## THE VISTULA LEGION - THE INFANTRY.

by Charles Reavley

The Vistula Legion was one of the toughest fighting regiments in the French Army during the Napoleonic Wars, and, because of its bright yellow facings, one of the most easily recognisable.

The Poles initially joined foreign armies after the third Partition of Poland in 1795 blotted out it's independence completely. Indeed Austria, Prussia and Russia were so busy snuffing out Poland that they tended to ignore the revolution in France until it had gained momentum and become a danger to the crowned heads of Europe.

The history of the Vistula Legion shows that originally founded as the Polish Legion in the army of Lombardy on 9 January 1797, it later became

the 1st and 2nd Foreign Demi-Brigades of the French Army. Under these titles they saw much action in Italy. The 2nd Demi-Brigade was destroyed in Haiti by fever and in fighting against the black inhabitants who wanted their independence.

On 31st March 1808 the Demi-Brigade was reorganised as the three regiment Vistula legion, and after initial service in the pay of the Kingdom of Westphalia was transferred to the French service. Each regiment was of two battalions. Although Johnson says three battalions each, I can find no trace of a third battalion in the Orders of Battle in either Oman or von Pivka. It is possible that the third battalion was a depot unit. They were equipped as light infantry, grenadiers and voltigeurs with sabres as well as bayonets, both in black scabbards. Fusiliers had only one crossbelt on which they carried both black cartridge box and bayonet. Although the companies used line infantry designations. A regiment of cavalry was also formed but this will be dealt with in a seperate article.

The prime mover in this recruiting activity was General Jan Henryk Dombrowski whose name is now immortalised in the Polish national anthem. The first commander of the Legion was General Josef Grabinski. The Legion, whose depot was in Sedan, was promptly moved to Spain as part of Junots III Corps.

The battles and engagements of the Legion set out below show how effective they were in the French cause, although, of course, the Poles main aim was the independence of their own country.

1st Regiment, commanded by Colonel

Josef Chlopicki. Mallen & Aragon June 1808, the second siege of Saragossa 1809 in which all three regiments of the Legion distinguished themselves, Maria & Belchite June 1810, and the sieges of Tarragona & Murviedra/Sagunto in 1811. They were then withdrawn from Spain and attached to the Imperial Guard for the 1812 Campaign in Russia. The attachment of all three regiments shows the high esteem in which Napoleon held them. The 1st Regiment fought at Smolensk, Mozhaisk, Krimskoya, Czerykow, Voronov, Taratina, Krasne, and the crossing of the Beresina.

2nd Regiment, commanded initially by Colonel Bialowieski. Both sieges of Saragossa in 1808 & 1809, Tudela 1809, Perdiguera,

Santa Fe, Belchite, Aquila, El Frasna, Calatayud, Retascon, Daroca, Ojos Negros, Tremadal, and Torre la Carcel 1810, Teruel, Villastar, Villel, Lancosa, and the siege of Tortosa 1811 as well as numerous engagements in Aragon, Catalonia, and Valencia during that year. Then to Russia at Smolensk, Mozhaisk, Taratina and the Beresina crossing.

3rd Regiment, commander Colonel Swiderski. Both sieges of Saragossa, Smolensk, Taratina, and the forcing of the Beresina.

In July 1809 a Second Vistula Legion commanded by General Mikolaj was raised in Wolkersdorf. It was merged into the First Legion and renamed the 4th regiment on 12 February 1811 when it's commander was Major Tanski. It fought at Puebla de Senabria 1810, Benevente and Salinas in 1811, and Penaranda and Rogozno in 1813.

The Legion, like most of the French Army, suffered grievous casualties in Russia, so on 18 June 1813 the remnants formed formed the cadre of one Regiment under command of Colonel Malchewski. It fought

at Kratzen, Kulm, Schluckenau, Ebersbach, Loebau, Neustadt, Borna, and Lipsk in 1813, and the defence of Soissons and Arcis sur Aube in 1814. At Arcis Napoleon took refuge from an enemy cavalry charge in one of the regiment's squares.

As you can see above the infantry of the Legion never faced British troops in the Peninsular which is unfortunate from a visual wargame point of view. I must admit that as one of my favourite regiments it has appeared on many a table against my British units.

The Legion returned to Poland after the abdication of the Emperor in 1814. However many Poles remained in France and those in the 3rd Foreign Regiment were among the last to offer resistance at a bridge in Sevres in 1815.

