



The Miajadas surprise attack, a triumph of the spanish cavalry

On asking military history and Napoleonic simulation game enthusiasts what is their favourite type of combat, almost 100% would certainly reply: cavalry combat.

The War of Independence is not particularly noted for its large number of great cavalry charges and encounters, unlike other campaigns such as those of Austria, Prussia or even Russia, and those after the 100-day campaign. However, we do find combats between small cavalry groups, some on reconnaissance missions and others providing cover to the armies.

Miajadas is the archetype of the use of cavalry in the War of Independence, ongoing individual combats between exposed troops and rearguards, rather than great charges deciding battles on the field.

Historical Background

In January 1809, Napoleon considered he had the situation in the peninsula under control, after the retreat of Moore's British troops from Corunna (see the article on Cacabelos), and the disintegration of the Spanish armies' opposition. He thus left matters in the hands of King José and his marshals.

The idea was to occupy Portugal and control the entire peninsula. For this purpose Soult's 2nd Corps, which had pushed the British back to the sea at Corunna, was to occupy Lisbon via Oporto, with support from Ney's 6th Corps which would cover his rearguard.



Meanwhile, Victor with the 1st Corps had to cross the Tagus and arrive at Merida when Soult reached Oporto, covering the flanks of this operation.

In mid-March, Victor began the offensive, crossing the Tagus at Talavera, over the Almaraz bridge. He found opposing him the Spanish army of Extremadura, under the command of Lieutenant General Gregorio García de la Cuesta. Faced with an French attack by the French, the Spanish army withdrew in good order towards Merida, while its numbers were gradually made up with the men reaching its ranks.

All these movements ended at the battle of Medellín (March 28 1809), with the defeat of the Spanish troops.

The french and spanish cavalry vanguards

During the retreat of Cuesta's troops, encounters continuously broke out between the vanguards of both armies, and significant actions were undertaken like those of Mesas de Ibor (March 17 1809), Valdecañas or Santa Cruz de la Sierra.

At the head of Victor's corps marched the division of Lasalle, the great cavalry general who was to meet his death that same year at the battle of Wagram. The spearhead of this division was the 2eme Régiment de





Hussares, known as the “Chamborant monks” (because of their previous name, hussars of Chamborant, and the colour of their uniform pelisses and jackets, a Franciscan brown), the 5eme and the 10eme de Chasseurs a Cheval.

Cuesta also posted Field Marshal Henestrosa’s division to the vanguard, together with the Royal Carabineers, the Rey and Infante Line Regiments, the Al-

mansa Dragoons and the Spanish Hussars cavalry regiments.

Note that in October 1808, the Rey, Infante and Almansa regiments had disembarked in Santander, on their return from Denmark. They had been part of the troops that had managed to flee from the Expedition of Marquis de la Romana in Denmark.

The three regiments had apparently been equipped with new harnesses in Seville. The army lists of the period really speak of the Almansa Dragoons, although when they had sailed for Denmark they were still Chasseurs. The question as to whether they were kitted out with dragoon uniforms or continued to wear their chasseur uniforms is still a matter of debate, as no sources are available. For the photos illustrating this article, we have considered them to be Chasseurs, since, given the scarcity of supplies, it would appear unlikely that they would have received new uniforms, and it would have been easier merely to replace the worn parts of the uniform.

The quality of the French troops was insuperable; both the hussars and the mounted chasseurs were among the best regiments of the French cavalry.

The quality of the Spanish troops was more irregular. Although the line regiments and the chasseurs were veterans, they could not equal the French troops; however, in those early years of the war their forces were still almost complete so they were efficient in operation.

The action of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, the first warning

The Spanish troops had retreated from Trujillo and on March 19 the French occupied the town. The Spanish troops had withdrawn in good order, Henestrosa’s rear-guard remaining behind to cover the retreat.

Half a squadron of the Royal Carabineers was located outside Trujillo to guard the progress of the Spanish troops.

The next day, March 20, Lasalle’s troops, at the vanguard of the French, and specifically the 5eme de Chasseurs a Cheval commanded by Colonel Bonnemains,



caught sight of the Carabineers and set off in their pursuit through the Berrocales, a series of hills in the surroundings of Trujillo.

Henestrosa, warned of the chase after the Carabineers, deployed his cavalry troops at about 5 km. to the south of Trujillo, on flat ground beside the river Magasca. The chasseurs, in hot pursuit after the carabineers, failed to spot the Spanish cavalry which fell on them and put them to flight, causing almost 80 French losses.

