

VITORIA 1813

A Historical Narrative

By Matthew Green

If Waterloo in June 1815 is Wellington's most famous battle, he had to share the credit with Blücher, and it didn't change the course of history much: Napoleon's strategic situation was hopeless. But two years earlier in Spain he won a victory which was all his, and which ended French rule in Spain. Perhaps more importantly, it also helped persuade the Austrians to join the anti-French coalition, an important step on the road to Leipzig, the battle that really did for Napoleon. That victory was Vitoria, on 21st June 1813, when Wellington commanded an Allied army of 77,000 infantry and cavalry (more than he commanded at Waterloo) against a French army of probably 57,000 under Joseph Bonaparte and his chief of staff Marshal Jean-Baptiste Jourdan.

And yet this battle is neglected by British historians. There is no dedicated book in English, other than an out of print Osprey, when there have been several for the much the smaller battle of Albuera, for example. The most comprehensive book on the battle and campaign is in fact in French, published as long ago as 1985 in a limited edition of 950, by Dr Jean Sarramon.

This article gives an overview of the battle, based largely on Dr Sarramon's account, but with important elements from other sources and I dose of my own interpretation.

INTO SPAIN

With the important exception of the border fortresses of Badajoz and Ciudad Rodrigo, the British started 1813 back in their base in Portugal. From this base they had already made three failed incursions into Spain (in 1808, 1809 and 1812). Wellington had led two of them, and no doubt he harboured bitter memories of the retreats that concluded each of these. He had no intention of repeating that experience. Fortunately, the strategic situation had moved in his favour.

In 1812 Napoleon had lost his main army in Russia, and now he faced an alliance of Russia and Prussia, with his nominal ally Austria remaining aloof. He desperately needed more men, and withdrew something like one quarter of his army in Spain. Some complete formations (like the Guard units) were moved, but mainly it was a matter of each regiment supplying veterans around which new units could be raised back in France. Napoleon also withdrew his top soldier in Spain, Marshal Soult. The French were already overstretched, so he ordered the capital of his brother Joseph's government to move from Madrid to Valladolid, with the former

being reduced to a mere border outpost. Southern Spain was abandoned. Apart from Marshal Suchet's strategically separate Army of Catalonia, this still left King Joseph with a total army of over 100,000 (infantry and cavalry: none of the force totals in this narrative include artillerymen or other supporting arms) – and they were almost all veterans, unlike the armies being raised in northern Europe.

Against this, Wellington had been sent some reinforcements from home, including the magnificent Household Cavalry, more than making up for his losses in 1812. This gave him 40,000 British and nearly 28,000 Portuguese infantry and cavalry – some 68,000 veteran quality troops to act as the backbone of his army. In addition he was now nominally commander in chief of the fractious Spanish forces, giving him supposedly up to 30,000 regulars – and further, even less controllable guerrillas, of whom about 25,000 in Navarre and the Basque provinces were the most important. Brave though these troops were, their training, equipment and ammunition supplies did not match the Anglo-Portuguese or the French, however.

This was better odds than Wellington had had before – but not enough to make the project certain. If the French could concentrate all their armies he could not be certain of beating them. And if they caught his own army divided, then he could face disaster. To handle these uncertainties he put in motion probably the best conceived campaign of his career. Launching off from Ciudad Rodrigo on 22nd May, before Joseph had moved from Madrid, he simply headed north-east towards the French supply base of Bayonne. He was not diverted by the glory of capturing trophy cities. He ignored Madrid, and bypassed Valladolid and Burgos. Each French position was turned by outflanking it to the north. He blithely ignored threats to his line of communication back to Portugal, because, with Spanish help, he could be supplied by the Royal Navy from Santander. Joseph and Jourdan were forced back towards Bayonne. First they abandoned Valladolid for Burgos, and then Burgos, which had broken Wellington's campaign of 1812, was abandoned for Vitoria. But here the pattern changed. The French decided not to retreat, and Wellington decided to attack rather than outmanoeuvre his quarry.

