

Campaign

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# Vimeiro 1808

Wellesley's first victory in the Peninsular



René Chartrand • Illustrated by Patrice Courcelle



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Series editor Lee Johnson • Consultant editor David G Chandler

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## Dedication

To Luce

## Acknowledgments

In Portugal, I have had considerable assistance, especially from Dr. Sergio Veludo Coelho, who patiently showed me the many superb resources available to a military historian of the Peninsular War in Portugal. Mr. Pedro de Brito of Porto gave access to his fine collection and also provided valuable advice. The Museu Militar do Porto (Porto Military Museum) was most helpful as were the Arquivo Historico Militar in Lisbon. In Great Britain, I am especially grateful to the staff at the Public Records Office at Kew (UK). All this material could never have come together in a handsome book without the fine editorial work of Lee Johnson and Marcus Cowper's coordination at Osprey. To one and all, please accept my heartfelt expression of deepest gratitude.

## Author's Note

Readers used to the more traditional versions of the Vimeiro campaign will find that this account looks at three rather than two protagonists: the French, the British and the Portuguese. Consequently, the campaign starts in June 1808 when the first battles between the French and the Portuguese occurred, several weeks before the British troops arrived with Sir Arthur Wellesley in August. Although the future Duke of Wellington's first Peninsular campaign occurred in Portugal, there has been a certain paucity regarding the role of the Portuguese in this and in his subsequent Lusitanian campaigns. The great British and French histories of these conflicts naturally and rightly concentrated on their national armies, although Sir Charles Oman's celebrated work probably came the closest to giving a worthy notice of the Portuguese actions. By visiting the 1808 campaign's battlefields, not only the famous ones of Roliça and Vimeiro, but also the sites of much lesser known fights at Teixeira, Régua and Evora, which were no less bloody, a surprisingly different account emerges.

The spelling of Portuguese generally follows the adaptations that have long been prevalent in British and American military and historical publications, in particular as expressed by Oxford Professor Sir Charles Oman in his *History of the Peninsular War*.

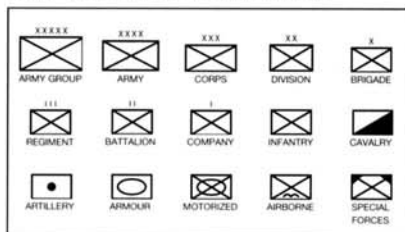
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## KEY TO MILITARY SYMBOLS



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# ORIGINS OF THE CAMPAIGN

## NAPOLEON'S CONTINENTAL BLOCKADE

**T**he events which led to the battle of Vimeiro in Portugal and the British involvement in the Peninsular War had their origins far from the little town set in the rolling hills north of Lisbon. Continental Europe in 1807 was dominated by Napoleon Bonaparte, emperor of the French and one of the great military captains in world history. He had seized power in France in 1799, been crowned emperor in 1804, had defeated Austria and Russia at Ulm and Austerlitz in 1805, vanquished Prussia at Jena the following year and humbled Russia again at Friedland in 1807. This had led to the Peace of Tilsit signed in July 1807 with Alexander I, emperor of Russia, which acknowledged the new balance of power in central and eastern Europe with Napoleon's creation of the kingdom of Westphalia and the Grand Duchy of Warsaw.

Of the major powers battling Napoleonic France, only Britain remained uncowed. As an island nation with flourishing world-wide trade and a great military fleet – by far the world's most powerful – it retained the resources to continue the fight while remaining virtually invulnerable to invasion by Napoleon's armies. In 1804 and early 1805, Napoleon had gathered an 'Army of England' at Boulogne but to no avail. The Royal Navy's iron grip on the English Channel proved unbreakable and, finally, Napoleon's troops marched towards Austerlitz instead. The Royal Navy was also blockading more and more of the European coastline.

At the end of 1806, shortly after his entry to Berlin, Napoleon, now preoccupied with Britain's blockade, signed decrees which put an embargo on all British trade with Europe. In effect, the Berlin Decrees declared Britain to be under a tight French-imposed blockade. Travel, trade and correspondence between Britain or its colonies and continental Europe were henceforth forbidden. Recalcitrant countries were severely punished by French troops appearing on their borders. Through this 'Continental System' it was hoped to ruin Britain, forcing her to sue for peace and accommodations with Napoleon. But Britain could get along quite well thanks to its colonies and overseas trade links. Wood for its immense commercial and military fleets came from Canada, sugar and other tropical delicacies from the West Indies, tea and spices and many other products from India and the Far East – only wine, most of which came from Portugal, seemed in jeopardy.

Nevertheless, the British retorted on 7 January 1807 with an Order in Council prohibiting trade by ships from neutral countries between two French or French-allied ports. This amounted to an attempt to totally halt Napoleonic Europe's external trade and commerce; and it was an effective blockade as Britain's Royal Navy was already monitoring the



Napoleon's troops enter Berlin on 27 October 1806. The following month, on 21 November, Napoleon signed the 'Berlin Decrees', which would lead in due course, to the invasion of Portugal a year later. (Print after F. de Myrbach)

French and French-allied coastline. The result was that nearly every product from outside Europe, such as sugar, became increasingly scarce and expensive on the Continent.

## PORTUGAL BEFORE 1807

Then there was Portugal to further exasperate Napoleon. This ancient kingdom shared the Iberian peninsula with Spain, its habitually hostile neighbour. But Portugal was and remains a very different country from Spain. From the Middle Ages, the Portuguese were drawn by the sea and, by the end of the 15th century, were the first Europeans to reach India. In the next century, they established trade links in the Far East and colonies in Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Ceylon, India, Macao and the Spice Islands including Timor.

Defensively, geography had favoured Portugal along her frontier with Spain. The country's northern and eastern borders have a nearly continuous chain of mountains pierced by the Douro, Tagus and Gardiana rivers which flow broadly east to west. In those wild border areas, their valleys are steep and almost impassable; in the mountain valleys the rivers flow fast like rapids and are unnavigable. Strong castles, and later mighty fortresses, were built to guard the few gaps in Portugal's mountainous shield.

Over the years, Portugal – whose history was largely a continuous struggle to retain her independence, first from the Moors and then from the Spanish – forged alliances with England, that other maritime nation to the north. English soldiers were found in Portugal as early as 1380 and links with England became stronger as trade developed between these two seafaring nations. They were allies in most wars and avoided interfering in each others colonial expansion overseas. The old saying that Portugal was 'Britain's oldest ally' was certainly true. A





**Maria I had been queen of Portugal since 1777 but because of her distraught condition, Prince Joao was made regent in 1799. Born in Lisbon in 1734, she died in Rio de Janeiro in 1816. Marble sculpture, Estrella Basilica in Lisbon. (Photo: RC)**

Roman Catholic country, Portugal nevertheless took a largely pragmatic attitude towards her Protestant ally. In the numerous wars of the later 17th and early 18th centuries, the Portuguese were often found fighting side by side with British troops in the peninsula as well as in other parts of the world.

The French Revolution had a profound effect on Portugal. In 1793, along with most European nations, she declared war on the French republicans. A Portuguese contingent with the Spanish army fought bravely but the French eventually broke into northern Spain and the Spaniards signed a peace treaty in 1795, then switched sides a year later. This came as no great surprise to the Portuguese who mistrusted the Spaniards more than the French anyway. The treaty with Britain, her old and trusted ally, remained. In 1797, Britain sent a corps of 6,000 men to bolster Portuguese defences. In 1798, a Portuguese Navy squadron proved such an irritant to General Bonaparte during his Egyptian expedition that he vowed revenge. All these tensions had an increasingly adverse effect on the health of Portuguese Queen Maria I. In 1799, her son became Prince Regent Joao VI, the effective ruler of Portugal.

By 1801, Napoleon Bonaparte had become First Consul and his victories over most countries on the Continent left France the most powerful nation in western Europe. Napoleon pushed his Spanish ally to attack Portugal with the help of a French corps. The resulting and half-hearted 'War of the Oranges', which lasted barely three weeks, demonstrated how desperately weak the Portuguese defences had become. The campaign got under way in May and Portugal, overwhelmed by three armies numbering some 60,000 men, lost the war and sued for peace, which was signed on 6 June. Portugal had to cede the border area around Olivenza to Spain and close its ports to British ships.

Britain eventually concluded the Peace of Amiens in 1802 but was again at war with France in 1803. Portugal, for its part, tried to stay more or less neutral but the pressure was mounting, especially from November 1806, when Napoleon signed his Berlin Decrees followed by the Milan Decrees of 1807. If Portugal chose to follow the French

**Emperors Napoleon I of France and Alexander I of Russia agreed on their respective areas of influence and some collaboration with each other at Tilsit on 25 June–7 July 1807. The Russians also agreed in principle to help the French in their efforts to isolate Britain but in practice were quite lukewarm to Napoleon's 'Continental System'. (Print after P. Grolleron)**





**Prince Regent Joao VI, c.1806. Regent from 1799, Joao VI (1767–1826) was destined to rule Portugal in one of the most turbulent periods of its long history. His decision to move with the court to Rio de Janeiro preserved the Portuguese crown and, ultimately, the country's freedom. He became king in 1816 following the death of Maria I. (Print after H. José da Silva)**

emperor's policy, its economy would most likely be rapidly ruined and its colonial empire – one of the keys to its prosperity – occupied by the British. If it chose to defy Napoleon and continue its overseas and British trade, a French invasion was almost inevitable. Portuguese diplomats attempted to negotiate compromises with the French, but Napoleon increasingly considered Portugal an enormous and frustrating loophole in his Continental System. By the summer of 1807, Napoleon had tired of Portuguese attempts at conciliation. Troops in south-western France were provided with supplies and prepared to march south.

Within Portugal, there was an increasingly powerful pro-French party that saw the country's future inextricably linked with Napoleon's Europe. Indeed some considered that Portugal's rather conservative institutions could only be reformed or abolished and 'progress' made if the nation looked more to Europe and forsook its ancient alliance with Britain. These men had no idea of Napoleon's terrible plans for their homeland. The most talented and progressive senior soldier in the country, the Marquis d'Alorna, shared this view. He was from one of Portugal's leading and most powerful noble families and his influence on other senior officers and officials appears to have been considerable. Although he was committed to major reforms to increase the Portuguese army's efficiency, he was certainly against using it to fight Napoleon's France. In his view, the Portuguese were to be allies of the French. Thus, there were powerful political forces working behind the scenes in Portugal.

In Spain, its prime minister and effective ruler, Manuel Godoy, conveniently agreed to let 25,000 men with about 45 guns of the French army pass through his country and to provide the assistance of a corps of 25,000 Spanish troops. Godoy had been lured by Napoleon's secret promise of part of Portugal, thereby unwittingly ensnaring himself in the web that the French emperor was spinning not simply for Portugal, but for the whole Iberian peninsula.

# CHRONOLOGY

## 1807

- 27 October** — Treaty of Fontainebleau between France and Spain; its secret clauses provide for the invasion of Portugal and its dismemberment into three parts.
- November** — 25,000 French troops with 26,000 Spanish troops under the overall command of General Andoche Junot assemble near the Portuguese border.
- 19 November** — Junot's French troops start crossing into Portugal.
- 25 November** — Junot reaches Abrantes.
- 27–29 November** — Prince Regent Joao VI and the court sail from Lisbon towards Brazil.
- 30 November** — Junot enters Lisbon with French troops.
- 15 December** — French tricolour flag raised over Lisbon; the resulting riots are put down by French troops.
- December** — Portuguese army ordered disbanded by Junot.

## 1808

- 2 May** — Insurrection against the French in Madrid, revolt spreads throughout Spain.
- 6 June** — Northern and central Portugal rise against the French, first at Porto and Vila Real, then at Braga on 8 June, Braganza on 9 June. The rising continues to spread.
- 18 June** — Fortress of Faro falls to Portuguese.
- 19 June** — Supreme Junta organised and led by the Bishop of Porto.
- 21 June** — French force marching on Porto forced by Portuguese to turn back at Teixeira and Régua.
- 26 June** — French take and sack Vila Vizosa and Beja.
- 27 June** — Fort of Santa Catarina at Figueira da Foz falls to Portuguese.
- 6 July** — French take and sack Leiria but later retreat to Lisbon.
- 12 July** — British troops under Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Wellesley (the future Duke of Wellington) sail from Cork.
- 16 July** — Portuguese levies surround and blockade French troops at Almeida fortress.
- 29 July** — French take Evora, massacre ensues.
- 1–8 August** — British troops land at Figueira da Foz under the command of Sir Arthur Wellesley.
- 12 August** — Wellesley meets General Bernadim Freire de Andrade e Castro at Leiria; a Portuguese contingent joins the British.
- 15 August** — Skirmish of Obidos.
- 17 August** — Battle of Roliça.
- 21 August** — Battle of Vimeiro.
- 21 August** — Sir Harry Burrard arrives to take over command from Wellesley, superseded by Sir Hew Dalrymple the next day.
- 22 August** — Dalrymple and Junot agree an armistice at Vimeiro.
- 30 August** — Convention of Sintra.
- September** — Junot and the French army evacuate Portugal.

# THE 1807 FRENCH INVASION OF PORTUGAL

## GENERAL JUNOT'S ADVANCE

To lead the invasion, Napoleon called on his old friend General Andoche Junot, who had been France's ambassador to the royal court in Lisbon. The French contingent was Junot's 'Army of the Gironde' posted south of Bordeaux. This force marched to Salamanca, Spain, in the fall of 1807. Three Spanish corps meanwhile assembled near the border: one of 6,500 men at Vigo intended to march on Porto, another of 9,500 men at Badajos to march on the fortress of Elvas, and another 9,500 men deployed at Cuidad Rodrigo and Alcantara to be put at Junot's disposal. Some 50,000 men were thus poised to invade Portugal on three fronts. It had been intended that Junot's main army of about 34,000 men – 25,000 of them French – would enter Portugal by the usual northern route from Cuidad Rodrigo to the fortress of Almeida, then to Coimbra and finally down to Lisbon. However, Napoleon directed Junot to go further south, to Alcantara, which was only 200km east of Lisbon, and to march on the Portuguese capital from there. On the map it looked to Napoleon like a brilliant move to by-pass the two great Portuguese border fortresses.

To Junot and his men, it proved to be the very devil of a route. After a terrible march through the arid country between Cuidad Rodrigo and

The old Alfama district of Lisbon remains much as it was at the time of the Peninsular War with its many historic houses and twisting, narrow streets. (Photo: RC)



**French troops marching into Portugal, November 1807.  
(Print after Raffet)**



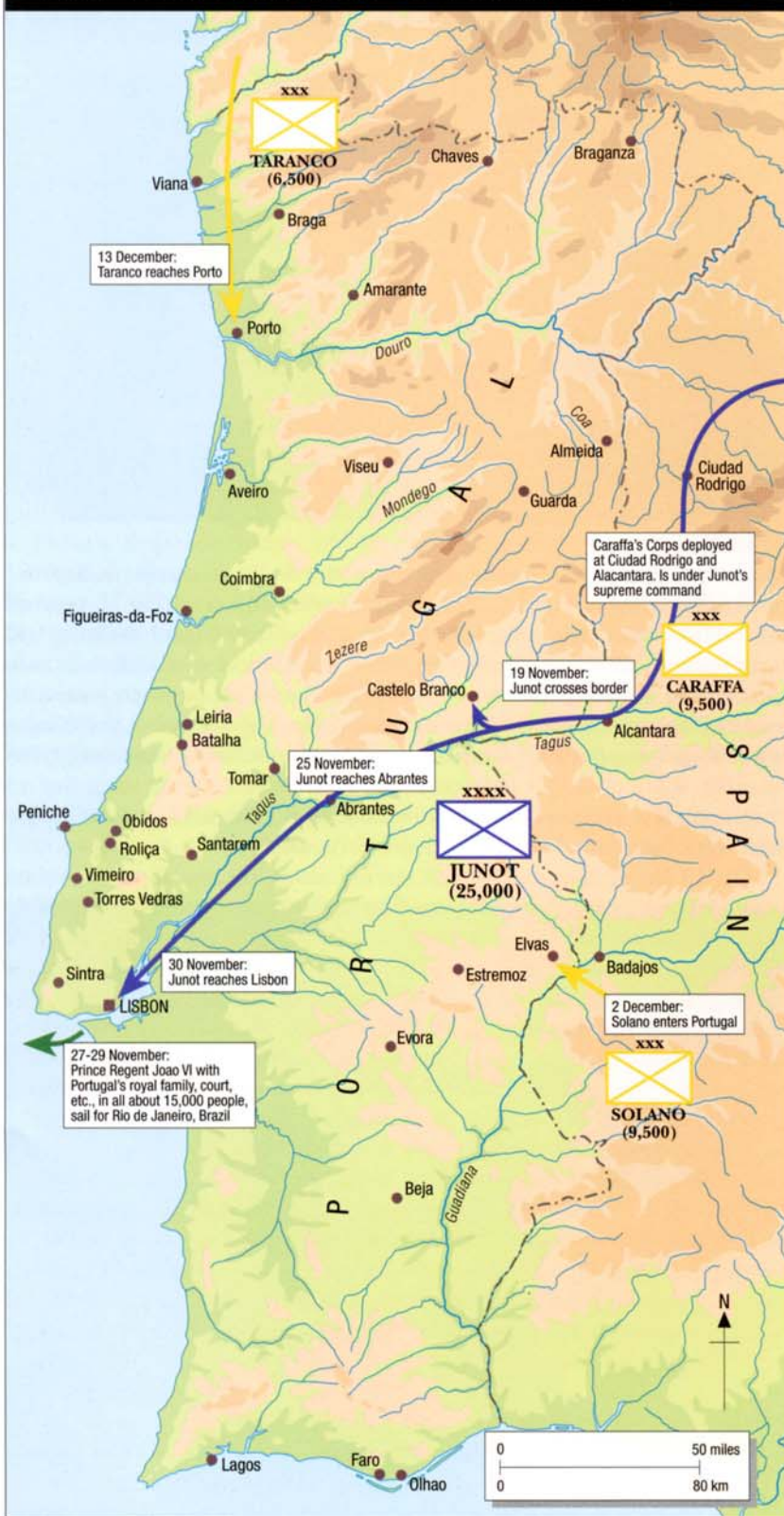
Alcantara, the route west looked even worse. In a narrow valley the upper Tagus River flowed wildly, swollen with the constant November rain. The terrain was such that there was no road (and there is still none today), only a path winding through a rocky mountainous area punctuated by deep ravines. At Alcantara, Junot's men were joined by some of Lieutenant-General Juan Caraffa's Spanish corps but there were not enough supplies to feed the French. Junot, who considered the Spanish soldiers worse than useless, took part of their supplies to continue. His army now numbered about 30,000 effectives with the addition of about 5,000 Spaniards from Caraffa's corps.

On 19 November, the French started along the awful and desolate route following the upper Tagus. The infantry, or at least some of it, somehow managed to march through. The cavalry had already lost half of its horses and the effects of the march left it effectively without mounts. Few guns made it as wheeled transport along the trail was next to impossible. At last, four days later, the French advance guard passed Castelo Branco and reached Abrantes. Junot arrived there with the main body of the army on 25 November. The men were nearly starved, on quarter rations or none at all, as neither bread nor anything else could be found in quantity. There was only strong wine, wrote Junot to the emperor, and some men had died from 'an horrible drunkenness' by consuming too much of it. Some soldiers had even died of exhaustion during the march and a few French stragglers had been killed by Portuguese peasants lurking in the mountains. Despite the terrain Napoleon's luck had held and the French army's march into Portugal had been largely successful. Junot was confident he would reach Lisbon within four or five days.

### **Portuguese Opinion Divided**

Had there been even a few thousand good Portuguese troops at Castelo Branco on the upper Tagus, the French would never have been able to enter the country; precisely why that route was not normally used. But at

# THE 1807 INVASION OF PORTUGAL





**Spanish infantry in the dress and undress uniform, c.1807–1809. This would have been the general appearance of the Spanish troops that entered Portugal in December 1807 and turned on the French from June 1808. (Print after J. Booth)**

this moment in its history Portugal was in total disarray, confused and divided as to what course to follow. This was not just another Spanish attack but an invasion by part of Napoleon's invincible army. Resistance appeared totally futile, the British were nowhere to be seen and the very name of Napoleon was enough to subdue opposition. The Portuguese army could possibly muster between 10 and 15,000 effectives for a campaign with perhaps a further 10,000 men, dispersed across the country. The prospect of Portugal becoming part of the Napoleonic bloc was considered by many – including numerous senior army officers and civil servants – as a positive development.

Meanwhile in Lisbon, the Prince Regent was faced with a monstrous dilemma. On 22 November, he received word that the French army was nearing Abrantes, only about 150km away. Resistance was hopeless; the army paralysed; the population resigned; part of the country's elite ready to collaborate. To call for resistance would result in a useless blood bath. Even if Portuguese arms would prevail this time against Junot, resistance was sure to be ultimately crushed by the combined forces of France and Spain. The strongest symbol of a united Portugal, the crown, held by the Braganza family since 1640, would be lost, the royal family left in at best a gilded cage.

In a remarkable decision, which saved the crown and, ultimately, saved his nation, Joao VI opted to sail for Brazil with the royal family and all at court that wished to follow him. Many officers and courtiers preferred moving across the Atlantic to living under Napoleon's rule. On 27 November, Joao VI, accompanied by some 15,000 people, embarked on a large fleet anchored in Lisbon's harbour, ready to leave. The last ships sailed out of the Tagus River on 29 November.

### **Junot Enters Lisbon**

A few days earlier, on 24 November, Junot received intelligence that the royal family was preparing to sail and that 'all the treasures and public funds' were being embarked while Lisbon's population was increasingly confused and restless. Assembling a temporary regiment from his army's grenadier companies as well as the 70th Infantry Regiment, which seemed in better condition than most, Junot pressed ahead. The march was difficult and the French were 'harassed' at times but there was no significant resistance. Indeed, Junot had formed 'a Portuguese guard' for himself from various Portuguese army detachments he encountered on the way. On 30 November, Junot entered Lisbon with his forward party. The rest of his army followed in the next days and weeks.

By then, Joao VI was sailing towards Brazil. Napoleon and Junot were most upset that he had 'fled'. French propaganda immediately made him a scapegoat, a lackey of the British who had abandoned his people instead of embracing the wise and better values of a Napoleonic Europe. This may have been the choice of some Portuguese intellectuals and officers such as d'Alorna but the mass of the people was not convinced by Junot's proclamations. By going to Brazil, the prince and the court had taken the only course open – the alternative was to kneel before the French emperor. Better to take up residence in Rio de Janeiro and be free than to become Napoleon's prisoner.

As all Portuguese knew, Brazil was a superb country and really a parallel kingdom – which it would officially become in 1816 – rather



**The embarkation of Prince Regent Joao VI with the royal family and the court for Brazil on 27 November 1807. (Museu Militar do Porto)**

than a mere backwater colony. Its population numbered over four million people; it had large cities, seemingly endless resources, enormous expanses of still unexplored land in the interior, vast riches to exploit, and even its own armed forces. Joao VI and all who followed him were greeted with triumphant joy when they arrived in early 1808. This was not an exile for the legitimate royal family of Portugal but a new base where Portuguese independence would be preserved until such a time as the mother country was freed of the French.

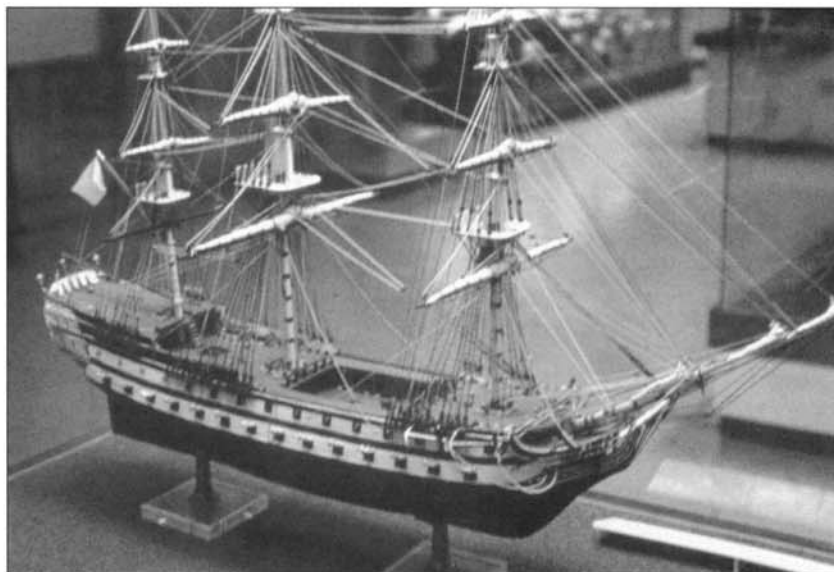
Through all this, Great Britain did little of value to help Portugal. The only tangible British presence amounted to some Royal Navy ships in the Lisbon area but this was certainly not much of an encouragement to the Portuguese. They knew there were Royal Navy vessels lurking off every coast in Europe as well as in many places around the globe. Unlike in previous crises there were no plans to send British troops and Portugal did indeed appear indefensible.

## **FRENCH OCCUPATION**

Once in control in Lisbon, Junot quickly consolidated his position. More French troops were marching in, starved and in rags, as the anti-French Portuguese bitterly digested the fact that Lisbon had been occupied with hardly any resistance by less than 2,000 French soldiers on 30 November. The two other Spanish corps now also entered Portugal, General Solano's 9,500 men occupied the south from 2 December while General Taranco's 6,500 men reached Porto on 13 December. On 15 December, Junot formally replaced the Portuguese flag with the French tricolour in Lisbon – a spontaneous riot broke out but was easily put down by French cavalry. The only other resistance was the refusal of



**Model of a 74-gun Portuguese ship-of-the-line. The fleet carrying the royal family and court to Brazil in late 1807 had three such ships (the *Rainha de Portugal*, the *Principe do Brasil* and the *Conde D. Henrique*) besides the 84-gun *Principe Real* and a number of smaller ships including four of 64 guns each. There were also four British warships sailing with the Portuguese fleet. (Museu da Marinha, Lisbon)**



the governor of Valenza to let in the Spanish until he had confirmation that Lisbon had been occupied. After a couple of weeks in Lisbon, most of the French army's 25,000 men, now well supplied and rested, were detached to various garrisons across Portugal. Spanish auxiliaries also crossed the border so that Portugal was soon occupied by 50,000 troops. The Spanish troops were uneasy with the situation however, acting as they effectively were under French orders and senior commanders. Not so the French, who saw superb opportunities for self-enrichment with this latest addition to Napoleon's empire.