This was the first warning to Lasalle's fiery troops: the Spanish cavalry was ready to defend itself and would not easily be subdued.

These and the following events are narrated in a lively style by Lieutenant Albert Jean Michel Rocca of the 2nd hussars, in his memoirs published in Madrid in 1908, under the title "La Guerra de la Independencia contada por un oficial francés, Memorias de M. Rocca".

According to Rocca, "the number of the dead on both sides was approximately equal, the Spanish lost a squadron leader". These data contrast with those of the Spanish and of the French themselves. Unfortunately we have been unable to ascertain which Spanish cavalry units took part, although we assume they were the same as in Miajadas, or were perhaps the Spanish Hussars and the Rey regiment. We will continue our search....

In spite of everything, the French pressed on and pushed back the Spanish troops, and, as it was not in Lasalle's character to let himself be intimidated, he continued to press the Spanish troops. This time, he was relieved by the 10eme de Chasseurs a Cheval.

The Miajadas surprise attack

As Rocca testifies, "both armies passed the night (March 20-21) face to face. The next day, an hour before sunset, the enemy continued its movement and we followed it."

Henestrosa's infantry had passed through Miajadas, closely followed by the 10eme de Chasseurs a Cheval under Colonel Subervie (one of Lasalle's "favourites", colonel of the 10th at Jena and Friedland, in the 100-day campaign; specifically, at Waterloo Subervie was to command the 5th cavalry division located at Mount Saint Jean).

By the afternoon of March 21, the 10eme believed they had Henestrosa's infantry within their reach. They decided not to wait and speeded off along the Medellin highway in pursuit of the Spanish cavalry.

The terrain surrounding the Medellin highway where it leaves Miajadas (where it is believed the events occurred) consists of what is known as the Sierra del Villar with the Rucas stream flowing beside it to the left, and hills, among them the one known today as the hill of Vivares, to the right. Contrary to what is shown in drawings of the ambush, only scrub and a few scattered cork trees grow on the hills.

Henestrosa lost no time. On seeing the daring of the 10eme, and taking advantage of the fact that the Spanish cavalry troops were not within sight of the French, he deployed the Infante Line Regiment and the Almansa Chasseur Regiment, around 1,000 horsemen, behind the hills. The French did not detect this movement, because at that season of the year the land was damp and no dust was raised.





The troops waited behind the hills while in their gallop towards the Spanish, the chasseurs progressively lost their cohesion and their horses tired. At a signal from the Spanish command, the Spanish troops surged over the hills and all at once made a lateral charge against the French

Subervie, immediately realizing his mistake, tried in vain to hold his troops back and have them face the charge. They had fallen into the trap. The French chasseurs, veteran troops, tried to repel the attack but the Spanish impetus was brutal, causing many losses and putting the Chasseurs to flight.

Rocca himself narrates: *"The Spanish had many squadrons of their best cavalry not far from the village of Miajadas. This select cavalry fell unexpectedly on the chasseurs of our vanguard, who were marching in a dispersed and disorderly fashion at a great distance from each other. They were overcome by the number, their horses tired by an outright charge, they were unable to assemble and in less than ten minutes our enemies put more than a hundred in fifty of the most valiant chasseurs of the 10th regiment out of action".* Any comment is superfluous.

Lasalle received the report of the ambush suffered by his vanguard and sent reinforcements to prevent disaster. In this case, Lieutenant Rocca himself, who was a member of the reinforcements, participated actively in the story, and he tells us : *"On receiving the news of what was happening, General Lasalle made us advance swiftly to their aid. We arrived too late and in the distance all we could see was the dust they left behind them.... The colonel of the 10th chasseurs was re-assembling his men, tearing his hair at the sight of the wounded stretched out here and there over a fairly large terrain. After surviving the night, we bivouacked again behind the place where the action had occurred."*

Massacre or combat, the black legend

Certain French sources have propagated a black legend of the ambush or surprise attack at Miajadas, in which it is said that the Spanish took no prisoners and killed off the wounded chasseurs. This originates from the story attributing to Henestrosa, officer of the Infante regiment and the field marshal's nephew, the order not to spare the French and to put them all to the sword.

Although the Spanish, particularly those from the Infante and Almansa regiments who had returned from "captivity" in Denmark, certainly had no good intentions towards the French, both Spanish sources and those of the French themselves (Rocca speaks of the "wounded" he found), and of the British (Oman in his History of the Peninsular War) give us the figures of 63 dead and 70 wounded.