The reason was that at Vitoria the French had a chance of achieving the sort of concentration of forces that could challenge the Allies. At the start of the campaign some 45,000 men had been tied up in General Clauzel's Army of the North in the north-eastern provinces of Navarre and the Basque lands. At Vitoria these could be drawn to the main body. Some 5,000 (Sarrut's division) had already been consolidated with Joseph's main army of about 55,000 by the 21st; Clauzel, based at Pamplona, was on his way with some 15,000 more. To the north General Foy had 5,000 or more further troops available, from his own division and a further brigade nearby. All this might give them an army of 80,000 – enough to take the foe on. Wellington knew this, and realised that he must strike before such a concentration could be achieved.

THE FRENCH SETTLE INTO THE VITORIA POSITION

Vitoria (or Vittoria as many British authors spell it) is the capital of the modern Basque country and of the province of Álava, and in modern times it is also known by its Basque name, Gastiez. It lies in a basin amongst the substantial foothills of the Pyrenees, in a valley formed by a small river, the Zadorra, which descends towards the great river Ebro some 30km to the south. The Zadorra's water flow may not have been that great, but it was still a very significant obstacle, especially to the east. In practice it had to be crossed by one of the several fine stone bridges; there were fords too, but only one was used in the battle. The hills were particularly important to the west, the Sierra de Morillas, and the south, the Montes de la Puebla. The Zadorra flows through the gap between these two ranges, in a gorge to the south-west of the basin. The Royal Highway from Madrid (by way of Burgos) come up through this gorge, on to Vitoria, and then exits the basin in the north-east towards Bayonne. This was easily the best road around – and the only practical one for the masses of baggage, civilian impedimenta and military *matériel* that the French had gathered. Apart from the not very big town of Vitoria, the basin was dotted with many small villages and hamlets. The plain between the Zadorra and the Montes de la Puebla also featured a number of low ridges, spurs from the mountains, which feature quite strongly in battle accounts, though you could easily miss them on a contour map. At the western end a more significant hill, the Alto de Jundiz, provided a vantage point, as did a steep hill, the Iruña, a couple of kilometres to the north-west, where the Zadorra formed a hairpin bend. All this contributed to quite a bit of dead ground, unless viewed from the very tops of the Montes de la Puebla, so that the Allies had trouble seeing where all the French had deployed, and the French could not see all the crossings of the Zadorra from one spot.

