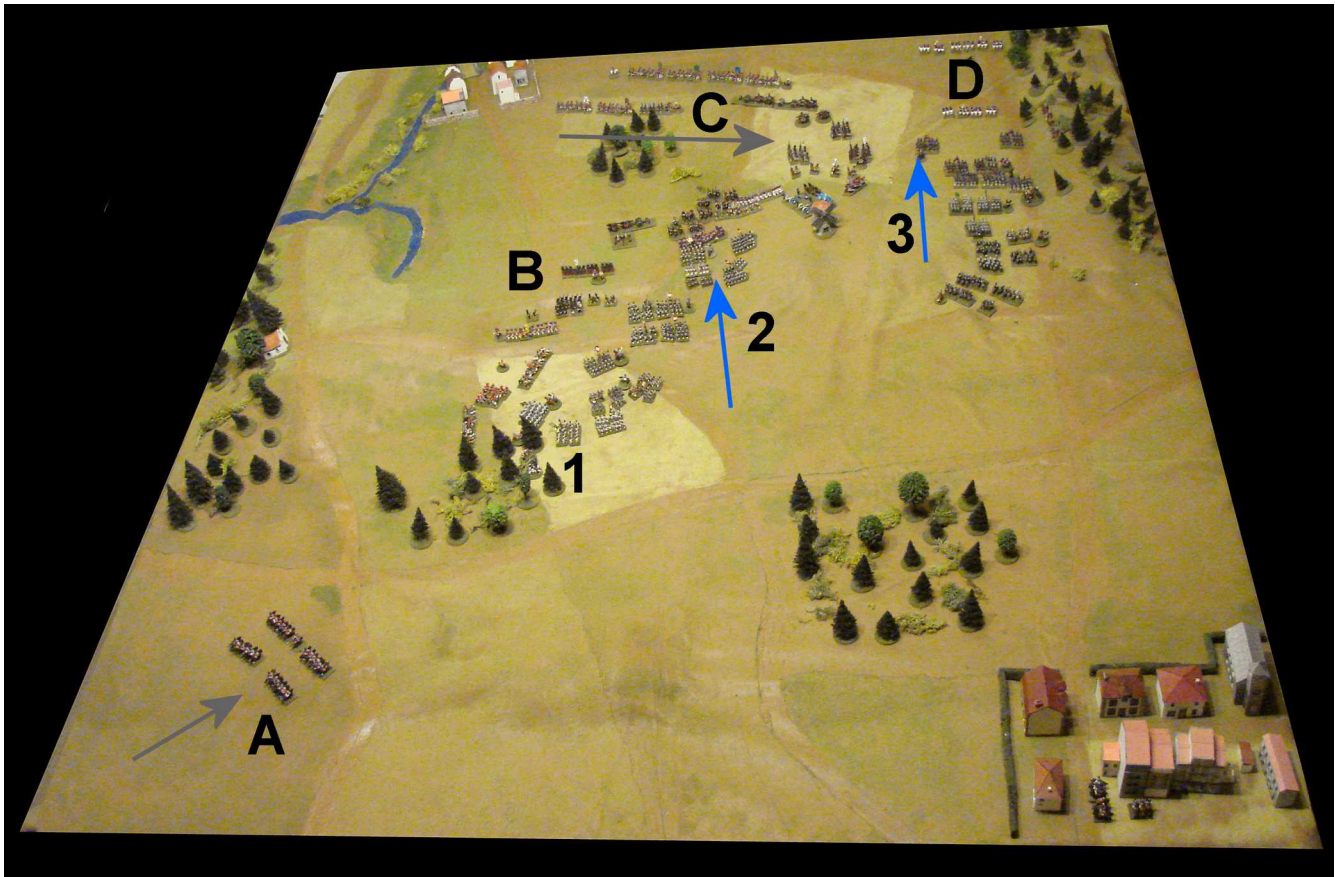
La Serna's infantry in the streets of Cardedeu.



The miquelets, held at bay after the initial shock of the counterattack.



The Spanish 12 pounders, stubbornly hanging onto the windmill as the Spanish position collapses.



A: The Hussars Espagnol, belatedly returning from their pursuit. B: The Spanish center, slowly giving way. C: De Caldagues' reserve brigade and La Serna's relief column; too little, too late. D: Von Reding's broken left flank, fleeing to the west. 1: The Italians holding off the counterattack. 2: Lechi's division pushing the defenders off the windmill hill. 3: The French, hotly pursuing Von Reding down the now-open chaussee to Barcelona.

We now see a result similar to the actual event. St. Cyr drove Vives' force from the field and marched into Barcelona on the 17th of December to a decidedly less-than-enthusiastic reception from General Duhesme, the commander of the garrison, who was of the opinion that he could have held out for another six weeks. Was the entire operation, though successful, essentially a fool's errand (as St. Cyr apparently thought) ordered by the Emperor to embarrass and discredit the commander? There's not much reason to believe so, but in any case this action was a blow to the Catalan revolt and enhanced St. Cyr's already sterling reputation as a commander, eventually leading (though not without some ups and downs) to a Marshal's baton.