

The Battle of Alexandria, March 21, 1801

“The high character of the British Army shone brightly forth after the clouds which had hung heavily over it...Our service regained its ancient standing in the estimation of the British people.”

Historical Overview

The March 21, 1801 Battle of Alexandria marked a turning point in the history of the British Army. Lieutenant General Ralph Abercromby had invaded Egypt with an untested army that included well-trained regiments from various Mediterranean garrisons, raw regiments full of militia volunteers fresh from the British Isles, and even a foreign brigade made up of Minorcans, Germans, Swiss, and French royalists. The recent history of the British Army had been unhappy; a troubled time of failure punctuated by indecision and bungling. The senior command remained divided over rival philosophies of drill and tactics. Regardless, Abercromby had trained his men hard in preparation for their encounter with the French. He fully recognized that in Egypt he possessed a high-risk opportunity to reverse the army's decline.

Opposing the British invaders was the French Republic's Army of the Orient commanded by Major General Jacques Menou. After Bonaparte's departure, the Army of the Orient suffered from a senior command riddled with rivalries. Yet most officers were talented, combat-hardened leaders, vastly experienced with the tactical interplay of the three arms. The infantry had perfected rapid battlefield maneuver spearheaded by skirmishers who practiced flexible tactics unlike any others. The cavalry was mounted on splendid Arabian horses and led by a gallant fighting general. The artilleryists were professionals who thoroughly understood their craft. As a whole, the army featured proud veterans of Bonaparte's triumphs in both Italy and Egypt. Their flags carried battle honors: Lodi, Rivoli, Castiglione. They had repeatedly defeated the Austrians and Turks. They had no doubt they would do the same to the British.

Gaming Overview

The scenario models the historical choices the rivals confronted.

Pre-Battle Briefing

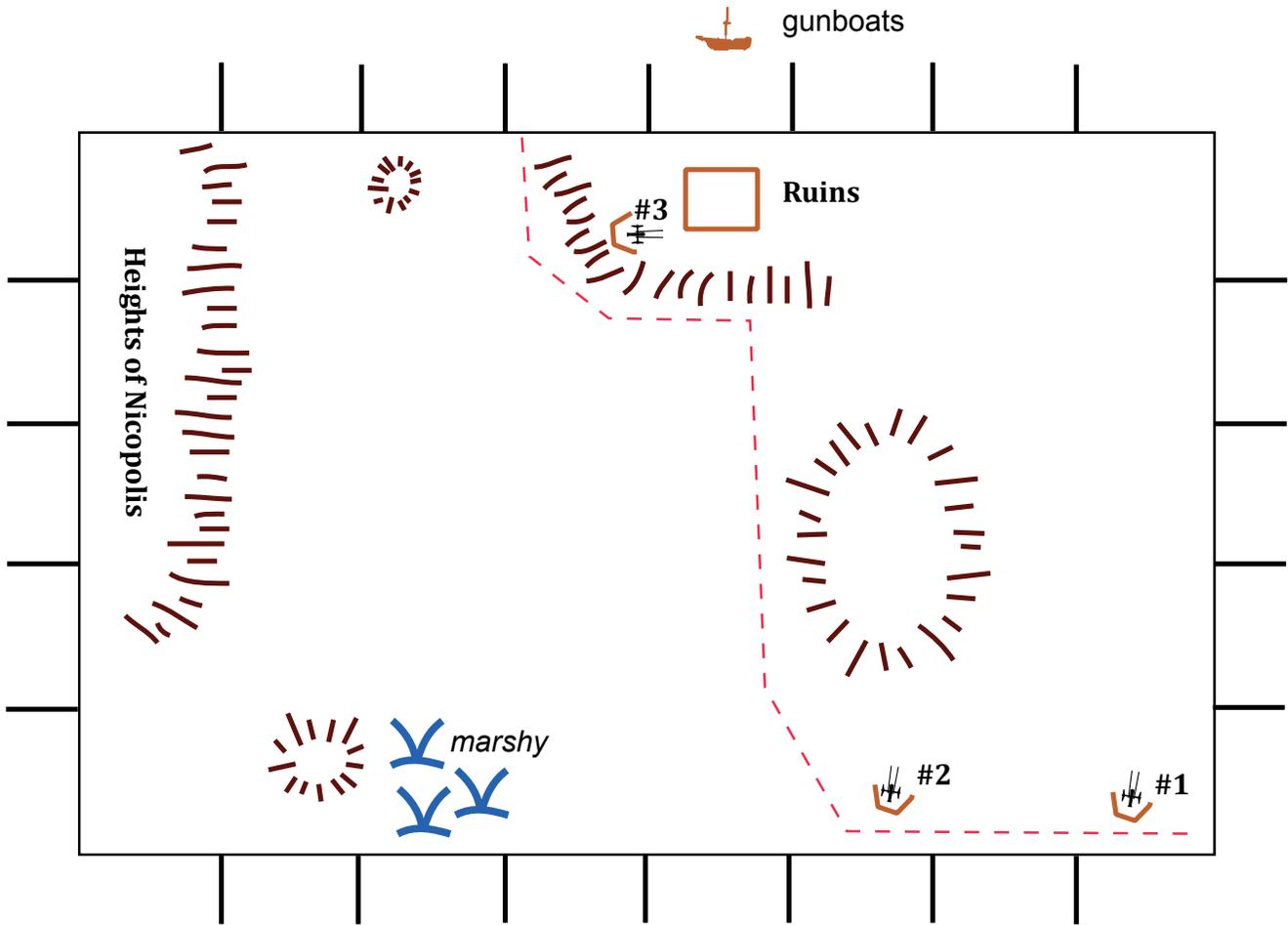
Abercromby: Your assault landing in Aboukir Bay was remarkably successful. The subsequent victory at Mandara, eight days ago, allowed you to consolidate your beachhead. However, poor weather has hampered the unloading of supplies and ammunition. Worse, the promised arrival of horses to mount your cavalry and to haul your artillery has not happened. Yesterday evening you saw dust clouds moving across the desert indicating reinforcements arriving at the French camps on the Heights of Nicopolis. Consequently, your soldiers are awake and deployed for battle well before dawn. Today's duty officer is the experienced John Moore. Moore is riding along your outpost line to ensure that all is well.

