

Battle of Busaco 20th June 1808

The French, moving north with orders to occupy and defend the town of Boialva met the British forces tasked with occupying Busaco.

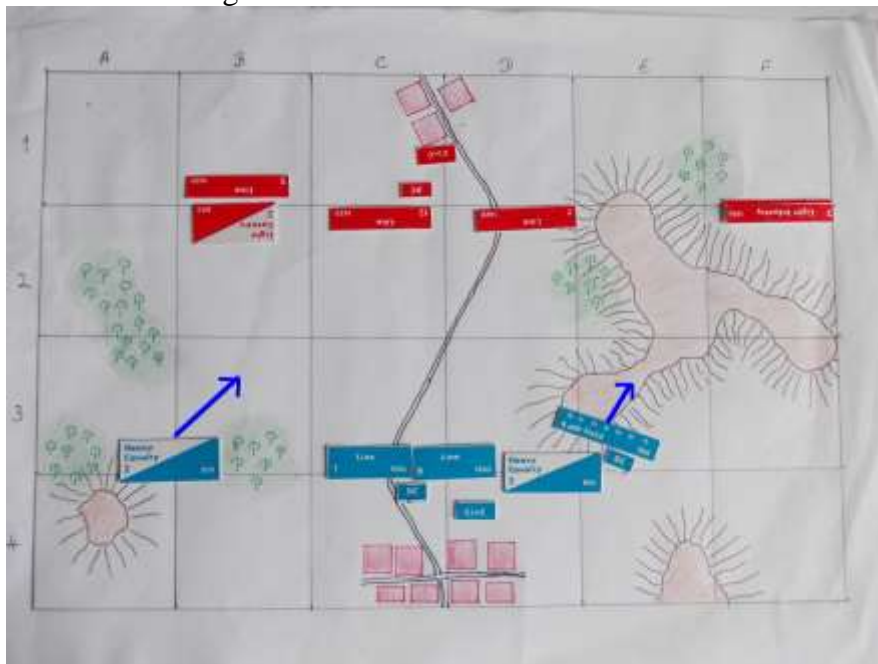
Both sides formed line of battle between two villages along the Boialva - Busaco road.

The British force was composed of three line battalions, one light infantry battalion and a depleted light cavalry regiment.

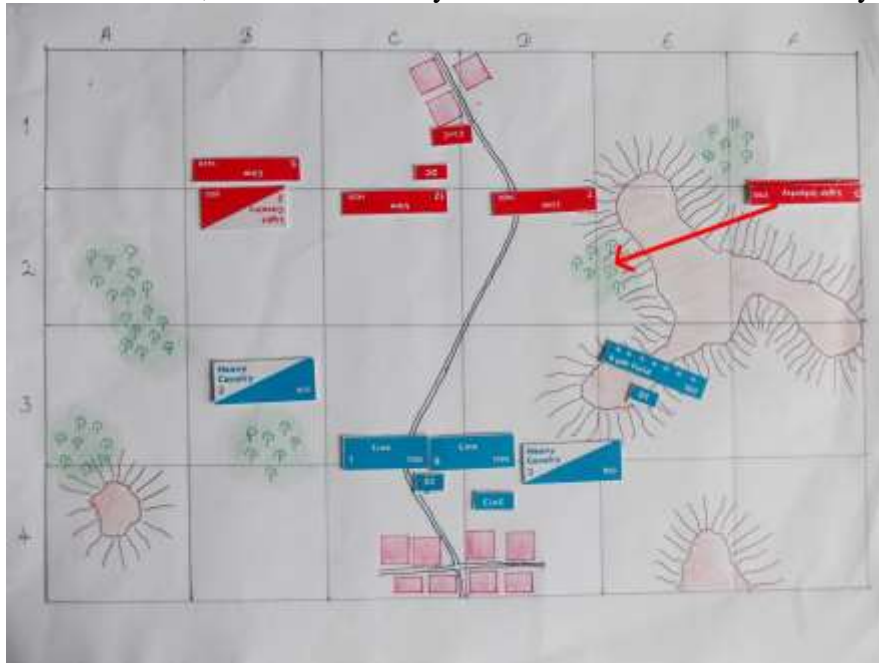
The French had one strong infantry battalion, a regiment of dragoons and an artillery battery

The ground was generally open with scattered woods and a low hill to the south east of the field.

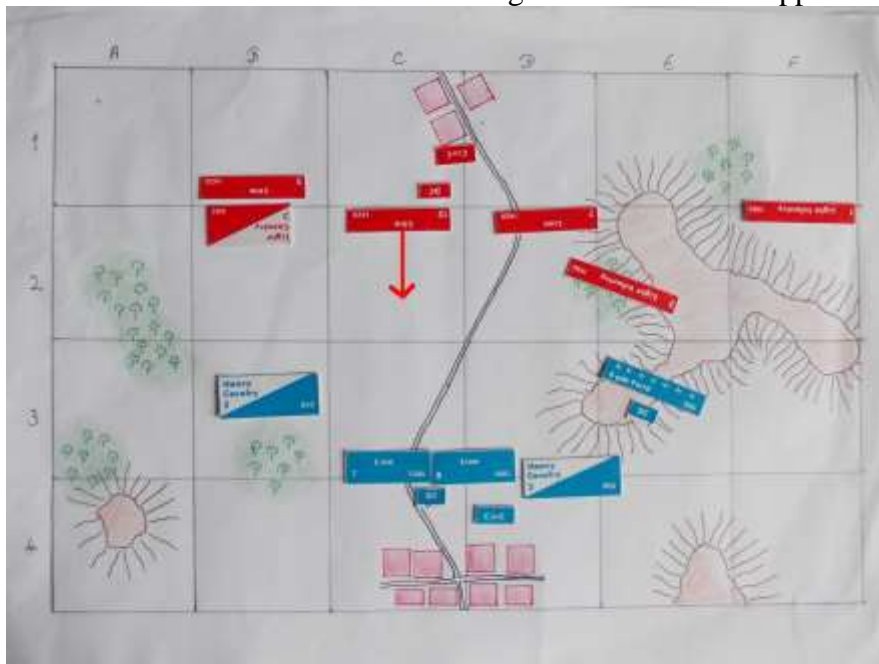
The French started by moving their artillery to the hill on their right flank and advanced the dragoons on the left.