The bemused Portuguese troops were simply relieved from duty. In early December, Junot had toyed with the idea of forming three Portuguese legions, each to have a line infantry and a light infantry battalion, an artillery battalion and six squadrons of cavalry but the idea was soon dismissed. Instead, on 22 December, the Portuguese regular army was disbanded and most of the men sent home. The reserve militias and *Ordonanzas* were also disbanded shortly thereafter (11 January and 10 February 1808). Only those regular soldiers having less than eight years' service were retained until they could be reorganised. From 16 January 1808, three numbered line regiments and two cavalry regiments were formed from part of the disbanded Portuguese army. On 20 February, the 4th and 5th infantry were established along with a 3rd cavalry regiment and a battalion of light infantry. This new Portuguese army in French service was placed under the command of the Marquis d'Alorna who had been made a general in the French service. On 21 March, Napoleon ordered all Portuguese troops 'formed or not' – about 8,000 men – to march out of Portugal through Spain to Bayonne and Languedoc in southern France. In Portugal itself, the only remaining Portuguese armed body of any importance was the Lisbon Police Legion, some 1,200 strong, and considered indispensable to maintain order in the capital. It was commanded by a renegade French émigré, the Count de Novion, who had rallied to Junot. Novion, who knew all about Lisbon society, became a sort of chief of the secret as well as of the public police.



Those who felt the French occupation would bring an enlightened regime of 'Liberty, Equality and Fraternity' to Portugal were to be sadly disappointed. Junot's administration proved to be a military regime with French generals governing like warlords in every sector of the country, including the areas actually occupied by the Spanish. From December onwards, everyone, from general to private soldier, began seizing and pocketing everything they could. All property in Portugal belonging to the royal family, the government and the 15,000 people that had gone to Brazil was seized by the French. This enormous booty did not satisfy Napoleon, who decreed a levy of 100,000,000 French Francs on the country. An already crippled economy was now squeezed dry, resulting in untold hardship for all classes of Portuguese. The union with Napoleonic Europe was proving an economic disaster for this largely international trading nation. No new European markets were set aside by Napoleon to make good the lost overseas trade. In the north, the wine trade with Britain was now totally ruined with no other viable outlets. And woe to those Portuguese who dared mutter or try to hide money and goods. Squads of French soldiers might appear, break down the doors and carry away the recalcitrant to torture and death. Executions of hapless Portuguese started in January 1808, barely a month into the new regime.

And there seemed no hope of relief – all the Portuguese could do was to try somehow to survive. Church leaders preached patience and forgiveness. Minor officials carried on somehow, fearful for their meagre positions and praying that the next squad of French soldiers passing by would ignore them ...

**The surrender of General Dupont's French army to General Castanos' Spanish troops at Baylen, southern Spain, on 19 July 1808, had extraordinary consequences throughout Europe. Until then, the French imperial army had seemed invincible but now, for the first time, a large French corps which included units of the Imperial Guard had been utterly beaten and forced to surrender. This victory gave hope to all in Europe who resisted Napoleon's rule. (Print after Maurice Orange)**

# REVOLT!

## SPAIN ERUPTS

It was at this point that an event took place in Madrid that would change the course of European history. By the late spring of 1808, Napoleon had attempted to secure control of the entire Iberian peninsula by seizing control of the kingdom of his Spanish ally. A series of intrigues led to the fall of Godoy and thousands of French troops poured into Spain on the pretext of defending her coast. The king, Carlos IV, and his son Ferdinand were forced to renounce the throne, and Napoleon's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, crowned King of Spain. Perhaps with the recent fate of their Portuguese neighbours in mind, the Spanish rose against French troops in Madrid on 2 May 1808. The flame of revolt was ignited and it spread like wildfire. All over Spain, French troops were attacked by an outraged populace.

When the news reached Portugal, its people were more than ready to take up arms and risk everything to oust the French. In early June word first reached Porto – perhaps the most bitterly anti-French area because of the damage to the native wine trade. The main occupation force there was a Spanish corps under French command. The Spanish soldiers were uneasy with their role as allies of the French. True, there was a bitter rivalry between the Spanish and the Portuguese after centuries of hostility, but the French, who openly despised anyone in the peninsula as almost sub-human and fit only to be exploited, robbed and kicked around, were an intolerable burden for both Spain and Portugal.



Napoleon - The Corsican Bullfighter - is being thrown by the Iberian bull to the joy of Europe's crowned heads in this caricature by J. Gillray published in 1808. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University, Providence, USA)



## RISINGS SPREAD TO PORTUGAL

Portuguese patriots rise in revolt in Braganza in early June 1808 and rally under the aged but able and popular General Manuel José Gomes de Sepulveda.

Lieutenant-General Taranco, the Spanish commander in northern Portugal, immediately mutinied with his whole corps of 6,000 Spanish troops in the city of Porto and was joined by Portuguese patriots. On 6 June, they seized the French governor of Porto, General Quesnel, with his staff and detachments of French gunners and dragoons. The Portuguese flag was raised over the fort of Sao Joao da Foz west of Porto. Taranco and his corps then marched away towards the border to join insurgent Spanish troops in western Spain. In the south, General Solano's Spanish troops evacuated Setubal and returned to Spain to fight the French there.

Thousands were joining the rising in the northern provinces of Minho and Tras os Montes. At Vila Real, Colonel Francisco de Silveira took command of the patriots on 6 June and was made general of the forces in the upper Douro valley. Two days later, Braga rose and Melgaço the next day. Patriots in Braganza asked aged General Manuel José Gomes de Sepulveda to lead them on 9 June. He had been a popular governor in the past and eagerly took up the banner against the French calling to arms all in Tras os Montes by re-forming their old regular, militia and *Ordenanza* units disbanded by the French a few months earlier. Thousand had rallied to the colours within a few days and the Portuguese flag flew again over Braganza's superb medieval castle, one of the kingdom's most powerful symbols of its independence. Meanwhile the patriots in Porto struggled to find an effective leader; finally, on 16 June, strong leadership emerged from a surprising quarter:



**General Manuel José Gomes de Sepulveda.**

the Bishop of Porto, who was to prove a most resilient leader in the difficult years to come. One of the great problems with the Portuguese resistance up to this point was the lack of leaders; many had gone to Brazil with Joao VI while others had joined the French.

The Bishop of Porto took things firmly in hand and, assisted by able senior officers and noblemen, set up a Supreme Junta on 19 June to govern the country in the name of Prince Regent Joao VI, who was immediately proclaimed the only legitimate ruler of Portugal. Other subordinate local juntas now sprang up in many places and recently retired officers and soldiers re-emerged. In the south, Colonel Lopez de Souza raised the banner of revolt at the port of Olhao on 16 June which spread rapidly to Faro, whose fortress was taken two days later. As nearly all military arms and field artillery in the country were in French hands, appeals were sent to the Spanish patriots in Andalucia and the British in Gibraltar to send whatever muskets and powder they could spare. In the meantime, fowling pieces, old pistols, swords, pikes and pitchforks would have to do.

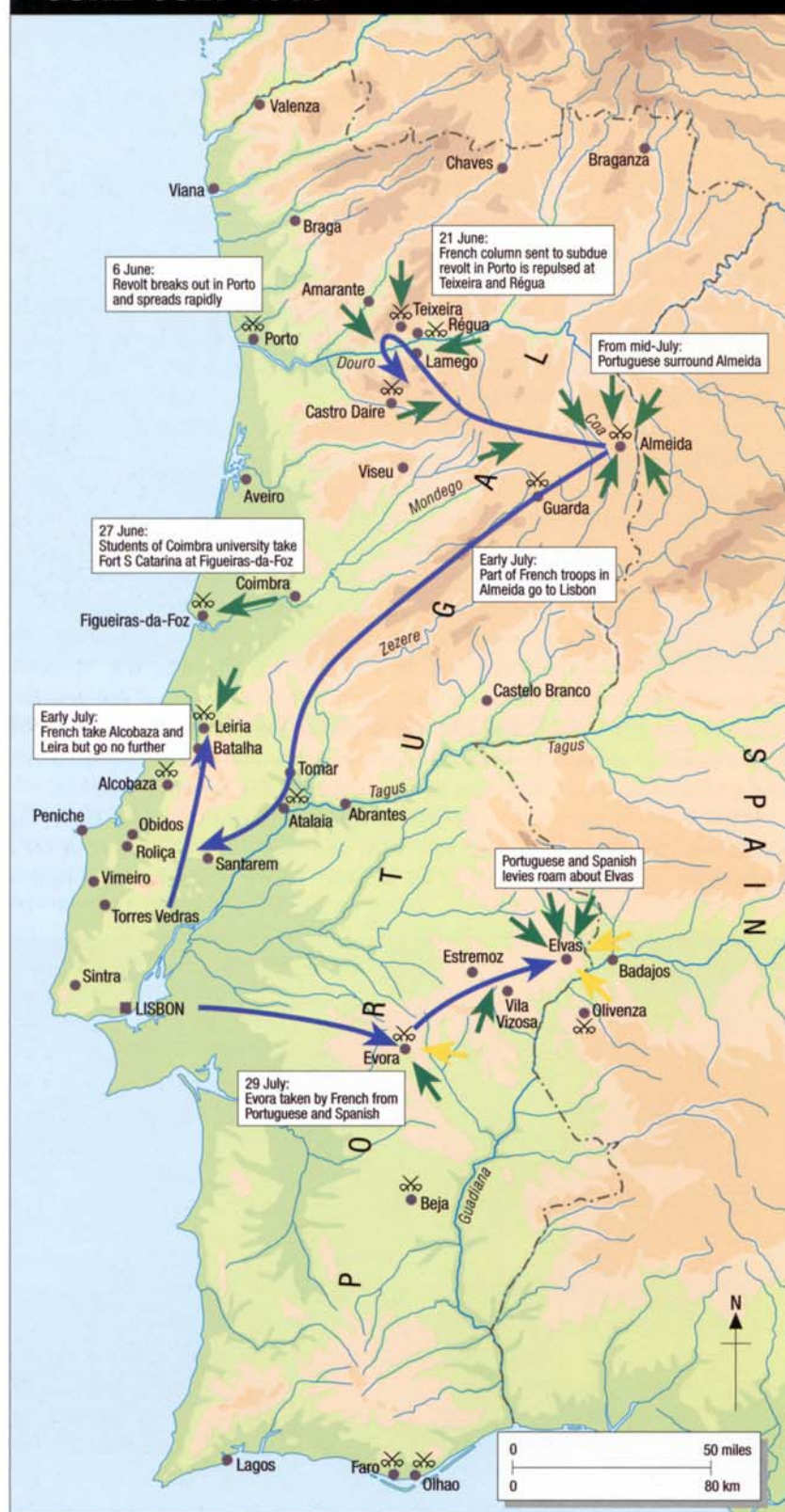
Overnight, the situation was transformed for the French. News of the rising had first reached Lisbon on 9 June and must have struck like a thunderbolt. Junot quickly took stock of his position. He had only about 25,000 French troops to hold Portugal and it was obvious the north was in full revolt. The first worry was the other Spanish corps of 7,000 men under General Caraffa posted along the Tagus River above Lisbon. To their credit, the French reacted very swiftly, surrounded the Spanish corps and disarmed it before it had been fully informed of the revolts; however one unit, the Reina Cavalry Regiment, escaped and rode north to Porto while some infantrymen of the Murcia and Valencia regiments fled to Badajos, which was now in the hands of the Spanish patriots.

The French situation was not desperate if they could hold on to Lisbon, by far the largest city with ten per cent of the country's population and perhaps half of its wealth. There was a strong French



**The old castle of Braganza was a symbol of Portuguese independence from the time when Joao IV rose against Spain in 1640. It was again the HQ of patriot forces in northeastern Portugal from 1808. (Photo: RC)**

## JUNE–JULY 1808



The Bishop of Porto, Don Antonio de Sao José de Castro (1754–1843) played a leading role in the uprising in Portugal of 1808. He was a fine administrator who imposed order on the rising in northern Portugal by setting up a provisional government council and having senior officers establish a coherent military organisation around which the people could rally. (Museu Militar do Porto)

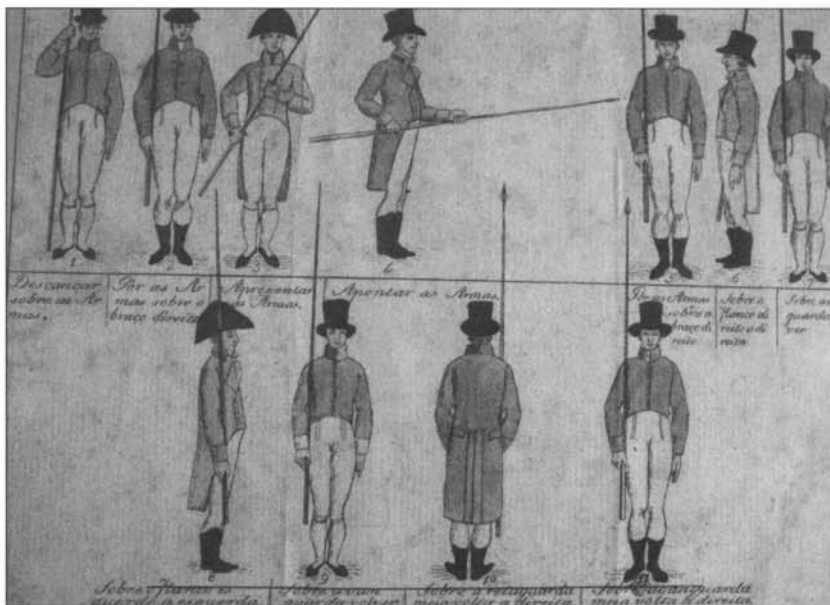
The character of the Portuguese insurrection of 1808 is illustrated in this old print. Civilians of all classes armed largely with makeshift edged weapons rose up everywhere. A few soldiers with an officer can be seen in uniform symbolising the re-establishing of the army disbanded by the French. At lower left, note the dead French soldier clutching his chest full of loot. (Print after N. Silva)



garrison of about 10,000 men in the city and its surrounding area. Unusually a substantial Russian fleet had arrived from operations in the Adriatic and was currently anchored in Lisbon harbour. Under the command of Vice-Admiral Alexis Seniavin, this fleet boasted an 80-gun ship, six of 74 guns, two of 66 guns plus smaller support vessels manned by about 6,000 sailors and marines. There were 150 men landed from each ship in Lisbon. No one knew how the Russians would react. Ten months earlier, Napoleon and Czar Alexander I had signed the peace treaty of Tilsit hoping to establish friendly relations. Russia had declared war on Britain but it was merely a gesture to please Napoleon; in reality no offensive actions were taken and Russia was more of a neutral power at this time. Russia was militarily much more powerful than other nominally neutral countries in Europe and Britain was anxious to avoid her siding with France. British warships off Lisbon observed the Russian warships but avoided any direct challenge. Junot naturally wanted the Russians to side with his forces but they kept their distance while professing cordial relations. Vice-Admiral Seniavin told a perplexed Junot that his fleet could not take on the stronger Royal Navy but would help defend Lisbon if the British ships attacked the city — an unlikely scenario. As for fighting the Portuguese, the Russian admiral would have no part of it. Russia was not at war with Portugal and had not formally recognised its occupation.

For the French to maintain their position in Portugal, it was important to secure the great fortresses of Elvas and Almeida on the Spanish border, those of Figueira da Foz and Peniche on the coast and certain key towns to ensure that lines of communication remained open. If this could be done, the country might be held no matter what went on elsewhere in the countryside. Most of these places were already in French hands, some with weak garrisons, while others, such as the

Pike drill by militiamen, probably in Porto, c.1808–10. Firearms were scarce and pikes were the weapons available to most Portuguese insurgents in 1808. (Museu Militar do Porto)



fortress of Almeida, had up to 4,000 men. Junot issued orders to tighten his grip on the country: from Almeida, General Loison was to reoccupy Porto, where he would be joined by troops moving up from Torres Vedras; the garrison of Elvas fortress was reinforced; further south, Estremoz and Evora were to be occupied and troops deployed at the mouth of the Guadiana River as well as along the coast near Faro.

## TEIXEIRA AND RÉGUA

As ordered by Junot, General Loison marched out from Almeida on 17 June with some 1,800 men (according to French sources; 2,600 according to the Portuguese) to crush the revolt in the north and take Porto. His force was harassed but carried on towards Porto, reaching Lamego on 19 June. As it approached the Douro River from the south, the already mountainous terrain became even steeper although, as the French neared Régua (also called Peso da Régua or Regoa) on the 20th, they were now in a populous rural area with hamlets dotted everywhere on its steep hills and mountains whose sides were shaped like stairways into the rock. On each of these 'steps' were planted vineyards for this area in the upper Douro was and remains the heart of the Porto wine-growing estates.

Early in the morning of 21 June, Loison and his troops crossed the Douro River at the ford at Régua and occupied the town. By now the French could see that its overlooking hills on the northern bank of the Douro were alive with thousands of hostile Portuguese. Loison nevertheless marched west hugging the north bank of the Douro and then turned north at Mesao Frio to march up to Amarante. The French were marching in the valley with hundreds of Portuguese shadowing them on the hills above. As they marched into more mountainous country, they saw even more Portuguese on the steep hills ahead as they reached the small village of Teixeira. The valley ended there; to go



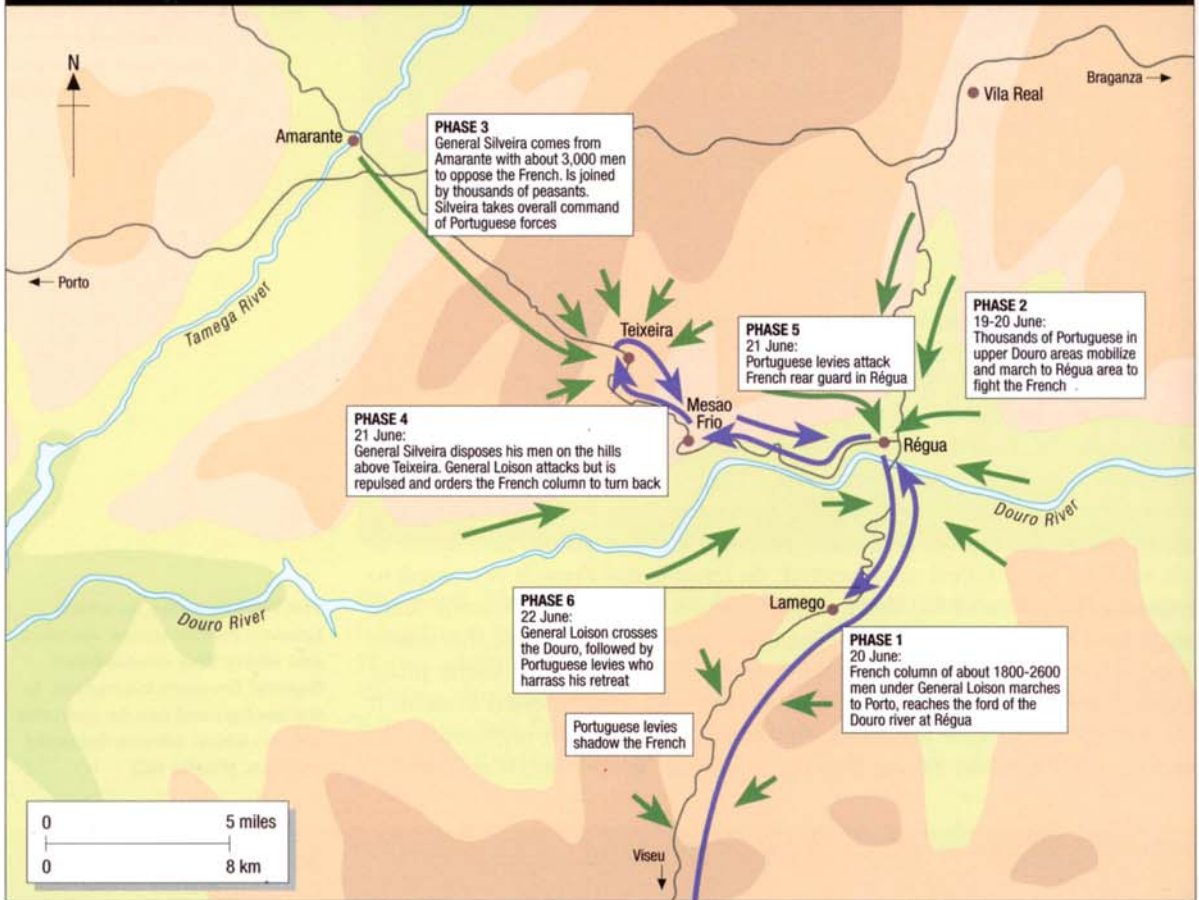
further, Loison's troops had to climb the steep hill ahead. General Francisco de Silveira had come down from Amarante with about 3,000 men and had chosen this spot just beyond the village to make a stand. Silveira disposed his men in a wide crescent spanning the heights which dominated Teixeira from three sides. They were positioned in echelon as far as possible with raw levies. It was nevertheless an excellent position and very tiring for the attacker who had to approach up a steep, high hill. The question was: would his untried, badly armed and ill-disciplined men be able to stand the French bayonet charges?

The French certainly did not think so. If they attacked the Portuguese centre in front of them, they were confident of carrying it and reasoned the whole Portuguese force would panic and flee. This had been the usual course of events up to then. Loison's light infantry therefore advanced and some of the Portuguese, mostly badly armed peasants, were scattered but, as the French climbed and increasingly lost their impetus, they found still more Portuguese, many of whom had firearms as well as edged weapons. There were even two field pieces served by six gunners in Silveira's makeshift force. There followed a sharp action during which Loison received a slight wound and some of his soldiers were killed or wounded. At length, the French retreated to regroup. Loison and his men could now see a multitude – some have suggested as many as 20,000 Portuguese were there although this seems a greatly exaggerated number and around 10,000 would seem more likely. Some rather astonishing intelligence had also reached Loison: it seemed that several of the disbanded Portuguese regular regiments had been reorganized in Porto. Equally worrying, the formerly disbanded

**The Teixeira valley up which Loison's French troops marched and where they encountered General Silveira's insurgents. In the background can be seen the hills on which Silveira deployed his men. (Photo: RC)**



## TEIXEIRA AND RÉGUA, 20–22 JUNE 1808



militia regiments and *Ordenanza* brigades in the north were also said to have been re-established and, at that moment looking at the nearby hills, it seemed true.

Meanwhile, the French column's baggage train, which was to the rear at Régua, was attacked and its escort nearly overwhelmed by a large number of Portuguese. It seems Silveira had managed to coordinate this attack on Loison's rear to create a diversion and perhaps even to cut his retreat. With only two battalions of the 2nd and 4th Light Infantry, six field guns and 50 troopers of the 5th Dragoons, Loison was substantially outnumbered. Normally, such a force of regulars would expect to scatter any hostile gathering of peasants but the Portuguese, with the advantages of terrain and Silveira's leadership, had held their own against Loison's regulars at Teixeira and Régua. He now risked being cut off and totally isolated. It was obvious that his force was far too small to go any further and Loison reluctantly ordered a retreat into Régua.

The next day, 22 June, General Silveira and his men were overlooking Régua but kept their distance as the Portuguese general knew his troops did not have the arms or the training to face French regulars in a formal engagement. Loison realised that should his men attack up the cliffs they risked being overwhelmed. The French could not afford to lose two battalions and Loison wisely decided to recross the Douro



Portuguese troops, largely Ordenanza peasants, under Brigadier-General Silveira stopped General Loison's French column marching towards Porto on the upper Douro River in June 1808. This painting attributed to Joao Baptista Ribiero most probably shows the triumphant patriots after driving the French out of Régua on 22 June. In the foreground, an unfortunate French soldier near a dead Portuguese is set upon by a couple of vengeful peasants. The militant friar at right is probably José Joaquim da Assumpsam, who was a noted leader of the patriots. Note the typical boats used to carry Port wine barrels on the Douro River in the background. (Museu Militar do Porto)

southwards and return to Almeida by way of Lamego and Colerico. The Douro was crossed after plundering Régua and the nearby villages but the Portuguese pursued the French so closely they lost most of their baggage and plunder in a succession of isolated actions during subsequent days. A friar, José Joaquim da Assumpsam, played a 'most distinguished part' in this fighting according to Halliday's account. Loison scattered some Portuguese who unwisely tried to make a stand at the town of Castro Daire, where the French claimed they inflicted some 400 Portuguese casualties. Loison finally reached the fortress of Almeida safely on 1 July but Silveira had clearly conducted a close pursuit as the French had lost around 300 casualties and two howitzers in the retreat.

## FRENCH REPRISALS

Elsewhere, on 26 June, Vila Vizosa rose in revolt and besieged a company of the French 86th Line Infantry Regiment in its ancient castle. They were relieved by a French column led by General Avril consisting of three other companies of the 86th, 50 dragoons and artillerymen with a field gun. A bayonet charge by the French troops scattered the poorly armed and disorganised Portuguese patriots. Another rising took place at Beja, also on 26 June, but Colonel Jean-Pierre Maransin with 950 men managed to crush the revolt by shooting and stabbing anything that moved and then set part of the town on fire. The French reported killing 1,200 Portuguese for a loss of 80 soldiers.