Menou: From the Heights of Nicopolis you have been observing the British army. Over the past days, you have seen that high surf conditions have prevented transports from unloading. Nonetheless, you can see that the force before you exceeds the strength of your own army. The British are deployed in multiple lines along high ground and are holding Pompey's Ruins, the dominant terrain feature. Although the challenge is daunting, you care not because your army is filled with veterans from Bonaparte's Army of Italy who have a long tradition of victory. So, you resolve to attack. To win you must drive the British from the field, or at least gain control of the high ground where sit the "Ruins."

Tabletop Dimensions

The tabletop map presumes an eight-foot by five-foot table. The map displays grid marks at one-foot intervals. For gaming terms, north is always at the top of the map. If you utilize a differently sized table, just retain the correct proportional distances and carry on!

Scenario: The Battle of Alexandria



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Terrain

The slope lines indicate ground that is higher than the flat desert. These are modest elevations that confer modest constraints on movement and combat. In my rule set, I slow uphill movement by one third and penalize an attacker who is charging uphill. Artillery stationed on the high ground may fire over the heads of friendly troops stationed on the slopes below.

Troops who enter the marshy ground move at half speed and lose any charge momentum.

The ruins provide a defensive advantage against both shock and fire attack.

The redoubts are light field works, providing a defensive advantage against both shock and fire attack. They provide no advantage if the attack or fire is striking from the open back side of the redoubt.

Time

The French player has a choice when the game begins. It can start as early as 4 a.m. Once it begins it lasts six hours.

Special Rules

As noted on the order of battle, the bulk of the British cavalry is dismounted. However, the French player does not know this. Use mounted figures to show the deployment area of the British dismounted cavalry. Replace the “false” mounted figures with dismounted figures when a French unit gets within musket range or when the “false” cavalry moves.

