

Polemos Battle Report – Benburb by Craig Lafferty

This is a fictional account, based on the Battle of Benburb using the 2nd Edition Polemos English Civil War rules.

It was the year of Our Lord Sixteen Hundred and Forty Six and nations are at war. Somewhere near the village of Benburb, Ireland, two armies met in a fateful clash of arms. The army of the Ulster Protestants, led by Major General Robert Monroe, had for days, been trying to bring to battle the army of the Catholic Confederation led by Lord General Owen Roe O'Neill.

The Ulster army scouts reported seeing a large force, near the village, but over the River Blackwater. General Monroe decided to send his squadrons of Scots horse across the river in an attempt to locate the Confederates, while the foot, made up of Ulster Scots and Anglo-Irish, marched with all haste towards the river crossing.

Nearing the bridge, General Monroe had a clear view across the river and in the distance he saw before him the Confederate army lined up and ready for battle. Three small brigades of foot faced him, further past the bridge, with the Irish horse contingent deployed on the right flank of their army. General's Monroe's horse was facing its Confederate counterparts on the right flank of the Ulster army, but across the river. It would be a race for the three foot brigades to make it to the bridge and cross the river in time to engage the Confederates.

General Monroe seized the initiative and moved the three brigades of foot forwards towards the bridge. While the Confederates responded by moving their whole army forwards with their horse positioning themselves to isolate the Scots horse from the crossing.

The armies continued to close and the first Ulster brigade began to cross the bridge. This meant some change in formation and caused disorder amongst the troops. As the Confederate foot brigades continued to close, it became clear that the first Ulster brigade across the bridge would become isolated, unless they were able to make enough space for the troops behind them to cross. They would have to push back the Confederates first.

Meanwhile the opposing horse began to clash, with the Confederate horse advancing, but being pushed back by the Scots horse. This proved too much for one squadron of Confederate horse, which broke and fled from the field. The Confederate horse fought back and broke a squadron of Scots horse, which routed into one of their companions, taking both squadrons from the field. A heavy blow for the army of Ulster!

Back at the bridge, the impetus of the Ulster army was waning and General O'Neill seized the initiative. One of his foot brigades held back in reserve, while the other two advanced and laid fire upon their foes. As the smoke cleared they could see that despite their intentions, the long range of the volley meant that their fire was ineffectual.

On his right wing, General O'Neill urged his horse on and they advanced into contact again. But once again the Scots horse proved a worthy foe and broke another squadron of Irish horse, allowing them to break through the line and threaten the right flank of the foot. The Irish horse was now in disarray and despite being evenly matched in numbers with their opposition, they were in a poor position to follow up.

The stand-off at the bridge continued, but the Ulster foot brigade deployed into a line formation, better to bring the battle to the Confederates.

It was now clear that the Anglo-Irish brigade of General Monroe's would face the Confederate foot on its own, as the Scots brigades stood back waiting for their route across the bridge to be clear. The good thing however was that his horse was holding its own on his left flank. The morale of both armies remained confident, as the decisive moment of the battle approached.

Sensing their moment and realising that this battle would be won or lost in the maelstrom of close combat, the Confederate troops seized the initiative and advanced into contact with the Anglo-Irish. First to falter was an Anglo-Irish regiment, however this seemed to firm the resolve of the others who pushed back two regiments of Confederates.

Meanwhile, the cavalry squadrons were manoeuvring for advantage with one squadron of Scots horse closing on the flank of the Irish foot.

The battle at the bridge intensified and the Confederate regiments with resolution, began the push back the Anglo-Irish against the banks of the river. This proved too much for the Anglo-Irish, who worried about being massacred on the banks of the Blackwater, turned and fled, most drowning in its perilous waters and only a few souls finding wretched salvation on the far bank.

The battle had reached its high water mark and the morale of the Ulster army was low, after seeing their fellows slaughtered on the far bank of the river. The two remaining brigades of Scots foot began to withdraw to safety, while the Scots horse having dominated their counterparts, were forced to withdraw in support and screen the retreat north. General Monroe in his flight to safety, had time to ponder what had gone wrong and just how the laurels of victory had escaped him.

The Catholic Confederate army under the leadership of General O'Neill had achieved victory, against expectation and was content to let their foe withdraw. General O'Neill reflected that the recent aid of money and arms had helped him achieve this great victory for his cause and began to plan his next move.