Junot and his staff officers grasping the seriousness of the uprisings in Spain and Portugal, decided to regroup the French army in the vicinity

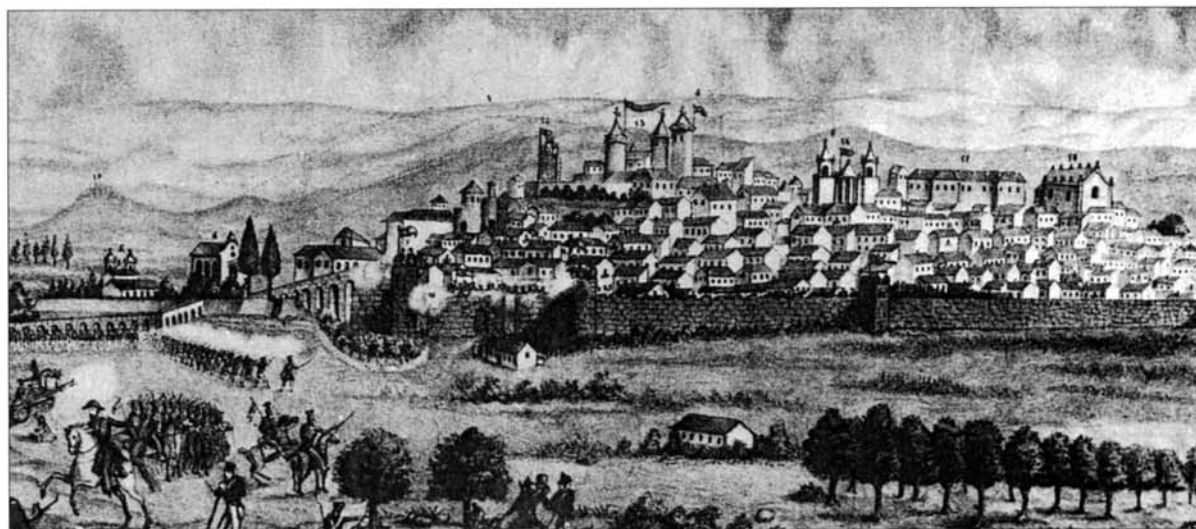


**Brigadier-General Francisco da Silveira (1763-1821) commanded the Portuguese troops, such as they were, in the upper Douro which stopped the French at Teixeira and Régua in June 1808. The following year, again commanding mostly ill-armed and undisciplined Ordenanza peasants, he fought a stubborn action delaying the French at the bridge at Amarante east of Porto. He was made Count of Amarante in 1811 by Joao VI for his distinguished services.**

**Evora, taken by General Loison's French troops on 29 July 1808.**

of Lisbon while maintaining strong garrisons in the fortresses of Almeida, Elvas and Peniche. After blowing up the nearby Spanish fort of La Concepcion so the insurgents would not be able to use it and leaving about 1,200 men to garrison Almeida, Loison marched out on 4 July with the light infantry battalions, the 32nd Line Infantry, the 4th Swiss Infantry and the dragoon and artillery detachments. He met some resistance at Guarda, but poorly armed militias could hardly resist well-armed veteran French regulars and Guarda was taken at bayonet point, sacked and partly burned. The rest of Loison's march followed the same pattern and he left a path of destruction and horror in his wake. Those inhabitants of the village of Atalaya who could not escape for example were all massacred following Loison's order that neither man, woman nor child should be spared. Reaching Santarem, French troops under generals Kellerman, Thomières and Brenier came under Loison's command. The 4th Swiss was posted at Peniche, the 2nd Light Infantry at Obidos, the 4th Light Infantry at Santarem and the 32nd Line Infantry at Abrantes. The other troops regrouped and formed a mobile force.

Meanwhile, General of Division Margaron with about 4,000 men from the 12th Light Infantry and 92nd Line Infantry, four elite companies from the 47th and 58th line infantry, two squadrons of dragoons and chasseurs and artillerymen with six cannons had marched to Leiria which he took after overcoming stubborn resistance from its badly armed citizens. Enraged by such resistance, Leiria was left to the 'fury of the troops' and many who did not flee were murdered in cold blood in their houses or in the streets on 5 July. The French reported killing 900 men and taking all the Portuguese colours. Tomar was spared after paying a huge ransom but more patriots were gathering at nearby Alcobaza. Learning this, Junot ordered Kellerman and Loison to march on Alcobaza. Kellerman's corps consisted of the 3rd Provisional Dragoon Regiment, two battalions of 70th Line Infantry, a battalion each from the 15th and 58th line infantry regiments and two cannons. Margaron joined him and, on 10 July, the French easily scattered what they claimed as up to 15,000 Portuguese at Alcobaza.



The French were then to march to Coimbra but Junot now recalled Kellerman. Numerous British warships had been sighted approaching Lisbon and rumours of a British landing were widespread. From Santarem, Loison also marched northwards with his troops but, beyond Leiria, intelligence reached him that a more powerful combined Spanish and Portuguese corps was marching to meet him. This was no more than a rumour but was effective nonetheless and the French army turned back towards Lisbon, a brigade being left at Peniche, Obidos and Caldas.

### **Evora's Terrible Fate**

By late July, the French had regrouped in the vicinity of Lisbon but were now worried that they might be cut off from Spain. Evora was the Portuguese HQ in the southeast and could block the way if the French had to retreat from Lisbon to Spain. Junot sent Loison with over 7,000 men to take Evora, which he reached on 29 July. Evora was defended by less than 3,000 so-called regular troops under General Leite, half of them Spanish sent from Badajos. Leite was a former naval officer and his troops lacked the experience and armaments available to the seasoned French troops. There were several thousand more Portuguese peasants and townsmen mostly armed with pikes and knives. The Portuguese and Spanish 'regulars' drew up in a line of battle outside the town, much to Loison's surprise and pleasure, who had expected to besiege Evora. The Portuguese and Spanish were promptly scattered by the first French charge led by the 58th Line Infantry, the Spanish Maria-Luisa Hussars riding off in panic without fighting while the Spanish infantry resisted obstinately. Leite and most of his men managed to retreat to Olivenza. The rest fled to Evora hoping to stop the French by defending its medieval walls. Summoned to surrender, the defenders chose to fight and a first French assault was repulsed. The city's gates were captured in the second assault and the fighting spread into the streets of the town. The Portuguese levies were soon overwhelmed by the French troops and the attack degenerated into horrific scenes as French soldiers pursued and bayoneted defenceless old men, women, children and babies in a mad, frenzied blood-lust. The slaughter was great, the city sacked, and its inhabitants put to the sword in what the Portuguese called 'major atrocities'. French accounts mention losing 100 killed and 200 wounded and killing 3,000 or 4,000 Portuguese and Spaniards besides making 4,000 prisoners. Oman gives a figure of 2,000 killed but the true number will never be known. Many times before Loison had sanctioned wanton and cruel deeds to cow the people by sheer terror. Nearby Estremoz and other small towns were defenceless and submitted. The terrible fate of Evora was soon known throughout Portugal. The short-term effects of the resulting terror were outweighed by the steely determination it forged in the Portuguese to fight the French to the end. As for Loison – nicknamed 'Maneta' in Portugal – to this day, his name is cursed in that country.

While this drama was unfolding in the south, there were clashes elsewhere. In Lisbon, a riot broke out during a religious procession on 16 June which, although put down, revealed how nervous the population was. To the north-east, the fortress of Almeida was surrounded from 16 July by thousands of Portuguese soldiers and militiamen. The great fortress of Elvas was also loosely blockaded by similar numbers of Portuguese and Spanish insurgents.



**Major-General Francisco de Paula Leite (1747-1833) had spent most of his life serving as a naval officer, which is perhaps why he seemed somewhat unfamiliar with field manoeuvres at Evora, but he did manage to save the remainder of his inexperienced force. During his naval career, he saw action against the Marathas in Portuguese India during the 1770s and Algerian pirates in the 1780s. In 1799, he was made major-general in the army and went into semi-retirement as governor of Fort St. Felipe in Setubal. He took up arms again in 1808. Later appreciated by Wellington as an efficient commander, he was made governor of the important border fortress of Elvas during the 1810-1811 campaign. (Museu Militar do Porto)**



**ABOVE** The fortress at the port of Peniche remained in French hands during the Vimeiro campaign. Situated north of Lisbon, Peniche was an ideal landing site for the British but its fortifications were much too strong to attempt an attack. (Photo: RC)



**LEFT** Elvas was Portugal's great border fortress facing southern Spain. The buildings outside the walls are modern but the city within the elaborate fortifications remains a remarkable historic site. Elvas also had two large flanking citadels, Fort La Lippe, which is on top of the hill in the background, and Fort St. Lucia, from where this photo was taken. Considered impregnable, Elvas was blockaded by Portuguese and Spanish levies in August 1808. (Photo: RC)

Students at the University of Coimbra under the leadership of a former artillery sergeant, Bernardo Zagalo, rose in revolt in early June and re-formed their volunteer militia unit, which dated back to the 1640s. They then proceeded to the coastal fort of Santa Catarina at Figueira da Foz, west of Coimbra, which was held by a small French garrison. The students certainly could not storm the place but neither could the French soldiers break their blockade. So the students decided to starve them out. On 27 June, the French surrendered. The students' brave action was to have considerable consequences. The capture of Figueira da Foz guaranteed that a British force could now land safely in Portugal.

## THE BRITISH ARRIVE

Unlike November 1807 and Junot's invasion, the British were now closely following the unfolding events in the peninsula and in Portugal



**Fort Santa Catarina in Figueira da Foz, built in the 16th century, was taken by the students of Coimbra University in July 1808. This proved vitally important to the campaign as it provided Wellesley's British force a safe place to land in early August. The lighthouse was added later in the 19th century. (Photo: RC)**

in particular. This time, the British were ready to send an expeditionary force. As soon as news came of the revolts, Lord Castlereagh and the Duke of York made preparations for such a move; some 10,000 troops had been gathered for an expedition to South America and they were redirected to the peninsula, sailing from Cork, Ireland, on 12 July. Lieutenant-Colonel S. Brown was already in Porto meeting with the bishop and his officers, gathering all the intelligence he could which he passed on to Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Wellesley, commanding the troops sent from Cork. The ships carrying this contingent were now approaching the coast of Portugal and joined Sir Charles Cotton's fleet off Lisbon. Brown's reports on the strength of the French in Portugal, estimated at some 15,000, were low but his arrival in Porto with the news that a British force was on the way raised spirits enormously all across Portugal. Acting on these reports, Wellesley himself landed at Porto on 24 July to meet with the bishop and the Portuguese senior officers. It was agreed that as soon as the British landed, about 5,000 Portuguese from Porto would be sent to support his forces while another strong contingent would blockade Almeida so that Wellesley's left flank would be secure.

Wellesley's troops from Cork were not the only ones earmarked for the peninsula: some 4,800 men under Brigadier-Generals R. Anstruther and W. Acland sailed from Ramsgate and Harwich in England. Another 5,100 men under Major-General Brent Spencer had come to Gibraltar from Sicily (also held by the British and the Bourbon King of Naples' forces). When the uprisings broke out in Spain, sending Spencer's force to help the Spanish in Cadiz was considered. At that point in time, the Spanish in Andalucia under General Castanos had just triumphed over General Dupont's French army at Baylen on 19 July – a victory that had prodigious effects as it destroyed the reputation for invincibility the French troops had gained for themselves all over Europe up to then. British assistance was not so needed in southern Spain and Spencer's force was sent to Portugal. Finally, another British force of some 11,000



men under Sir John Moore was later directed to join the other British contingents about to land in Portugal.

The site of the landing was crucial. Porto was too far north. Ideally, Wellesley would have liked Peniche but its strong fortress, garrisoned by the French, would have prevented 'the disembarkation under the shelter of that peninsula' so Figueira da Foz, which had been captured by the students of the University of Coimbra, was chosen. Its importance to the British was considerable and 400 Royal Marines had been landed to strengthen its garrison by mid-July. On 1 August, some 70 sails bearing Wellesley's 8,700 men anchored at the estuary of the Mondego River. The rifle units were the first to land at Figueira da Foz followed by other units. The British landing encountered difficulties due to the strong surf at Mondego Bay and several boats were upset. The landing was completed on 5 August, but the next day another British fleet bearing the 5,400 men from Gibraltar under MajGen Spencer appeared from the south. By 8 August the landings were complete including the 24 guns and all baggage and provisions.

The British now had over 14,000 men at Figueira da Foz, the largest contingent they had ever sent to Portugal. The Portuguese were gathering their army and while figures were vague, about 26,000 regulars and militias were said to have mustered in the north. However, they lacked money, arms, ammunition, clothing, equipment and even food. Under these conditions, they would hardly make an effective force. Still, at last, here was the chance to save Portugal and strike a blow against the 'invincible' French army.

**British troops landing at Figueira da Foz in early August 1808. Detail from a period print. (Bussaco Military Museum)**



# OPPOSING COMMANDERS

## THE FRENCH



General Andoche Junot, Duke of Abrantes (1771–1813), commander-in-chief of the French forces in Portugal, 1807–1808. Print after an 1804 sketch by David.

**Andoche Junot, Duke of Abrantes** (1771–1813) was born in Burgundy, read law in Dijon, volunteered in 1792 and met Napoleon Bonaparte at the siege of Toulon in 1793 as a corporal in the Côte d'Or Battalion (see *Osprey Military Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 5). He became Napoleon's ADC and campaigned in Italy and Egypt by which time he had risen to the rank of general of division. One of Napoleon's closest friends during his early career, Junot became governor of Paris during the Consulate and colonel-general of hussars in August 1804, decorated grand eagle of the Legion of Honour in 1805 and also of the Order of Christ of Portugal where he was France's ambassador. Back with the Grande Armée in the fall of 1805, he took part in the triumphant Austerlitz campaign. Although a good soldier, Junot was not an outstanding tactician nor a master strategist and this is probably why Napoleon never made him a marshal. Nevertheless, he frequently commanded large army corps and had marshal-like powers although his own staff felt he was 'a good cavalry officer, but nothing more'.

When Napoleon wished to resolve the Portuguese question in the later part of 1807, he naturally turned to his old friend Junot, who was certainly the most qualified to deal with this. His knowledge of Portugal and his influence over the Portuguese nobility indeed brought over the country without resistance when he appeared with a French army in November 1807. He was named Duke of Abrantes by Napoleon for his successful and bloodless campaign. While pleased, Napoleon became increasingly concerned about rumours concerning the behaviour of his troops in Portugal. In May 1808, he wrote to Junot: 'I have learned that you have generals that loot, put some order to this.' But Napoleon was far from Lisbon ... The harsh rule and excesses of the French generals and their troops ensured that the country would revolt at the first opportunity. The subsequent campaign curtailed Junot's ambitions when he had to surrender to the British. It was only thanks to General Kellerman's negotiating skills that the conditions were so favourable to the French. Napoleon forgave Junot and, in 1812, he was in command of the 8th Army Corps in Russia. Made governor of the Illyrian Provinces in 1813, he had by then become increasingly erratic, possibly because of old head wounds, and was brought back to France. On 29 July, he committed suicide by jumping out of a window in a fit of delirium.

**Henri-François Delaborde** (1764–1833) was born in Dijon, educated for the priesthood but went off to join the army and was a corporal in the Condé Infantry Regiment in 1789. Soon promoted, he was a staff officer at the 1793 siege of Toulon and saw much service in campaigns that took him to Spain and Germany where he achieved field rank. A commander of the Legion of Honour in 1804, he came to Portugal with Junot after a period of regional commands in Rennes. He suffered from rheumatism,



General of division Henri-François Delaborde (1764–1833), commander of the French forces which fought at Roliça on 17 August 1808. (Col. Jacques Ostiguy Collection, Ottawa)



ABOVE, LEFT **General of Division Paul Thiébault** was chief of staff of the French army in Portugal during 1807–1808. Born in 1769, Thiébault enlisted as a private in 1792 and rose from the ranks, served as a staff officer and became brigadier-general in 1799. He received the Legion of Honour in 1804 and was wounded at Austerlitz in 1805. Promoting him General of Division in 1807, Napoleon nevertheless advised Junot to keep an eye on Thiébault as he had shown a weakness for loot. He was also a competent staff officer and he fought bravely at Vimeiro. He later served with distinction in Spain and Germany. Thiébault was also a man of letters interested in history. In Spain, he had the tomb of El Cid restored and was later made doctor of the University of Salamanca for his history of that institution. He continued to serve on the French army's general staff after 1815 and wrote many works including an account of the campaigns in Portugal and Spain, whose figures are unfortunately often exaggerated.

ABOVE, CENTRE **General of Division Jean-Baptiste-Maurice Loison** (1771–1816) was a talented soldier but a cruel man. This print shows him in about 1800.



ABOVE **General of Division François Kellerman** (1770–1825), cavalry commander and negotiator of the Sintra Convention. (Camara da Almeida)

having at times to travel in a litter, but a whiff of gunpowder always seemed to revive his warlike spirit. It was said that Junot and Delaborde hated each other. He was certainly a brave commander and his skill at defensive fighting gave Wellesley's far superior force a lot of trouble at Roliça. He later served in Spain, Russia, Germany and at Toulouse in 1814.

**Jean-Baptiste-Maurice Loison** (1771–1816) was born in Damvillier (Meuse), volunteered in 1792, was commissioned sub-lieutenant in the 94th Demi-Brigade and rose through the ranks by his sheer bravery in many campaigns, notably in Italy and in the 1805 Austerlitz campaign. Wounded several times, he had by then lost an arm in combat. He came to Portugal with Junot as a general of division in late 1807. He was a shrewd though quick-witted and determined soldier of considerable tactical ability. He could move a body of men safely and quite rapidly in the most hostile countryside, outwitting the partisans at every move. He was a redoubtable opponent who would immediately profit from his enemy's mistakes. After serving in Portugal and Spain, he fought with distinction in Russia in 1812, in Germany in 1813 and held Hamburg in 1814. He retired as a much-decorated hard-fighting soldier, but there was a darker side to Loison: he was a cruel individual who manifestly enjoyed the death of innocents. Nicknamed 'Maneta' by the Portuguese since he had one arm, his notoriety was never forgotten. To this day, a popular saying in Portugal: 'Foi para o Maneta' – 'Brought in to see Maneta' – is uttered as black humour when things are going really wrong. This deranged man believed that wanton force, especially against the weak and defenceless, was the only solution to subdue the Portuguese. Encouraged by their leader, his soldiers increasingly lost all sense of decency and humanity.

**François Kellerman** (1770–1825) was the son of Marshal Kellerman (1735–1820). He first worked in Washington in the French embassy between 1790 and 1793, then went into the army and served as a staff



**Brigadier-General Pierre Margaron (1765–1824)** was a cavalry officer promoted to field rank in 1805. He took Leiria in early July 1808 during the French attempts to repress the Portuguese patriots. He commanded the division of French cavalry at Vimeiro, later serving in Spain and Germany.



**Arthur Wellesley (1769–1852)** the future Duke of Wellington when lieutenant-colonel of the 33rd Foot, c. 1795. The uniform of the 33rd was scarlet with scarlet facings, silver buttons and lace. (Print after John Hoppner)

officer in Napoleon's 1796–1797 Italian campaign. Noted as a talented cavalry officer, he was a cavalry brigadier-general at Marengo in 1800 but was badly wounded at Austerlitz in 1805. Recovered, he was promoted general of division and commanded the somewhat paltry French cavalry in Portugal in 1807–1808. He was a skilled negotiator and certainly outwitted British Lieutenant-General Dalrymple during the negotiations that followed Vimeiro and culminated in the Sintra (or Cintra) Convention which Kellerman signed for Junot. He later served bravely in Spain, Germany and France in 1813–1814 and charged with the cuirassiers at Quatre Bras the following year. One of Napoleon's best cavalry commanders, Kellerman remained loyal to the emperor and was retired after Waterloo.

## THE BRITISH

**Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Wellesley (1769–1852).** The future Duke of Wellington was born in Ireland. He belonged to an influential family and, after attending Eton and the military school in Angers (Belgium), he went into the army in 1787. His first campaign was in Holland during 1794–1795 where he commanded the 33rd Foot but his career took a different course when his regiment went to India in 1796. In May 1798, his elder brother, Lord Mornington (later Marquis Wellesley) was named governor-general in India. Wellesley was thus propelled to senior rank in the Indian army and participated in the siege of Seringapatam in 1799. It was in 1803, when put in command of the forces to subdue the Mahrattas in central India, that Wellesley's exceptional talents in the field were first revealed. By then a major-general, he besieged and took four fortresses and triumphed in the field at Assaye (23 September) and Argaum (29 November) against greatly superior numbers of Mahrattas. Hailed in India and knighted the following year, Wellesley was back in England in 1806 seeking new opportunities. These were relatively few but he did command a brigade at the British raid on Copenhagen in 1807. Gazetted lieutenant-general, he was still seen as a 'Sepoy General' but lobbied for his own command. With Spain and Portugal exploding in general uprisings against the French in May 1808, the opportunity came and he was put in command of the troops sailing from Ireland to Portugal in July. However, Sir Harry Burrard and Sir Hew Dalrymple were senior to young Wellesley and he was superseded the day of the battle of Vimeiro.

Wellesley's short time in command of the British contingent in Portugal, up until 21 August, was nevertheless to prove most crucial. In those few weeks, he managed to strike hard at Junot's army. One of Wellesley's misunderstandings may have been to assume that the Portuguese would automatically be under his orders. However, Wellesley did not let this distract him. He took the initiative, fully exploiting the numerical superiority he enjoyed, keeping Junot on the defensive and using terrain with unusual skill. Most of all, British officers and enlisted men immediately sensed that this general, when in the field, was an exceptional leader. Young William Warre, who wrote to his father after the battle of Vimeiro about 'our noble general, whose gallantry and conduct is almost impossible to give an idea', sums it up nicely.



ABOVE **Brigadier-General Rowland Hill (1772–1842).** A brigadier in the Vimeiro campaign, Hill went on to become Wellington's most trusted general. Print after a portrait taken later in life.

Sir Harry Burrard and Sir Hew Dalrymple were good career officers but there was nothing exceptional about them. This was amply proven by events following Wellesley's victory at Vimeiro. Burrard, appointed second-in-command to Dalrymple, arrived to take command the day of the battle and compromised its results. Dalrymple, the senior officer, then arrived and took command from Burrard the day after the battle of Vimeiro. He had served mostly in various staff functions. His only campaign had been in Flanders in 1793 commanding a grenadier battalion of the Foot Guards. In 1808, by now a lieutenant-general on the staff at Gibraltar, he was appointed to command the army in Portugal by virtue of his seniority – an unfortunate decision. Dalrymple was hesitant and prone to compromise with the French. He also ignored the Portuguese which caused a considerable rift in the allied camp following the Sintra Convention.

Several of the British field commanders in the short Vimeiro campaign obviously impressed Wellesley by their good services and would serve again with him in future campaigns. Rowland Hill rose to become the future duke's most trusted commander. Miles Nightingall later fought at Fuentes de Onoro before going on to India. Nicholas



LEFT **Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Wellesley, 1804–1806,** the future Duke of Wellington. Although shown in a full dress general's uniform, Wellesley was usually seen in very plain dress. He also wore his hair short and unpowdered as shown, for reasons of hygiene it was said, instead of the regulation powder and queues. (Print after both Robert Home's 1804 portrait painted in Calcutta and John Hoppner's 1806 portrait)



ABOVE **Lieutenant-General Sir Hew W. Dalrymple (1750–1830)** took command of the British army in Portugal after the battle of Vimeiro had been fought. He signed the controversial Sintra Convention on 30 August 1808. (Print after J. Jackson)

LEFT **Lieutenant-Colonel C.D. Taylor (1772–1808)** commanded the 20th Light Dragoons during the campaign. He was killed at the battle of Vimeiro. (From an 1809 print)



**General Bernardim Freire de Andrade e Castro (1759–1809), commander-in-chief of the northern Portuguese forces in 1808. His suspicious attitude towards the British was not appreciated by Wellesley and he angrily denounced the shameful Sintra Convention which certainly vindicated his misgivings.**

Trant – captain in July and lieutenant-colonel in August – proved to be an able commander of Portuguese troops. Sir Denis Pack, who commanded the 71st at Roliça and Vimeiro, went on to field rank later in the peninsula and was at Waterloo. A competent but not flamboyant officer, Brigadier-General Catlin Craufurd of this campaign should not be confused with Robert Craufurd who later commanded the Light Division. Catlin Craufurd later commanded a brigade in Wellington's army from September 1809 until his death a year later.

## **THE PORTUGUESE**

**Bernardim Freire de Andrade e Castro** (1759–1809) had campaigned in Roussillon in 1794–1795. He came out of retirement when appointed by the Supreme Junta in Porto as senior general of the Portuguese forces in the north on 11 July 1808. Considered a hindrance by British historians and a hero of the resistance against the French by Portuguese historians, General Freire is best described as a fiery and uncompromising patriot. He did a great deal to re-establish and organise the Portuguese troops and exerted great efforts to obtain money from public donations and whatever arms and ammunition could be found. His talents as a tactician seem to have been modest but one should consider that his forces in 1808 were largely volunteers without military experience, modern arms and supplies. General Freire loudly and rightly denounced the Sintra Convention negotiated by General Dalrymple. He foresaw and resented the influence of the British, which would become overwhelming in Portugal. He died in 1809 in tragic circumstances, lynched by a crazed mob in Braga.

No other outstanding general emerged to take overall command of the Portuguese troops during the Vimeiro campaign. The Bishop of Porto was certainly not a soldier but he had the influence and the administrative talent to rally the various factions in the north. Otherwise, leaders emerged locally in various areas but could not be brought under a unified command, the country being much too disorganised. General Francisco da Silveira was the most talented as seen at Teixeira and destined to become one of the leading Portuguese generals of the war. General Francisco de Paula Leite, defeated at Evora, learned much and was later to gain the esteem of Wellington.

# OPPOSING ARMIES

## THE FRENCH

In the autumn of 1807, the French army seemed invincible. Led by Napoleon, it had triumphed in all its recent campaigns in continental Europe. Thus, to conquer and occupy Portugal was not considered a great challenge. The 1st Corps of Observation of the Gironde, renamed 'Army of Portugal', had three infantry divisions under generals Delaborde, Loison and Travot, a small cavalry division under General Kellerman plus some artillery, train and other support troops for a total of 24,918 men. Most of the units were French but there were two Swiss, one Italian (the Légion du Midi) and one Hanoverian battalions. The 4th Swiss proved especially discontented with its French service as would be seen at Roliça. Apart from the foreign infantry, the force was generally made up of fairly recent drafts of conscripts which often made up the 3rd battalions of French imperial infantry regiments. By the middle of 1808, most of these men had been about eight months in Portugal, many having been in action against the Portuguese insurgents in June and July.

The French imperial army probably had the most elaborate command system of its time. There were several 'armies' assigned to large geographic areas. Each army was subdivided into corps, each of which had three or four divisions, each division having several brigades, each brigade containing three or four battalions. Thus, Junot's 'Army of Portugal' was really a corps. It officially became the 8th Corps of the 'Army of Spain' in October 1808 while keeping its original name.