Everything appears to refute this black legend; the truth is that a charge of two to one on the flank and by surprise had a demolishing effect.

A bitter end, vengeance

Only seven days later, at the battle of Medellín, the French were able to wreak their vengeance for the losses they had suffered at Santa Cruz de la Sierra and at Miajadas. The 10eme de Chasseurs a Cheval, together with a regiment of dragoons from Latour-Mabourg's division, at the far left of the French troops, made an in-depth charge against the Spanish, destroying the 2nd, 3rd and 4th battalions of the Regiment of Royal Walloon Guards. Of 1752 men, only 42 survived.



At Medellín, the Infante and Almansa cavalry regiments were deployed to the left of the Spanish line. Faced with the French attack, they fled from the battle field. A sad ending - it's a good thing that at the battle of Talavera (July 28 1809) both regiments were able to restore their reputation after their conduct at Medellín.

Author, photos & maps: Miguel Costa Simón
Designer of the Capitán rules and of Capitangames

CAPITÁN games www.capitangames.com

El mejor reglamento napoleónico para miniaturas

Capitán

Reglas para combates entre pequeñas unidades napoleónicas
Vive tu propia historia

REGLAS COMPLETAMENTE GRATUITAS

Quimera

TIENDA DE MINIATURAS, JUEGOS DE MESA Y WARGAMES

Los sistemas de juego más destacados, las últimas novedades en miniaturas, eventos de primera clase, emocionantes torneos... y un enfoque como no has conocido aún.

¿TE GUSTA DISPARAR?

ACTIVIDADES DE CALIDAD

- Torneos, Campañas y Ligas
- Mesas de juego
Con escenografía de gran calidad
- Partidos de iniciación
- Cursos de Pintura
Cualquier nivel (Iniciación, Avanzado y Experto) con profesores de renombre!
- Pintura por encargo
Acabado profesional para tus ejércitos a cualquier escala, miniaturas de exposición.
- NOCHE DEL VETERANO
Dishuta de nuestra zona de juego todos los Miércoles hasta las 23:00.

ESPECIALIZAMOS EN...

FLAMES OF WAR

BRITAIN • WEST LINES

XANTON

CAPITÁN

GUERRA CIVIL ESPAÑOLA

Tale Of War, Andrea, Corvus Belli, Enigma, Freebooter, Wyn Gamezone, ShadowForge, Games workshop, Backham, Hordes, Warmachine,

Wargames, Juegos de mesa, todo el material para el hobby
... ¡y mucho más!

Metro O'Donnell LB
Autobuses:
143 - 2 - 30 - 54
71 - C - 28 - 60

C/ Jorge Juan
Nº 112
28028 Madrid
91 409 68 43
www.quimeraminis.com.es
info@quimeraminis.com.es

(Te esperamos!, pero si no puedes visitarnos, enviamos tu pedido a domicilio, con gastos de envío incluidos a partir de 100,€*

* Para envíos a Península y Baleares

Scenario for Capitan

The CAPITAN rules and its unit counters have recently been published. The rule book consists of 47 pages in black and white and a cardboard cover in colour. It includes all the rules, special skills supplements and artillery rules, together with the tables summarizing the game. The rules are accompanied by 140 cardboard counters in colour on both sides, so we have 280 different units to play at this innovative Napoleonic game, based on a new playing system of initiatives. Ideal to represent small actions and combats. They can also be obtained from the game's website. The rules are free and the unit counters can be bought from its online-shop, all in PDF format, See more at www.capitangames.com

How to represent an ambush. Special rules

Good to relate, hard to simulate ... this could be the corollary of this scenario, since it's a complicated matter to simulate an ambush when both sides know it is going to happen. But for this purpose, we can count on the versatility of the CAPITAN rules.

For the scenario to be equally balanced, we divide the participating troops into:

- 1.- Spanish troops I: Infante Regiment and command
- 2.- Spanish troops II: Almansa Chasseurs Regiment and command
- 3.- Spanish troops III: Command of the ambush
- 4.- French troops I: 10eme de Chasseurs a Cheval and command
- 5.- French troops II: French reinforcements

The French troops I and II, as the initial French deployment, should appear on the game table at the area indicated on the scenario map, that is on the highway to Medellin, at most 40 cm. from the edge of the table.

