

The War of Gradisca 1615-1617

Introduction

Simulation is a procedure widely used today by the armed forces in order to recreate situations and conditions as close to reality as possible, while at the same time reducing costs. Far from being limited to the military world alone, the simulation also involves important sectors of civil society: think of the world of finance and that of the automotive industry. The simulation counts many fans also in the particular world of war games, whether they are on paper or electronic.

A credible war simulation game requires a serious analysis of the historical events to which it refers. A conflict simulation based on wars, military campaigns and battles that actually took place, can not leave room for improvisation, because the context must be realistic and the game must have rules compatible with a number of factors such as: the potential of the forces, the restrictions on movement imposed by the terrain, the halting power of the static defenses, the level of neutralization expressed by the artillery, the ability to carry out tasks on the battlefield, the recovery time of the operational capabilities of the units used on the battleground, as well as other aspects, less perceptible. Variables, such as the provision or lack of supply, the improvement or deterioration of the health situation, the entry into the Operational Theater of forces drawn from the reserves or conveyed from other sectors of the front, or the conditioning due to periods of truce between the fighting parties must also be realistic.

In all these aspects a simulation game sharply differs from a fantasy game, based on the clash between imaginary armies of good and evil, formed by the most disparate creatures such as monsters, orcs, elves, dwarfs or dragons: here, in fact, it is just enough to apply to the game rules established arbitrarily, or at most, referring to particular literary or cinematographic works. The simulation game "The War of Gradisca", on the contrary, offers a faithful and consistent historical picture from the historical-military point of view, placing the players in the condition to apply some fundamental principles of military art, among which the surprise, the concentration of the fire and strength, bypassing, static and dynamic defense. The creators of this simulation have also demonstrated the ability to adapt the game to the principles and rules to which the "Mestiere delle Armi" (the Profession of Arms) was inspired in those times.

The result is that enthusiasts can relive the historical events that took place during this particular war, and, with their ability, modify the outcome of the conflict. A simulation, therefore, serious and involving, with minimal forcing and linear rules, detached from superfluous complications. A product made with care, the result of experience gained in the specific sector by those who conceived and produced this simulation game, for which they made use of some advice from the writer, who on the war in Gradisca carried out those patient archive researches which led to the publication of the book *The War of Friuli 1615-1617* Otherwise known as the war of Gradisca or Uscocchi (Gorizia, LEG 2007).

If players feel stimulated to deepen their knowledge of these historical events, they know that other authors have treated this conflict (Faustino Moissesso, Enrico Palladio degli Olivi, Biagio Rith of Colemberg, Anton Gnirs, ...) and that the interesting studies presented in the volume edited by Mauro Gaddi and Andrea Zannini, *Venezia non è da guerra* (Udine, Forum 2008), are among the most recent.

In a nutshell *The War of Gradisca of Europa Simulazioni* is well suited to the purpose of war games, which consists - think of the classic game of chess - in training the minds of the contenders to the correct use of the available forces, through the application of rules to a situation constantly modified by the decisions of the opposing party. Lastly, it is important not to underestimate how a simulation game set in a historical period can contribute to let know, in particular among young people, important events of the past, often neglected as a consequence of the absolute priorities of economic return that characterize the great television, cinematographic and editorial productions.

Historical framework of the War of Gradisca

On the eve of the war of Gradisca numerous reasons of friction opposed the Venetians and the Habsburgs of Austria, lords of Carinthia, Carniola and Styria: problems related to the irrational Istrian and Istrian borders, to resentment for neutrality maintained by the Republic during the last Ottoman-Imperial conflict (1593-1606) and, above all, the desire not to recognize the Venetian naval domination of the Adriatic Sea.

In 1615, after repeated clashes in coastal and border areas, failed the last attempts to reach an agreement, the army of the Republic of Venice and that of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria came to arms. The triggering cause was the predatory actions of the Uskoks, Slavic refugees from the Christian religion to whom the Archduke had allowed to settle on the coastal territories of the Kvarner. To the Uskoks, useful to the Archduke in anti-Turk and anti-Venetian function, but allocated by him in inhospitable and difficult to conquer places, bandits and adventurers had joined, who, starting from Segna, carried out fierce acts of piracy, provoking serious economic damage to Venice.

In the late summer of 1615 the general Pompeo Giustiniani, took the command of the Venetian army, crossed the eastern terrestrial border and took possession of Cervignano, Cormons, Aquileia and of the whole plain up to the Isonzo; the Archducal, with the help of the Uskoks (who had been repulsed in Monfalcone), later broke into the Venetian Istria, prevailing in the clash of Zaule and devastating the less fortified places. Soon the struggle focused on the focal point of the Austrian offensive and defensive system: Gradisca, which, except for a short interval, was besieged from February 1616 at the end of hostilities.