In 1807–1808, each French line or light infantry regiment usually had an establishment of three service battalions and a depot battalion. From 18 February 1808, this was raised to five battalions (four on service and one as depot). The service battalions had a company of grenadiers, one of voltigeurs and four of fusiliers, the depot battalion having four fusilier companies, all companies 140 men including three officers. With battalion staff, eagle bearers and musicians, the regimental establishment totalled a theoretical 3,908 men including 78 officers. In practice, this translated into battalions hovering between 550 and 1,400

BELOW French elite infantrymen, full dress, c.1807–1811. At left, a grenadier of the line infantry. Grenadiers wore basically the same uniform as fusiliers, but with red epaulettes and red grenades on the turnbacks. They wore a bearskin cap with a brass plate in front, red cords and plume. From 1807–1808, the shako officially replaced the bearskin but many units hung on to them as long as possible. At right, a voltigeur of a light infantry regiment with his distinctive yellow-buff collar and green and yellow epaulettes. (Print after Phillipoteaux)





ABOVE Musician of the Grenadier Company of a French line infantry regiment, c.1805-1810. (Print after Maurice Orange)

CENTRE 'Private of French Infantry', c.1808-1809. This print after Bradford shows the long off-white dust coat worn by French troops at Roliça and Vimeiro and doubtless many other engagements also. The private is a grenadier distinguished by the red epaulettes and pompom on the shako. He also has a blue collar. (Pedro de Brito Collection, Porto)



ABOVE, RIGHT Trooper of French Dragoons, c.1808-1809. He may be from the 9th Dragoons, which had a detachment of 257 men with Junot's army and wore crimson collar and lapels on its green coats. The white buttonhole lace, if worn, was not a regulation feature. Print after Bradford. (Pedro de Brito Collection, Porto)

men in Junot's army (see Orders of Battle, p.90). To provide an elite body, the grenadiers were grouped into two provisional regiments of reserve grenadiers having two battalions each. During the Vimeiro campaign, the French infantry wore 'long white frockcoats, and with the eagle in the front of their caps' in the words of Benjamin Harris of the 95th Rifles.

The cavalry consisted of one regiment of light horse, the 26th Chasseurs à Cheval, and detachments from six dragoon regiments. Each dragoon regiment was to have four squadrons, each squadron having two companies, each company 128 men including four officers. To reach such an establishment, Junot reorganized the dragoons into provisional regiments of about 600 each by adding drafts and using the horses from the disbanded Portuguese cavalry. The Chasseurs à Cheval units were to have three squadrons. The provisional Chasseurs à Cheval reorganized from the 26th Chasseur à Cheval regiment appears to have had only one service squadron.

The artillery and the artillery transport 'train' with Junot was made up of men detached from various artillery and train units. The proportion of guns to the number of men in Junot's army was much lower than the four field guns per 1,000 men called for by Gribeauval. Napoleon sometimes had one gun per every 200 men when he was with his army. In Portugal, there were about 45 field guns instead of 100 but the French still enjoyed superior numbers of ordnance: at Vimeiro they had 23 guns against the 16 British.

The looting and therefore the discipline of the French army in Portugal was deplorable. Yet Napoleon felt looting 'destroyed

**RIGHT Elite Company Trooper of the 26th Chasseurs à Cheval, 1807–1808. This unit came into Portugal in November 1807 and was present at the battles of Rolica and Vimeiro in 1808. The elite company wore busbies as shown while the rest of the regiment had shakos. The uniform was dark green trimmed with bright red and white buttons and lace. Copy after the Otto Ms. (Private collection)**

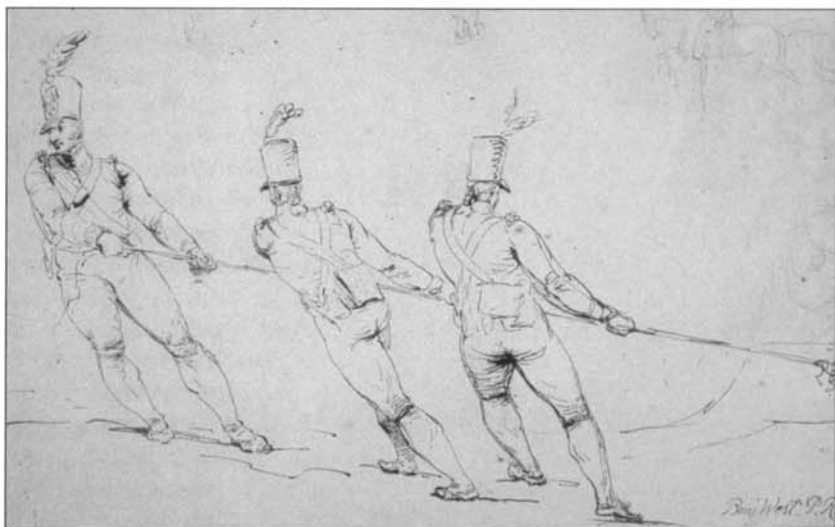


**FAR, RIGHT Troopers of British Light Dragoons, 1807. The 20th Light Dragoons in Wellesley's army had blue dolmans with yellow cuffs and collar in 1808. Print after Atkinson. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University, Providence, USA)**

everything, including the army that practised it'. It made a soldier useless as 'there is no discipline if he can loot and if by looting he is enriched, he immediately becomes a bad soldier; he does not wish to fight any longer.'

## THE BRITISH

The units making up Wellesley's army came from various areas – England, Ireland and Malta – and had different levels of experience. The battle-seasoned veterans were more likely to be in the units coming from Malta than from the freshly recruited regiments in Great Britain. Thus, for many men in the British force, the expedition to Portugal was their first campaign so they would have been generally 'green' compared to the French conscripts of 1807 opposing them. There can be no doubt, however, that the level of discipline was far higher in the British regiments than in the French corps. For instance, if British soldiers became rowdy and brutalised and robbed civilians, they were likely to be



**Gunners of the Royal Artillery pulling ordnance. Sketch by Benjamin West. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University, Providence, USA)**



very severely punished in Wellesley's army. The most important result of the strict British discipline and training was the impressive steadiness under fire and devastating firepower unleashed by British troops.

The army had an efficient staff organization with many experienced officers. However, their experience had been largely acquired in various overseas expeditions and not in continental Europe operating in very large armies. Thus, the British force in Portugal from August 1808 was organised into brigades, each brigade having two or three battalions. While Wellesley's force was still small enough to manage in brigades, a larger force would require a more complex command system. This was finally adopted in October 1808 when the divisional system, long used in the much larger French army, was introduced into the British army in Portugal then led by Sir John Moore.

British regiments were usually much smaller than French regiments, only a few having three battalions or more, 61 having two battalions and 31 having only one battalion. Of the two or more battalion units, it was very seldom that both battalions would be found together. Rather, if a battalion was deployed in the Peninsula, another might be in the colonies or recruiting in Britain. The establishment also varied from one regiment to another, most hovering at about 1,000 men per battalion but some having less than 700 (see Orders of Battle, p.90). Each battalion had ten companies including the elite grenadier and light infantry companies. The British army was organised around the battalion as the basic tactical unit which was a more self-contained all-purpose corps than its French counterpart. This was because a British battalion was almost invariably sent on foreign or colonial service and this developed an exceptionally strong regimental esprit-de-corps. Most regiments were of the line infantry but a few were light infantry regiments such as the 43rd, 52nd and 71st in Wellesley's army. Whether line or light infantry, they were armed with smooth-bore muskets and wore red coatees. The relatively new rifle units, the 5/60th and the 95th, were also with Wellesley, clad in green coatees and armed with Baker rifles. These were much more accurate but took longer to load than the standard smooth-bore muskets.

There was only one squadron of the 20th Light Dragoons. The Royal Artillery was represented by two companies from Britain at the time of the battles of Roliça and Vimeiro. A half company from Gibraltar with six guns had come with Brigadier-General Spencer but they had to be left in Leiria because of lack of transport facilities. Eventually, 16 of the guns brought by Wellesley from Britain participated in the campaign. He thus had less than one gun per 1,000 men, a very low average. Another half company from Gibraltar arrived after the battles. There were a few engineer officers with a detachment of the Royal Staff Corps, which was, in spite of its name, an engineer unit. Finally, a British expeditionary force came complete with supplies and food administered by officers of the Commissariat, a very different system than in the French and most other continental armies who tended to live largely off the land.

## THE PORTUGUESE

The roots of the modern Portuguese army lay in December 1640, when the country's military institutions were set up by King Joao IV. The king



Private, Light Company, 5th Foot, c.1807-1811. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University, Providence, USA)



Rifleman, 5th Battalion, 60th Foot, c.1806-1815. (Print after P.W. Reynolds)



aimed at mobilising all able-bodied men and decreed all aged from 15 to 60 years old were liable to obligatory military service. Local officials appointed from the gentry and nobility – *Ordenanza* officers – were instructed to list all able-bodied men. From these lists, three classes of men were drafted: those forming the ‘first line’ troops were young bachelors enlisted in the regular army; the militia formed the ‘second line’ troops

gathering exempted and married men; the ‘third line’ consisted of *Ordenanza* companies made up of older men who were largely responsible for the application of the recruiting system and who could also be called up for duty in emergencies. This system fell into neglect during the 18th century and, following the defeat of 1801, major reforms were decreed on 19 May 1806. The number of regular units remained the same at 24 infantry regiments, 12 of cavalry and four of artillery but there would now be 48 instead of 43 militia regiments and 24 *Ordenanza* brigades. The regular line infantry, cavalry and artillery regiments were henceforth numbered. The reorganisation also touched generals, staff officers and indeed just about every function of the army (for details, see *The Portuguese Army of the Napoleonic Wars*, Men-at-Arms Nos. 343, 346 and 356). These reforms were being implemented when the French marched in during November 1807 and disbanded the army in the following weeks and months.

The spontaneous rebirth of the army from June 1808 was very orderly compared to what was going on in Spain at the same time. There, a multitude of improvised new units of all sorts emerged out of nowhere to fight the French in a generally very disorganized way (see *The Spanish Army of the Napoleonic Wars 1808-1811*, Men-at-Arms No. 332). In Portugal, there



ABOVE, LEFT The 91st, or Argyllshire, Regiment of Foot, was the only killed Highland unit in the Vimeiro campaign. Raised in 1794, it had yellow facings. At first, the officers had silver lace until changed to gold in 1803. In 1809, the regiment's Highland dress was discontinued. Print of 1807 after Atkinson. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University, Providence, USA)

ABOVE Privates of the 95th Rifles, 1807. Print after Atkinson. (Anne S.K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University, Providence, USA)



**Trooper of the Lisbon Police Cavalry, c.1808–1810. This security unit had been retained in the French service by Junot since December 1807. Few liked the French and the more mobile cavalrymen absconded when they could. On 4 August, some 124 galloped into Coimbra and joined General Freire de Andrade's army. Another 41 police troopers joined Wellesley's army about ten days later and were present at Roliça and saw some action at Vimeiro. The hue of their blue coattee was actually darker than shown in this print. Print after Bradford. (Pedro de Brito Collection, Porto)**

were a few new volunteer units but the overwhelming majority of men that took up arms instead simply revived their old regular regiments, militia regiments and *Ordenanza* brigades disbanded by the French a few months earlier. A new element was the creation of 'Cazadores' to serve as light infantry and one such unit, the Porto Cazadores, served in Wellesley's army. Many men had no military experience and good cadres were not always easily found to lead them as some of the better officers had gone to Brazil while others, with the most able soldiers, had been sent to France to form the Portuguese Legion of the French Imperial Army. Still, many from all walks of life including numerous recently retired officers stepped forward, determined to be rid of their French oppressors. The veteran officers and soldiers tried to organise the rank and file into something like a military body but, in 1808, this was far from easy. Lacking tactical training and led by officers having no campaign or field manoeuvre experience, Portuguese troops were largely unable to stand against the well-led French units on a field of battle.

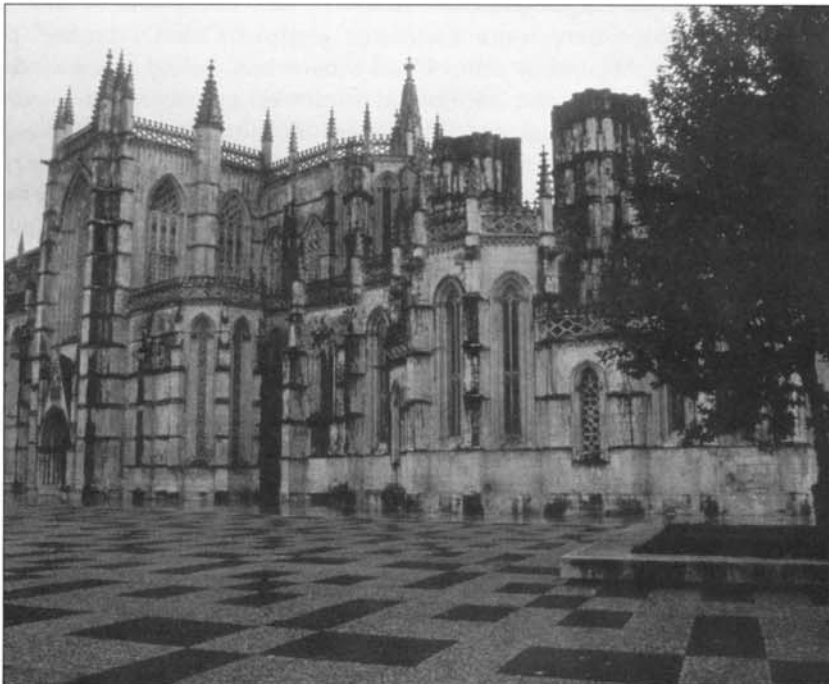
Arms, uniforms and supplies of all kinds were also sorely wanting and only about a dozen field guns had been found, none of which were in good working order. General Freire nevertheless made appeals which resulted in many donations in Porto. Harriot Sessler, a British resident in the city noted in July 1808 that the Wine Company gave 4,000 pairs of shoes and 'many thousands of shirts' for the new troops. On 1 August, she saw 'a Squadron of Portuguese Cavalry entirely new dressed' making a 'very handsome appearance'. This was the exception as most Portuguese troops were more like those seen by Colonel Leslie on 13 August 1808: 'The poor fellows had little or no uniform, but were merely in white jackets, and large broad-brimmed hats turned up at one side, some having feathers and others not.' These white jackets likely came from a large gift of white cloth by the citizens of Porto. This was probably the appearance of most of the Portuguese troops attached to Wellesley's British army. The Portuguese with Wellesley were, however, well armed. Some 5,000 stands of arms had been landed at Figueira da Foz for the Portuguese under Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholas Trant and General Freire de Andrade and 3,400 were issued in early August. Trant's Portuguese wore some white linen or a handkerchief tied round their left arm to distinguish them from the French.

# OPPOSING PLANS

## WELLESLEY MARCHES ON LISBON

**T**he British army having all landed at Figueira da Foz, Wellesley decided to move on Lisbon right away before the French could finish regrouping their forces. This was, on the whole, the British campaign plan that Wellesley decided once on the spot. There had been various notions of what to do when and if the British forces should land in Portugal but nothing definite could be decided until they were actually there and could take stock of the situation. On the French side, there was suspicion that the British might come to the rescue of the Portuguese but little else was known. Only after Wellesley's force had actually landed could Junot be sure that he was facing an additional foe. The Portuguese revolt was bad enough but that could yet be contained. The involvement of the British created real peril for the French and, if they were to maintain their position in Portugal, they had to meet and crush Wellesley and his troops. The question was when and where.

On 9 August, some 14,300 British troops with 18 guns marched from Figueira da Foz towards Leiria. They had rations for 18 days, three days' worth being carried in the haversack of each soldier, the rest on mules following the army with the baggage. Leiria was reached the next day.



**The magnificent medieval abbey at the town of Batalha. Wellesley and his British troops arrived there on 13 August 1808, barely a day after its evacuation by the French. The abbey was started in 1388 on the site of a victorious battle - 'batalha' in Portuguese - which secured Portugal's freedom for centuries. Its liberation in 1808 was an encouraging omen. It is the last resting place of several Portuguese kings including the famous Henry 'The Navigator' and Portugal's Memorial to the Unknown Soldier, guarded permanently by soldiers. (Photo: RC)**



**The medieval town of Obidos, HQ of the French troops under General Delaborde on 15 August 1808. Some shots were fired from its castle at the British riflemen advancing below. (Photo: RC)**

Now that the British had landed, the Portuguese could join them. The 5,000 men promised by the Bishop of Porto were in the area but they lacked weapons, equipment, money and training. They were led by General Bernardim Freire de Andrade e Castro, who, although a brave soldier, turned out to be more pretentious than of actual assistance to Wellesley. He joined the British at Leiria on 10 August. Things did not get off to a good start. He had his own campaign plan, which Wellesley felt incompatible with his own, and he demanded that pay, arms and rations for his troops be provided by the British. Wellesley replied that he did not have sufficient supplies and asked that Freire send him his cavalry, light infantry and 1,000 line infantry to be employed as he chose. Rations would be provided for these troops but the British simply could not supply and arm large bodies of men at this time. Freire complied and a contingent of Portuguese troops was detached from the 4th artillery, the 6th, 11th and 12th cavalry, the 12th, 21st and 24th infantry and the Porto Cazadores were put under the command of LtCol Trant. Wellesley put their number at 1,650 including 250 cavalry but Portuguese sources mentions about 2,300 men. If one uses the Portuguese figures, which seem more accurate than Wellesley's remarks as they are taken from musters, Freire thus detached close to half of his force to be put under direct British command.

Wellesley and his men then marched to Alcobaza and then into the town of Batalha with its magnificent medieval abbey where several Portuguese kings rest. French troops under General Delaborde had left the previous day, retreating further south because Batalha was too large and lacked adequate defences to provide a good defensive position. Delaborde's much smaller force of 4,300 men was the only French corps in the immediate area. It consisted of Brigadier-General Brenier's Brigade of the 3/2nd and 3/4th Light Infantry, the 1/70th and 2/70th Line Infantry. To these were added two companies of the 4th Swiss Infantry, the 26th Chasseurs à Cheval and five field guns. Delaborde's objective was to delay the British and Portuguese for as long as possible. This would give Junot time to gather a respectable force to face the British.

# TROOP MOVEMENTS, AUGUST 1808



Meanwhile, on 12 August, another Portuguese force consisting of 420 men of the 24th Infantry with some *Ordenanza* overwhelmed the French garrison of Abrantes, east of Batalha. With that area in full-scale revolt, French troops under Loison at Torres Novas headed towards Santarem to regroup with Junot's troops.

### **Junot regroups to face the British**

To the French, it was now clear that, except for the troops holding out in the fortress of Almeida, the north of Portugal was lost to them. Since 16 July, Almeida had been surrounded by a Portuguese army. It consisted of 104 men of the 11th Cavalry, 605 from the 6th Infantry, 200 from the 12th Infantry, 605 from the 18th Infantry, 1,438 from the 24th Infantry supported by many local militiamen and *Ordenanza*. The Portuguese had no artillery and could not storm such a strong fortress but its French garrison of about 1,200 men was trapped and could not get out.

The full impact of the rising in Spain and Portugal followed by the British landing at Figueira da Foz were now only too apparent to Junot and his senior officers. Their communications with other French forces in Spain were cut off following General Dupont's surrender at Baylen and they were now isolated in Lisbon and central Portugal. The British were the best organised and best supplied troops opposing them. If they could be defeated, the Portuguese insurrection would suffer a tremendous and perhaps fatal blow.

Now that he knew where the British were, Junot's task was straightforward enough: gather all the troops he could to form a field army, then march north towards the British and defeat them before more reinforcements – British or Portuguese – reached them. It was too late to call in the French garrisons of Almeida and Elvas, who were now isolated, and around 6,000 men were required to maintain control of Lisbon. However, Loison was marching to join Junot and Delaborde's troops, shadowing Wellesley, could also join him. That would give Junot about 12–14,000 men, enough to face the British.

# THE BATTLE OF ROLIÇA

General Delaborde's French force withdrew southwards from Batalha towards Torres Vedras before Wellesley's much stronger army. Delaborde was aware that Junot was trying to regroup as many troops as possible and to do this he needed all the time he could get. Delaborde therefore opted to make a stand with his small force to slow the British. The longer they could be delayed, the better for Junot.

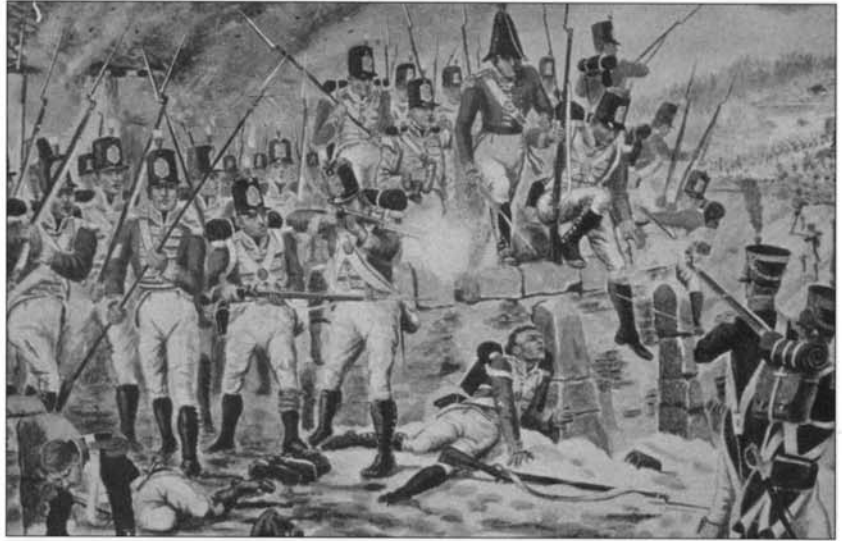
On 14 August, Delaborde was at Alcobaza but decided to quit the place as his piquets spotted Wellesley's forward cavalry scouts. The French soldiers proceeded to rip from the walls and ceilings of Alcobaza's beautiful convent its silver and gold decorations before leaving. The French then moved out rapidly with their loot towards Obidos leaving the nearby bridge over a deep ravine intact. Had they blown it up, the British would have been considerably delayed. Instead, Wellesley's troops moved down swiftly and were at Caldas the next day. It was probably at that time that some 41 Portuguese troopers from the Lisbon Police Guard who had escaped from the French in the capital joined the allied army. During the march, General Wellesley was generally seen at the head of his column, except when 'with a small party of cavalry and light troops, he occasionally advanced to reconnoitre'. Here was a foretaste of the tactical approach of the future duke – terrain was very important to him and now, in his first campaign as later, he wanted to see it for himself.

## Skirmish near Obidos

Delaborde, upon reaching the walled medieval town of Obidos, left some troops there as a rearguard while his main body went to Roliça, 10km to the south. On 15 August, a British advance guard consisting of four rifle companies of the 5/60th and the 95th Rifles ran into a French piquet with a few troopers at Brilos, a hamlet just north of Obidos. A few shots were exchanged and the French detachment retreated towards Obidos. The British riflemen, excited that they had the French on the run, followed closely in pursuit. This was against Wellesley's orders who wished the advanced parties to be cautious. The riflemen soon reached the outskirts of Obidos and ran into a battalion of French infantry which formed the rearguard of Delaborde's troops. Rifleman Benjamin Harris of the 95th related that his party received 'a shower of [musket] balls upon us as we advanced, which we returned without delay. The first man hit was Lt. [Ralph] Bunbury', who was killed by a shot through the head, the first British combat fatality of the Peninsular War. This was Harris' first engagement and he 'had never heard such a tremendous noise as the firing made' – the sound of battle – and saw that 'men on both sides of me were falling fast'. Lieutenant John Cox of the 95th was also there and recalled that the French were firing from 'a windmill on a rising



The appearance of British line infantry during the 1808 Vimeiro campaign was much as shown in this reconstitution of the battle of Corunna a few months later. The enlisted men had the 'stovepipe' shako with the large brass plate, the red coat, white breeches and black knee gaiters – these last being mentioned by rifleman Harris after the battle of Vimeiro. (Print after H. Oakes-Jones)



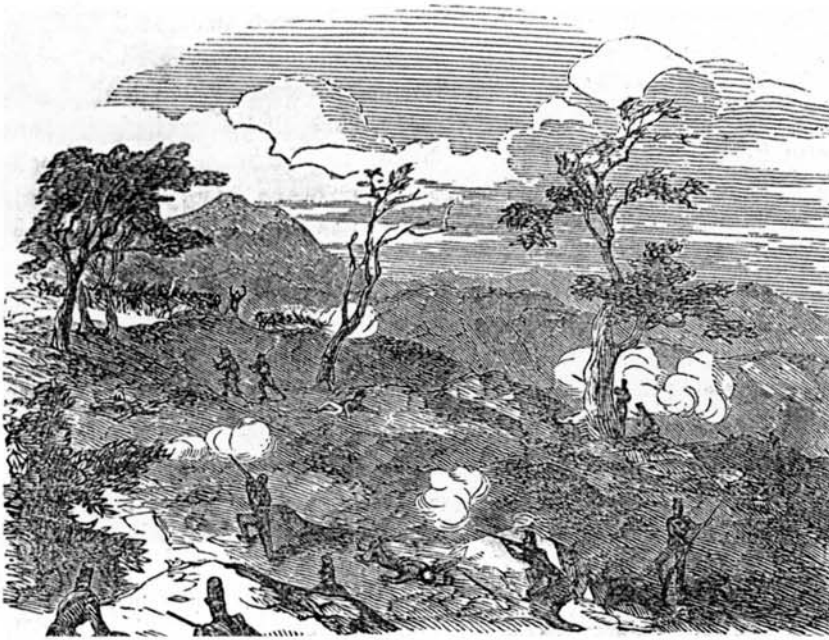
ground' adjoining Obidos and that some shots also came from the town. The riflemen drove out the French skirmishers but more French infantry with cavalry now counterattacked the riflemen, who were stopped in their tracks and they retreated to a small hill 'and formed there all round its summit, standing three deep, the front rank kneeling. In this position we remained all night, expecting every moment' a French attack. The French did not attack and retired when Major-General Spencer and his brigade arrived at the scene. Things had not gone well for the British riflemen. Two officers and 27 other ranks were killed and wounded.

