

BATTLE OF THE CARATARRA FRANZIA FROM COLDWARS 2010

The battle in question occurred on the 18th of March 1937 between the C.T.V. (Italian Fascist) Littorio Motor Division under General Annabale Bergonzoli and the Republican 11th Division under Major Lister. The CTV force consisted of 2 infantry regiments, one machinegun battalion, an artillery regiment of 3 “gruppos” of 65mm infantry guns, 75mm field guns and 100mm howitzers respectively. It was also reinforced by a special strike force consisting of several tank companies, a motorcycle MG company, and both motorized and armored flame thrower companies.



I had a full complement of gamers. Above the Fascists are on the left holding positions along a road to Brihuega (where another battle was fought that day) and anchored by the town of Valdereanas. On the right are the Republicans, whose 11th Division consisted of the 1st Bis, a spin off of the “5th Regiment”, the militia of the Partido Comunista Espanol (PCE) from Madrid, a pre-war formation, and the XIth International Brigade, raised by the COMINTERN (Communist International) which like the PCE was under overall control of the Russian Government of Josef Stalin.

The latter formations included some drafts on other militia and contained some mortars and light artillery batteries. But they lacked organic artillery gruppos and trucks. They were anchored around the other road to Brihuega and the town of Trijueque. The river at the edge of the board was the Badiel which delineated the sectors of the Italian Fascists and the Spanish Fascists (Soria Division) and the Republican 11th and 12th Divisions.

Although most of the Russian T-26b tank companies in Spain were deployed for the attack on Brihuega some miles away two as well as a detachment of BA 5 armored cars were assigned to the 11th Division. Unlike the Italian tankettes, they had turret mounted 45mm AT guns.



The photograph above shows elements of Littorio's 1st Infantry Regiment supported by armored cars and tankettes launching an early attack towards Trijueque.

The Italian Littorio Division consisted of two three battalion infantry regiments, and one three "Gruppo" artillery regiment. There was also a machine gun battalion. But the latter element was given a lower morale rating for this scenario since its commander and staff platoon had been captured a week or so earlier by the Communist Italian "Garibaldi" Battalion's Assault Platoon. It was the best of the Italian (Fascist) divisions in Spain, and was supported by a "Rapid Support Group" consisting of tankette companies, and companies of motorcycle machine gunners (Motomitraglierie Bersaglieri.) Attached were a 47mm anti-tank gun battery and a 20mm automatic anti-aircraft battery (which with the thin armor of those days could double as anti-tank.)

The Artillery Regiment and three off the board gruppos were key to the CTV effort. The Russian tank companies were virtually impervious to the Italian "armor." These photos would be more illustrative of the action had I used markers representing shell bursts, for, predictably, both the CTV offensive down the Caratarra and the Republican positions (as well as the counter attacking tanks) were subjected to heavy fire. Sometimes the friendly fire was as dangerous as that of the enemy.

As they raced down the road the CTV suffered heavy losses in one battalion of the 1st Regiment, but perhaps more important, the motorized engineer flamethrower company suffered heavy casualties and retreated, while a company of tankettes was hard hit and retired..