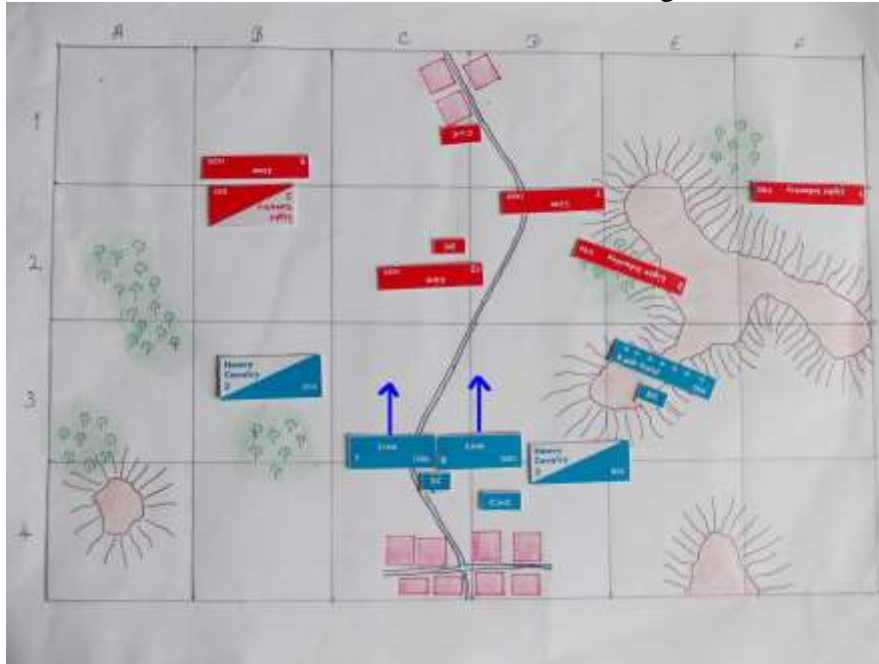
The British responded by moving half of the 52nd Light Infantry into the woods on their left centre, from whence they could fire on the French artillery.



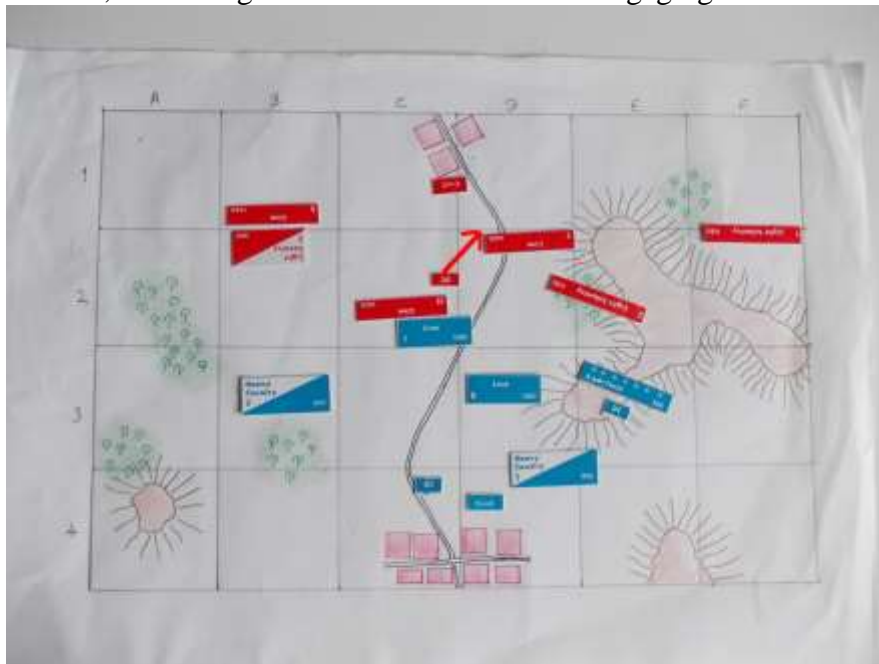
The 82nd Line moved forwards to the right of the wood in support.



In the centre General Delaborde ordered the 86e Ligne forward.

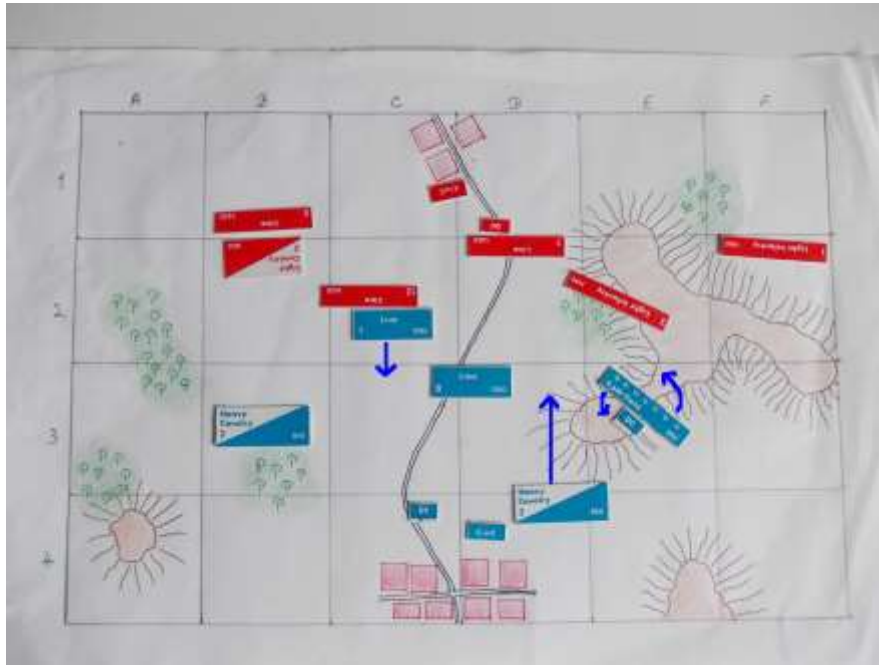


The commander being somewhat rash, his left flank rushed forward further than ordered, contacting the British 82nd Line and engaging in close combat.