This was not an auspicious beginning against the French troops but Wellesley was not too disturbed. He correctly attributed the riflemen's



The recently restored 16th-century church of Nuestra Senora da Purificao at Roliça. (Photo: RC)

**British Riflemen skirmish the French second position at Roliça.**



embarrassment to inexperience and undue haste. He felt the skirmish 'was unpleasant, because it was quite useless; and was occasioned, contrary to orders, solely by the imprudence of the officer, and the dash and eagerness of the men', nevertheless concluding that they had 'behaved remarkably well, and did some execution with their rifles'. This last point seems debatable as the French appear to have had trifling losses at Obidos. On the other hand, the prime French objective of slowing down Wellesley's march towards Lisbon had not been achieved in this skirmish.

Delaborde, knowing the main body of the British army to be approaching, withdrew his remaining troops from Obidos to Roliça further south. The main British-Portuguese force soon marched into

**The field north of Roliça which the British troops had to cross to attack the second French position. (Photo: RC)**





At Roliça, some British riflemen of the 95th were 'bogged down' by the French taking cover in two small wine sheds on a hill. A private called on his comrades to charge the place as this print shows. They immediately did so according to Rifleman Harris, 'fixing their sword-bayonets' while charging up the hill and drove out the French sharpshooters. The musician should have a bugle rather than a drum and the riflemen used sword-bayonets rather than the socket bayonets shown. (Print after R. Jack)

Obidos. Meanwhile, Loison's corps of about 6,000 men had marched from the south-east and was now at Santarem, but his troops were totally exhausted and required rest and supplies. Delaborde was hoping Loison could join him but that would only have weakened the army Junot was trying to muster to face Wellesley's force. Loison was now to join Junot after a couple of days' rest.

### **Wellesley Reaches Roliça**

From Obidos, Wellesley's army moved towards Roliça early on 17 August and the orderly marching of the British troops was noted by French scouts. Up till now, they had seen bands of ill-organised levies which often had no military experience at all moving about like crowds on country roads. Now they could see that – whatever its battle experience or lack thereof – the red-coated British force was a well-organised, well-trained, fully armed and very disciplined body marching in files. Approaching Roliça, the British-Portuguese force was divided into three columns: the right which was to the west consisting of 1,200 Portuguese infantry and 50 cavalry under Nicholas Trant which was meant 'to turn the enemy's left'; the centre formed the main part of the army – about 9,000 British infantry with 12 guns led by Wellesley; the left column under MajGen Roland Ferguson consisted of Brigadier-General B. Bowes' Brigade with three companies of rifles, some artillery, 20 British and 20 Portuguese cavalry, was to turn the French right and also keep an



eye on Loison's Corps. If Loison moved to join Delaborde, he could come up unexpectedly on Wellesley's left flank. Wellesley seems to have felt this was unlikely but he took no chances and always wanted to be well informed of the enemy's movements at all times.

Delaborde had chosen the small village of Roliça for a first stand because the plain narrowed to about a kilometre wide with steep hills on either side. There were also thick bushes in many places – as indeed there are today – which might help mask the weakness of his force. His troops were disposed to cover this narrow front but Delaborde had also warned his men that they should be prepared to quickly retreat in good order when required, should they be outflanked.

This was because Delaborde had chosen a second site for a stand to slow the British. It was situated about one and a half kilometres south of the first position at a wooded ridge near a hamlet called Columbeira. To reach this second defence line, the British would have to cross an open field south of Roliça where it was hoped they would suffer more casualties. His ultimate objective was to pin down Wellesley's force for as long as possible, inflicting heavy casualties while suffering minimal to moderate losses to his corps. This would give more time for Junot to assemble a strong force while weakening Wellesley's troops.

**The countryside looking towards Vimeiro as seen from south of Roliça. This area saw extensive French and British troop movements in August 1808. (Photo: RC)**

## **THE ATTACK ON THE FIRST FRENCH POSITION**

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Wellesley's army was coming into view in the distance, advancing in a crescent-shaped formation with Trant's and Ferguson's columns on the hills at either side, forming the wings that were pushed further forward



**The church at Vimeiro. Note its elevated site with a sturdy wall. The British troops used this position to resist the French attack by Maransin's troops. (Photo: RC)**

than the main force at the centre. The main body of 9,000 men formed the centre consisting of four British brigades – Hill's on the right, Nightingall's in the centre, Brigadier-General H. Fane's on the left and Craufurd's and the Porto Cazadores forming the reserve. The cavalry – half British and half Portuguese – and the artillery followed.

The British infantry was arranged in two lines and formed a magnificent sight according to the French, who looked at them slowly coming on 'in beautiful order' towards the flat field just north of the village of Roliça. The village itself is on lower ground just beyond. Used to facing disorganised, rag-tag and ill-armed peasants, the French soldiers were now confronted for the first time by uniformed regular troops resplendent in their red coatees and stovepipe shakos with brass plates, and equipped with muskets whose barrels and bayonets gleamed in the sun.

Fane's Brigade consisted mostly of riflemen and some of these, deployed 'in the hills on his [Wellesley's] right' in skirmish order, started exchanging fire with the French while Hill's and Nightingall's 'advanced upon the enemy's position'. Ferguson's column on the left, Wellesley observed, was also now 'descending from the hills into the plain' with Trant's Portuguese doing the same on the right thus putting considerable pressure on the French line.

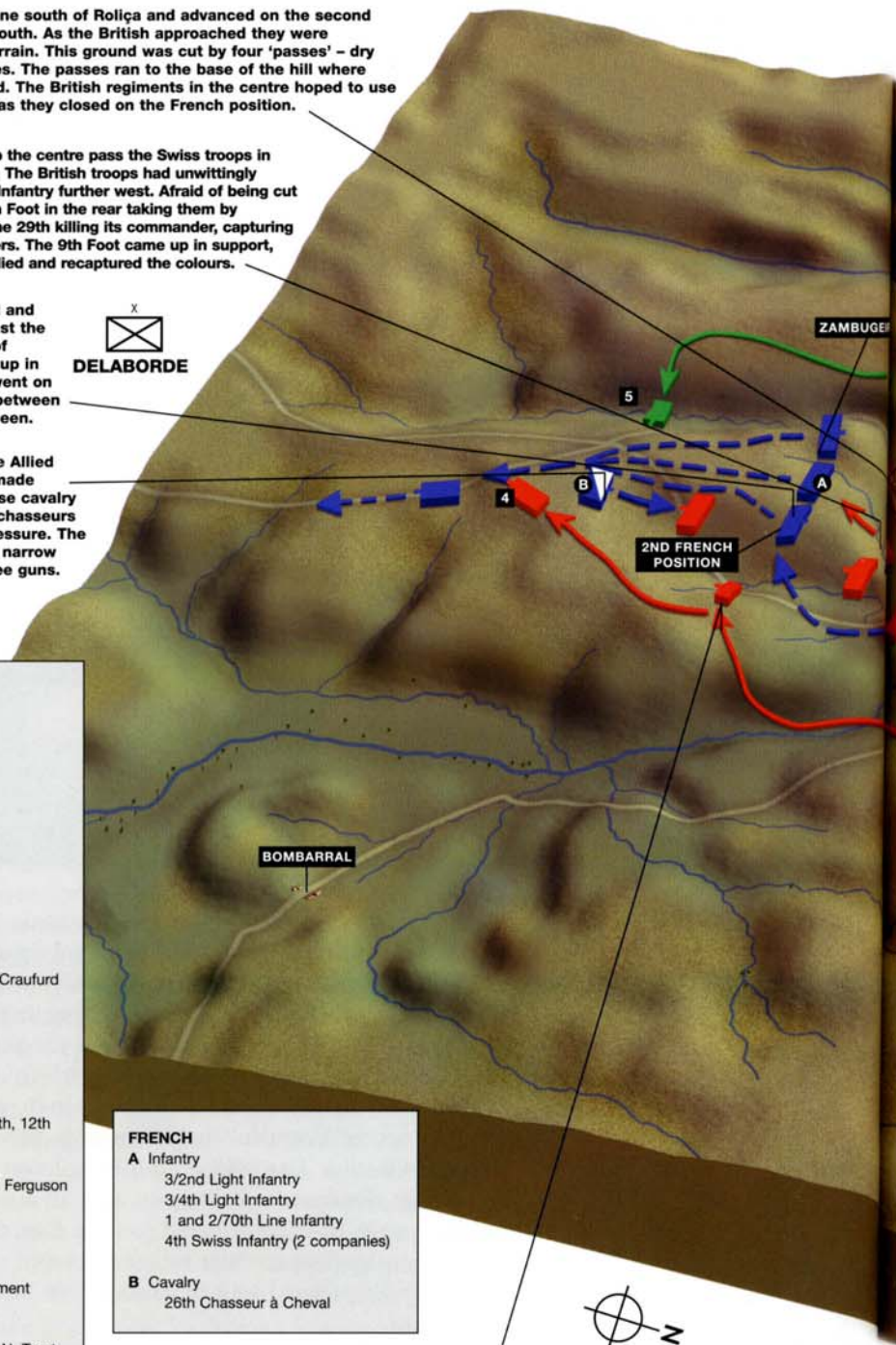
Before they were attacked from all sides, Delaborde ordered his men to retreat as fast as they could to their second position which they did

**PHASE 4:** The British reformed their line south of Roliça and advanced on the second French position on the slopes to the south. As the British approached they were forced to cross increasingly broken terrain. This ground was cut by four 'passes' – dry watercourses forming gullies or ravines. The passes ran to the base of the hill where Delaborde's force was now entrenched. The British regiments in the centre hoped to use these passes to cover their approach as they closed on the French position.

**PHASE 5:** As the 29th Foot advanced up the centre pass the Swiss troops in French service came over to the British. The British troops had unwittingly by-passed part of the French 70th Line Infantry further west. Afraid of being cut off the French soldiers charged the 29th Foot in the rear taking them by surprise. The French crashed through the 29th killing its commander, capturing its colours and taking numerous prisoners. The 9th Foot came up in support, attacked with part of the 29th which rallied and recaptured the colours.

**PHASE 6:** The French fell back, rallied and four battalions counter-attacked against the 9th and 29th who withstood a series of charges. The 5th and 95th then came up in support. Charge and counter-charge went on for about two hours with skirmishing between riflemen and light infantrymen in between.

**PHASE 8:** In order to further check the Allied pursuit the 26th Chasseurs à Cheval made several limited charges. The Portuguese cavalry fell back when faced with the French chasseurs but British skirmishers kept up the pressure. The French retreat went smoothly but at a narrow pass they were forced to abandon three guns.



#### BRITISH/ALLIED

- 1** British Main Force
  - 1/5th Foot
  - 1/9th Foot
  - 29th Foot
  - 36th Foot
  - 1/38th Foot
  - 1/40th Foot
  - 1/45th Foot
  - 5/60th Foot (Rifles)
  - 1/71st Foot
  - 1/82nd Foot
  - 2/95th Rifles (1 company)
- 2** Reserve Infantry Brigade – BrigGen C. Craufurd
  - 1/50th Foot
  - 91st Foot
  - Porto Cazadores
- 3** Cavalry – LtCol C.D. Taylor
  - 20th Light Dragoons
  - Portuguese detachments of 6th, 11th, 12th and Lisbon Police Cavalry
- 4** Left (or east) Flank Column – MajGen R. Ferguson
  - 4th Brigade – BrigGen B. Bowes
  - 1/6th Foot
  - 1/32nd Foot
  - 2/95th Rifles (3 companies)
  - 20-man Portuguese cavalry detachment
  - Artillery detachment
- 5** Right (or west) Flank Column – Lt. Col. N. Trant
  - Detachments of 12th, 21st and 24th infantry regiments
  - 50-man Portuguese cavalry detachment

#### FRENCH

- A** Infantry
  - 3/2nd Light Infantry
  - 3/4th Light Infantry
  - 1 and 2/70th Line Infantry
  - 4th Swiss Infantry (2 companies)
- B** Cavalry
  - 26th Chasseur à Cheval

**PHASE 7:** Ferguson's column finally appeared on Delaborde's eastern flank. Once again faced with the prospect of being outflanked, the French general ordered a retreat. The French battalions moved back in good order, alternately retiring and giving covering fire against the advancing British and Portuguese.

## BATTLE OF ROLIÇA

17 August 1808, viewed from the east, showing the successive British and Portuguese attacks on the two French defensive positions and the subsequent orderly French withdrawal.

**PHASE 2:** The French held their first position just in front of Roliça and awaited the main Anglo-Portuguese force. Gen Delaborde intended to retreat to a second position as soon as the British pressure intensified. The fighting around this first position appears to have been moderate.

**PHASE 1:** The bulk of the British infantry advanced towards the first French position deployed in two lines with Craufurd's Brigade and the Portuguese Porto Cazadores behind in reserve. Further to the rear were the cavalry and the artillery. To the west (on the British right) was a column of Portuguese infantry under Trant, to the east (or British left) was another column of British troops under Ferguson.



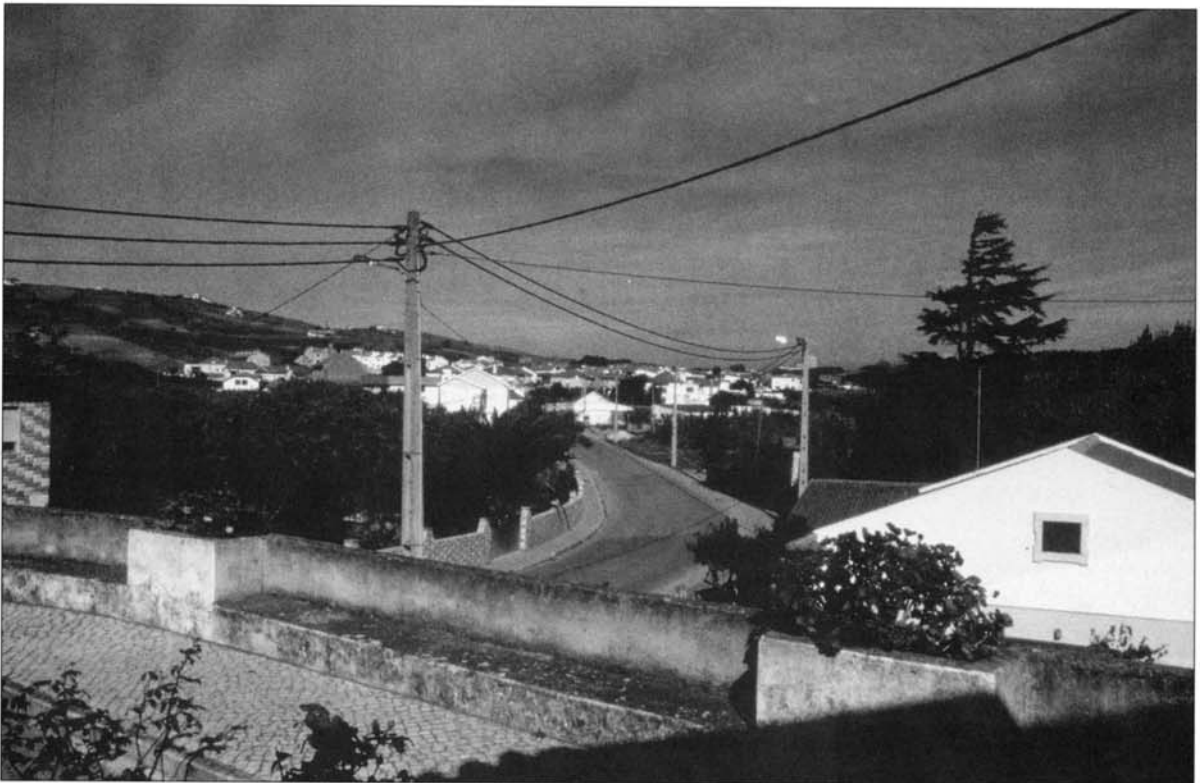
**PHASE 3:** Eventually, Trant's and Ferguson's columns appeared on each flank of the French position. To avoid being outflanked, Delaborde gave the order to retreat to the second position as planned which the French did in good order, skirmishing with the British troops as they left the village.

'with the utmost regularity and the greatest celerity' observed Wellesley, who was frustrated at not having 'a sufficient body of cavalry' to pursue the French as they had suffered 'but little loss on the plain'. Having taken possession of the village of Roliça, the British now had to re-form to attack the new 'formidable' French position. The assault on this second position was executed in the same manner as the attack on the first. The main force at the centre would advance under Wellesley's command across the ground leading to the second French position with Trant's Portuguese on the right (west) and Ferguson's column on the left (east) of the British centre as before.

## THE ATTACK ON THE SECOND FRENCH POSITION

The terrain that Wellesley's centre now had to cross south of Roliça to get to the French position was not flat and even but craggy and broken with four 'passes' as Wellesley called them – gullies or ravines formed from dry watercourses. The passes ran to the base of the hill where Delaborde's force was now entrenched. As they came closer to the French position, the British regiments at the centre tried to penetrate by way of these 'passes' – the Portuguese Cazadores were to take a pass furthest to the right, the 5th Foot the next pass to the left, the 9th and 29th a pass at about the centre and the 45th and 82nd a pass at the left. The passes were, according to Wellesley, 'all difficult of access, and some

**The road by which the French attacked the church at Vimeiro. Now paved and modern, its route is nevertheless generally the same as in 1808. Photo taken from the wall where the British were posted. (Photo: RC)**







In this evocative French view of the battle of Vimeiro from the 1830s, French hussars seem to prevail over British infantrymen in the foreground. In fact, Junot's army had no hussar units and the British wore stovepipe shakos rather than the high-fronted 'Belgic' shako, which was introduced from 1812. Like most prints of Peninsular War battles, French or British, the terrain and buildings were imagined by illustrators and engravers who had never been to the sites. (Print after Martinet)

#### OVERLEAF

#### ROLIÇA, 17 AUGUST 1808

During the attack on the second French position at Roliça, the British infantry were forced to advance along several gullies or dry watercourses. The ravine down which the 29th Foot advanced was particularly difficult, and well defended by the French. The 29th Foot persisted in their attacks and, supported by the 9th Foot, eventually carried the position. Roliça was the last battle in which the British infantry wore their hair in queues. Shortly after the battle the news arrived that the practice had been abandoned, much to the joy of the men. (Patrice Courcelle)

of them were well defended by the enemy, particularly that which was attacked by the 9th and 29th regiments'. There, the 29th Foot in the lead, supported by the 9th, went into a pass which narrowed considerably to their front, the men slipping on the loose stones of its rocky bed while the French fired at them from above.

Nevertheless, the British brigade 'attacked with the utmost impetuosity, and reached the enemy' before Trant's and Ferguson's columns on the wings had time to reach and attack the French flanks. Several companies on the right of the 29th managed to push further up the hill and deployed as best they could to fire. Facing them were some companies of the red-coated 4th Swiss Regiment in French service, many of whose soldiers now raised the butt of their muskets, called out that they were friends and rushed out to shake hands with the surprised soldiers of the 29th. The 29th was now badly disorganised and before it could re-form, it was surprised by a vigorous attack on its rear. Some French troops, probably posted between the passes, had been by-passed on the lower ground. Brigadier-General Brenier, who commanded the French in that area, had sent two companies of the 70th Line Infantry a little further to the west. Afraid of being cut off and isolated, they formed and attacked the British troops in their way in an attempt to rejoin their lines. Their attack was stunningly successful – they killed the officer commanding the 29th, LtCol the Hon George Lake, captured six officers, about 30 men and the regiment's colours, which they brought back to their lines.

The 9th Foot now came up and, according to Sergeant Hale of that regiment, it was 'a great relief' to the 29th when the 9th appeared. Lieutenant-Colonel John Stuart commanding the 9th 'thought the most proper was to show them [the French] the points of our bayonets, which we immediately did'. The portion of the 29th that had been smashed re-formed with its right wing and also 'gave another grand charge, by







which they retook their colours and some prisoners' from the French. It was a hard-fought contest in which LtCol Stuart was killed. The French infantrymen were far from beaten. They retreated, obviously in good order, and 'then turned and attacked us again' but were received 'most gallantly and soon repulsed'. The 9th and 29th, by then bearing the brunt 'of nearly all the French army for sometime', faced several further French attacks 'but without effect, as they found true Englishmen every time' proudly related Sergeant Hale. The French had only four battalions – all of their infantry – posted on the ridge of the hill but they were good troops, expertly manoeuvred by Delaborde and BrigGen Brenier.

The 5th Foot and Fane's riflemen of the 95th came up and engaged the French on either flank of the centre although they too were repulsed. When the British forward skirmishers came close enough to the ridge, the French would come out and charge them before they could form. This stubborn contest went on for two hours, the British attacks being repulsed three times. However, Delaborde, who was wounded, knew that he could not hold forever against Wellesley's much stronger force.

Major-General Ferguson's flanking column on the British left (to the east) finally appeared on the flank of the French position. They 'arrived rather late, and were scarcely engaged' losing only 'a few men – 5 or 6' wrote William Warre, Ferguson's ADC. Seeing Ferguson's men, Delaborde knew he would soon be outflanked and ordered a retreat, which was executed in a most orderly fashion, the battalions moving back by echelon, two by two, alternately providing cover against the oncoming British and Portuguese. To check the pursuit further, the French troopers of the 26th Chasseurs à Cheval made limited charges; the Portuguese cavalry which had come up was much intimidated by

**Piper George Clark of the 71st Highland Light Infantry was severely wounded at Vimeiro but nevertheless played 'Up them Waur and aa, Wullie' to encourage his comrades. He survived and the Highland Society of London later presented him with silver pipes for his bravery. Many details in this print show that the artist attempted to make an accurate rendering. The French infantry wear the long white linen overcoats, the men of the 71st are depicted wearing bluish trousers possibly intended to indicate trows. Inspection reports of early 1809 confirm the bonnets and trows and also mention 'Russia Duck Pantaloon' that would have been white (PRO, WO 27/94). Clark, however, is shown with blue cuffs and collar instead of the 71st's buff. (Print after Atkinson)**

them and turned back, but British skirmishers brought several French cavalymen down including their commanding officer. The French retreat went smoothly with few losses for well over a kilometre, but at a narrow pass they abandoned three of their field guns and some of the prisoners escaped in the confusion. Nevertheless, the French troops retreated safely towards Lisbon.

Delaborde had fought a brilliant delaying action, managing to pin down the greatly superior British-Portuguese force for much of the action. This in spite of the desertion of some of the Swiss in his second position. He did suffer about 600 casualties, probably mostly due to the steady British volleys which the French were to find so murderous during the Peninsular War. The three guns were not lost in combat but abandoned because of difficult roads and while this was unfortunate, it was of no great consequence. No part of his force had been cut off or captured and he managed to take it back, less its casualties and Swiss deserters, to join Junot's army.

For their part, the British had performed well in their first engagement against elements of the French Imperial Army. Wellesley enjoyed greatly superior forces but had only engaged about 4,700 men and suffered 70 killed, 335 wounded and 74 missing for a total of 479. The 29th Foot had suffered the most with 190 casualties and prisoners. No casualties were reported for the Portuguese but the Cazadores may have lost a few as they were missing seven men four days later. Wellesley's British troops, if inexperienced, had performed with courage and determination which gave the army confidence for future actions. The Portuguese levies had remained largely unengaged, however, and the cavalry detachments that were had proven unsteady. Clearly, the Portuguese lacked experience and training and might be unable to hold their own facing French troops. Finally, Wellesley had learned at Roliça that French troops could strike hard in good order and very fast, even if isolated or in retreat, a lesson he would remember.

# THE BATTLE OF VIMEIRO

## British Reinforcements

**O**n the morning of 18 August, the day after Roliça, Wellesley was heartened by excellent news. A number of British ships had arrived off Peniche with some 1,300 men on board to reinforce his army. It was General Acland's Brigade, which had sailed from Harwich, and this fleet was followed by more ships carrying General Anstruther's Brigade from Ramsgate consisting of 2,700 men. The most important object was to get these troops landed right away. It was out of the question to attempt a landing anywhere near Peniche with its fortress garrisoned by a sizeable French force. The small fishing village of Porto Novo, south of Peniche, at the mouth of the small Maceira River, provided the only alternative. To protect the landing, Wellesley marched his army to Vimeiro, a large village about two kilometres inland from Porto Novo, and set up camp on its heights.

The Porto Novo area was not ideal for landing an army. Getting from the ships to the shore was a risky affair. The surf there was strong and some longboats were capsized and a few men drowned during the

**Wounded Piper George Clark of the 71st Highland Light Infantry as seen in another period print. While quite inaccurate compared to Atkinson's print insofar as the uniform of the 71st, it is nevertheless a very good depiction of Highland regimental dress and equipment during the Napoleonic wars. The blue facings and dark tartan suggest the 42nd Foot (The Royal Highland Regiment) is the unit depicted. (Print after Manskirch)**



landing of the reinforcements. Anstruther's Brigade consisted of the 2/9th (633 men), the 43rd (721 men), the 52nd (654 men) and the 97th (695 men) regiments. Acland's was made up of the 2nd (731 men), the 20th (401 men) and two companies of the 1/95th (200 men). Only seven and a half companies of the 20th Foot landed as the boats with the rest of the companies were carried away by strong currents and only landed late the next day, too late to participate in the battle. All the same, nearly all troops made it to shore safely on 19 and 20 August, particularly as on the 20th, some transport ships managed to get into the mouth of the Maceira River – a feat of seamanship in itself – and land the troops directly. Wellesley now had an additional 4,000 troops to face Junot, who was unaware of the arrival of these new reinforcements.

The new arrivals brought most welcome news for every man in the British Army: by an order dated 20 July 1808, powdered hair and queues were abolished! Within a short time, there was probably not a queue left in Wellesley's army. Captain Dobb's of the 52nd Foot noted that 'the men had great joy, for they were relieved from hair-tying, which was an operation grievous to be borne'. The next battle would be the first fought by British soldiers with their hair cut short and in its natural colour.

### Junot Marches Up

Meanwhile Junot wanted to reach Wellesley as fast as possible. He correctly evaluated that the British troops marching south towards Lisbon were only the first elements of a larger force that Britain wished to land in Portugal. His objective was to reach and destroy this first contingent and the others that would follow. He had now assembled over 14,600 men, which gave him a slight superiority over the 13,000 troops he thought the British had. He did not take much notice of the Portuguese; their contingent with Wellesley was small and made up of untried troops that the French could easily scatter on a field of battle. He had also gathered a fairly decent train of artillery which now boasted 24 guns and he must have been informed by his scouts that the British had fewer guns. Junot was seconded by Delaborde, Loison and Kellerman, all good and experienced field commanders and their troops were seasoned. So the French army was optimistic as it marched north towards Vimeiro.

