

Battle of San Fernando

Mid September, 1814, Rancagua province
Hypothetical

SITUATION:

In this scenario, based on a hypothetical (wargame) campaign, O'Higgins and Carrera join together to fight in defence of Santiago – the army after some recent victories and recruitments is in high spirits, defending the capital from the advance of the Royalists, who are much weakened and poorly supplied from the incessant combat. (historically the opposite was true but in this game we reverse history). The Patriots are the defending force.

ORDER OF BATTLE

(1:40 scale, based on a similar organisations before the battle of Rancagua)

Royalist – Ossorio (Poor)

UNRELIABLE **HC=16** **ABP=20**

All generals rated POOR (-1). Ossorio may not attach to a unit to give a ' +1 attached leader bonus'.

Vanguard: (Col. Elorreaga)

Valdivia Battalion (militia) [8/7/6]

Chillan Battalion (militia) [4/-/3]

1 Artillery Battery - 4 x 4 pdr guns (militia)

1st Division: (Col. Ballesteros)

Voluntarios de Castro Battalion (milicia) [7/6/5]

Voluntarios de Concepcion Battalion (militia) [7/6/5]

1 Artillery Battery – 4 x 8 pdr guns (militia)

2nd Division: (Col. Montoya)

Veterano de Chiloé Battalion (militia) [5/4/3]

Auxiliar de Chiloé Battalion (militia) [5/4/3]

1 Artillery Battery – 4 x 4lbs (militia)

3rd Division:

3rd Division: ***(Col. Moroto)***

Talavera Regiment (regular) [19/16/12]

Milicia de Elorriaga (militia) [5/4/3]



ORDER OF BATTLE

(1:40 scale, based on a similar organisations before the battle of Rancagua)

Patriot – Jose Miguel Carrera (Poor)

SPIRITED **HC=17** **ABP= 21**

All generals rated POOR (-1).

1st Division: (Brigadier Bernardo O'Higgins)

2nd Infantry Battalion (militia) [4/2/1]

3rd Infantry Battalion (militia) [12/8/5]

1 Artillery Section – 2 x 8lbs (militia)

1 Artillery Section – 2 x 4lbs (militia)

2nd Division: (Brigadier Juan Jose Carrera)

1st Infantry Battalion (regular) [17/12/8]

Aconcagua Militia Regiment – 2 coys (militia) [4/2/1]

1 Artillery Battery - 4 x 4 pdr guns (militia)

HC = Heavy Casualties; ABP = Army Break Point



Deployment:

The Patriot army drew up its forces defending two Key Positions (objectives – blue flags), one to the left and right of their line, which was somewhat stretched, and struggling to cover both locations.

Carrera's orders were confused and hence misunderstood by his brother, Juan Jose, and resulted in the 2nd division deploying *within* a dense wood (east woods) in front of one of the objectives, rather than in a position to deny a route toward the enemy's objective, which would've still allowed freedom of movement of the two infantry battalions – this miscommunication would have serious implications for the Patriots.

The much larger, but less well motivated Royalist forces deployed along a range of low, but uneven hills, in a long line with their right flank anchored on the outskirts of San Fernando and its surrounding fields. They also had two objectives that needed protecting to similar to the Patriots.

In the centre was a neutral contested key position which once seized gave the more aggressive side a psychological edge over their enemy.

Within this scenario, the taking of the objectives was the key to victory, these positions being defined as important exit points for both armies on their line of march and counting as (-1) key positions on the RFnF manoeuvre die rolls.



Opening moves:

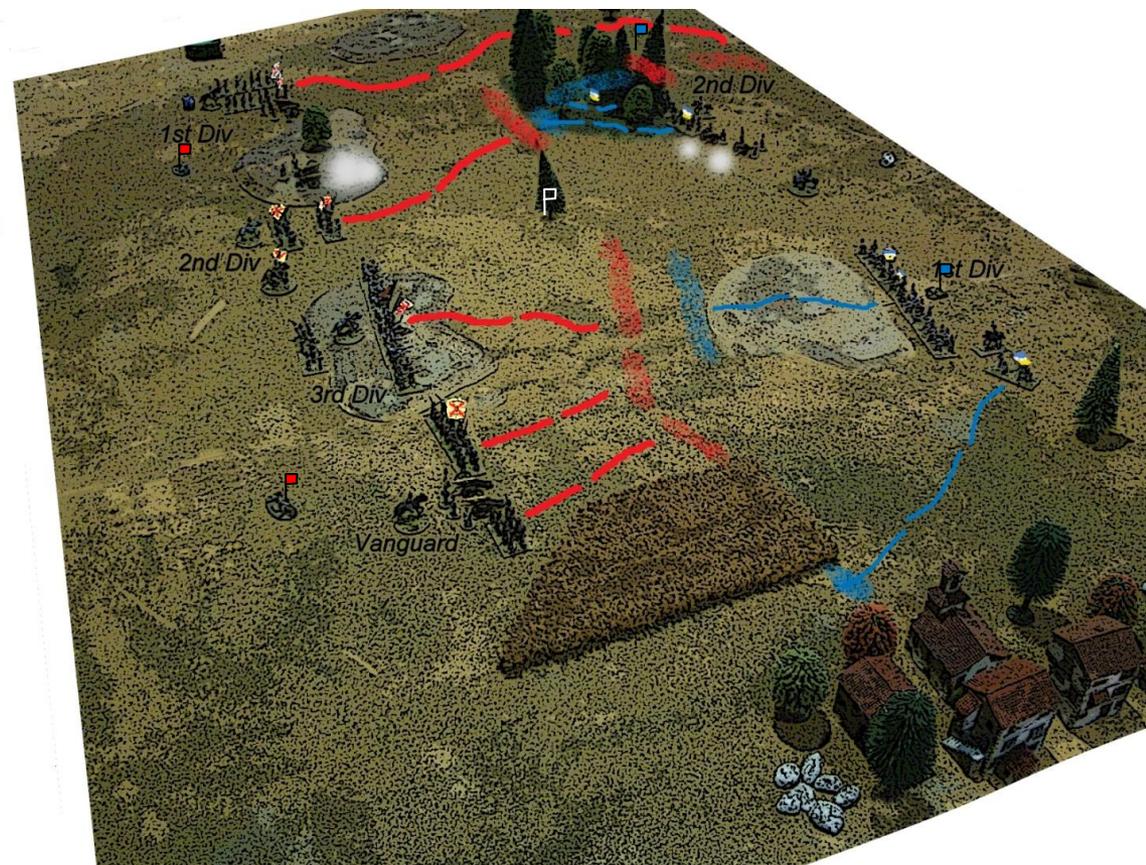
The battle commenced with Ossorio pushing the 1st Division forward with the objective of turning the thinly stretched Patriot line. Under the command of Colonel Ballesteros, the division made steady progress. In the centre the 2nd and 3rd Division pushed up, careful not to mask the guns located on rising ground to their rear.

The Vanguard was aggressively handled, pushing hard on the Patriot left flank. Right from the start Ossorio tried to impose his will on Carrera through aggressive action - the Royalists were going to take the fight straight to the impudent rebels, to restore the honor, and Chile, to their king.

Carrera's initial moves were more cautious. Realising the centre hill in front of the 1st Division was an important location he pushed the 1st battalion forward, throwing out the two companies of the Aconcagua Militia Regiment in an attempt to get around behind the Royalist right wing.

The Chilean 2nd and 3rd infantry battalion, 2nd Division, got hopelessly lost in the heavy 'east woods', but Juan Jose's artillery unlimbered and determined to give a good account of itself.

Ballesteros' scouts reported that there was much confusion within the Patriot ranks in the nearby woods and he pushed his 1st Division hard to try and by pass the position before the rebels could react.



Whilst all this activity was taking place, no shots had yet been fired. However, once the troops starting moving forward through the valley, cannon fire broke the eerie silence. Despite their relatively light weight the artillery proved somewhat effective. The poor quality of the troops made them quite susceptible to the effects of cannon fire and the Royalists came off worse in the exchange.

The low quality and effectiveness of the troops meant that even relatively light casualties posed the threat of the troops quickly moving from fresh, to a worn and ultimately spent condition, making them very skittish.

As the battle developed it became apparent that the Royalists were going to try and use their weight of numbers to force the issue.

The Royalist vanguard under Col. Elorreaga continued pushing forward, driving his troops hard. They quickly approached the large 1st Chilean infantry battalion of the Patriot 1st Division and received a crushing volley - both the Royalist Valdivia and Chillan battalions took modest losses but their very brittle morale resulted in them both being reduced to a spent condition with in one brief firefight. This proved too much for the untried Royalists and they promptly fled to the rear in rout.