Special rules

1. The French troops I (the 10eme de Chasseurs and command), is the only unit placed on the table in the first turn, and until turn 3 they should move, in marching movement at least, along the highway in the direction of Medellin.
2. The Spanish troops I, II and III may be deployed on the game terrain at a charging distance from the units making up French troops I at any time until turn 3.
This deployment may be made with all three groups of Spanish troops at the same time, or with only one of them. If only one group is deployed, the others may be deployed on the game terrain until turn 3, but they have to do it at a distance of 40 cm. or more from any friendly unit already deployed, and never less than 60 cm. from the starting edge of the French troops.
When the groups of Spanish troops are first deployed on the game terrain, the group of French troops I are automatically considered active, even if they have already been activated, and can take any action they like before the movement of the Spanish troops that have just been deployed.
3. In turn 4, the units of French troops II enter the game terrain from the area of the initial French deployment. In that turn, they may not throw for initiative, they win this automatically over any troops on the game table.
4. Rule 8.11 on annihilation does not apply in this scenario.

The Game surface

The cavalry is able to ride over all the features of the ga-





me terrain and these do not present obstacles, except for the cultivated land which is considered as such, the stream, which cannot be forded, and the scattered bushes, which are considered a scattered wood. We recommend that the hills should be at least 10 cm. high

Victory conditions

If the group of French troops I is completely destroyed, the Spanish have automatically won. In the contrary case, the victory points obtained by each side should be added up (as stipulated in chapter 10 of the CAPITAN rules).

The scenario is played to 8 turns.

List of units of the scenario

We have already said in previous articles that to compensate scenarios and units, we sometimes use units that had not really fought in the historical scenario. This is the case of this scenario, in which we have permitted ourselves the luxury of replacing the 5eme de Chasseurs a Cheval with the Chevaux Legers de Westphalia.

Although these did not form a part of Lasalle's division, they were in fact present in the area. They are included in order to get the most advantage from their special skill of double movement.

In the case of the Almansa chasseurs, we use the unit of the Olivencia chasseurs because the Almansa chasseurs do not as yet have a unit counter in the game.

In both cases, the units of both commands add up to approximately 2,000 points, so that, between the points and the special rules, equality is guaranteed. From then on, it is the players who have to tip the scales.

SPANISH TROOPS

The Infante cavalry line regiment is represented with:

- 1 command unit of the Infante Cavalry Reg. / Captain Alameda, unit counter no. 12106, with all its special skills. (238 points)
- 1 10-figure troop unit of the Infante Cavalry, unit counter no. 12105, with all its special skills. (460 points)

The Almansa Chasseurs cavalry regiment is represented with:

- 1 command unit of the Olivencia Chasseurs Reg. / Lieutenant Salvador, unit counter no. 12204, with all its special skills. (241 points)

- 1 8-figure troop unit of the Olivencia Chasseurs Reg., unit counter no. 12203, with the Old Guard and Brutal Charge special skills. (398 points)
- 1 8-figure troop unit of the Olivencia Chasseurs Reg., unit counter no. 12203, with the Furious special skill. (398 points)

The Command of the ambush is represented with:

- 1 command unit Corps Guards / Captain Beltran unit counter no.14101, without the Concealed Movement special skill. (273 points)

FRENCH TROOPS

The 10eme Reg. de Chasseurs a Cheval is represented with:

- 1 command unit 10eme Reg. de Chasseurs a Cheval / Colonel Subervie, unit counter no.52207, with all its special skills. (266 points)
- 1 12-figure troop unit of the 10eme Reg. de Chasseurs a Cheval, unit counter no. 52206, with all its special skills. (596 points)

The 2eme Reg. de Hussards is represented with:

- 1 command unit of the 2eme Reg. de Hussards / Lieutenant Rocca, unit counter no. 52213, with all its special skills. (257 points)
- 1 10-figure troop unit of the 2eme Reg. de Hussards, unit counter no. 52212, with all its special skills. (442 points)

The 5eme Reg. de Chasseurs a Cheval is represented with:

- 1 8-figure troop unit of the Westphalien Chevaux Légers, unit counter no. 62205, with all its special skills. (441 points)

Figures from the author's collection.

All the figures in the photos are from Front Rank Miniaturas, except for the escort of the Beltrán Corps Guard, the two Spanish hussars, which are from Barcino Miniaturas www.barcino-miniatures.com

(The 2eme of hussars is represented in the photos with figures in the uniform of the 4^eeme of hussars)

You can obtain the Capitan rules free of charge at www.capitangames.com

Author, photos & maps: Miguel Costa Simón
Designer of the Capitan rules and of Capitangames