Their British opponents were just as confident as they marched south into the village of Vimeiro and its surrounding area on 20 August. Wellesley, characteristically, had sought the high ground that Vimeiro and its surrounding countryside offered. On the flat-top hill of Vimeiro itself were posted Fane's and Anstruther's Brigades. Trant's Portuguese were put in reserve further north, just beyond Vimeiro, with a view to reinforce Fane's and Anstruther's. The brigades respectively commanded by Hill, Bowes, Catlin Craufurd, Nightingall, Acland and



The battle of Vimeiro was seen as an almost heaven-sent liberation from the French in this Portuguese print. British troops at left led by Wellesley scatter the French with an angel above bearing the arms of Portugal on his shield. Note the French imperial eagle flying away in the distance. (The Count of Amarante and Marquis of Chaves, Porto)

**RIGHT** The surrender of Brigadier-General Antoine Brenier to Wellesley during the battle of Vimeiro on 21 August 1808. Brenier commanded the 1st Brigade in Delaborde's Division. Born in 1767, Brenier joined the army in 1786 and campaigned in Spain, Italy and Holland in the 1790s. Promoted general of division in 1811, he served until 1813 in Spain, then in Germany, Belgium and France. He was wounded on numerous occasions. This Portuguese print done a few years after the battle shows the Portuguese troops fighting the French wearing circa 1810–1815 uniforms and Wellesley, later Wellington, wearing a Portuguese marshal's uniform. (Museu Militar do Porto)



**OPPOSITE** General Kellerman (right) is greeted by an officer as he arrives at the British camp under a flag of truce on 22 August 1808 to negotiate terms with Sir Hew Dalrymple. The flag bearer and trumpeter escorting him would have been dragoons or Chasseurs à Cheval rather than lancers. (Print after R. Caton Woodville)

Ferguson were disposed roughly from west to east on the heights running somewhat south-west to north-east behind Vimeiro. The cavalry, British and Portuguese, only numbered some 500 men and they were also initially posted in reserve in the Maceira River valley. Of the artillery, six guns were up on the height of Vimeiro with Anstruther's Brigade, eight guns on the high hill to the south-west and four in reserve. Good dispositions in case the French showed up but Wellesley's plan was to march on to Mafra, about 20 km away, early the next morning by making a detour around the French at Torres Vedras, so as to cut Junot off from Lisbon. The arrival of Sir Harry Burrard at Porto Novo changed all these plans.

Burrard arrived on the 20th on board the *Brazen* and would replace Wellesley in command of the army as he was the senior officer. Wellesley's spirits must have been considerably dampened by this news although he expected it. He nevertheless hurried to meet Burrard on board his ship to report on the situation. Burrard was a much more cautious general than Wellesley and disapproved of the proposed march to Mafra. It seemed too risky. Burrard felt, with some justification, that it was more prudent to wait for Sir John Moore's 12,000 men to arrive in order to have substantially superior numbers before attacking the French. Sir John's force was said to be nearing the coast of the peninsula. Furthermore, he would take overall command of the British forces in Portugal once landed so that Burrard knew he too would soon be superseded. After his interview with Wellesley, Burrard decided to spend a comfortable night on the ship and go ashore to take over command of the army the next day. Wellesley went back to his troops at Vimeiro and issued the order that the army would 'halt tomorrow' but that the men were 'to sleep accoutered tonight in readiness to move out, and to be under arms at three o'clock in the morning' of the 21st.

## THE FRENCH REACH VIMEIRO

The French had plans too. Junot wanted to reach Vimeiro as soon as possible and pressed his men on, marching through the night of





**PHASE 5: The British troopers of the 20th Light Dragoons did not falter and charged the French, pushing deep into their position. They were finally repulsed by a counter-charge made by two French dragoon regiments. Although the cavalry charge had failed, unlike Junot, Wellesley still had fresh troops.**

**PHASE 6: Junot had now committed nearly all the troops under his direct command. All had been beaten back and were in no shape to mount another attack. His only hope was that General Brenier's flanking movement would succeed.**

**BRITISH AND PORTUGUESE FORCES :**

- 1** 1st Brigade – MajGen R. Hill  
1/5th Foot, 1/9th Foot, 1/38th Foot
- 2** 2nd Brigade – MajGen R. Ferguson  
36th Foot, 1/40th Foot, 1/71st Foot
- 3** 3rd Brigade – BrigGen M. Nightingall  
29th Foot, 1/82nd Foot
- 4** 4th Brigade – BrigGen B. Bowes  
1/6th Foot, 1/32nd Foot
- 5** 5th Brigade – BrigGen C. Craufurd  
1/45th Foot, 91st Foot
- 6** 6th Brigade – BrigGen H. Fane  
1/50th Foot, 5/60th Foot [Rifles], 2/95th Rifles  
(4 companies)
- 7** 7th Brigade – BrigGen R. Anstruther  
2/9th Foot, 2/43rd Foot, 2/52nd Foot,  
2/97th Foot
- 8** 8th Brigade – BrigGen W. Acland  
2nd Foot, 20th Foot (7 1/2 companies),  
1/95th Rifles (2 companies)
- 9** Cavalry – LtCol C.D. Taylor  
20th Light Dragoons, Portuguese  
detachments of 6th, 11th, 12th and Lisbon  
Police Cavalry
- 10** Portuguese infantry – LtCol N. Trant  
Detachments of 12th, 21st and 24th infantry  
regiments and the Porto Cazadores

**FRENCH FORCES :**

- A** Brenier's 1st Brigade, Division Delaborde  
3/2nd Light Infantry  
3/4th Light Infantry  
1/70th & 2/70th Line Infantry  
One provisional dragoon regiment
- B** Thomières' 2nd Brigade, Division Delaborde  
1/86th & 2/86th Line Infantry  
4th Swiss Infantry (2 companies)
- C** Solignac's 1st Brigade, Division Loison  
3/12th Light Infantry  
3/15th Light Infantry  
3/58th Line Infantry
- D** Charlot's 2nd Brigade, Division Loison  
3/32nd Line Infantry  
3/82nd Line Infantry
- E** Reserve: Kellerman  
1/1st & 2/1st Regiment Reserve Grenadiers  
1/2nd & 2/2nd Regiment Reserve Grenadiers
- F** Margaron's Cavalry Division  
1st Provisional (ex-26th) Chasseurs à Cheval  
Two provisional dragoon regiments and a  
squadron of volunteer cavalry

# BATTLE OF VIMEIRO

21 August 1808, viewed from the north showing the repeated French attacks on Vimeiro village and Brenier's and Solignac's flank marches.

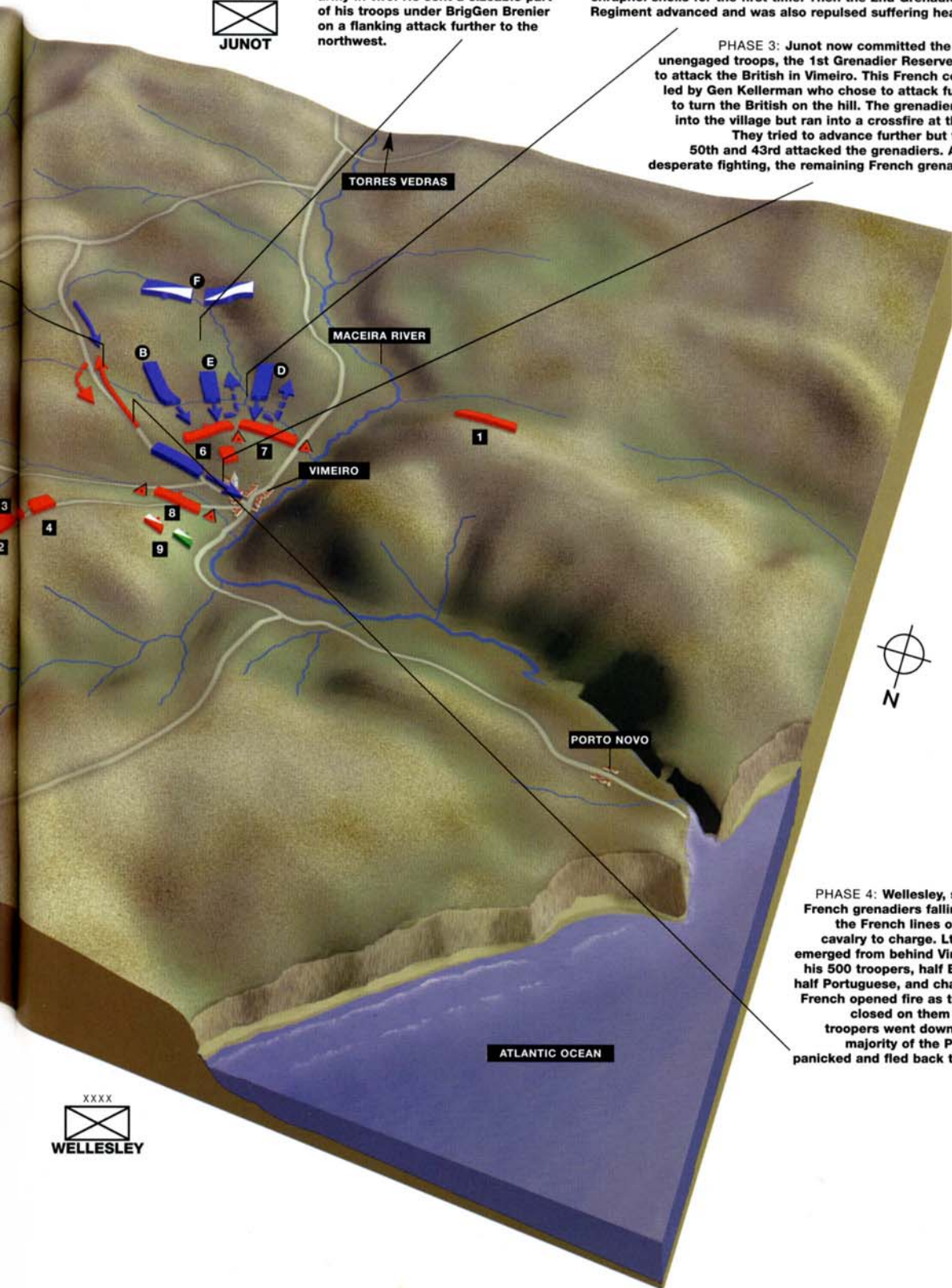
**PHASE 1:** Once Junot arrived with his army before the village of Vimeiro, he proceeded to divide his army in two. He sent a sizeable part of his troops under BrigGen Brenier on a flanking attack further to the northwest.



**PHASE 2:** Junot formed part of the infantry with him in columns to attack the hill above Vimeiro. The columns attacked the hill and were repeatedly repulsed with loss by the British who used shrapnel shells for the first time. Then the 2nd Grenadier Reserve Regiment advanced and was also repulsed suffering heavy losses.

**PHASE 3:** Junot now committed the last of his unengaged troops, the 1st Grenadier Reserve Regiment to attack the British in Vimeiro. This French column was led by Gen Kellerman who chose to attack further east to turn the British on the hill. The grenadiers charged into the village but ran into a crossfire at the church. They tried to advance further but the British 50th and 43rd attacked the grenadiers. After some desperate fighting, the remaining French grenadiers fled.

**PHASE 4:** Wellesley, seeing the French grenadiers falling back to the French lines ordered his cavalry to charge. LtCol Taylor emerged from behind Vimeiro with his 500 troopers, half British and half Portuguese, and charged. The French opened fire as the cavalry closed on them and a few troopers went down. The vast majority of the Portuguese panicked and fled back to Vimeiro.



20/21 August. During that night, British cavalry patrols to the south spotted French troops on the march near a small village about 5 km south of Vimeiro. The British troopers galloped back to Vimeiro and reported this intelligence to Wellesley. He issued the appropriate orders to be ready but, after a while, wondered if his cavalymen had really seen the French as there was no sign of them as dawn broke. This was because Junot had not advanced beyond the small village in order to allow his tired men a few hours' rest. With daylight breaking, the French were again on the march and, at about seven, they could be seen in the distance from the British positions at Vimeiro, raising clouds of dust as they approached.

As they slowly came into view, the French force was seen on a broad front with a large column to the west, another on the east side of the road with a reserve of grenadiers, the artillery and most of the cavalry. The British and Portuguese expected to see the French infantry in their familiar blue coats but these were folded and tied on top of their knapsacks. Instead, they wore their long white linen coats. These were found to be more suitable for the hot Portuguese summer and the dust



**The house in Vimeiro where the armistice was signed following the battle. (Photo: RC)**

of the country's roads. Ahead of the main body of the French army marching towards Vimeiro was a screen of its cavalry to push back any small British advanced party and to report on the dispositions of the British and Portuguese army.

At first it seemed to Wellesley that Junot might attack him to the west on the British right. The French cavalry had seen and reported its strength so the French general opted for a frontal attack on the centre with another column going east and making a flanking movement against the British left. It is important to understand that the battle of Vimeiro was fought in two separate areas, the first area Vimeiro itself, which was subject to repeated assaults. The second area of fighting was a couple of kilometres to the northeast and this action occurred towards the end of the battle.

Junot's decision to assault the British centre was an unfortunate choice. The centre position on the flat top of the hill just above Vimeiro selected by Wellesley was very strong, partly covered by vineyards and bushes and provided good cover for its defenders. The turning movement might also prove a tough affair as the British brigades were well deployed on the hills.

Observing the movement of the French columns, Wellesley quickly perceived that his centre would come under heavy attack while his left would be turned. By contrast his right should be safe and he did not hesitate to quickly dispatch Ferguson and his men north towards the village of Lourinhao to cover the French flanking movement led by General Brenier with a regiment of dragoons and four battalions of infantry. As a result, both the French and the British were marching along roughly parallel to each other. Ferguson's Brigade was followed by Catlin Craufurd's and Trant's, greatly reducing the prospects of success for Brenier. Wellesley also ordered Bowes', Nightingall's and Acland's Brigades to move north behind Vimeiro. Only Hill's Brigade remained on the British right, in case the French should be tempted to try something there. Within minutes the British deployment had been transformed smoothly and efficiently; something which the French had not previously encountered in Portugal.

### **Junot reinforces Brenier**

Observing this, Junot now worried that Brenier might be overwhelmed by a force twice his size. Clearly, his British counterpart had seen through his opening moves. Junot now ordered the three battalions of Solignac's Brigade detached from Loison's Division to reinforce Brenier. Junot now felt that the best chance for success lay in the frontal attack upon the British centre on the hill of Vimeiro. His army was now split in two with seven battalions gone to Brenier, and Junot had only eight battalions and three cavalry regiments with which to break the British centre. Nevertheless, confidence in the French camp was high as time and again determined attacks by its columns had shattered the positions of every enemy on the Continent. The battalions of Delaborde's and Loison's divisions formed into attack columns, each more than 1,500 men strong deployed in 30 files and 52 ranks.

In the British camp, Rifleman Harris described the scene that morning with confidence and pride. It was a beautiful sunny day and, as he looked around, he saw that the British 'lines glittered with bright

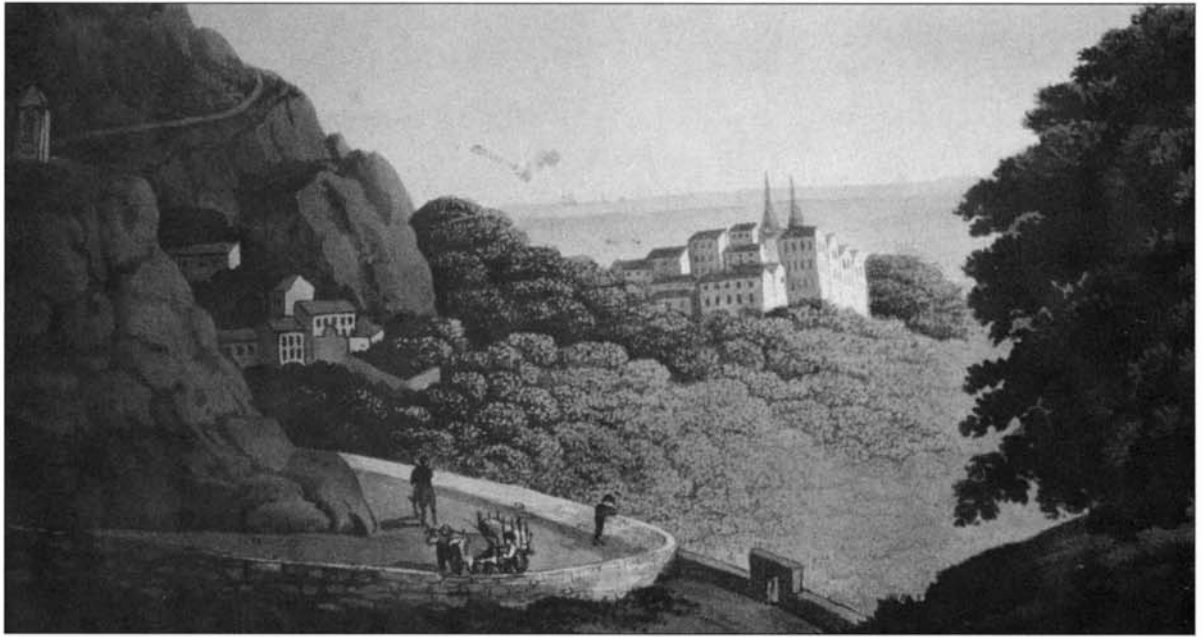
### **OVERLEAF**

**VIMEIRO, 21 AUGUST 1808 – Attack of the French Grenadiers. The main French attack on Vimeiro was launched by the 1st Grenadier Reserve Regiment under General Kellerman. In spite of withering British fire, notably from the raised terrace just in front of the church, the French grenadiers pushed on into the town suffering grievous casualties. The grenadier's attack was soon stopped and routed by a British counterattack. The French infantry are shown in the long linen dust coat they wore during this campaign. (Patrice Courcelle)**



P. Louyse





arms, and the features of the men were stern as they stood with their eyes fixed unalterably upon the enemy. The proud colours of England floated over their heads of the different battalions, and of the dark cannon on the rising ground were all in readiness.' Looking south, Harris could also see the French infantry columns approaching 'and, as they came on, the sun played on the arms of the enemy's battalions as if they had been tipped with gold'.

These approaching columns were commanded by General Delaborde with Thomières' Brigade of two battalions of the 86th Line Infantry and two companies of the 4th Swiss, nearly 2,200 men in the attack. The British skirmishers fired the occasional shot as they retreated before the line of French light infantry towards the main British position on the plateau above Vimeiro. The men of Fane's and Anthruster's Brigades were in position enjoying good cover. When the French columns got close enough, the British on the plateau poured a heavy and steady musketry and cannon fire into them as they came up. Nor was this a static defence. The 97th Foot advanced out of their position and charged the front of Charlot's French columns while the 52nd attacked its flanks. It was too much for the French and their columns broke and ran down the hill. Shortly thereafter, the 50th Foot with some rifle companies did the same to Thomière's column, which also fled down the hill. General Fane restrained his troops – 'Don't be too eager, men' he said coolly – and the British were soon back in their positions up on the plateau. The French suffered heavy casualties and generals Delaborde and Charlot were wounded.

**The vicinity of Sintra, c.1808–1811. The two cone-shaped chimneys of the palace are visible in the distance. Print after Bradford. (Pedro de Brito Collection, Porto)**

## **THE FRENCH GRENADIERS ATTACK**

The failure of this first attack may have been a disappointment for Junot but the battle was just starting and the 2nd Grenadier Reserve Regiment



consisting of two battalions under Colonel Saint-Clair was called upon to make a second assault. They marched up formed in columns to attack the same British positions on the plateau of Vimeiro. Simultaneously, the men of the first attack were rallied and formed again to march in support of the grenadiers. To pound the British position, eight guns were brought up but seem to have had little effect. The British infantrymen on the plateau were ready to meet the new attackers. There were no British riflemen out skirmishing so this time the British artillerymen had a clear field of fire. They used, for the first time in battle, a new type of shell invented by Sir Henry Shrapnel. This new anti-personnel ammunition could be fired from cannons and burst hurling a shower of metal debris at its target. By the time the French grenadiers started to climb up the hill, they were under intense British musketry and artillery fire. As the grenadiers reached about halfway up, their attack broke up with men falling everywhere under the fire of the 52nd, the 97th and the rifle battalions.

The position must be taken if Junot were to succeed. He therefore called upon his ultimate reserve, the two battalions of 1st Grenadier Reserve Regiment under Colonel Maransin, to attack the plateau 'pour en finir' – to put an end to it – and clear the British off the hill. General Kellerman led the attack but this time the French columns did not go straight up the hill. Instead, Kellerman tried to exploit a lower ridge to the north-west which could, if they took it, outflank Fane's Brigade and open the way for an attack on the village of Vimeiro. As they moved north, the French grenadiers had no troops on the road directly facing them but, as they came up to the village church, they found themselves fired at from both sides of the road. Brigadier-General Anstruther had seen the move and sent the 43rd Foot, which had not yet fired a shot, to the south-west side of the ridge. The 43rd took cover in the churchyard which, facing the road from the north-west side, was elevated and surrounded by a high retaining wall. The men of the 43rd poured a terrible fire into the French grenadiers who could not scale the wall or turn the position. The French did not get much further into Vimeiro as they were now under fire from the east side of the road as well.

Brigadier-General Acland had seen the attack of Kellerman's French grenadiers developing and, on his own initiative, moved his brigade to the north-eastern side of the road, some taking position in the church cemetery. Acland's two companies of the 95th and the light companies of the 2nd and 20th attacked the east flank of the French grenadiers at once while the brigade's two guns also opened up on the column. Fane also turned his brigade's guns on Kellerman's column. The intense shrapnel fire tore into the ranks and would burst towards the rear, remarked French artillery Colonel (later General) Foy. Still the brave French grenadiers hoped to charge up the street leading up the hill, carry all before them and fall on the British rear on top. Such a move had been anticipated and they were in turn charged by the 50th Foot on the west side with the 43rd also charging in. The fighting was desperate with men firing at each other within five metres; there were many duels at bayonet point. The French finally wavered and broke in retreat to 'the cheer of the British soldiers in the charge' after losing many men and fleeing 'as hard as they could run for it' recalled Rifleman Harris. But they also inflicted appreciable losses on their British opponents. The

#### OVERLEAF

**VIMEIRO, 21 AUGUST 1808 – Charge of the British Cavalry.** As the French were in retreat, Wellesley shouted to Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor 'Now, Twentieth, now is the time!' and with that, the 20th Light Dragoons and the Portuguese cavalry at its side charged. Unfortunately, many of the raw Portuguese troopers bolted and ran back when they came under French fire. Taylor and his men never hesitated and the British troopers charged and routed a body of French dragoons. The British cavalry kept up its charge until finally driven back by French reserves. In spite of losing LtCol Taylor, the 20th rallied and was ready to charge again later but, by then, General Burrard had arrived and, as a result, Wellesley's victory would not be exploited. (Patrice Courcelle)



P. Loupcaffe



43rd Foot alone had 40 killed and 79 wounded out of 700 men in a matter of minutes in this fight with the French grenadiers. All the same, Wellesley's centre had held admirably. This had been the critical point of the battle. The French attack had been totally repulsed by the British. Kellerman and his remaining grenadiers retreated towards their original position.

### **British Cavalry Charge**

Wellesley now felt that a cavalry charge was in order. He raised his cocked hat to Lieutenant-Colonel Taylor shouting 'Now, Twentieth, now is the time!' Seeing this, Taylor brought his 240 troopers of the 20th Light Dragoons with the 260 Portuguese cavalry out from behind the Vimeiro hill. They formed a line, the 20th at centre and the Portuguese on both sides, and then charged towards the retreating French. As they approached, some of the French formed up and fired at them with some effect. The Portuguese troopers saw a few of their men hit, panicked, bolted and galloped back, ultimately taking refuge behind Fane's Brigade. But perhaps not all fled as a Portuguese account by Joaquim Paes de Sa, an officer who was there, mentions Commandant Eleziario of the Lisbon Police being killed and has much praise ('maior elogio') for Lieutenant Pinto's conduct. Nevertheless, Taylor and his men were now basically charging alone. They first came against a strong body of French dragoons which had just been sent by Junot to protect the infantry's retreat. The British troopers rode at them, burst through the French dragoons who did not know 'what they were about', to quote Lieutenant Du Cane of the 20th Light Dragoons, and reached some of the retreating infantry. This is where 'poor Colonel Taylor was shot by them by pressing the infantry too far, without support'. Still they went on up a hill when they came upon a stone wall and were charged by two French dragoon regiments held in reserve. Logic dictates that the 20th should have been annihilated but, amazingly, most of the daring troopers managed to get back to the British lines with a loss of 21 killed, 24 wounded and 11 made prisoners. One of the captured was Captain Eustace who, taken to Junot, received 'wonderful praise' for the 20th's bravery from the French general. Nevertheless, the British-Portuguese charge had utterly failed and this was largely due to the unsteady Portuguese troopers.

Junot had by now engaged nearly all of the troops under his immediate command to attack Vimeiro and to repulse the British cavalry attack. Wellesley had only engaged part of his force as yet and would have plenty of fresh troops available to attack the French position.

## **BRENIER'S FLANKING ATTACK**

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The one hope Junot had was to outflank the British position and thus turn the situation to his advantage. The instrument for this French move was Brenier's Brigade, which was marching further to the north-east. Brenier was to turn west and follow the road to reach the farm of Ventosa. Beyond Ventosa lay the British east flank. Feeling his artillery could not pass through the rough ravines between the hills, Brenier had decided to make a wide detour using the available roads to by-pass a



**French troops evacuate Portugal in September 1808. Detail from print. (Bussaco Military Museum)**

range of hills running from west to east. This took him further east before he could turn north and eventually west on a road skirting the north of the hills by which he would reach Ventosa.