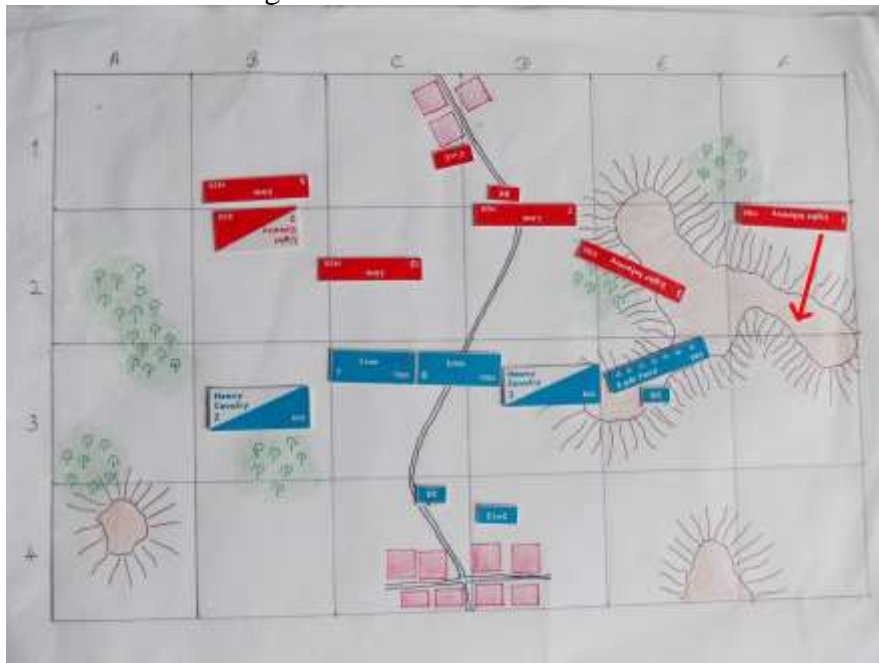


However the 82nd held their position. General Anstruther rode to the 32nd Line to order them forward in support.

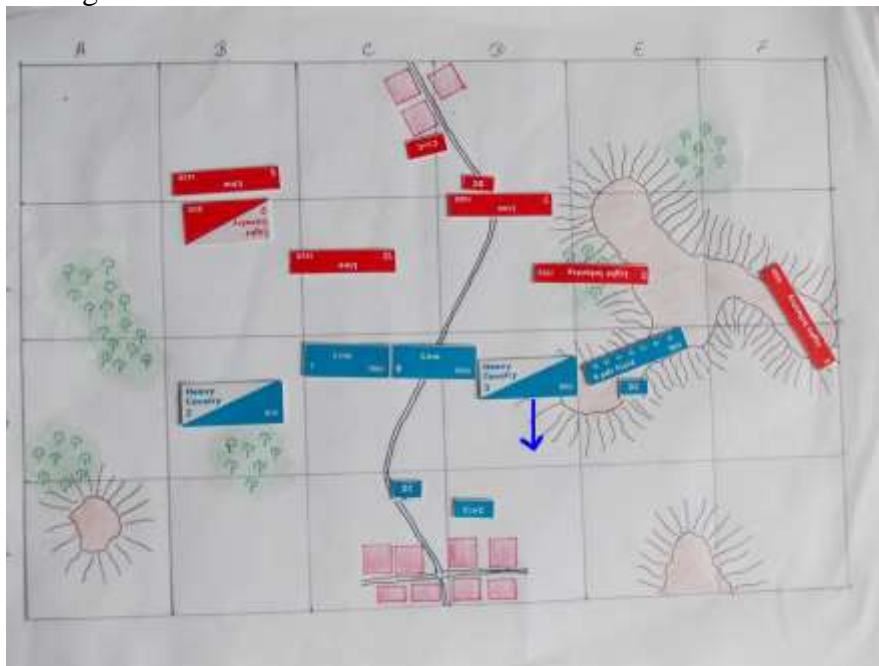
The French infantry withdrew and resorted to musket fire against the British line. On the right flank the artillery battery re-aligned towards the British centre while half of the French dragoons (the other half being deployed on the left wing) moved forwards to complete the battle line. The French artillery opened fire against the 32nd Line with little effect



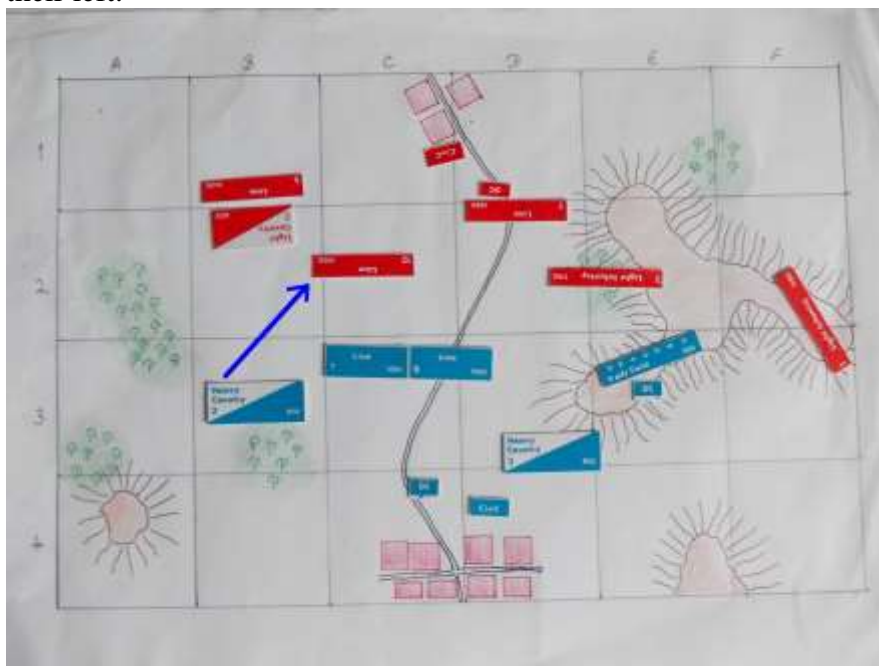
The remaining companies of the 52nd Light Infantry moved up onto the hill to outflank the French guns.