For most of this period it was uniformed in the French fashion.

The headdress was a French type round shako decorated with a sunburst brass helmet plate and the French cockade. The shako cords were generally accepted as white, though an illustration by Chelminski shows a voltigeur with green cords and a trumpeter with red. The chinstraps were reported as white by Job and Gembarzewski, but yellow by others. It is possible that, because of short supply of light infantry shakoes, some line shakoes were issued which would have yellow metal chinstraps.

As previously mentioned the companies had line infantry designations, thus a battalions two elite companies were called grenadiers and voltigeurs respectively, whilst the four centre companies of each battalion were named fusiliers. The fusiliers wore a white pompom on the

front of their shakoes, while the grenadiers had a red pompom with a tuft. Voltigeurs had a yellow pompom with a tuft. Some artists show fusiliers with a tuft and grenadiers with a high acorn shaped tuft.

Initially they were a long blue coat similar to the Spenser with yellow turnbacks for much of their service. The front was yellow and of plastron type. There is much controversy over the collar and cuff details. No decorations are known for the turnbacks. The change to an habite veste with similar facings was made in early 1813 after the Russian campaign.

Lienhard and Humbert in a folio published in 1810 say that the four regiments of the Legion existing at that time were differentiated as follows:-

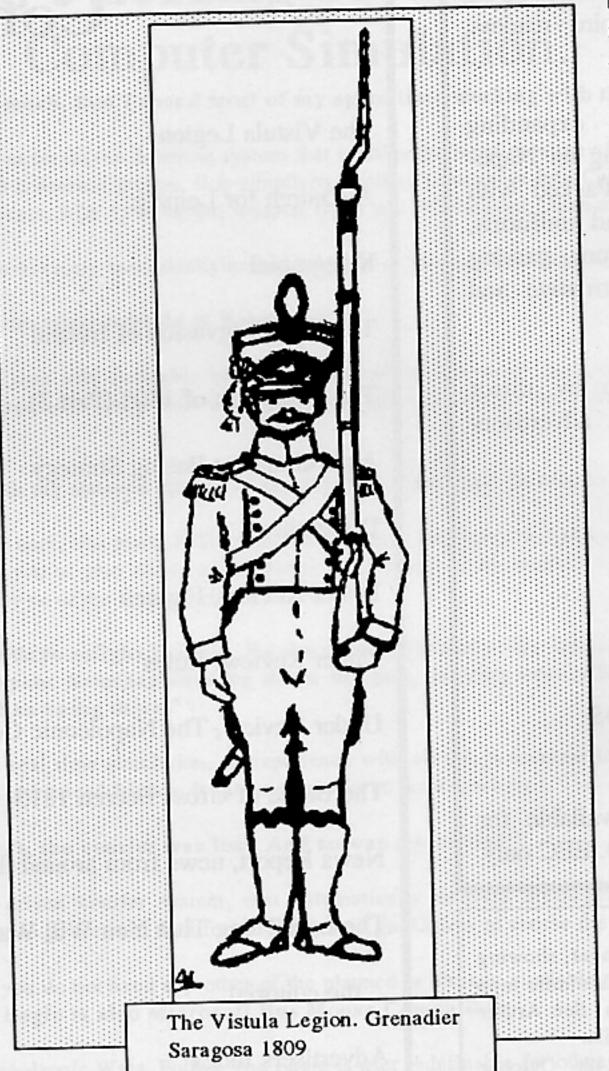
1st Navy blue collar with yellow piping and yellow cuffs.

2nd Collar and cuffs yellow.

3rd Collar yellow. Cuffs navy blue piped yellow.

4th Both collar and cuffs navy blue piped yellow.

This source is unsupported by any other, and these authors are not



normally accurate in respect of Polish uniforms. In addition in the army of Napoleon such regimental distinctions are not normal.

The cuffs are reported as shaped round by Job and Gembarzewski but pointed by Lienhard and Humbert. Two other sources show them as rounded but with white or yellow trident shaped cuff patches.

Kozolubski is of the opinion that such differences in cuffs are possibly as a result of commanders wishing to polonise the uniforms.

Grenadiers wore white epaulettes rather than the red usual in French line and light regiments. Voltigeurs had green epaulettes with yellow piping, while fusiliers wore blue yellow piped shoulder straps. In 1812 grenadier shakoes had a red band round the top, and voltigeurs a yellow band. Fusiliers shakoes remained plain. All companies wore white trousers and knee length gaiters. The latter were shown trimmed along the top with white lace. Boots were black.