The lack of horses also impaired the movement of the British artillery. For the duration of the game, British artillery should move at half rate. Also, for the second hour of combat, the British artillery is without ammunition due to completely bungled ammunition resupply. Beginning with the third hour, each British battery has enough ammunition to last for one more hour of firing as well as enough canister to fire once.

The gunboats are not subject to this constraint. They cannot fire before 5 a.m. and thereafter may move along the north edge and may move and fire.

Orders of Battle

Strengths: The unit strengths are given in multiples of twenty-five real men. In other words, the historic returns, when available, are rounded to the nearest twenty-five. When lacking precise strengths, I used the nearest to the event returns or, as a last resort, historic authorized strength, adjusted for campaign conditions.

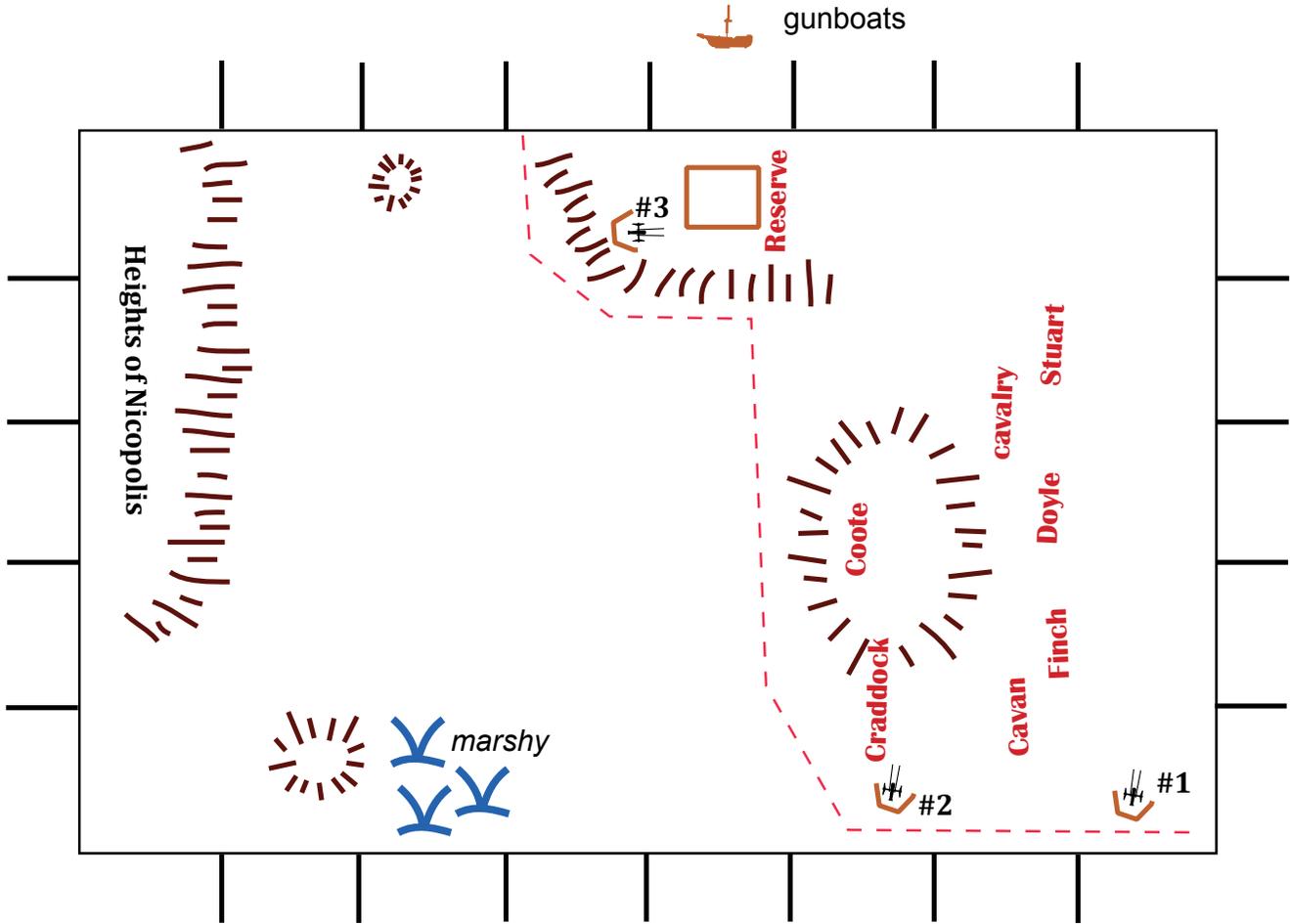
Reading the Orders of Battle: The list of units provides the unit name, the strength, and the morale rating.

