

The Battle of Castlebar 27 August 1798 - "*De l'audace, de l'audace, encore de l'audace!*" *Erin Go Bragh!*

General Humbert set sail from La Rochelle and arrived in Killala Bay in Mayo on 22 August 1798 with what was only meant to be the advance guard of a French army ordered by the Directory to support the Irish Rebellion (which had already been crushed by General Lake at Vinegar Hill in July). However the main fleet failed to arrive and Humbert was forced to do what he could with just 1100 men. He rapidly recruited some Irish volunteers, armed them with muskets and named his force the Army of Ireland. Then, with typical Republican and revolutionary élan, he decided to attack the superior British forces ensconced around Castlebar. His boldness was tempered by a plan to arrive via a defile through the mountains and surprise the British forces early in the morning from the north, rather than following the main road that entered the town from the west and on the south side of the river.

Humbert had 2 battalions of regulars (2nd Battalion, 70th Demi-Brigade and 50 Grenadiers), a squadron of 3rd Chasseurs and one of 12th Hussars for his personal escort, and just one artillery piece. He also had a large number of Irish militia, comprising 700 men, about half his force, armed mainly with pikes, but some had been given muskets. General Sarrazin commanded the Grenadiers. There was an Irish General Blake in charge of the Irish Volunteers but as I cannot find a photo of him I have substituted General Teeling who sailed with Humbert from Rochefort.

Opposing him, the British had perhaps twice as many men: 1 company of 1st Warwicks, 6th Warwicks, Fraser's Fencibles (Scots), 11 guns, 23rd Light Dragoons, 5 squadrons of yeoman cavalry (1 of Roden's Dragoons and the rest from the 6th Carabineers), County militias from Kilkenny and Longford, and the Galway Volunteers. General Hutchinson was the most able British commander, although subordinate to General Lake.

The small county town of Castlebar was behind the river. General Lake positioned the Kilkenny militia in the front line with the Warwicks and the artillery, the Galway Volunteers and Fencibles in his second line with the Longford Militia behind, and the yeomanry cavalry and 23 Dragoons in reserve.

Unfortunately for Humbert his plan had been revealed to General Lake who repositioned his artillery across the river to the north of the town. He then sat back and awaited the Franco-Irish force, which he expected to defeat comfortably. But Humbert knew the revolution in Ireland depended on him. So, against the odds, he attacked...

The battle was an incredible but hard fought victory for the French (most of the Irish on both sides ran away!). The speed of the British withdrawal led to the battle being called the 'Castlebar Races!' The French victory led to the establishment of the Republic of Ireland with a provincial government for Connaught. This lasted but a few weeks until Cornwallis (yes him of Yorktown!) had Humbert's army surrender while surrounded on all sides. Humbert, many years later after his prisoner exchange, made his way to the USA and fought against the British in the War of 1812.

I have only found one actual (French) map of the (final?) battle positions, but have done my best from my own research. Sion Hill is to the north east, and a lake to the north west; the defile is in the centre. The main roads to Castlebar enter from the east, where they had expected the French to arrive. The town is linear, and has a church and gardens. There are 2 fords as well as the bridge, otherwise the river is impassable. The British army camp is to the south of the town. The game starts with the French and Irish forces appearing to the north. The British artillery is entrenched north of the bridge and thrown forward to cover the defile and Sion Hill.

The rules are based on C&C American Revolution, but with a few twists. Some of the combat cards have been eliminated, the French/Irish have two more - Whites of their Eyes and Liberty or Death; the Franco-Irish use the Continental Combat deck. The scale is about 50 men to one block with a 30/40 block advantage to the British. Both British Leaders, Lake and Hutchinson start in camp having their breakfast, a sign of overconfidence. The French regular units are shielding the Irish and leading the charge; Sarrazin has the grenadiers on the left, Teeling has the Irish right wing. Humbert has his cavalry in the centre.

Can you repeat the Franco-Irish victory and establish a Free Erin?! Or beat these damned rebels back into the bogs from which they came?! Choose your side!

THE GAME

Command/ Combat cards:

French/Irish : 6 + 3 Combat cards. Move first.

British: 5 + 2 combat cards.

Victory Banners: 7

French/Irish gain 1VP for capturing the Bridge and 1VP for any town hex; British start with 2 VPs and lose 1 each for the bridge and if any town hex is occupied. They cannot be regained by recapture BUT French/Irish will lose their VP.