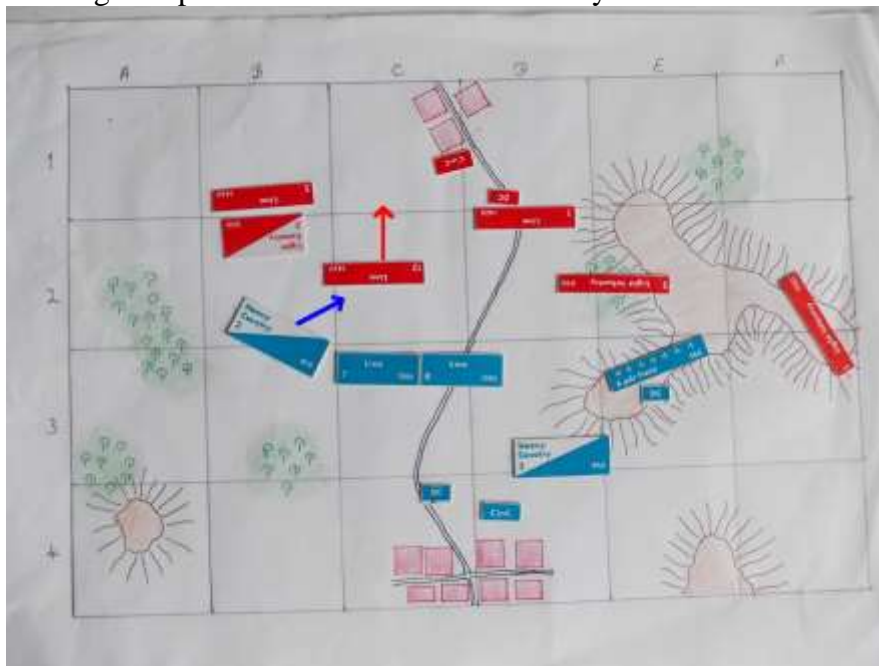
The 52nd Light Infantry companies in the woods opened fire on the French dragoons, forcing them to retreat.



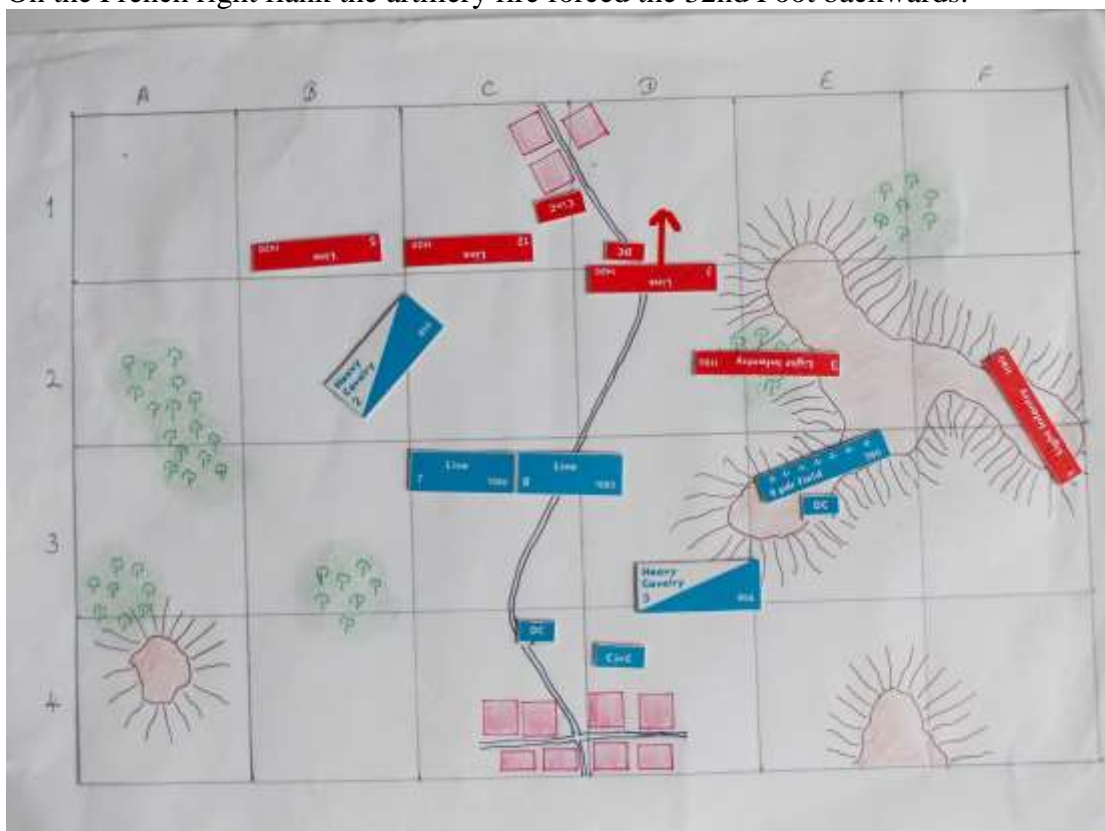
The French now advanced the infantry in the centre, supported by the dragoons on their left.