Buttons of brass with grenades on them for grenadiers, bugles for voltigeurs and stars for fusiliers are reported. By strongly enforced regulation grenadiers grew both moustaches and sidewhiskers, voltigeurs had side whiskers only, and fusiliers were clean shaven. Only the pioneers were allowed beards.

NCO's rank markings are uncertain but probably French. Officers were the usual French marks of rank in silver. Buglers had red capcords and a red pompom with yellow tuft. Bugle cords were red and white twisted cord. their epaulettes were green with red fringes.

Sappers are shown having a white apron and epaulettes, a tall bearskin with a sunburst plate and a shoulder length yellow busby bag with wolf tooth white edging. It also had white flounders, they also wore a white shoulder cord on the right and red sapper insignia on the left upper sleeve. This ensemble was completed with an ornate cock's head handle to a machete type sabre.

Though my armies are Sixmil these days I have tried to give enough uniform detail to enable the accurate painting of 25mm or even larger figures.

The Polish language is phonetic even if the letter combinations are different to English. A guide to pronunciation is below:-

Polish	English
W	V
CKI	TSKI
L	W
RZ	Close the teeth and say "
I	EE
A (with tail!)	OM
CZ	CH

Whilst on the subject of pronunciation the Polish four cornered hat is a "Czapka", there is no "S" in the word.

I hope this article will inspire you to add these magnificent regiments to your wargame armies, and to respect the fighting power the Poles added to their allies the French.

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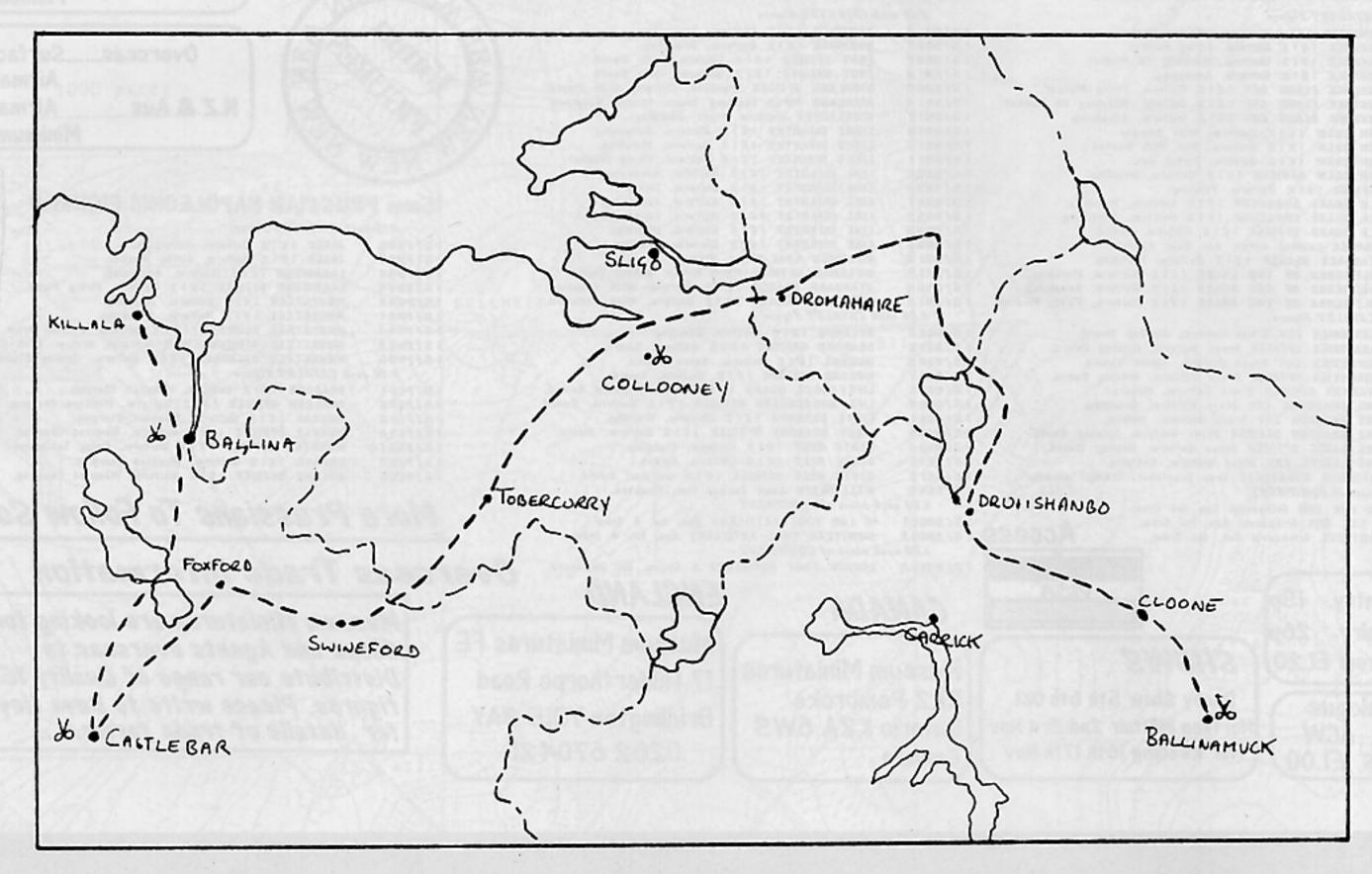
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# The French Invasion of Ireland -1798 by David Whelan