Morale ratings include two terms: experience and *élan*. The two-tier morale ratings, with their experience and *élan* ratings, are provided to help you convert historical performance to your own game system or rule set.

Experience reflects the combination of a unit’s training and previous exposure to combat. Experience levels progress from lowest to highest in the following way: M = militia; R = regular; V = veteran; E = elite. Militia are unreliable, having received minimal training with little or no combat experience. Regulars are the core of most armies. They have mastered formation changes and been exposed to the sights and sounds of combat. They are accustomed to the shock of battle. They are professional soldiers in all but name. Veterans share these qualities but in addition have demonstrated repeatedly combat endurance. The shock of battle seldom unnerves them. They are expected to perform even in a crisis.

Élan is a numerical measure of a unit’s enthusiasm for battle on a ten-point scale with nine being the best, highest rating and ten representing unattainable perfection. Baseline *élan* values are six for militia (e.g. M6, meaning the unit has a sixty percent chance of passing morale by rolling a six or lower on a ten-sided die); seven for regulars (R7); eight for veterans (V8); and nine for elite (E9).

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British Deployment at the Battle of Alexandria

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Ratings can be refined to reflect special circumstances. Thus, Lanusse's division had shed its elite companies. Those elite companies formed converged units in Rampon's division. Accordingly, Lanusse's veterans have a rating of V7 while the rest of the regular French demi-brigades have a rating of V8 because they retained their elite companies.

Skirmishers

Every French demi-brigade has an organic skirmish component. On the British side, only the Corsican Rangers can operate in skirmish order. (The organic British light companies had yet to master skirmish combat so that they could compete effectively with the French skirmishers).

Starting Positions

The British are placed in their historical alignment provided on the "British Deployment" map. Note that the Reserve Brigade can be distributed anywhere atop the hill or in the Ruins. The two mounted units are behind the Reserve Brigade and labeled "cavalry." The label "Finch" shows where the dismounted cavalry is deployed. Each of the three redoubts is occupied by an artillery crew.

The French have a choice: attack before dawn, in which case start anywhere west of the dotted red line. Units placed on the line are within close-range musket fire of the British. During the predawn hour, from 4 a.m. to 5 a.m., only close-range fire is allowed. No gunboat fire is allowed during the predawn.

If the French player decides to wait for daylight, then he deploys west of the dotted red line but outside of British musket range.

In either event, the French player can send a flank column along the southern edge. A mounted flank column (that can include some or all the French mounted force including the dromedary corps) can start the game off the board anywhere along the southern edge. If infantry are added to the flank column, the infantry starts the game off board along the southern edge no farther east than the marsh.

Victory Conditions

French decisive victory: drive British from the field

French tactical victory: hold the Ruins and the hill on which the Ruins sit

French marginal victory: inflict more losses than absorb

British decisive victory: drive French from field and secure the Heights of Nicopolis

British tactical victory: hold the Ruins and the hill on which the Ruins sit

British marginal victory: inflict more losses than absorb

Additional Scenario

After fighting this scenario, gamers may wish to ponder a "what if?" scenario; namely, what if Menou had chosen to remain on the defensive atop the Heights of Nicopolis and awaited attack. Gamers can try to wrest the heights from the French with the force at hand, and/or mount some or all of the British dismounted cavalry and give it a go.