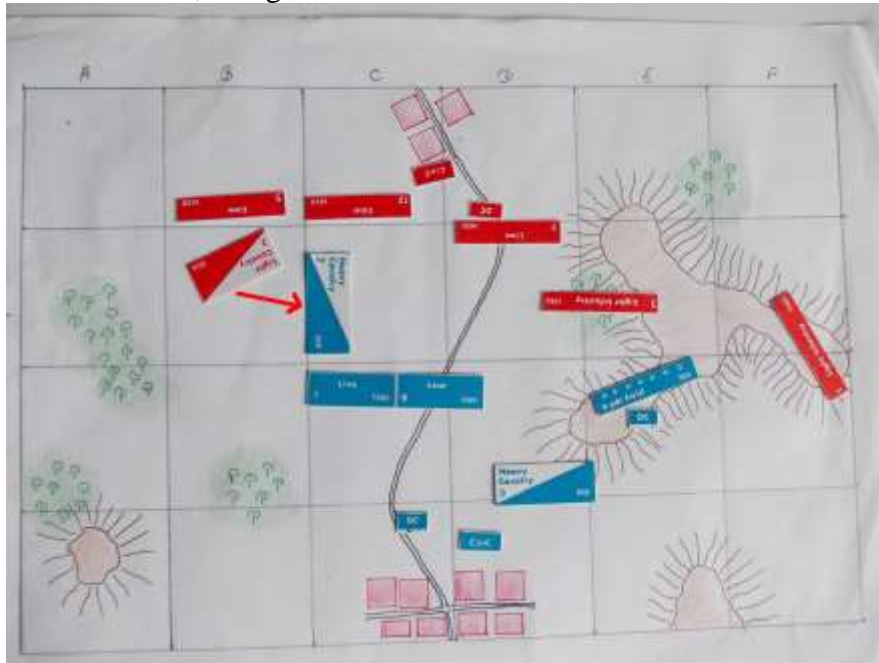
The infantry firepower forced the 32nd infantry back, decimated, and the charge of the dragons petered out as the British infantry retreated.



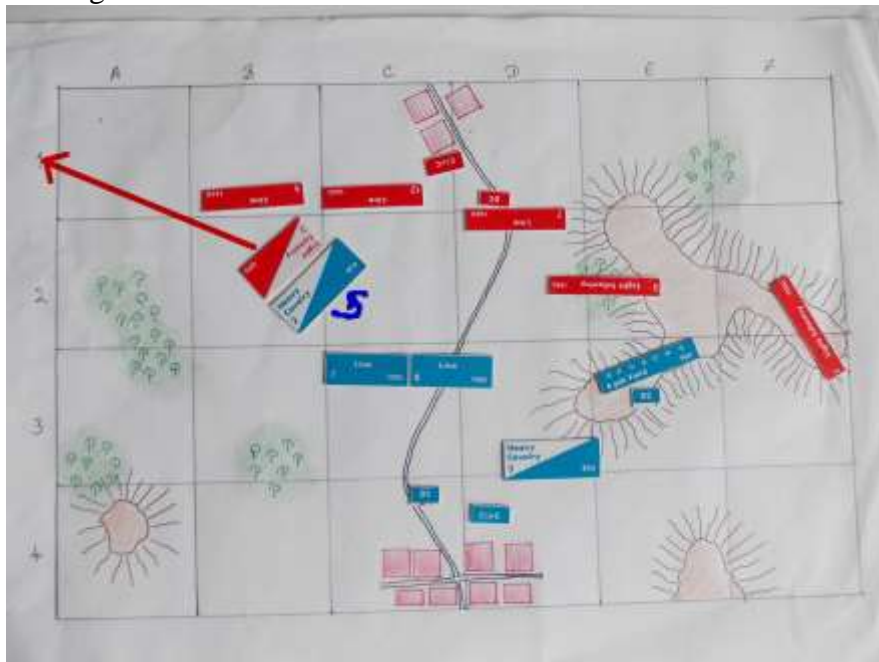
On the French right flank the artillery fire forced the 32nd Foot backwards.



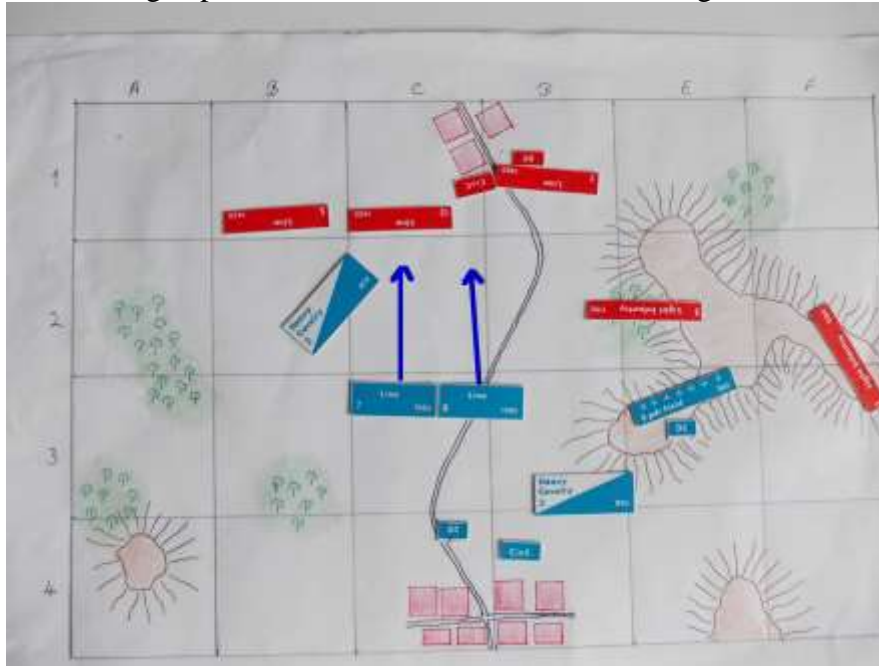
The British 20th Light Dragoons, seeing the French dragoons disordered after their abortive attack, charged towards their rear.