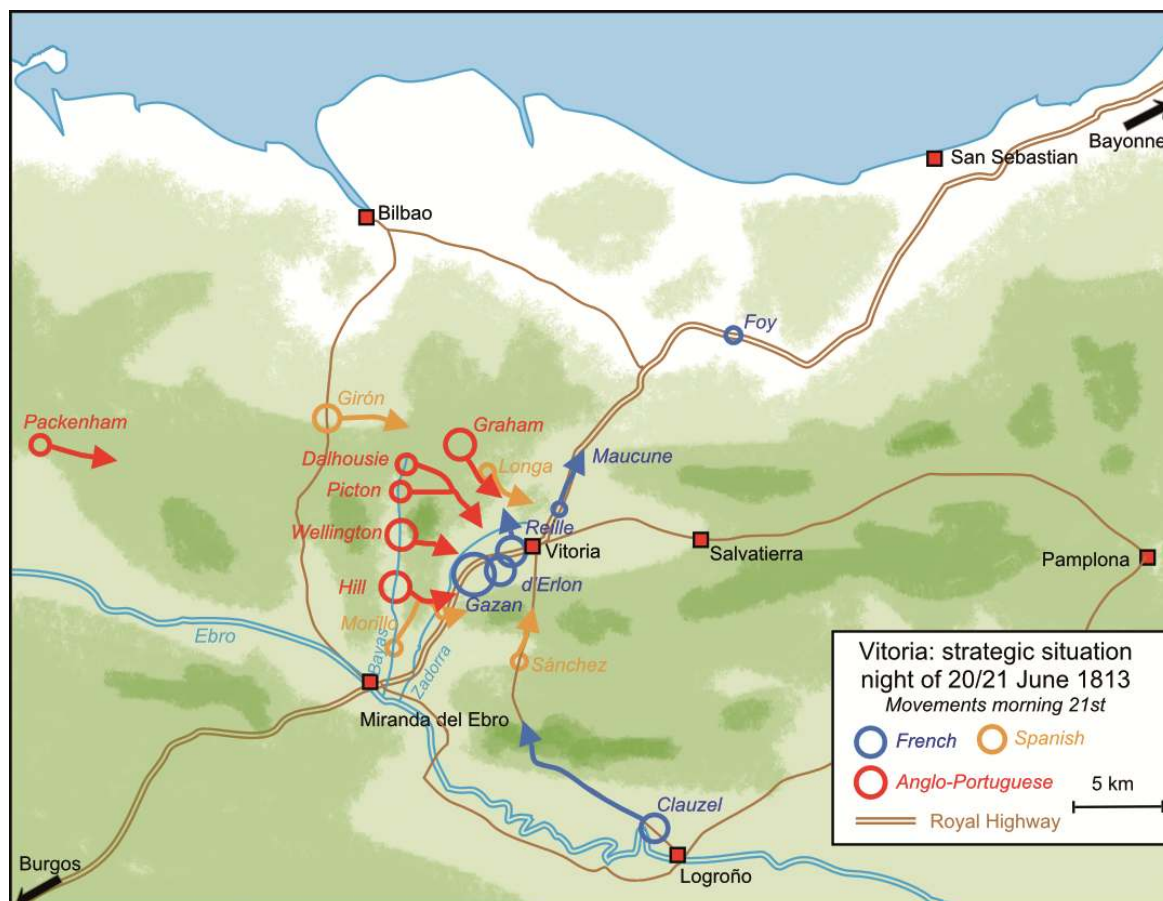
The French occupied the basin to the south and east of the Zadorra, protected by the river and the Montes de la Puebla. Their organisation reflected their roles when defending the whole of Spain, and so was rather awkward. There were three “armies”, in reality of corps size. The biggest, occupying the west of the French position, was the Army of the Midi (often translated as “the South”). This was Soult's old command, previously covering Spain's southern provinces, and now under the command of General Gazan. It had nine brigades of infantry (in four and a half divisions), and three brigade-strength divisions of cavalry. Next came Count d'Erlon's Army of the Centre, which had been based in Madrid. Under d'Erlon's direct command were four infantry brigades in two divisions (including one borrowed from the Army of the Midi), and a couple of cavalry brigades. Also counted on its roll, but not under d'Erlon's control were Joseph's personal troops: a Royal Guard of under 3,000 infantry and cavalry (mainly French veterans), and about 2,000 Spanish “Josefinos” in Casapalacio's division. To the east was General Reille's Army of Portugal, which had originally formed the north-western part of the French occupation force, but had transferred most of its strength to the Army of the North. However, it had recovered one of its divisions (Sarrut's), giving it three

divisions of infantry, six brigades, on the eve of the battle and two rather under-sized divisions of cavalry. No doubt Reille was hoping that another of his lent out divisions, Foy's, would march in from the north. Finally there was a single battalion of the French 3rd Line from the Army of the North, which had formerly garrisoned the town of Haro, and missed its colleagues who were escorting the convoy to Bayonne on the 19th.

In addition to this, the French had with them all the paraphernalia of government. There were a large number of officials and hangers on, including many women and children. Joseph's Spanish co-operators had nowhere else to go, and many French officers had brought their families to Spain. On top of this were all the army's central resources of artillery, munitions and engineers. And then there was the royal entourage itself, and a treasury convoy sent out by Napoleon to support the government. All this occupied Vitoria and the area to its east. The presence of large numbers of guns in the central artillery park means that confusion reigns about the artillery that the French used in the battle. Overall they had over 150 pieces, but by my reckoning they only used about 110 in the battle. My guess is that about 40 of these were 8pdrs (perhaps including a small number of mis-identified 6pdrs), about 30 each of 4pdrs and howitzers, and ten 12prs. If this is right (and evidence is not robust), the 40 or so pieces not used were about half and half 4pdrs and 12pdrs. Overall the artillery was commanded by General Tirlet, and packed a real punch.

The French had achieved this concentration on the evening of the 19th/20th, when the Army of Portugal arrived. That same night they started to clear the excessive volume of civilians and their possessions in a great convoy, escorted by various odd units from the Army of the North garrison and some of Casapalacio's Josefinos. They sent out another great convoy on the night of the 20th/21st, this time using the weakest of Reille's divisions, Maucune's, as an escort. This included about 50 pieces of heavy artillery taken from the cities that they had evacuated.