Junot had sent General Jean-Baptiste Solignac's Brigade to reinforce Brenier's flanking movement. Solignac was therefore trying to catch up with Brenier. When Solignac, skirting the road to the south of the hills, arrived at the ravine leading to Ventosa, he decided to cross it with his three battalions, thus gaining time. When he got to Ventosa, he found the farm empty – Brenier had not yet reached it. Solignac then deployed his battalions at the foot of the hill to the west on whose top a thin line of red-coated British skirmishers could be seen in the distance. What Solignac did not know was that behind the hill were three British brigades formed in a battle order of two lines: the first line was Ferguson's Brigade with the 36th, 40th and 71st regiments, and the 82nd from Nightingall's Brigade; the second line having the 6th and 32nd of Bowes' Brigade and the 29th from Nightingall's. Furthermore, Acland's and Craufurd's Brigades were less than two kilometres to the west.

The French battalions moved up the hill in line with their screen of voltigeurs in front. The British skirmishers moved off but when the French reached the crest, they saw, no doubt to their anguished surprise, some 3,300 redcoats in two lines on the reverse slope of the hill. The British ranks now started to march up to meet them, their lines so long that they extended beyond the flanks of the French line. Solignac had little choice. It was too late to retreat and a desperate fight was the only hope. At about 100 metres, the four regiments of the first

**PHASE 2:** Sometime later, Junot dispatched BrigGen Solignac with his three battalions to reinforce Brenier. Initially Solignac followed the same route as Brenier, but anxious to catch up with the leading brigade, decided to take the road leading west to the hamlet of Toledo, then cut north across the hills to meet Brenier who should be heading west on the Lourinha road towards Vimeiro.

**PHASE 6:** Other British troops from Nightingall's Brigade now arrived. Ferguson's Brigade rallied and swiftly counter-attacked alongside Nightingall's men. The British attack surprised Brenier's men with devastating effect. Brenier was wounded and captured while the remnants of the two French columns fled to the southeast to rejoin Junot's main force.

**PHASE 5:** The pursuing British, mostly from Ferguson's Brigade ran into Brenier's men who in turn charged them. Ferguson's Brigade wavered but retreated in fairly good order.

- BRITISH AND PORTUGUESE FORCES :**
- 1 1st Brigade – MajGen R. Hill  
1/5th Foot, 1/9th Foot, 1/38th Foot
  - 2 2nd Brigade – MajGen R. Ferguson  
36th Foot, 1/40th Foot, 1/71st Foot
  - 3 3rd Brigade – BrigGen M. Nightingall  
29th Foot, 1/82nd Foot
  - 4 4th Brigade – BrigGen B. Bowes  
1/6th Foot, 1/32nd Foot
  - 5 5th Brigade – BrigGen C. Craufurd  
1/45th Foot, 91st Foot
  - 6 6th Brigade – BrigGen H. Fane  
1/50th Foot, 5/60th Foot [Rifles], 2/95th Rifles  
(4 companies)
  - 7 7th Brigade – BrigGen R. Anstruther  
2/9th Foot, 2/43rd Foot, 2/52nd Foot,  
2/97th Foot
  - 8 8th Brigade – BrigGen W. Acland  
2nd Foot, 20th Foot (7 ½ companies),  
1/95th Rifles (2 companies)
  - 9 Cavalry – LtCol C.D. Taylor  
20th Light Dragoons, Portuguese  
detachments of 6th, 11th, 12th and Lisbon  
Police Cavalry
  - 10 Portuguese infantry – LtCol N. Trant  
Detachments of 12th, 21st and 24th infantry  
regiments and the Porto Cazadores

**PHASE 1:** Junot ordered BrigGen Brenier to make a flanking movement from the east with his brigade (four battalions) reinforced by a regiment of dragoons. Brenier planned to march east and then north before turning west on the Lourinha road north of the hills to pass through Ventosa farm and approach the British positions at Vimeiro from the rear.

# BATTLE OF VIMEIRO

21 August 1808, viewed from the north showing the defeat of Brenier's and Solignac's flank attacks.

**PHASE 3:** Solignac's Brigade crossed the ravine to the road north of the hills and reached Ventosa. There was no sign of Brenier but British skirmishers were spotted on a hill to the west. Solignac's Brigade formed up and advanced against them. As the French crested the hill they saw, to their horror, the three British infantry brigades of Ferguson, Nightingall and Bowes deployed in two lines at the foot of the hill.

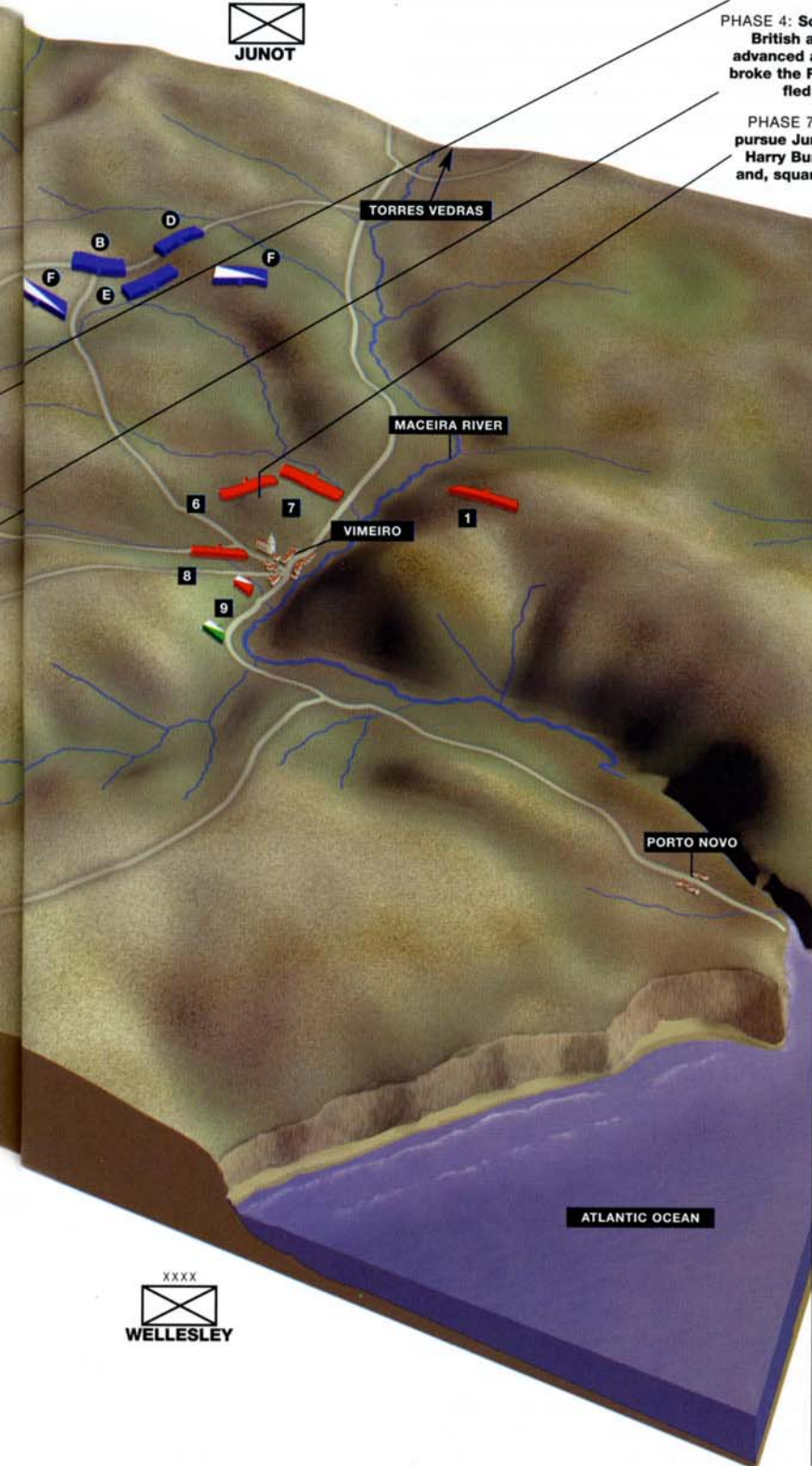
**PHASE 4:** Solignac decided his only chance was to charge the British at the foot of the hill. However the British brigades advanced against him, opening a shattering volley fire which broke the French brigade and wounded Solignac. The French fled eastward in disorder with the redcoats in pursuit.

**PHASE 7:** With fresh troops to hand Wellesley was keen to pursue Junot and finish the French completely. However, Sir Harry Burrard had arrived to take command from Wellesley and, squandering the chance for a decisive victory, ordered the army to hold its positions.

XXXX  
  
**JUNOT**



XXXX  
  
**WELLESLEY**



- FRENCH FORCES :**
- A** Brenier's 1st Brigade, Division Delaborde
    - 3/2nd Light Infantry
    - 3/4th Light Infantry
    - 1/70th & 2/70th Line Infantry
    - One provisional dragoon regiment
  - B** Thomières' 2nd Brigade, Division Delaborde
    - 1/86th & 2/86th Line Infantry
    - 4th Swiss Infantry (2 companies)
  - C** Solignac's 1st Brigade, Division Loison
    - 3/12th Light Infantry
    - 3/15th Light Infantry
    - 3/58th Line Infantry
  - D** Charlot's 2nd Brigade, Division Loison
    - 3/32nd Line Infantry
    - 3/82nd Line Infantry
  - E** Reserve: Kellerman
    - 1/1st & 2/1st Regiment Reserve Grenadiers
    - 1/2nd & 2/2nd Regiment Reserve Grenadiers
  - F** Margaron's Cavalry Division
    - 1st Provisional (ex-26th) Chasseurs à Cheval
    - Two provisional dragoon regiments and a squadron of volunteer cavalry

British line halted and fired a devastating volley on the French line, practically wiping away the voltigeur skirmishers in front. Solignac was badly wounded. The British reloaded and marched forward in silence. The French gave sporadic and ineffective fire while shouting and, as the wide British lines drew near, broke and ran along the road heading north-east. The British ran in pursuit, firing an occasional volley on the retreating French, capturing three field guns and taking many prisoners as they went.

On a hill further to the north-east, Brigadier-General Brenier had arrived with his French force. He saw the British 36th and 40th in pursuit of the remnants of Solignac's Brigade veering north, and the 71st and 82nd stopped below the hill near the three captured guns to take a rest and catch their breath. Brenier immediately ordered his four battalions with two squadrons of dragoons to charge down the hill to surprise the 71st and 82nd. The British soldiers were at first startled by the French column's charge and abandoned the cannons, quickly falling back to rally and form a defence line. Unluckily for the French, the 29th Foot arrived on the scene at that time. All three British regiments now formed a battle line, advanced against the French and fired very effective volleys. The effect of these soon told on the French who broke in panic and ran in disorder up the hill. Brenier was wounded and taken prisoner by the British. Ferguson's and Nightingall's Brigades had beaten the two French brigades nearly all by themselves, Bowes' Brigade in the second line having been only slightly engaged. Craufurd's Brigade and Trant's Portuguese were marching hard to join the fight but arrived just as it had finished. It was about noon.

Junot's turning movement had failed utterly. Only two and a half hours into the fight, his troops were in retreat at both ends of the battlefield. Wellesley had won the battle of Vimeiro. The time was now ripe for the British brigades to advance and finish crippling the enemy forces so as to remove the last French hopes of retaining Lisbon. Ferguson's Brigade was especially anxious to move as it had part of Solignac's troops within reach backed up against a hill. Instead, the whole British army was ordered not to advance any further. Disappointed officers and soldiers complied wondering why such an opportunity to destroy the enemy was squandered.

## **CHANGING BRITISH GENERALS**

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The explanation was to be found at the British HQ. Sir Harry Burrard had arrived in Vimeiro to take over command. He had the good sense to wait until the fighting was over before relieving Wellesley of command. A much less daring general than Wellesley, instead of calling for a general advance to pursue the retreating French, he did not want to take any risks, even after the enemy had been beaten, and ordered a halt on the pretext, unfounded by any solid evidence, that there could be more fresh French troops. Even if there had been, there were plenty of fresh troops on the British side too as barely half of Wellesley's force had been engaged. A deeply disappointed Lieutenant Du Cane echoed the feelings of the army when he wrote that 'there was not the smallest doubt but if the enemy had been pursued by us – but for half our force



were in action, and all the French nearly – for an hour, they would have surrendered at our discretion’. Seeing there was no immediate pursuit, Junot and his officers rallied their men into some order to be able to resist the British but as Hulot, a French artillery officer, put it, ‘I was amazed at not seeing the enemy overtake my guns.’

It had been a hotly fought affair. The French reported losing a total of about 1,800 officers and men killed, wounded or taken prisoner, these last being about 3 or 400 hundred. Of the field officers, Delaborde and three brigadiers had been wounded (and one of them, Brenier, captured) as well as colonels Foy and Prost of the artillery who had also been wounded. Heavy losses which lowered the morale of the French army.

The British had far fewer losses at 720 officers and men. They broke down as follows: four officers and 131 men killed, 37 officers and 497 men wounded, and two officers and 49 men missing. Some were lucky that day. William Warre, who had his horse, ‘a beautiful, nice creature’, shot dead from under him then had his cloak ‘shot away before me’ on another mount, was unscathed as was Ferguson ‘in a fire like a hail around him’.

The Portuguese had an officer of the Lisbon Police Cavalry killed, ‘a cadet and others wounded’ according to a letter by Joaquim Paes de Sa, a cavalry officer present. This agrees with the figures given by Luz Soriano, who reports two men killed and seven wounded, and seven horses killed and one wounded.

Burrard only had command of the army until the early morning of 22 August. Sir Hew Dalrymple landed and immediately relieved Sir Harry. Wellesley laid before Dalrymple a plan to march on Mafra so as to trap the French army but he had no further luck with Sir Hew than with Burrard the previous day. Indeed, Dalrymple obviously resented Wellesley and opposed just about any measure he favoured. The British army had seen three commanders within about 20 hours, a confusing experience for any force, with the result that it had ground to a halt while rifts developed between its senior commanders.

# AFTERMATH

## THE SINTRA CONVENTION

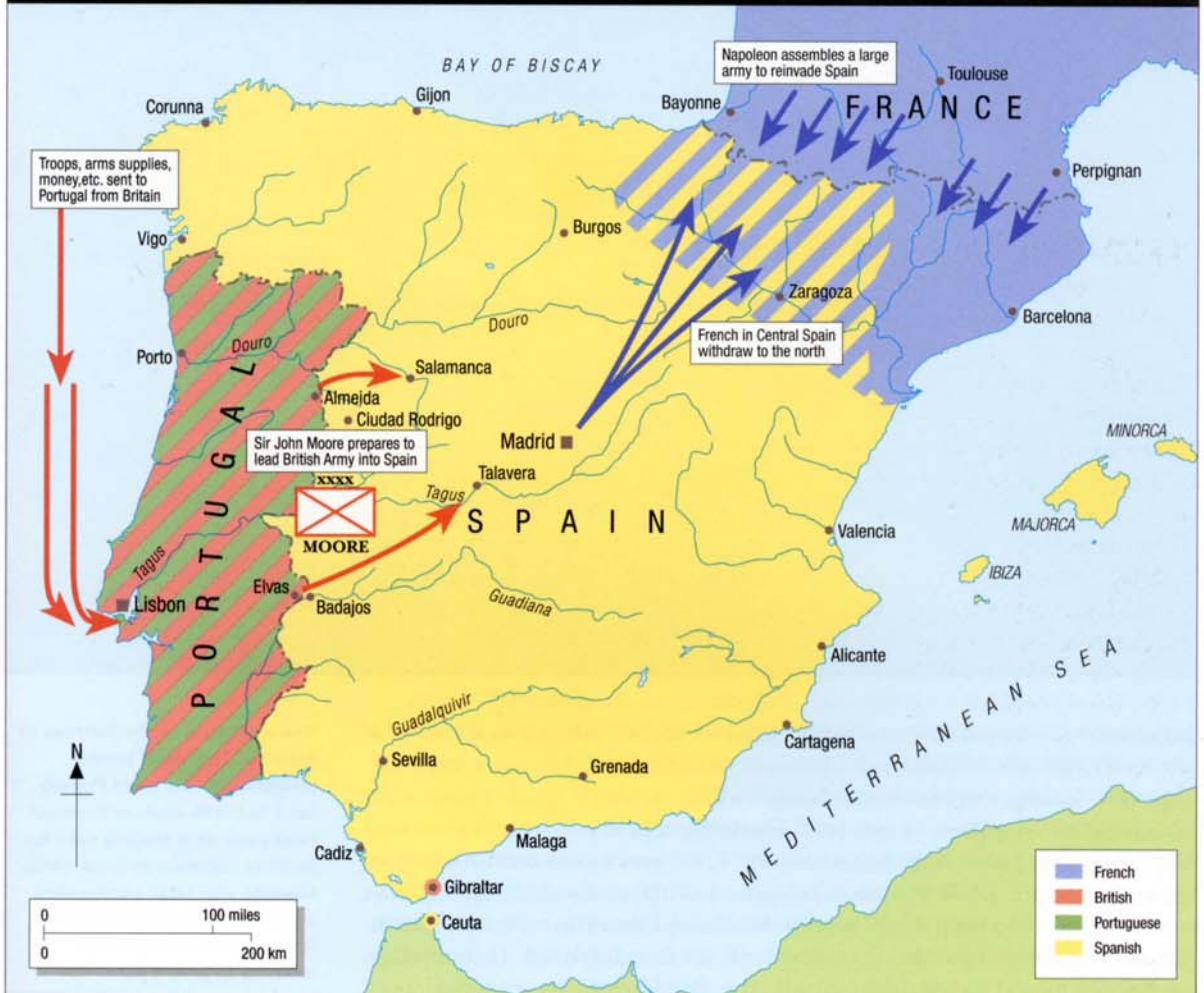
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**O**n 22 August, a body of French cavalry approached the British lines raising great clouds of dust. One of the troopers carried a flag of truce. It was the escort of General Kellerman, who, accompanied by his two aides de camp, was coming to the British camp to negotiate a suspension of arms and, if possible, to prepare an agreement for the evacuation of the French from Portugal. Sir Arthur Wellesley proposed to meet Kellerman at the outposts but Sir Hew Dalrymple refused to allow Wellesley to meet him. Sir Hew decided instead that the French general would meet him at what had been, up till then, Wellesley's HQ in Vimeiro. A mortified Wellesley was now relieved, most fortunately for him as it turned out, of any active role in the negotiations.

General Kellerman had been sent by Junot because of his diplomatic skills which, in the event, were revealed to be far greater than those of Sir Hew. As a British writer put it in 1812, in 'all that relates to military diplomacy, the French are unquestionably so superior that no ordinary caution is requisite in those who enter the lists with them on any occasion, particularly with the generous openness of the English character.' By the end of the meeting, Dalrymple had agreed to suspend hostilities and see to the evacuation of the French army from all forts and fortresses and that it would be sent to France from Portugal. Here was the great advantage of the agreement for it meant that long sieges or blockades of the great fortresses of Almeida, Peniche, Elvas as well as Lisbon would be avoided. This was Dalrymple's main aim. But there were many less favourable clauses. The French troops with their dependants were to be carried on British ships to France at British expense. They were to keep their weapons, colours and field artillery. They further were not to be considered prisoners of war and thus could be deployed again immediately. Finally, they could bring all their baggage and personal property with them. This not only applied to the military but also to civilians attached to the French army, French residents of Portugal and those Portuguese who had sided with the French also leaving Lisbon. The French military chest and assorted 'government' property was also to be taken out even though much of it came from Portuguese coffers, art museums and royal libraries.

Kellerman, who was signing for Junot, then noted that Sir Hew should not sign the agreement with a junior general such as himself. Dalrymple, almost adding insult to injury, therefore sent for Wellesley to sign it. He did sign, albeit under duress, as it was his duty to obey but also wrote of his disagreement with the terms granted and declined any responsibility for the outcome of the negotiations. Relations between the two men could hardly have been worse. Five days later Wellesley

## THE PENINSULA, AUTUMN 1808



asked and was granted leave to return to Britain. He left Portugal on 20 September.

Meanwhile, the thorny problem of the Russian fleet in Lisbon harbour was solved much more smoothly by admirals Cotton and Seniavin. As Russia was technically at war with Britain but in reality neutral, the last thing either side wanted was a fight. As the British wanted to deny the potential use of the Russian ships to the French while the Russians did not want to lose their ships outright, a novel agreement was reached. The Russians agreed that the ships would be taken to Britain and kept there to be returned to Russia six months after the signature of a peace treaty and that the Russian crews would be immediately transported to Russia. In all this, it became clear to the British that the Russians detested their French 'ally' and were delighted at Junot's defeat.

By the terms of the Sintra Convention, the British now had to transport a large body of French troops to France with its baggage and artillery as well as its dependants. The 'Embarkation Return' of the French army under General Junot drawn up on 15 September 1808 is



impressive. It amounted to a grand total of 25,747 officers and men. Of these, 22,635 were infantry, 1,974 were cavalry and 1,121 were gunners, the rest being engineers and staff. The artillery park embarking consisted of 30 pieces of artillery. These figures are interesting in that they show that Junot had received some 4,500 recruits as reinforcements since December 1807. His army remained at about the same strength in spite of losses of about 4,500 men in battle and desertions to the British. Of these, about one in five deserted as hundreds of Hanoverians and Swiss joined the British. In all, the British had to transport over 29,000 persons to France.

### **Outcry Over the Convention's Terms**

The convention was formally agreed to by Junot in Lisbon on 30 August. Three days later, General Dalrymple wrote to Lord Castlereagh from Sintra regarding the convention and thus it came to be known as the Sintra (or Cintra) Convention although it was neither negotiated nor signed there. No Portuguese official had been party to it in spite of the effect it had on the country. The news of it first caused a furore in Portugal. General Bernardim Freire de Andrade vigorously protested its various clauses to Gen Dalrymple. He was followed by other military officers and civil officials. In the Portuguese view, the French, who had ransacked their country and slaughtered countless helpless people for the last nine months, were now free to leave with their luggage full of goods and their pockets filled with money looted in the country. The protests were made with due respect to 'the generous allies who have liberated Portugal' but desired redress and a say in their own affairs. Dalrymple's reaction was far from gracious as he basically replied it was none of their business. The Bishop of Porto was no less incensed at the Sintra

**The west gate of the fortress of Almeida. The great border fortress was the main French base in north-eastern Portugal. First used as a staging area for punitive columns in June 1808, Almeida was later surrounded and blockaded by Portuguese levies. Its French garrison 'refused to give it up to the Portuguese' following the Sintra Convention, no doubt fearing for its safety. As a result, the 6th Foot with 35 Royal Artillery were sent there. On the way, they were 'much caressed and saluted with cries of Viva Englies (Hail the British), Bueno Englies (Well done Englishmen), Rumpu Francies (Damn the French) and in some of the large towns' there were fireworks 'and the women covered us with flowers and laurel leaves' in the words of Royal Artillery gunner Benjamin Miller. Finally, on 2 October, the British troops 'formed up at the gate of the fortress. The French marched out prisoners of war and we took possession of it.'**  
(Photo: RC)

Convention. He immediately wrote to the British government that this document was an insult to Portugal and unworthy of the British nation.

When news of the Sintra Convention reached Britain, the reaction of the public and of the politicians was most negative. The terms were seen as much too generous and the diplomats were further embarrassed by the protests from their Portuguese counterparts. Generals Burrard and Dalrymple were recalled to England – Wellesley was already there – and Sir John Moore put in command of the British forces in Portugal on 25 September. A full-scale Court of Inquiry was held in England between 14 November and 22 December sitting in the great hall of Chelsea Hospital. Dalrymple, haughty and devious as ever, tried to shift some of the blame on Wellesley but the ploy turned against him as several of the brigadiers at Vimeiro testified their frustration at Burrard's and Dalrymple's orders, which prevented them from pursuing and finishing the French. They also praised Wellesley's military leadership throughout the campaign. Finally, Wellesley was cleared of any blame while Burrard and Dalrymple were found to have acted improperly, especially as Dalrymple's Sintra Convention had political as well as military clauses. Wellesley had also written (on 5 September) a remarkably fine strategic assessment of the military situation in Portugal and Spain which impressed cabinet ministers when they eventually saw it. Now cleared of any active involvement in the Sintra Convention, he was seen as an authority on peninsular military affairs.

As for Napoleon, he was disappointed but not displeased. He wrote to Junot that he had done nothing dishonourable as 'you are bringing back my troops, my eagles and my cannons ... I had warned you ... to have no trust of them [the Portuguese], to build a entrenched camp [around Lisbon] ... You could have held out, in such a position, for six months until relief came ... This [Sintra] Convention, you won it by your courage, but not by your [tactical] dispositions ...' The emperor went on to find it 'hardly justifiable' that the fortress of Elvas had been included in the convention. But he was in an optimistic mood and concluded that 'before the end of the year, I want to return you myself to Lisbon ... You will be with the advance guard [of the Grand Army] and I will be behind you.'

In the meantime, Sir John Moore's British force in Portugal was rapidly growing in strength. The British forces in Portugal stood at 33,129 on 1 October. Nearly all were infantry except for 2,234 gunners and only 1,558 cavalry. This weakness was recognised as 3,410 cavalymen were under orders to embark for Portugal with another 11,419 infantry which would bring the British army there to some 46,275 officers and men. Of these, 31,500 formed Sir John Moore's army that marched into Spain at the end of the year.

### **Lessons of the Vimeiro Campaign**

On the whole, the British army in Portugal functioned very efficiently in 1808 and the Vimeiro campaign had shown that it could certainly take on the French imperial forces. The tactical approach (largely the line versus column debate), the weapons, the supply system and, most of all, the men, were more than equal to the task. But the Vimeiro campaign also revealed serious deficiencies. Perhaps the most pressing problem was the ludicrous command structure which resulted in three successive



commanding generals within 20 hours! No matter how good, the army could not operate efficiently with this idiotic game of musical chairs taking place at the top. Unlike in the later peninsular campaigns, the future Wellington was not the unquestioned senior commander of the British forces in 1808. Nor did a British commander have any clear authority over the Portuguese troops at this time. However, in spite of the embarrassing British bumbles, the Vimeiro campaign demonstrated that the future duke had an excellent tactical and strategic eye. In the long run, this was probably of greatest benefit to the British and Portuguese forces.

Another challenge ahead for the British army was the development of a truly effective division and corps system such as the French Imperial Army operated. If a large allied army under British command was to be deployed permanently in the peninsula, it would require an efficient and sophisticated staff machinery to support it.