The Uskoks, unable to act on the sea, were organized in terrestrial units joined to the archducal army, commanded by Adam of Trautsmannsdorf. In April 1616, instead of contrasting the progress of the Venetians on the Collio, the Archduke units passed the Isonzo near Gorizia and attacked south towards Sdraussina and Sagrado, vital positions for the defense of the besieged fortress. Giustiniani re-established the balance by obtaining the arrival of fresh troops from Dalmatia and Friuli, whose employment forced Trautsmannsdorf to split his forces. Gradisca resisted, but in both camps, already in the middle of 1616, the payment of troops and supplies were anything but regular.

In the first days of August 1616 the Archduke, reinforced by substantial mercenary forces sent by the bishop of Bamberg, penetrated the Val Canale, threatening Chiusa(forte): an attempt to seize Pontebba failed and these forces, in order not to remain isolated, withdrew. In the same period the Venetian forces conquered Caporetto (Chiavoretto) and Mount Podgora to the west of Gorizia and the reliefs of the Collio to the southwest of Mount Sabotino. The Venetians, intentioned on investing Gorizia, however, suffered the death of their commander Giustiniani, reached on October 10, 1616 by a shot of arquebus during the recognition of a ford: the death of Giustiniani led to the suspension of offensive maneuvers, culminating in the conquest of the castle of Vipulzano sul Collio. Both armies, exhausted, erected new fortifications near Gorizia, the Venetians to the west of the city (fort Erizzo, Fort Santa Croce, Fort Priuli ...), the Archducal to the northwest (forts of Castagni, Torrione bridge, ...).

Between the end of November and the middle of December, an Uskok incursion took place in the territory of Cividale and some cavalry clashes, one of which, near Lucinico, involving also the infantry and artillery, took on large proportions. In January 1617, the Archducal received substantial reinforcements led by the Marquis of Austria, the natural son of Emperor Matthias, and in the same month Don Giovanni de Medici became commander of the Venetians. The Venetian army, reorganized, began to exert greater pressure in the Isonzo area, between Gorizia and Gradisca, while the archducal cavalry of Don Balthasar Marradas was sent to raid Istria.

In the meanwhile, the siege of the Venetians in Gradisca got tighter: nevertheless, the fortress managed to receive supplies. In May the archducal troops were further strengthened and the Venetians were reached by sea, by a strong contingent of Dutch mercenaries, placed under the orders of John of Nassau. At the beginning of June, Giovanni de Medici launched an all-out attack on the Carso, aimed at breaking the enemy front. Large contingents of troops moved from Mariano and Romans: Cosimo del Monte pointed towards Doberdò, the column of Giovanni Martinengo went up the left bank of the Isonzo towards San Pietro, while the cavalry of Ferdinando Scotti, through Romans and Monfalcone, moved on to Vermigiano, where it joined the infantrymen of Orazio Baglioni, and reached Rubia, the headquarters of the Archducal. In the meanwhile the troops of Francesco and Carlo di Strassoldo interrupted all communications between Gradisca and Rubia and the Dutch conquered a series of archducal forts.

Never, the Venetians, had been so close to seize the full field victory. The bombing on Rubia killed the Austrian general Trautsmannsdorf, so that Marradas urgently returned from Istria to take over the command. The third and final assault on Rubia was rejected on 20 June and the victory, this time, faded because of the failure to send reinforcements to the Dutch, who had penetrated the Austrian defenses and were overpowering the defenders. According to General Medici, they had, in fact, moved to battle without his order. After the moment of disbanding, the Archducal reorganized and on 11 and 12 July they attacked the Venetian undefended headquarters of Mariano, but they were rejected.

In August 1617 the Venetian commander divided his troops differently and tightened the siege of the fortress of Gradisca, which however continued to receive supplies and reinforcements from the road to Merna. In one of these operations the Bohemian leader, Albrecht von Wallenstein, whose star had to shine during the upcoming Thirty Years War, greatly distinguished himself.

In April 1617 the Venetian ambassador in Spain was given the task of finding a negotiated solution using Spanish mediation: even the emperor, first cousin of Ferdinand of Styria, was convinced of the need of a negotiated peace, for whose achievement the French also worked.

On September 6, 1617, the preliminary treaty was formalized, based on the articles proposed in Madrid. At the end of November the truce was published and the contingents of the two armies began to be withdrawn from the front. On September 26, 1617, peace was signed in Madrid: the war thus found a diplomatic settlement. The peace forced the Venetians to withdraw from the lands conquered in Friuli and in Istria and the Archduke to burn the boats of the Uskoks and deport the populations far from the coasts: these aspects were treated in the following year at the Rijeka and Krk meetings, dedicated to the execution of the part of the Treaty concerning the Uskoks.

Col. Riccardo Caimmi