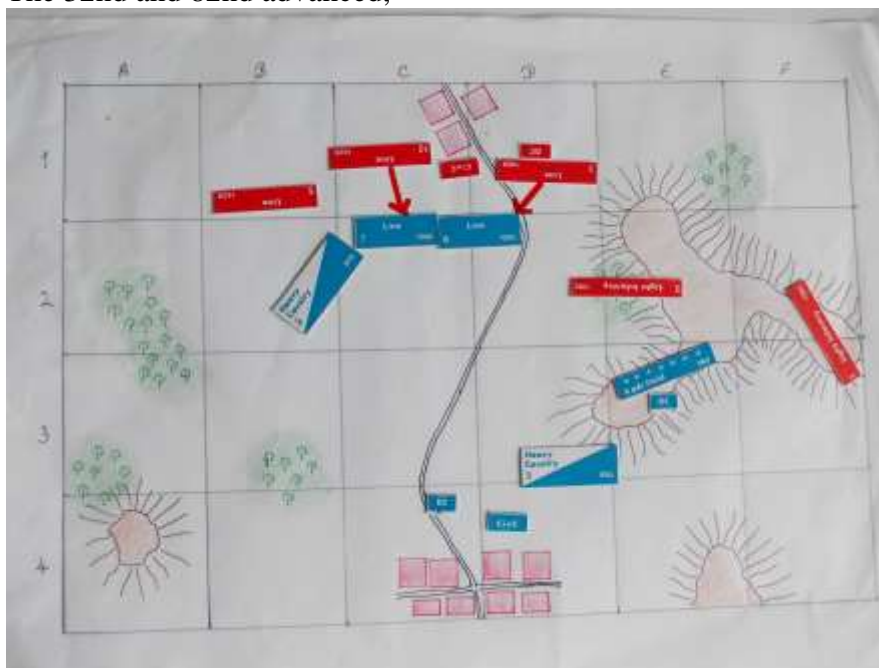
Unfortunately for the British, the French reformed, wheeled about and met the charge. The 20th Light Dragoons were effectively destroyed as a fighting force in the ensuing melee.



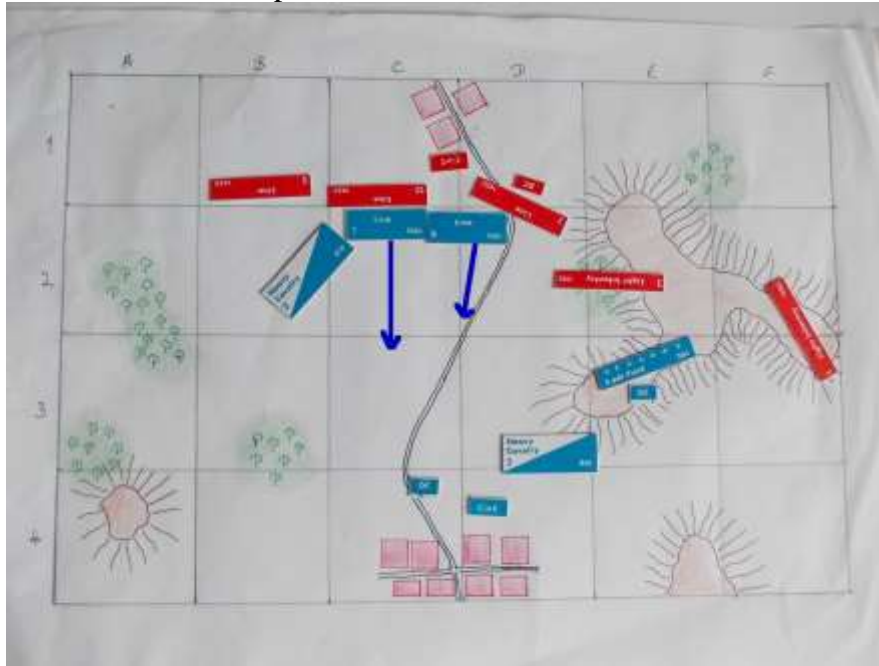
The 86e Ligne pushed forwards after the two retreating British infantry units,



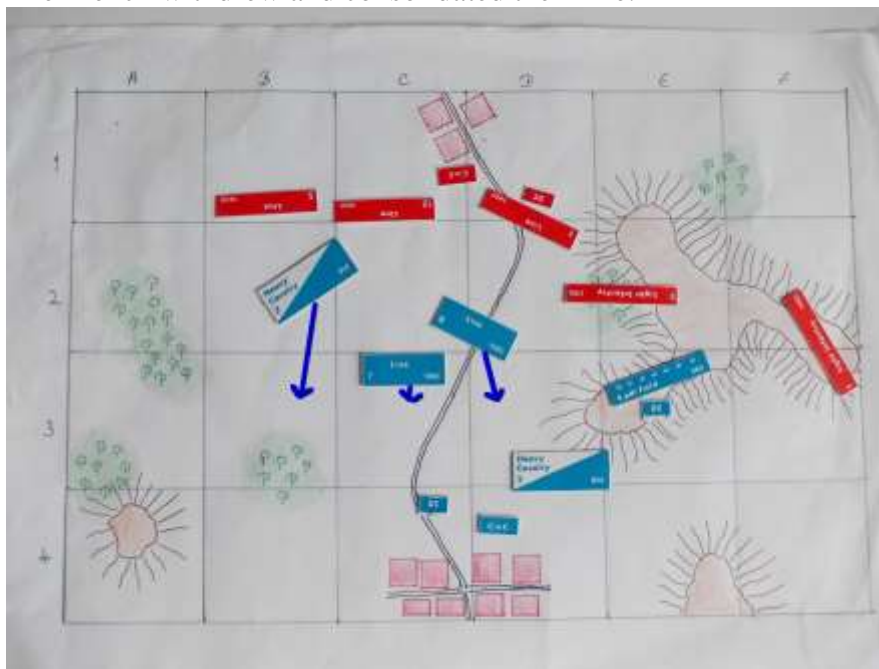
but the British infantry reorganised and advanced in the centre. The 32nd and 82nd advanced,