The Portuguese army for its part was computed at about 30,000 men at the end of the year. As can be seen in the detailed returns (see Table 1: The Portuguese Army, late 1808) it still lacked just about everything an army should have, especially good weapons, uniforms and money. There were also countless other major problems to cope with: the lack of training in modern tactics of the officers and men was self-evident; what drill and manoeuvre there was followed the outdated Prussian-style drill introduced in the 1760s by Count de Lippe; there were no integrated and knowledgeable cadres through which the Portuguese army could be trained, enabling it to act in concert with British brigades; thus, there was little confidence that the Portuguese would hold their own under fire. The staff work and organisation required for a self-sufficient army in the field, such as the British army, was largely unknown to Portuguese senior officers as indeed to nearly all other European armies of the time. They depended to a large measure on

**Fort La Lippe in Elvas. This citadel built on a height next to the fortress city was considered impregnable. Following the Sintra Convention, the French garrison of Elvas under Captain Girod de Novillars retreated to Fort La Lippe to fight off the Spanish and Portuguese whom they did not trust. The Spanish trained a few guns on La Lippe but to no effect and the French remained in their 'eagle's nest' insisting that some French taken prisoner in Badajos also be included in the evacuation and that all would be escorted by British troops. At length, the British showed up, agreed to include the Badajos prisoners and, in late November, recalled Captain Paulin, the French garrison of 1,200 men marched out with their loaded field pieces, 'their arms gleaming, all their baggage, their eagles deployed and their drums beating as if on parade'. Once in Lisbon, these proud French troops, the last to leave Portugal, held a parade on the anniversary of the battle of Austerlitz [2 December 1805] shouting 'Vive l'Empereur' before boarding ships that took them to France. (Photo: RC)**

supplies found on the spot. The British, because of their colonial ventures and seaborne armies landing anywhere, had developed an elaborate logistical system. This required considerable money which the Portuguese simply did not have. Yet, if it was to be a truly effective ally, the Portuguese army would have to be totally reorganised, retrained, rearmed, re-equipped and funded. The Vimeiro campaign had shown that much. There lay one of the keys to future success against the French on the peninsular battlefields. The British could not hope, by themselves, to oust the French from the peninsula. That was to be dramatically demonstrated in its next campaign and by Sir John Moore's retreat to Corunna (Spain) in January 1809. Only with a strong and efficient Portuguese allied army at its side could Britain dare to hope for long-term success.

To many the Vimeiro campaign clearly demonstrated that their case was righteous and their struggle against Napoleonic France just. There had been previous stories of French brutality and atrocities but they were often tempered by accounts of similar offences on the part of their opponents. Now however, a whole pernicious system of persecution of the defenceless and the weak was revealed during the Vimeiro campaign. The bloody horrors perpetrated by some French officers and soldiers, first in Portugal and then in Spain, probably did more harm to Napoleonic France than any army could have. France's grand declarations on the Rights of Man and world brotherhood were totally debased as a result. These wanton acts gave Britain and its allies the 'moral high ground' they needed. It hardened their resolve to rid themselves of this evil enemy; and this resolve was a prerequisite of final victory.

# THE BATTLEFIELDS TODAY

**T**here are many battlefields in this campaign besides Vimeiro, some having changed considerably in the last few decades, others much less. The sites of the first substantial battles in the north are in the mountainous upper Douro area. Régua has grown substantially and its ford is now spanned by bridges. Teixeira is situated in the hills, on the road to Amarante, and retains its rustic character. Visiting these beautiful sites demonstrates General Silveira's intelligent use of terrain to the advantage of his raw levies. Similarly, a visit to the mighty fortress of Almeida clearly illustrates why it had to be blockaded and could not be stormed. Leiria and Evora are both much larger than in 1808 but retain well-preserved historic city centres.

Figueira da Foz has become a large seaside resort since the British landed but Fort Santa Catarina is still there at the harbour's entrance, next to beach hotels. Batalha has grown but not out of recognition and its superb medieval abbey remains unchanged from when British soldiers saw it in 1808. Several Portuguese kings and queens including the great King Henry 'The Navigator' rest in its chapels as well as the tomb of Portugal's Unknown Soldier from World War I, always guarded by two sentries of the Portuguese army.

Obidos, where the first British shots and the first British casualties of the Peninsular War occurred, is now a major tourist attraction. Its medieval walls have been preserved and its castle turned into a luxury hotel. It is still a small town, full of charming houses and easily visited on foot.

Roliça on the other hand retains its village character and while there are more houses, it is easy to visualize the first phase of the battle. In the village is a large *azulejo* tile commemorating the battle and the British are well remembered with streets named after Wellesley and Trant. The construction of railways and, recently, large highways, as well as the development of modern agriculture seem to have transformed the area where the French had their second line.



**LEFT** Monument on the heights above Teixeira, commemorating the repulse of General Loison's French column by General Silveira's Portuguese levies in June 1808. (Photo: RC)

**ABOVE** The main street in Roliça today is named after Lieutenant-Colonel Nicholas Trant, who commanded the Portuguese contingent with the British troops. (Photo: RC)





ABOVE **The battle memorial at Rolíça. (Photo: RC)**

RIGHT **The fine memorial park of the battle of Vimeiro is situated on the flat top of the hill where Fane's brigade was posted. It features a monument with a number of tile *azulejos* illustrating the various phases of the battle. (Photo: RC)**



Vimeiro has obviously changed greatly. It has grown into a small town with many new houses and businesses. The heights where Fane's and Anthruster's brigades were posted, then barren, are now covered with houses and the nearby hills are also dotted with mostly recent constructions. However, it retains the essential features of the battle, notably the village church, which was the scene of heavy fighting. Up on the height, a substantial memorial park to the battle has been created. *Azulejos* tile tablets illustrate the various phases of the action.

Renting a car to visit these sites is a rewarding experience. The country is scenic, the roads and accommodation are good and the Portuguese, many of whom speak English and/or French, are friendly and eager to help.

# ORDERS OF BATTLE

## JUNOT'S ARMY OF PORTUGAL, NOVEMBER 1807

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General Andoche Junot, Duke of Abrantes  
Chief of Staff: General Thiébauld

### FRENCH FORCES:

#### 1st Division, General of Division Delaborde

3/15th Line Infantry (1,033)  
2/47th Line Infantry (1,210)  
1 and 2/70th Line Infantry (2,299)  
1 and 2/86th Line Infantry (2,116)  
1/4th Swiss Regiment (1,190)

#### 2nd Division, General of Division Loison

3/2nd Light Infantry (1,255)  
3/4th Light Infantry (1,186)  
3/12th Light Infantry (1,302)  
3/15th Light Infantry (1,314)  
3/32nd Line Infantry (1,265)  
3/58th Line Infantry (1,394)  
2/2nd Swiss Regiment (755)

#### 3rd Division, General of Division Travot

3/31st Light Infantry (653)  
3/32nd Light Infantry (983)  
3/26th Line Infantry (537)  
3 and 4/66th Line Infantry (1,004)  
3/82nd Line Infantry (861)  
1/Légion du Midi (797)  
Hanoverian Legion (703)

#### Cavalry Division, General of Division Kellerman

26th Chasseurs à cheval (244)  
1st Dragoons (261)  
3rd Dragoons (236)  
4th Dragoons (262)  
5th Dragoons (249)  
9th Dragoons (257)  
15th Dragoons (245)

Detachments from the 1st and 2nd Foot Artillery Regiments, the 6th Horse Artillery Regiment, the 9th 'Ouvriers' company and the 14th Train company 1,297 with 45 guns.

Total French forces : 24,918

### SPANISH FORCES:

#### Lieutenant-General Juan Caraffa's Division

Provincial Grenadiers of Castella Vieja (1,796)  
Zaragoza Infantry Regiment (850)  
Mallorca Infantry Regiment (1,819)  
2nd Cataluna Light Infantry (351)  
Tarragona Light Infantry (633)

Gerona Light Infantry (620)  
Barbastro Light Infantry (700)  
Cavalry detached from the Principe, Borbon, Farnesio, Alcantara, Espana, Calatrava, Santiago, Numancia, Olivenza and Reina (Dragoon) regiments (2,164)  
Artillery (424 with 20 cannons)  
Engineers, Sappers and Miners (400)  
Total Caraffa's Division : 9,757

#### Lieutenant-General Francisco Taranco's Division

Provincial Grenadiers of Galicia (633)  
Rey Infantry Regiment (761)  
Principe Infantry Regiment (1,004)  
Toledo Infantry Regiment (519)  
Leon Infantry Regiment (789)  
Aragon Infantry Regiment (1,098)  
Corunna Volunteers Infantry Regiment (744)  
Navarra Light Infantry (620)  
Artillery (315 with 12 cannons)  
Engineers, Sappers and Miners (101)  
Total Taranco's Division : 6,584

#### Lieutenant-General Francisco Solano's Division

Guardias Espanolas Infantry Regiment (800)  
Guardias Wallonas Infantry Regiment (833)  
Provincial Grenadiers of Andalucia (1,545)  
Saboya Infantry Regiment (455)  
Cordoba Infantry Regiment (580)  
Burgos Infantry Regiment (800)  
Murcia Infantry Regiment (1,832)  
Ordens Militares Infantry Regiment (584)  
Irlanda Infantry Regiment (353)  
Valencia Light Infantry (685)  
Campo Mayor Light Infantry (680)  
Maria Luisa Hussars (150)  
Artillery (431 with 12 cannons)  
Total Solano's Division : 9,738

Total Spanish Contingent : 26,069 with 44 guns

Total of Junot's Army : 50,987 with 89 guns

(French after Oman Vol. I, Spanish after Luz Soriano Vol. 4)

## ORDER OF BATTLE: EVORA, 29 JULY 1808

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### PORTUGUESE AND SPANISH FORCES:

Officer Commanding: General Francisco de Paula Leite

3rd Portuguese Artillery (58)  
3rd Portuguese Infantry (848)  
Portuguese volunteer cavalry (about 120)  
A battalion of Spanish Infantry (about 1,000 men)  
Maria Luisa Spanish Hussars (about 500 men)

Spanish artillery with seven field guns (about 100 men)

Total Portuguese and Spanish : 2,626 plus several thousand ill-armed and untrained Portuguese civilians.

#### **FRENCH FORCES:**

Officer Commanding: General Louis-Henri Loison

Two battalions of Reserve Grenadiers (1,100)  
3/12th Light Infantry (1,253)  
3/14th Light Infantry (1,305)  
3/58th Line Infantry (1,428)  
1 and 2/86th Line Infantry (1,667)  
1st Hanoverian Legion (804)  
4th and 5th Provisional Regiments of Dragoons (1,248)  
Artillery with eight field guns (about 120 men)

Total French : 8,915

(After *Historia Organica ...*, Vol. XI and Oman, Vol. 1)

## **ORDER OF BATTLE: ROLICA, 17 AUGUST 1808**

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#### **BRITISH AND PORTUGUESE FORCES:**

Officer Commanding: Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Wellesley

#### **Cavalry : Lieutenant-Colonel C.D. Taylor**

20th Light Dragoons (180)

#### **Royal Artillery : Lieutenant-Colonel W. Robe**

220 (16 guns, 15 attached to the six brigades and one 9-pdr, unattached).

Royal Staff Corps (48)

#### **1st Brigade : Major-General R. Hill**

1/5th Foot (990)  
1/9th Foot (833)  
1/38th Foot (957)  
Two 6-pdrs and one howitzer

#### **2nd Brigade : Major-General R. Ferguson**

36th Foot (647)  
1/40th Foot (843)  
1/71st Foot (903)  
Two 6-pdrs and one howitzer

#### **3rd Brigade : Brigadier-General M. Nightingall**

29th Foot (863)  
1/82nd Foot (991)  
Two 6-pdrs

#### **4th Brigade : Brigadier-General B. Bowes**

1/6th Foot (1,020)  
1/32nd Foot (941)  
Two 6-pdrs

#### **5th Brigade : Brigadier-General C. Craufurd**

1/50th Foot (1,019)  
91st Foot (917)  
Two 6-pdrs

#### **6th Brigade : Brigadier-General H. Fane**

1/45th Foot (599)  
5/60th Foot [Rifles] (936)

2/95th Rifles (4 companies) (400)  
Two 6-pdrs and one howitzer

Total British : 13,307

#### **Portuguese detachment : Lieutenant-Colonel N. Trant**

6th Cavalry Regiment (104)  
11th Cavalry Regiment (50)  
12th Cavalry Regiment (104)  
Lisbon Police Cavalry (41)  
4th Portuguese Artillery (210)  
12th Infantry Regiment (605)  
21st Infantry Regiment (605)  
24th Infantry Regiment (304)  
Porto Cazadore (569)

Total Portuguese: 2,592

Total British and Portuguese : 15,899

#### **FRENCH FORCES:**

Commandant : General of Division Henri-François Delaborde

#### **Cavalry**

26th Chasseur à Cheval (250)

#### **Artillery (100)**

One battery (five guns)

#### **Infantry**

General of Brigade A. Brenier  
3/2nd Light Infantry (950)  
3/4th Light Infantry (950)  
1 and 2/70th Line Infantry (1,850)  
4th Swiss Infantry (2 companies) (250)

Total French : 4,350

(British infantry as per *History of the Campaigns ...*, Vol. 2, Portuguese after *Historia Organica ...*, Vol. XI, others after Oman, Vol. 1)

## **ORDER OF BATTLE: VIMEIRO, 21 AUGUST 1808**

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#### **BRITISH AND PORTUGUESE FORCES:**

Officer Commanding: Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Wellesley

#### **Cavalry: Lieutenant-Colonel C.D. Taylor**

20th Light Dragoons (240)

#### **Royal Artillery: Lieutenant-Colonel W. Robe**

Two and a half companies (226 men, 16 guns)

#### **1st Brigade: Major-General R. Hill**

1/5th Foot (944)  
1/9th Foot (761)  
1/38th Foot (953)

#### **2nd Brigade: Major-General R. Ferguson**

36th Foot (591)  
1/40th Foot (923)  
1/71st Foot (935)

**3rd Brigade: Brigadier-General M. Nightingall**

29th Foot (616)  
1/82th Foot (904)

**4th Brigade: Brigadier-General B. Bowes**

1/6th Foot (943)  
1/32nd Foot (870)

**5th Brigade: Brigadier-General C. Craufurd**

1/45th Foot (915)  
91st Foot (917)

**6th Brigade: Brigadier-General H. Fane**

1/50th Foot (945)  
5/60th Foot [Rifles] (604)  
2/95th Rifles (4 companies) (456)

**7th Brigade: Brigadier-General R. Anstruther**

2/9th Foot (633)  
2/43rd Foot (721)  
2/52nd Foot (654)  
2/97th Foot (695)

**8th Brigade: Brigadier-General W. Acland**

2nd Foot (731)  
20th Foot (7½ companies) (401)  
1/95th Rifles (2 companies) (200)

Total British present: 16,778

**Portuguese detachment: Lieutenant-Colonel N. Trant**

6th Cavalry Regiment (104)  
11th Cavalry Regiment (50)  
12th Cavalry Regiment (104)  
Lisbon Police Cavalry (41)  
4th Portuguese Artillery (210)  
12th Infantry Regiment (605)  
21st Infantry Regiment (605)  
24th Infantry Regiment (304)  
Porto Cazadores (562)

Total Portuguese present : 2,585

Total British and Portuguese : 19,363

**FRENCH FORCES:**

Commanding Officer: General Andoche Junot, Duke of Abrantes

There is no exact muster of the French at Vimeiro. At the end of July, the units involved had:

**Cavalry Division: Margaron**

1st Provisional (ex-26th) Chasseur à Cheval (263)  
3rd Provisional Dragoons (640)  
4th Provisional Dragoons (589)  
5th Provisional Dragoons (659)  
Squadron of Volunteer Cavalry (100)

Artillery, engineers, train (700)  
Four batteries (23 guns)

**Division Delaborde**

1st Brigade: A. Brenier  
3/2nd Light Infantry (1,075)  
3/4th Light Infantry (1,098)  
1 and 2/70th Line Infantry (2,358)

2nd Brigade: J. Thomière

1 and 2/86th Line Infantry (1,945)  
4th Swiss Infantry (2 companies) (246)

**Division Loison**

1st Brigade: Solignac  
3/12th Light Infantry (1,253)  
3/15th Light Infantry (1,305)  
3/58th Line Infantry (1,428)  
2nd Brigade: Charlot  
3/32nd Line Infantry (1,034)  
3/82th Line Infantry (963)

**Reserve: Kellerman**

1 and 2/1st Regiment Reserve Grenadiers  
1 and 2/2nd Regiment Reserve Grenadiers  
(1,050 each regiment but not counted as drawn from the French regiments)

Total French : 15,656 (mid to end of July)

Oman calculates the French force at Vimeiro on 21 August, after various deductions, as:

Infantry 8,305  
Reserve Grenadiers 2,100  
Cavalry 1,951  
Artillery, etc. 700

Total French at Vimeiro : 13,056

(British and French after Oman, Vol. 1, Portuguese after *Historia Organica ...*, Vol. XI)

**The Portuguese Corps under General Freire de Andrade e Castro, 5 September 1808**

The Portuguese army under Gen. Freire de Andrade which met Wellesley's British army in the second week of August was said to number about 5,000 men. Three weeks later, it had grown to over 9,000 according to this muster. Some 2,600 men from this force were detached with the British under the command of LtCol Nicholas Trant (see OOB's of Roliça and Vimeiro), the rest remained in the area of Batalha and later Obidos by 21 August.

1/6th Infantry Regiment: 472 including 24 officers  
1 & 2/12th Infantry Regiment: 1,248 including 60 officers  
2/18th Infantry Regiment: 482 including 23 officers  
1 & 2/21st Infantry Regiment: 925 including 60 officers  
Grenadier Battalion from 6th and 18th Infantry: 699 including 19 officers  
Grenadier Battalion from 11th and 24th Infantry: 662 including 19 officers  
Grenadier Battalion from 12th and 21st Infantry: 422 including 19 officers  
Transmontanos [Tras os Montes] Cazadores Battalion: 720 including 28 officers  
Porto Cazadores Battalion: 596 including 20 officers  
Corpo Academico of Coimbra University: 135 including 3 officers  
Portuguese Cavalry squadrons: 891 including 54 officers  
Corpo Academico Cavalry of Coimbra University: 57 including 3 officers  
Spanish cavalry: 97 including 3 officers  
Porto Militia Battalion: 562 including 26 officers  
Moncorvo Militia Regiment: 797 including 38 officers  
Artillery: 344 including 15 officers.

Total: 9,109 including 412 officers

(*Boletim of the Arquivo Historico Militar*, Vol. I, Lisbon, 1930)

**TABLE 1: THE PORTUGUESE ARMY, LATE 1808**

This document, dated 3 January 1809, titled 'Actual state of the Portuguese Army' is a remarkable compilation of that army up to the end of 1808. It can be seen that, although re-raised from June and July 1808, the infantry and artillery regiments were far from well armed in spite of over 40,000 stands of arms promised by Britain but few yet delivered. The Cazadores, organized into six numbered battalions from late October 1808, obviously had the same problems. Only the

6th had many weapons, obviously those its men had received from the British when in the Porto Cazadores with Trant's corps in August. The Porto Cazadores essentially formed the 6th in October. And the Cazadores would have had worse problems regarding clothing. The number of uniforms listed only accounted for those newly made. Many infantrymen and artillerymen had come back wearing their old 1807 uniforms, something not possible for the new Cazadores.

**Infantry**

Regiment	Men	Arms	Uniforms	Location
1st	844	600	200	Lisbon
2nd	1,144	1,019	-	Abrantes
3rd	594	340	-	Estremos
4th	260	600	200	Lisbon
5th	449	371	-	-
6th	1,507	1,404	1,505	Porto, Lamego
7th	512	400	-	Setubal
8th	491	471	220	Castelo de Vide
9th	1,527	1,444	1,375	Tomar, Viana
10th	455	600	200	Lisbon
11th	1,409	1,390	264	Viseu
12th	1,542	1,200	-	Chaves, Vila Real
13th	578	600	200	Lisbon
14th	1,341	1,516	-	Tomar
15th	420	209	118	Vila Vizosa
16th	592	600	200	Lisbon
17th	244	186	68	Elvas
18th	1,815	1,545	1,344	Porto, Tomar
19th	459	250	-	Cascaes
20th	610	497	126	Campo Maior
21st	1,142	869	892	Valenza, Guimaraes
22nd	242	217	-	Elvas
23rd	1,389	1,281	-	Almeida
24th	1,534	1,534	-	Braganza

**Cazadores**

Regiment	Men	Arms	Uniforms	Location
1st	339	250	-	Castelo Branco
2nd	321	260	-	Moura
3rd	239	185	203	Trancoso
4th	614	-	-	Penamacor
5th	120	95	-	Campo Maior
6th	646	500	-	Vila Real

**Cavalry**

Regiment	Men	Arms	Uniforms	Location
1st	344	149	233	Lisbon
2nd	88	-	1	Beja
3rd	325	160	364	Evora
4th	410	100	252	Lisbon
5th	284	-	65	Evora
6th	300	-	300	Chaves
7th	317	100	225	Lisbon
8th	218	20	36	Elvas
9th	300	-	300	Chaves
10th	226	100	179	Santarem
11th	427	-	377	Almeida
12th	452	-	285	Braganza

**Artillery**

Regiment	Men	Arms	Uniforms	Location
1st	1014	1024	970	S.Julian & Santarem
2nd	1243	1126	1243	Faro
3rd	618	600	618	Elvas
4th	1043	619	585	Viana, Porto, Almeida

**Total of 30,989 men**

NB. Each regiment of infantry to consist of 1550 men, the cavalry 594 men, the artillery of 1200, & the battalions of chasseurs [Cazadores] of 628 each. The arms of the infantry & chasseurs are of various calibres, & a great part of them little fit for use, as well as the leather belts. In the cavalry there is a great want of harness, carbines, pistols & swords. The kingdom ought to have 48 regiments of militia of 1101 men each, they are beginning to be organised, but there are no arms for them. Those regiments of infantry & cavalry of whose uniforms no mention is made, are only provided with some old ones.

(Document dated 3 January 1809, received at Lisbon 8 January 1809 and delivered to Mr. Villiers. Public Records Office, War Office 1/232)

# FURTHER READING

While there is a large choice of books on the 1808 Vimeiro campaign from the time the British arrived in August, there is little written in English on the fighting that took place between the Portuguese and the French before the British arrival and their first action near Obidos on 15 August. Sir Charles Oman's *A History of the Peninsular War*, Vol. 1 (Oxford, 1903) gives some early coverage as does Andrew Halliday's *The Present State of Portugal and of the Portuguese Army*, (Edinburgh, 1813). For the campaign once the British landed, volume II of the *History of the Campaigns of the British Forces in Spain and Portugal* (London, 1812) is invaluable as is Oman above. The *Dispatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington* (London, 1838) and the *Supplementary Despatches, Correspondence, and Memoranda of Field Marshal Arthur Duke of Wellington*, (London, 1860) are essential. William F.P. Napier's *History of the War in the Peninsula* (1828-1840) should be used with caution. On the whole, the most reliable work remains Sir Charles Oman's study. I have found the older biographies of the Duke of Wellington to be the most useful, especially W.H. Maxwell's (1839-1841), Col. William's (c. 1853) and J.H. Stoqueller's (1854). British participants, such as Rifleman Harris, have left valuable personal memoirs and letters that have been published and many are quoted in the text. See the excellent bibliography in Paddy Griffith, ed., *A History of the Peninsular War, Vol. IX, Modern Studies of the Wars in Spain and Portugal, 1808-1814* (London, 1999).

The British army is well covered in Oman's *Wellington's Army*, (London, 1912) and in Philip J. Haythornthwaite's *The Armies of Wellington*, (London, 1994). Regimental histories of the various British regiments involved all cover their unit's

participation. John H. Leslie, *The Services of the Royal Regiment of Artillery in the Peninsular War 1808 to 1814*, (London, 1908) covers the gunners in detail. There are few works in English on the Portuguese forces besides Halliday's 1813 book cited above and my own *Portuguese Army of the Napoleonic Wars* (Osprey Men-at-Arms Series Nos. 343, 346 and 356).

As might be expected, there are fewer published French sources on the campaign. Junot's journal of the 1807 invasion was published in French in Sepulveda, Vol. XIII (see above). A good overview from the French perspective is in A. Hugo's *France Militaire*, Vol. 4 (Paris, 1837). Foy's *Guerre de la Péninsule* and Thiébauld's account give more details but, like all French sources, must be used with caution as the numbers they give are often exaggerated. Brenier left an interesting account of Rolíça in the September 1829 *Spectateur Militaire* (part of which appeared in the 1830 *United Service Journal*).

In Portuguese, essential data for the 1808 campaign is found in Simao José da Luz Soriano's *Historia da Guerra Civil...*, Vol. 4 (Lisbon 1870) and Carlos de Azeredo's *As Populacoes a Norte do Douro e os Franceses em 1808 e 1809* (Museo Militar do Porto, 1984). Ferreira Martins' *Historia do Exercito Portugues* (Lisbon, 1945) is the standard history of the army. Christovam Ayres de Magalhaes Sepulveda, *Historia Organica e Politica do Exercito Portugues*, Vols. XI-XIII (Coimbra, 1916-1925) has many valuable documents and compilations and statistics as does Claudio de Chaby's *Excerptos Historicos e Collecao de Documentos Relativa a la Guerra Denomida da Peninsula...*, Vols. III to VI (Lisbon, 1865-1882).

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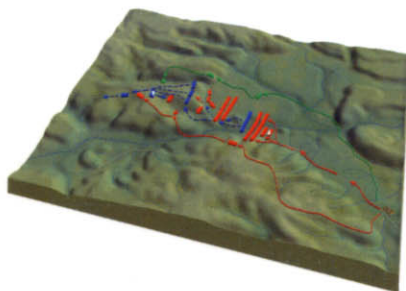
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On 2 August 1808 a British army of 14,000 men began landing north of Lisbon under the command of Sir Arthur Wellesley, the future Duke of Wellington. They were coming to assist the Portuguese, Britain's oldest ally, to liberate their country from its French occupiers. Within a month Wellesley was to win two victories over the French at the battles of Roliça and Vimeiro. General Andoche Junot, the French commander, was forced to surrender and evacuate Portugal. René Chartrand examines the first of Wellesley's string of victories in the Peninsular War.