Scenario: The Battle of Alexandria

ORDERS OF BATTLE

Lieutenant General Ralph Abercromby (11,550 infantry; 725 cavalry, 600 artillery)

Guards Brigade Major General George Ludlow		
Coldstream Guards	675	R9
Third Guards	725	R9
1st Brigade Major General Eyre Coote		
1st Royal Scots	550	R6
1/54th West Norfolk	425	R7
2/54th West Norfolk	425	R7
92nd Gordon Highlanders	150	R8
2nd Brigade Major General John Craddock		
8th King's Own	375	R8
13th First Somerset	500	R8
18th Royal Irish	350	R8
90th Perthshire Volunteers	625	R8
3rd Brigade Major General Richard Cavan		
50th West Kent	425	R8
79th Cameronian Volunteers	525	R8
2/27 Inniskilling (seven companies)	325	R7
4th Brigade Brigadier General John Doyle		
2nd Queen's Royal	475	R7
30th Cambridgeshire	350	R8
44th East Essex	225	R8
89th Regiment	325	R8
Foreign Brigade Brigadier General John Stuart		
Minorca Regiment	825	R6
De Roll's Regiment	475	R6
Dillon's Regiment	475	R6
Reserve Major General John Moore		
23rd Welch Fusiliers	400	R6
28th North Gloucestershire	525	R8
40th Second Somersetshire (four companies)	225	R7
42nd Royal Highland (Black Watch)	600	R8
58th Rutlandshire	400	R8
Corsican Rangers	175	R6
Cavalry Brigade Brigadier General Edward Finch [225 mounted, 500 dismounted]		
11th Light Dragoons [one troop]	50 mounted	R7
12th Prince of Wales Light Dragoons	300 dismounted	R6
26th Light Dragoons	250 dismounted	R6
Hompesch's Hussars	125 mounted	R6

Scenario: The Battle of Alexandria

Royal Artillery [thirty-four field pieces] 600 all batteries at R7
 twenty-four light 6-pound four light 12-pound six 5.5 inch howitzer
 Redoubt 1 one 12-pound Redoubt 2 one 12-pound Redoubt 3 one 24-pound

Gunboats: firepower equivalence equals one 6-pound battery
 Gunboats many not fire during pre-dawn turns.

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Army of the Orient Major General Jacques Menou (9,600 infantry; 1,450 cavalry, 350 artillery; 200 dromedary)

Brigadier General François Lanusse	four 8-pound, two howitzer	V8
Brigadier General Pierre Silly		
4th Light Demi-Brigade	600 two 4-pound	V7
18th Demi-Brigade	800 two 4-pound	V7
Brigadier General François Valentin		
69th Demi-Brigade	800 two 4-pound	V7
88th Demi-Brigade	700 two 4-pound	V7
Major General Antoine Rampon		
Brigadier General Georges Eppler		
Converged Carabiniers [three companies]	240	V9
Converged Grenadiers		
French Grenadiers [three companies]	180	V9
Grenadiers Grec [native troops, two companies]	100	R6
21st Light Demi-Brigade	700 two 4-pound	V8
32nd Demi-Brigade	900 two 4-pound	V8
Major General Jean Renyier		
	four 8-pound, two howitzer	V8
Major General Louis Friant		
75th Demi-Brigade	600 two 4-pound	V8
25th Demi-Brigade	650 two 4-pound	V8
61st Demi-Brigade	500 two 4-pound	V8
Major-General François Damas		
85th Demi-Brigade	800 two 4-pound	V8
13th Demi-Brigade	800 two 4-pound	V8
Artillery reserve	three 12-pound, howitzer	V8

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Cavalry: Brigadier General César Roize

Brigadier General André Bron

7th Hussars	200	V8
22nd Chasseurs à Cheval	150	V8

Brigadier General André Boussart

3rd Dragoons	200	V8
14th Dragoons	250	V8
15th Dragoons	150	V8
18th Dragoons	100	V8
20th Dragoons	200	V8
horse artillery battery	four 8-pounder, 2 howitzer	V8

Dromedary Corps	200	R7
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The Dromedary Corps moves at mounted rate and dismounts to fight. Once dismounted, cannot remount for remainder of game.