Route of Humbert's Campaign

Despite having failed in their two previous attempts to land troops in Ireland, (Bantry Bay and Camperdown), the French Directory still dwelt upon the possibilities of a third attempt, encouraged by the vigorous appeals of Wolfe Tone and other Irish exiles in Paris. A split in power amongst the high ranking meant, however, that any such plans had to be postponed. Upon the split being healed it was agreed to dispatch two small expeditions to Ireland, with the purpose of effecting a landing there and to arm and encourage the population to rise up against the English forces.

The large of these forces comprised one ship of the line and eight frigates under Commodore Bompard, along with some 3,000 men under General Hardy. This force was to sail from the port of Brest. The second force contained just three frigates under Commodore Savary plus 1,100 men under General Humbert, who had also taken part ion the failed attempt at Bantry Bay.

Both of these forces were ordered to set sail simultaneously, taking different routes to the coast of Sligo or Mayo, land the troops and provisions, and then return at once to the nearest French port, avoiding any contact with enemy ships. However, owing to numerous delays, disputes, and more than a slight hint of English gold in certain French hands, Humbert's force set sail before Hardy's on August 5th.

Humbert's force consisted of the following:-

- 1 battalion of Light Infantry
- 1 detachment of Light guns
- 3 field guns plus ammunition wagons and supplies
- 3,000 muskets with bayonets, 3,000 cartridge cases, 400 sabres, 200,000 cartridges, 1,000 French uniforms

There is also mention of some 100 dragoons in the force. The troops were allocated to the various ships as follows:-

- 'Concorde'-415
- 'Franchise'-300
- 'Medee'-355

After a fortnight at sea, during which there was a near mutiny when Humbert refused to pay the men monies owed to them, but then gave in to their demands, the fleet reached their destination, anchoring off Killala Bay off the Mayo coast on the 21st. They landed flying the English colours, and captured an officer who arrived to greet them, complete with the fish he had just caught. As the first French troops landed they ran up the French flag.

Once ashore Humbert quickly settled down to business. Whilst the stores were landed General Sarrazin was dispatched with 300 grenadiers to take the town of Killala, some three miles away.

The English forces at Killala, were a few men of the Leicester Regiment under one Lt. Sille and the local Yeomanry under one Capt. Kirkwood, in all a total of 80 men. The English met the French advance with a ragged and ineffective volley, and as the French prepared to charge home with the bayonet, they turned on their heels and fled. Casualties were 2 English dead and 3 French slightly wounded.

Humbert was soon busy consolidating his position in Killala, handing out arms and uniforms to the Irish who were joining him. Their numbers, however, were not as great as he had been led to believe, most of those who did join up were worse than useless as they had no experience of drill or the use of muskets. Indeed many of those with knowledge of arms spent most of their cartridges shooting at crows.

Despite this, preparations continued, Humbert deciding that although the town of Castlebar - the administrative centre of Mayo - was his main objective, the garrison of Ballina had to be dealt with first. Accordingly Sarrazin was again sent forward with a mixed band of French and Irish some 500 strong to gain Ballina.