Opening cannonade rule in effect. French gun fires first, then all 3 British artillery units.

French Grenadier block attached to the regulars - treat the whole unit as Grenadiers until 2 blocks are lost. 3rd loss is the grenadier block.

French Élan: French regulars do not suffer -1 die when moving into melee combat.

Irish Pikes can move 2 hexes into melee only (like the Highlanders and gain +1 on charge while they remain at full strength. Irish pikes do hit on sabres. No ranged combat allowed.

Fencibles (Highland) treat as Highlanders as per normal game.

British Provincial Militia (Longford and Kilkenny): may change sides (as they in fact many did in the battle!). When forced to rally, if 2 or more flags are rolled the whole unit changes sides and joins the rebels. If flee, then roll 1 D for each block, a flag means they change sides.

Yeomanry: when conducting a successful combat against Irish militia a British light cavalry unit *must* conduct a bonus attack if possible against any adjacent unit. If there is a choice of target they must always attack Irish militia. (They were poorly disciplined and just loved sabring Irish (Catholic) peasants. The units were raised from loyal Protestants of Scottish descent).

23rd Light Dragoons: do hit on sabres; on successful melee they must conduct a bonus attack against any adjacent unit, again Irish will be prioritised over French.

French artillery has only one block, an easy VP for the British.

Unit Reference Chart	Move	Combat Dice	Retreat	Ignore Flag	Rally	Notes
Br Regulars/Fencibles	1/2*	(2) 2 1	2	N		<i>*Fencible charge into melee 2</i>
French Regulars	1	(2) 2 1	2	N		Elan no -1 on move to combat
French Grenadier block	1	(3) 2 1	2	Y	+1	Elan, Bonus cmb
French Light Cavalry	2	(2)	2	N	+2	Elan, Bonus cmb
British Yeomanry L Cav	2	(2)	3	N		Retire & Rally
British 23 Dragoons	2	(2)	2	N		Bonus combat
Br Artillery	1NB	(2) 2 1 1 1	1	N		Retire & Rally
French Artillery	1	(2) 1111	1	N	+2	Destroy on 1 hit
British (Loyalist) Militia	1	(2) 11	3	N	-1	No sabre hits
British Provincial Militia	1	(2) 2 1	3	N	-1	No sabre hits

Irish Pikes	1/2*	(2)	2	N		Sabre hits *when charge into combat
Irish Militia	1	(2) 1 1	2	N		No sabre hits
Leader	3	+1 to unit	3	Y	+1	Bonus combat

Morale table

Full strength French/British Regulars add +1, from base figure (5-3-2-1)
 Grenadiers present +1 (6-4-2-1) - this is because the grenadiers are lost on 3rd hit
 Br Yeomanry Light Cavalry (5-3-2-1)
 Br 23 Dragoons (5-3-2) only 3 blocks
 French Light Cav (4-3) only 2 blocks
 Br Art (4-2-1)
 Fr Art (3) just one block
 Br Militia (4-2-1-0)
 Br Provincial M (4-2-1-0)* change sides if Fail Morale check or roll 2 or more flags
 Irish Pikes (3-1) 2 block units
 Irish Militia (4-2-1-0)

Leader adds +1 if with unit *or adjacent*
 Hedge and Stone wall count as 1 support

Units adjacent to unit that routed must also take an immediate morale check

Terrain

Hill - no benefit unless attached from lower level - ignore 1 flag

Stone wall - ignore 1 flag and 1 hit from ranged combat *except from Art*; counts as 1 support

Hedge - ignore 1 flag from ranged combat *except from Art*; counts as 1 support

Town - ignore 1 hit from ranged and melee combat; Light Cav battle in or out at -2

Field work - Inf/Art ignore 1 hit from ranged combat *except from Art*; ignore 1 flag *except from Artillery*; Light Cav -2 attacking or defending;

Bridge - Inf ignore 1 flag

Ford - no benefit

Road - Inf/art move 2, Cav 4, but can't battle

Woods - ignore 1 hit from *ranged* combat

Marsh/Lake - Art prohibited; inf/cav/lone Leader - roll for loss 1 die unit symbol = lose 1 block

Units must STOP when moving onto Woods, Town, Ford or Field Work; moving onto Woods or Town battle out at -1