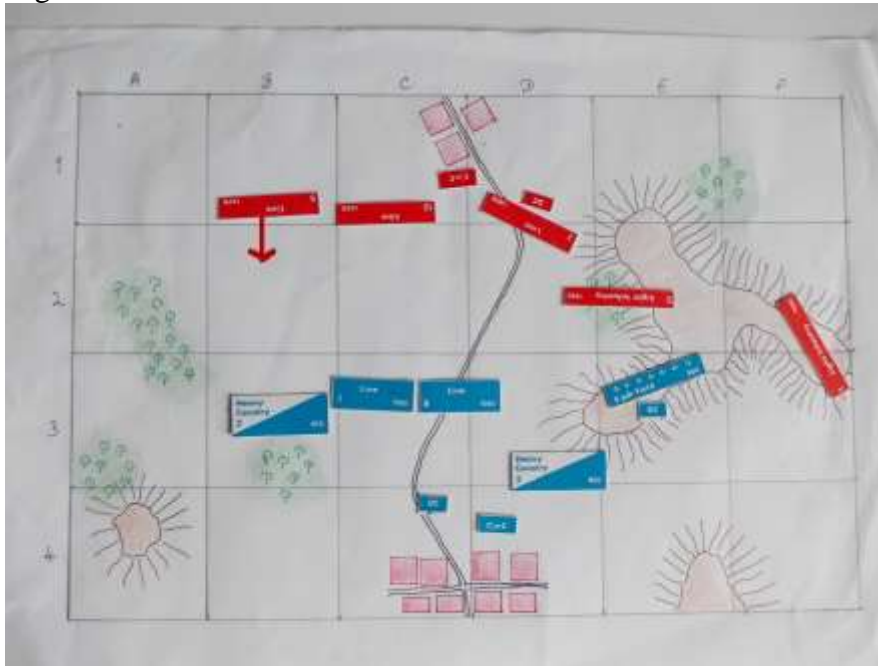
and the French were pushed back.



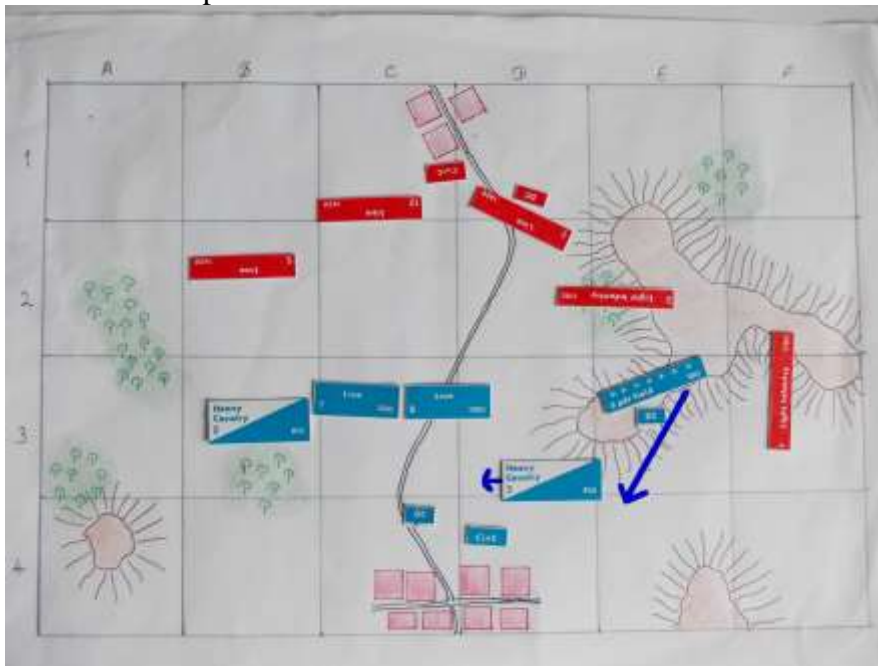
The French withdrew and consolidated their line.



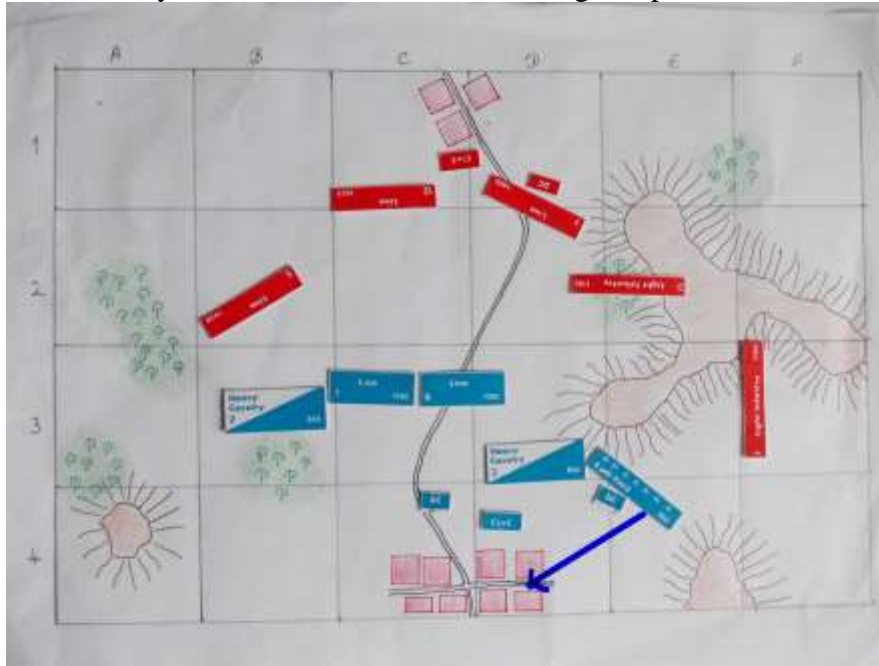
At last the 2nd Foot on the right, who had been ordered to make the main attack, began to move.