In the centre the Patriot gunners found their mark and the best infantry force on the field, the Spanish Talavera infantry battalion, supported by the Chilean Milicia de Elorriaga, received cannon-fire sufficient to disorder their ranks resulting in them being pinned in the valley, having to dress their ranks and halting their progress.

In response, the 4pdr battery of the Royalist 1st Division continued a counter battery duel to neutralise the rebel guns and achieved some success.

For the moment Carrera's line was holding strong and despite the debacle that was unfolding in the east woods, all was looking manageable as one Royalist wing was already looking vulnerable, steeling his resolve. Ossorio's fortunes seemed less prosperous as his right wing had fled from the first encounter with the enemy, but he hoped for more from his Spaniards.



As is often the case in war, things can change rapidly, and so it did for the Patriot cause. Carrera desperately tried to get his infantry out of the east woods but his battalion commanders could barely control their formation, all the while Ballesteros pushed his advantage seeing the Patriot's discomfort.

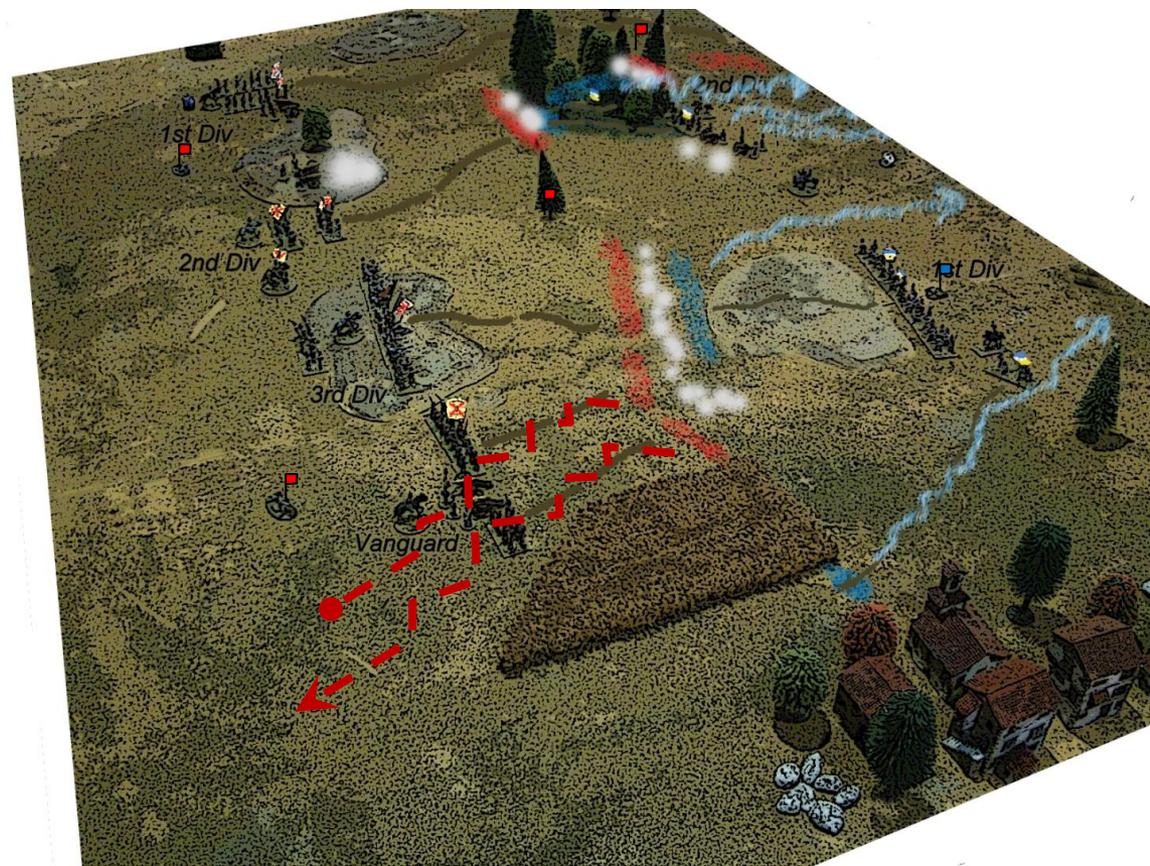
Moving rapidly, he swung the Voluntarios de Castro toward the exposed flank of the Chilean 3rd infantry battalion which was now assailed on both flanks as the Royalist battalions Veterano de Chiloe and Auxiliar de Chiloe had moved up to the edge of the wood on their opposite side. With fire now poured into each flank of the 3rd, their position became extremely vulnerable as casualties mounted.