Deciding that the garrison, which included two cannon, was to strong, Sarrazin withdrew but then resolved to attempt a surprise night attack. At the same time the Ballina garrison had begun to advance up the Killala road. The two forces clashed in the night, both putting up a stubborn fight until the Irish, led by General Fontaine, worked their way onto the English flank, into which they poured a number of volleys. Thinking that they were beset by fresh troops the English broke ranks and fled.

By the time that General Humbert reached Ballina with his main force, the English Commander in the area, General Hutchinson, was busy gathering his forces at Castlebar. At this time the troops stationed in Ireland were of poor quality. Most units were severely under strength. At the start of 1798 the 8 regular regiments in Ireland had a total strength of 1,800 against an establishment figure of 5,824. There were also some 25 Regiments of Fencible Infantry and 2 Irish and 5 English Regiments of Fencible Cavalry. The Fencibles were untried in action and both officers and men were of a very poor standard of quality and discipline. The Militia consisted of 37 County and City Regiments, most of whom were raw recruits. The mainstay of the English were the Yeomanry, who were organised into small local corps of both cavalry and infantry, they were raised by local magistrates, but were armed by the government. Their initial purpose was to preserve the peace, releasing the Militia and regulars for active duty. In reality they were used as a combat force. although numerous, the English forces were scattered throughout the country in garrisons and detachments, it being stated by Abercromby that no more than 6,000 could be assembled for action within a week, in the event of a French landing.

Although having a force of some 3,000 in total, by the time he had dispatched garrisons to Foxford and elsewhere, Hutchinson was left with some 1,700 men plus 10 curricle guns and a howitzer. With these troops and his superiority in artillery, Hutchinson was extremely confident of victory over Humbert. he deployed his men to await the expected advance of the French along the main road. Humbert had no intention of obliging the English general. Guided by locals, the French advanced along a very rough and little known mountain path, manhandling the solitary cannon that they had brought along. After an all night march of 25 miles they reached the town of Castlebar. The English had been given slight warning of the French by a Yeomanry farmer who had spotted them. A patrol under General Trench confirmed this report and within the hour the English had drawn up ready for battle.

Hutchinson, who had at this stage been joined by General Lake, had chosen a good position on one of the hills, (Sion Hill), that protected the town. the troops were drawn up in three lines, the first consisting of the Prince of Wales Fencibles, 6th Infantry Regiment and the Killkenny Militia under Lord Ormonde. the second line was composed of the Fraser Fencibles, with 2 battalion guns, and the Galway Yeomanry. In the third line were 4 companies of the Longford Militia under Lord Granard. In reserve were the cavalry - Lord Roden's Foxhunters, a few squadrons of the 6th Carbineers, and some local Yeomanry Cavalry. Most of the artillery was placed along the first line. To the front right of this line were placed 3 guns under gunners of the Royal Irish Artillery.

At about 8 O'clock the advancing France-Irish forces appeared over the ridge of the hill. Humbert had 800 French plus 1,500 Irish, 500 of which were formed into a band known as the Irish Legion, plus the single cannon.

General Lake ordered his cannon to open fire, raking the 800 yards between the two forces with a deadly effect. Humbert ordered 500 Irish under Blake and Dufour to advance in mass column over the hill. To support this Sarrazin was to make a similar advance on the left with 150 French, Colonel Ardouin doing the same on the right. The French attacks had the benefit of some slight cover. As the Irish went forward they were met by a hail of grape and canister shot, and try as they might, they were forced to retire. This action had lasted half an hour. The two French forces on the wings, kept in cover maintained a steady if ineffective fire on the English gunners. They then attempted an advance on the guns but, like the Irish, were forced to withdraw. Humbert, watching these two defeated attacks, now ordered the French to deploy and advance in open order, supported by the Irish. this attack was made along the whole length of the English Line.

As they advanced the artillery had less effect upon them, and as they closed the glistening bayonets and the threat of the same caused the gunners to become wild in their fire. Ardouin, on the right, was at first checked by the Fraser Fencibles, but came on. Seeing that the enemy