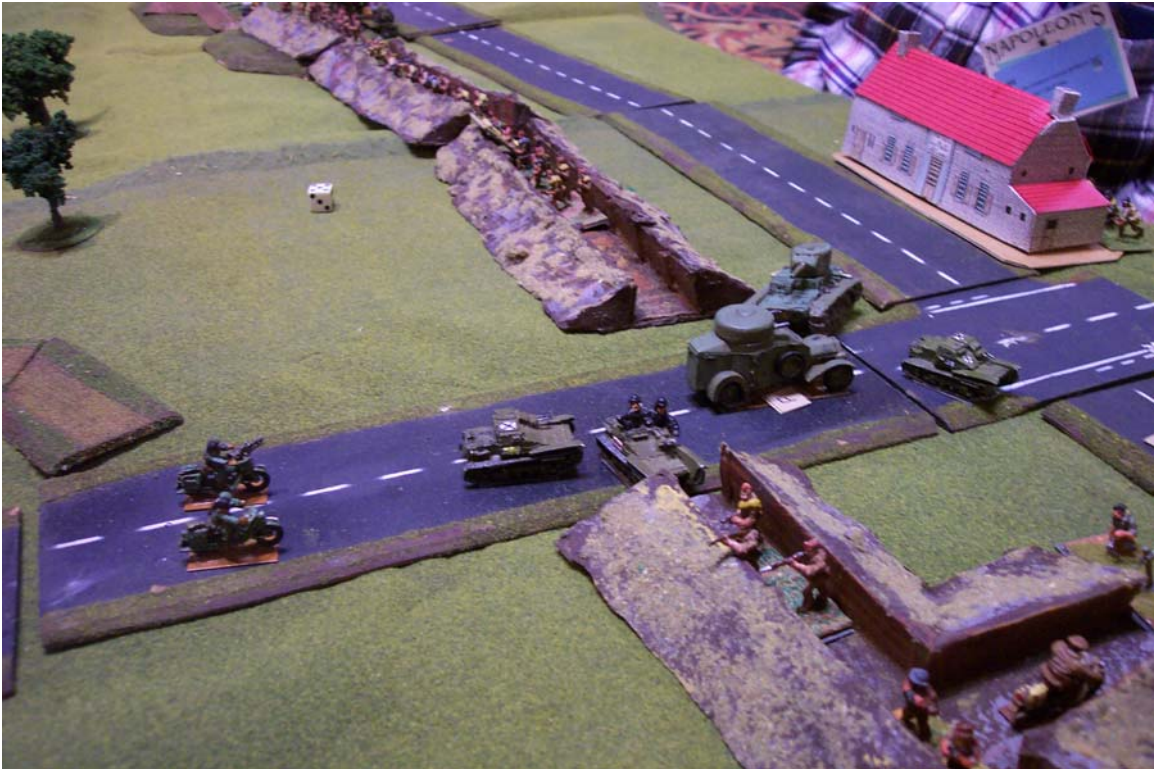
Above, the 1st Bis holds light entrenchments at Trijueque and awaits the attack. The Caratarra Franzia has not been cut as it may be useful for the Russian armor.



The CTV attack races down the Caratarra under enemy artillery fire. The flame thrower unit is shown behind the lead to CV33 companies. It managed to engage and demoralize one of the enemy tank companies before being put out of action by 45mm shells.



By the time elements of the CTV reach the town the Russian tanks have taken their toll, but they too have been whittled down by both friendly and hostile artillery fire. The armored car company did manage to rake the Republican trenches before being shot up. The Russian tanks also did away with the flamethrower tankette company, but received enough damage for one tank company to recoil (morale effects of casualties are doubled from flamethrowers.)



Hard fighting in Trijuique



Meanwhile the XI IB and the Littorio's 2nd Infantry Regiment moved into the Bosque de Brihuega-Torija to feel out enemy strength. Although some casualties were exchanged the effect was not decisive.



With the tank companies suffering heavy losses in the fighting for Trijueque the XI IB sends an Hotchkiss anti-tank battery to reinforce the 1st Bis against being rolled up by the remnants of enemy armor. A 75mm field battery is shown behind the line where the 1st Bis and XI IB meet.



The remaining Italian tankettes reinforced by motorcycle machine gunners roll up the left flank of the 1st Bis. In the process the advanced CP of the 11th Division was overrun and Major Lister killed while heroically leading a close assault on the enemy armor.

At this point it was ruled a Fascist victory. The CTV mobile elements were badly cut up, but would probably have been sufficient to ensure the capture of the leftmost battalion of the 1st Bis. A reinforcing battalion holding the building behind the T-26b remnants had the inside shot at commandeering the truck company behind the building. Other elements would retreat towards Brihuega (where the 14th Republican Division was defeating the 1st Blackshirts) under cover of the XIth IB.

Fortunately for the cause, a "column" of militia attached to the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Bis absorbed most of the casualties to the right of the road and would probably have been wiped out. But it was probably a bunch of useless Trotskyites anyway. So the politically correct elements would, for the most part, have lived to fight another day.