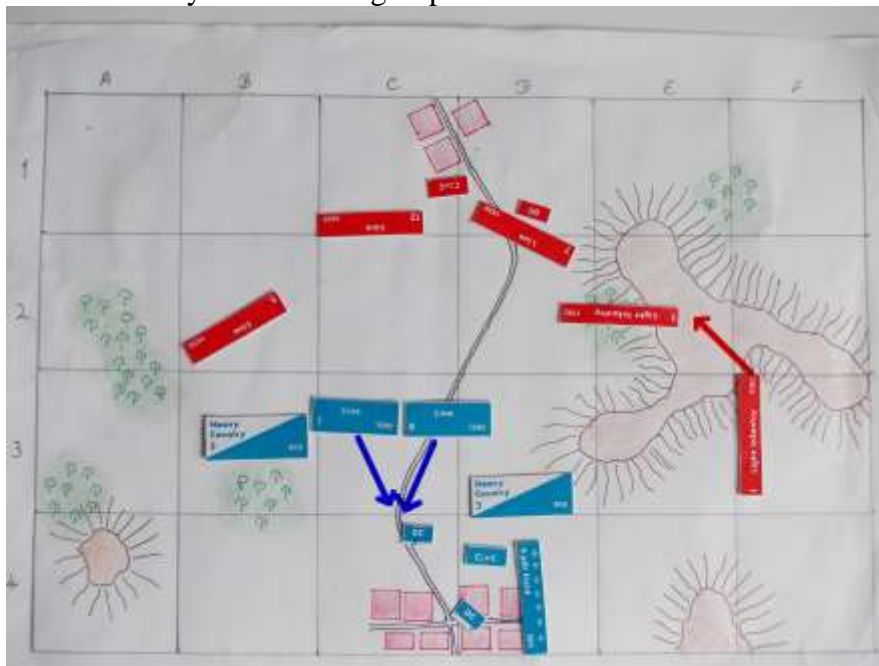
On the British left flank the remainder of the 52nd moved forwards to outflank the French guns, which retreated and set up a new firing position to defend the French right flank. A substantial number of the 52nd fell when the French guns opened fire from their new position.



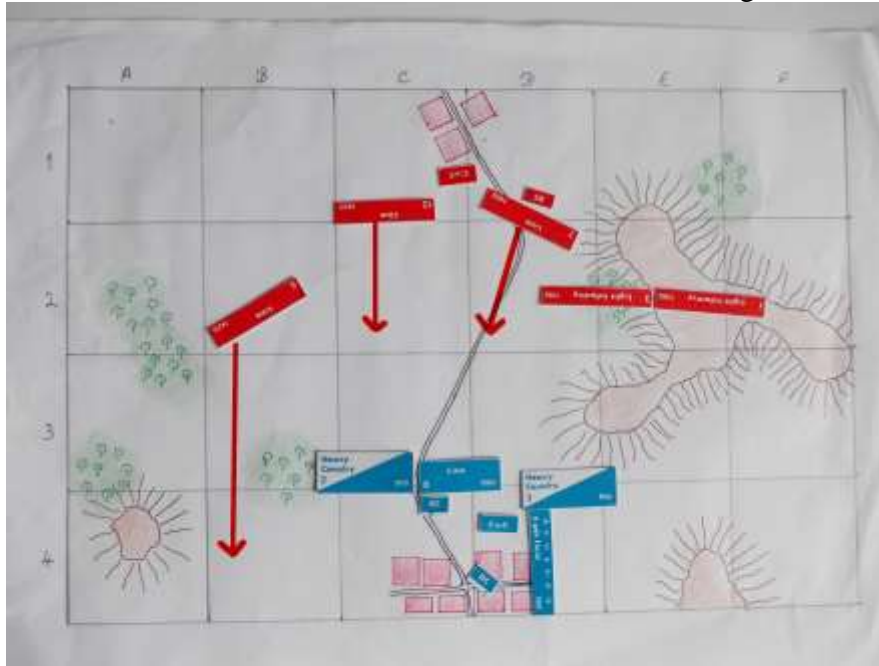
The artillery, under strict orders to save the guns, pulled back into the village.



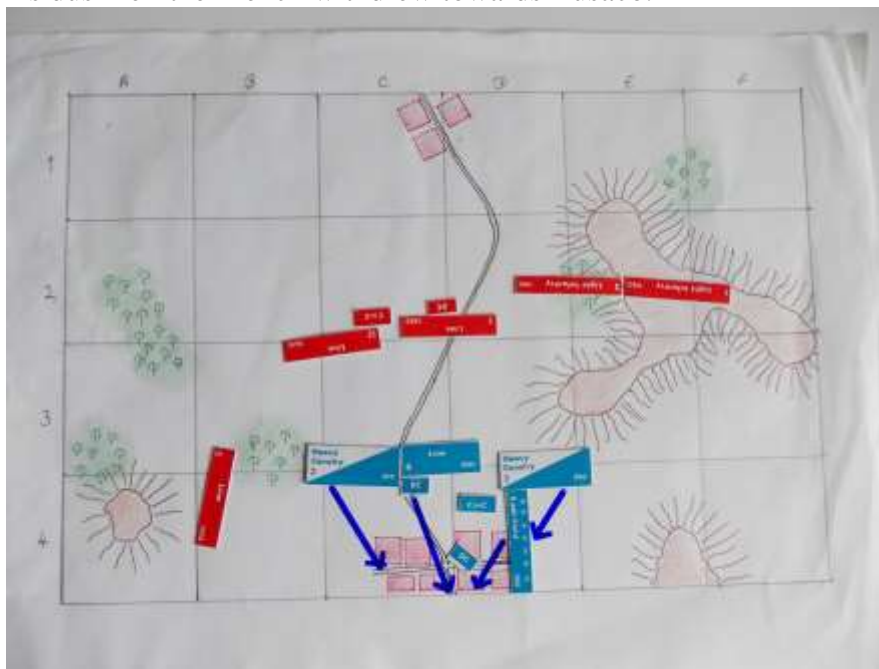
The 86e Ligne continued to withdraw as they came under fire from the advancing British infantry. The 52nd regrouped at the wood



as the line battalions advanced in the centre and on the right flank.



As dusk fell the French withdrew towards Busaco.



Casualties: French 233 of 1705 (14%), British 290 of 3122 (9%)