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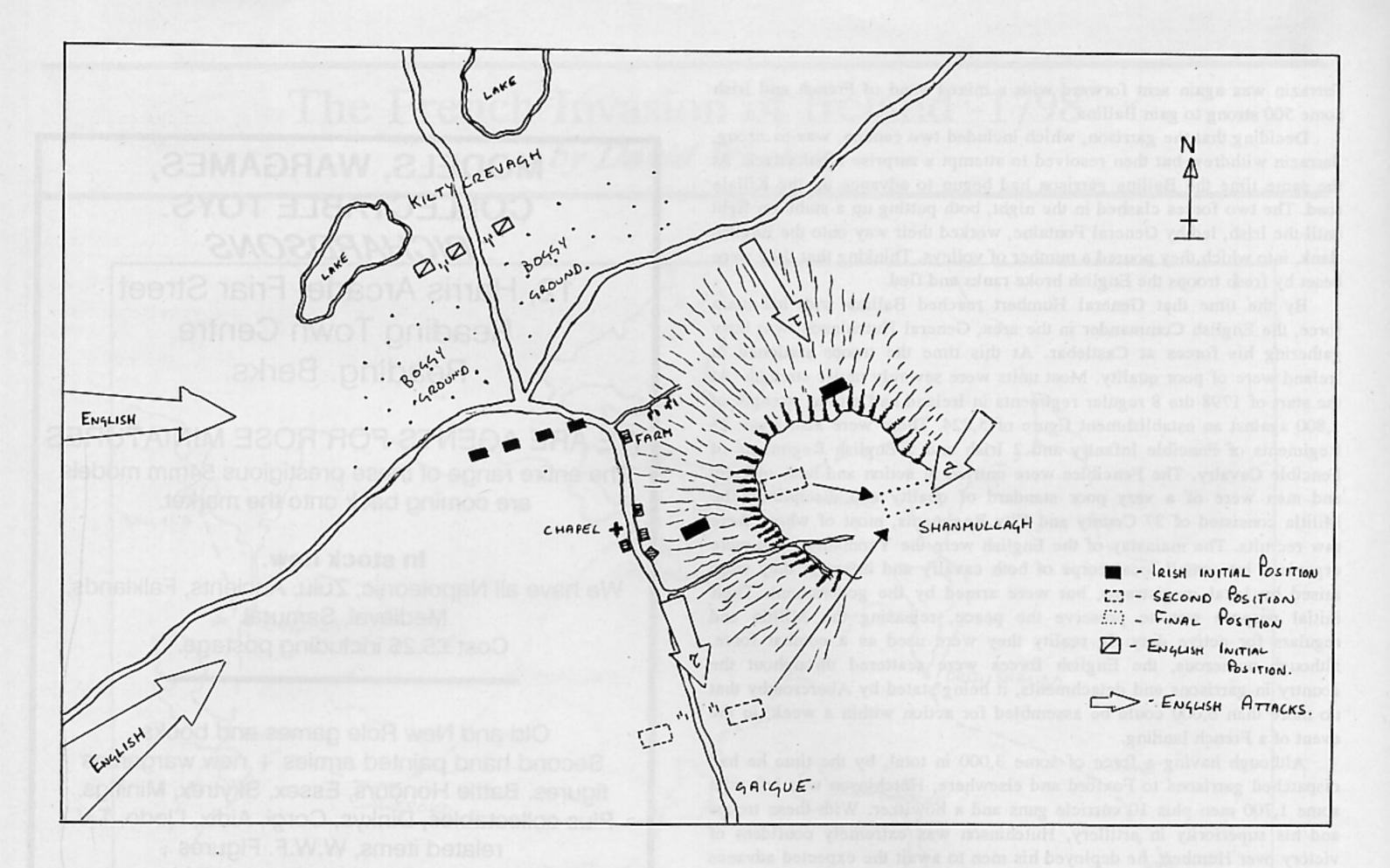
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#### Battle of Ballinamuck

showed signs of wavering, Sarrazin, hat on sword, urged his men forward in a bayonet attack and captured the English guns. Upon this, confusion spread in the English ranks, and despite the attempts of their officers to halt them, they began to retire to Castlebar. Lord Roden's Foxhunters gallantly made a stand, but to no avail. In the town itself, there was much confused fighting as some English officers attempted a last stand, every foot of ground being disputed by a detachment of Highlanders with two curricle guns. After an hour the town was in Franco-Irish hands, with the English fleeing to Tuam and Athlone. This retreat became known as 'The races of Castlebar'.