The rest of Ballersteros' troops (the Concepcion battalion and their supporting guns) pushed forward to the rear of the Patriot gun line and overran a key position as they totally unHINGED the Patriot position.

In the centre the Talavera's finally moved forward to engage in a firefight with the 1st Chilean infantry battalion.... capturing the central key position as they advanced. Meanwhile Col. Elorreaga, commander of the Royalist Vanguard, raced back to try and rally his broken forces. Despite heavy odds, he did manage to restore order to the Valdivia battalion but the Chillan battalion continued to scatter, lost for the day.

Nevertheless, Ossorio took heart, as the loss of his Vanguard division and any further calamities would surely have spelled a Royalist defeat and he had at least seen off that possibility for now. Upon seeing the Valdivian's rallying, the small Patriot flanking force now realised that capturing the enemies key position was a forlorn hope and they would be best employed in assisting to break the Talavera battalion which would certainly decide the battle in the Patriots favor.

In the centre the gun duel continued - the Royalist continuing to fire at the Patriot gunners, causing one damaged gun, with the Patriot gunners peppering away at the Talavera battalion which now was taking fire from several directions. The Peninsulars however were made of sterner stuff than the locally raised Royalist forces. They held their ground and delivered their own devastating volley against the Chilean 1st battalion to their front.



However it was the struggle in the east wood that would determine the battle outcome...with a devastating fire delivered to the flanks of the hapless defenders of the dreaded woods, there was terrible carnage to the Patriot soldiers within. Assailed on both flank, with two key positions lost, their rear threatened, the brave freedom fighters could take no more. They threw down their arms and ran pell-mell back through the forest and to safety.

The Royalist gunners, also now outflanked sought safety in retreat. In an instant the entire right wing of the Patriot line melted away. In a desperate last gamble, the small but stalwart 2nd Chilean battalion threw caution to the wind and charged the Veterano de Chiloé which was more than equal to the challenge. Not budging an inch the Chilean rebels shattered like water on a rock as the unit literally disintegrated from the casualties suffered in the combat.

At this critical juncture in the centre of the battle field, the 1st Chilean tested its morale and withdrew from the firefight from the Talavera's who were now supported by their artillery and sensing victory. Ossorio could see Royalist success all along the battle line and was most pleased with his troops performance despite their initial 'lack of enthusiasm'.

Carrera, realising the battle was lost, was swept up in the rout as the entire Patriot army ran from the field, a broken, shattered force.

.....victory to the Crown and the march to Santiago continues.....



Post Summary:

An excellent battle. The forces used were those made up from the order of battle from the Rancangua scenario in the Liberator volume 1 supplement converted for use with RFnF.

The game was bit unusual in that the overall quality of the troops was low...nearly all being rated militia. Also, the Royalist side being rated unreliable made them quite brittle vs the more spirited Patriot forces. This gave the battle a distinctive 'feel'.

The force differential was roughly 3:2 in favor of the Royalists but by the end of the game when the Patriot forces crumbled, both sides were teetering on their Heavy Casualty limit.

Taking the key positions was even more important given the low troop quality as multiple factors started to pile up against each side once they had lost key positions, sustained heavy casualties and greater losses than their opponent.

Combined, these factors made it a tough task to get back to a battle winning position, so setting up a confrontation to seize objectives and inflict losses on the enemy...just what we were after...a decisive clash of arms....straight at it!!

The game provided a good degree of maneuver, firefight, combat and artillery engagements that provided a nice flow of action.



The terrain was laid out using a prescribed terrain set up system whereby the laying of terrain pieces and the objectives formed part of the game plan. This is what forced the key positions to be placed the way they were and very much 'pushed' players into the way they needed to devise their battle plan to maximise their tactical advantage and achieve the scenario goal. It worked quite well.

All in all a cracking game, taking about 30 mins to set the terrain up and just under two hours to fight, after 5 turns of play. I think played again there was probably a few more turns in it before a battle conclusion would most definitely be reached, probably all finished up in under three hours...a nice fit.