Instead of pursuing the enemy, as his staff advised, Humbert remained in Castlebar, thus giving the English time to reorganise and coordinate their actions. Lord Cornwallis had by this time arrived on the scene and took overall command. He was immediately informed of the defeat at Castlebar and the losses incurred there, namely, 9 cannon captured, 53 killed, 36 wounded and 278 missing. Cornwallis, afraid that this defeat might lead to a popular rising through out the country, sent to Pitt in London asking for strong reinforcements. Cornwallis, decided that no trust could now be placed in the Irish Militia, took two Scottish Regiments, the Sutherland and Rehy Fencibles, left Athlone and headed for Tuam, some thirty miles from Castlebar. It was here that the rest of the English army had assembled and organised into four brigades under Generals Hunter, Cambell, Moore and Hutchinson. The forces at Tuan totalled 7,800 men with a further 2,800 under General Taylor at Boyle. In order to gather such an army, Cornwallis had been forced to strip the country bare, leaving 1,100 men to hold Dublin.

Receiving reports that Humbert was digging in at Castlebar in order to await the arrival of Hardy's Brest expedition, Cornwallis decided to act at once, moving the Army to Hollymount in preparation for an attack on the 5th September. Although his army of 10,000 seems large, a great proportion were Militia and Cornwallis had no illusions about their worthiness in battle.

In Castlebar, Humbert had been busy recruiting and reorganising his forces. Again the Irish proved to be more of a hindrance than a help, looting and pillaging the town's inhabitants. Except for some minor localised outbreaks, Humbert's victory had not provoked the country into open revolt. Humbert took the decision to head north towards Sligo, with

the intention of joining Hardy's expedition when it landed and also with the Northern rebel who were holding out in the mountains.

While the French were advancing on Sligo, the commander of the Sligo garrison, Colonel Vereker, received reports that some 300 rebels were gathering at the village of Collooney, some five miles away, with the intention of attacking the town.

Verekar quit Sligo, with the intention of striking the rebels first. Advancing of Collooney, Vereker sent forward and advance guard of 100 men, while he followed with 20 men of the 24th Dragoons, 30 Yeomanry cavalry, 250 Limerick City Militia, 20 Essex Fencibles, and 30 Yeomanry Infantry. On reaching Collooney, the advance guard was surprised to encounter and find themselves confronted by the whole Franco-Irish force and were checked. Vereker sent forward the Limerick Light company to support them and to delay the enemy whilst he deployed the main body. His right was covered by the Collooney River, whilst the left occupied the side of a rugged hill, thickly covered by trees, that stretched down to the road where Vereker's force and two curricle guns were positioned. One company was positioned on the hill to prevent the enemy turning the flank there.

The action started at 2.30 and lasted for around an hour and a half, the company on the hill were forced to retire, enabling the French to move around that flank and threaten the rear of the English line, superiority of numbers were beginning to tell. Seeing that all was up, Vereker gave the order to retreat across the river, attempting till the last to save his cannon, even though all of the horses were dead. The cannon were abandoned only when the English were nearly surrounded by the French. In this action the English lost 6 killed and 30 wounded plus 100 captured, whilst the French lost 20-30 killed and wounded.

Humbert pushed on Northwards, but upon reaching Dromahair, news came to him that the midlands had risen up in rebellion. This news caused Humbert to again change his plan of action. From Dromahair he turned back into the midlands, hoping to effect a junction with the rebels before they were put down. Humbert even abandoned some of his captured cannon in order to make greater speed. Alas, the rebels of Longford and Westmeath could not hold out until Humbert reached them.

Cornwallis, meanwhile, hoping that Humbert would indeed turn back towards the midlands, had split his force in two. The first corps under

Lake was pressing closely on Humbert's rear. Cornwallis, in charge of the second, was keeping between Humbert and Dublin to prevent any French attempt to reach to reach the capital. Slowly the English net was tightening.

Reports from Lake indicated that Humbert was abandoning more and more of his cannon, 8 6pdrs and a tumbril. Closely pursued by Lake's advance guard under Colonel Crauford, the race to Dublin began. It was one that Humbert was always going to lose. On the 8th September the French were caught by Lake at the small village of Ballinamuck. Though the outcome of any battle was never in doubt, Humbert, turned to face Lake and deployed his men to give battle.

A large number of Irish and 400 French were stationed on the side of a large hill called Shanmullagh which overlooked the village. The rest, a battalion of Irish pike and a company of French grenadiers, under General Blake and Captain Jobit respectively, took up a position along the roadway. Two cannon were placed in the lane beside Cassidy's farmhouse, both of them manned by deserters from the Longford Militia at the Castlebar encounter. A small band of pike and sharpshooters were placed on the northern slope of Shanmullagh to prevent an enemy flanking movement in that direction.

The French and Irish were expecting to be joined by a rear guard they had left to delay the enemy's advance, unknown to them this force had surrendered to Lake. Instead the first troops to appear before them were dragoons belonging to Hompesch's Mounted Rifles, a Hessian regiment recruited and sent to Ireland in 1798. Both the Hessian cavalry and infantry wore green jackets, with light blue trousers for the foot and red cloth trousers for the cavalry. They all wore long moustaches which gave them a sinister appearance. They also gained a bad reputation during their stay in Ireland, while pursuing Humbert they would often be mistaken for French by the Irish, who would try to join them, and be promptly bayonetted for their troubles.

The Hessians were brought under fire, whereupon they were dismounted and taken prisoner. Several squadrons of cavalry and some cannon were then deployed across from the rebels at Kiltycrevagh. A round of cannon and musket fire then commenced. Jobit ordered some of his grenadiers to advance across the bog to the enemy line, but they had only gone a short distance before they began sinking into the marsh and were forced to retire. During this time the infantry continued to be reinforced by infantry and cavalry, which was arriving from the South and West. these new units surrounded Jobit's forces with flanking movements, who was forced to surrender.

As this flanking movement began, Blake and his Irish retreated East with the cannon, taking up a new position at Gaig, an awaited the enemy who had followed as far as the village. By now almost half of the French force had surrendered. the rest under Humbert were still on Shanmullagh, with a large number of Irish. general Lake ordered several companies of horse and foot to move to the left and ascend the hill. They were repulsed by a charge by a body of Irish Pike, who succeeded twice in repulsing the English attempts to advance. lake then sent a large body of troops around the base of the hill to the northern slope. At the same time the rest of the English force advanced past the village towards Blake's position at Gaig. Humbert had meanwhile retreated to the Eastern part of the hill.

The attack opened with a blast of cannon fire and the cavalry swept in from the North of the hill. The French troops offered little resistance, firing a few feeble volleys before throwing their hands up in the air.

Thus did the French surrender, after the formalities were over the English turned their attentions to the waiting Irish. Lake advanced on Blake, the cannon on both sides belching out grapeshot. A shot from an English cannon struck and disabled one of the Irish pieces. Encouraged by this the English cavalry galloped in but were stopped by a charge of pikemen. Several more attacks were made with the same result. Then an Irish shot struck and exploded an English ammunition wagon. As the the Irish prepared to follow this up with a mass attack on the cannon they were ordered to the rear of the English line.

Blake, now seeing the events on Shanmullagh, began to lead his men towards Humbert's position, with the intention of attacking the English there in the flank. Before he could reach the hill, the French had surrendered. Back on the road, Gunner Magee, with his single cannon and a small body of pike, was making a forlorn stand. Soon after exploding the ammunition wagon he had exhausted his supply of shot and was forced to use pots, kettles and other implements hammered into bits and mixed with the grape and canister. As they were loading the gun to fire one more time, it was struck by a shot which broke the stock of one of its wheels, thereby disabling it. The English advanced and captured the gun and the

attendant Irish.

Blake and the remaining Irish on Shanmullagh were attacked by the numerous English cavalry and on both sides from the musket fire of the infantry. The unequal struggle continued for half an hour or so, leaving some 500 Irish dead on the hill.

So ended the French Invasion of Ireland. From the outset it was doubtful that the handful of men under Humbert could effect anything. There are a number of factors which should be taken into consideration.

First. If Humbert had sailed on schedule, he would have arrived, he would have arrived in time to coordinate with the many uprisings around the country, before they had been put down.

Second. If Hardy's expedition had landed on time the two could have effected a junction, thus giving a far healthier force of over 4,000 French veterans, more than a match for Cornwallis' unsteady units.

Third. The choice of Mayo was in fact the poorest option possible for a landing, as there was neither the population nor the spirit of rebellion in the county. Nearly any other county would have served Humbert better.

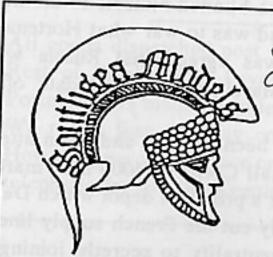
Fourth. Humbert should have continued North, where the spirit of rebellion was still strong, rather than turn back towards the midlands and placing himself between the forces of Lake and Cornwallis.

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## MINIFIGS STOCKIST

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