Historians have, shall we say, not been impressed by Jourdan's and Joseph's performance while preparing for the battle. Beyond organising the second convoy, practically nothing was done on the 20th; Jourdan was ill and Joseph and the rest of the staff more or less helpless; Gazan, in command of the front line, saw no reason to fill the leadership vacuum. The various armies hung around without any clear idea of what they were supposed to be doing. Bridges could have been blown and defences prepared. Or the army could have moved back to a less stretched perimeter. Did the convoy really need to be escorted by 3,000 valuable veterans? Foy was not given clear orders: leaving it to his discretion as to whether to join them – he decided he had more pressing tasks where he was. They did not know where Clauzel was, as his envoy could not inform them of the route by which he planned to reach Vitoria from Logroño, but they assumed he would arrive on the 20th or 21st. In fact Clauzel did not appreciate the strategic situation, and how fast Wellington had moved forward. He was slow to move, and headed first for Miranda on the Ebro, which route would have isolated him from the French main



army; he did not approach Vitoria until the 22nd. Furthermore Joseph and his advisers didn't seem to think that Wellington would attack on the 21st, but either rest his men or try to bypass Vitoria to the north. What a reversal from Napoleon's campaigns! This time it was the French that were in a state of perpetual surprise over how quickly their opponents moved, while always wanting to pause, regroup and wait for reinforcements themselves.

WELLINGTON PREPARES

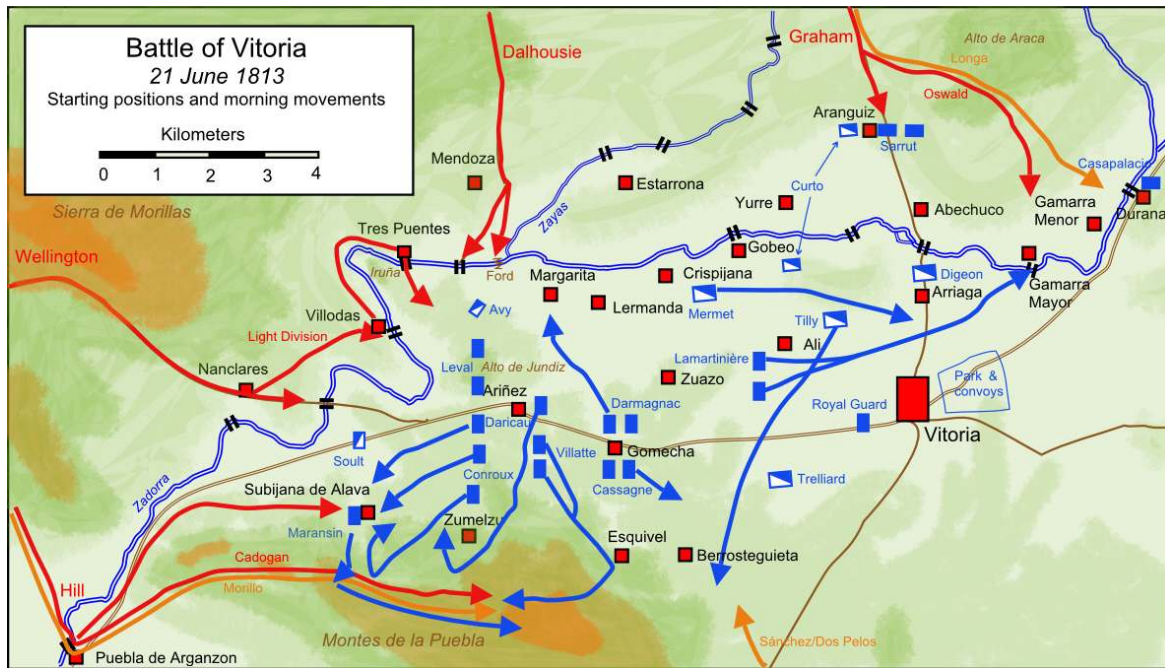
Meanwhile Wellington had been working his way eastwards along much poorer roads, consistently threatening the French northern flank. His core Anglo Portuguese army was often separated into three columns. Graham operated to north, Hill to the south, while Wellington himself stayed in the centre. Spanish forces moved mainly separately. Morillo's division operated to the south, working with Hill; Longa's division of Basques, former partisans, was now working with Graham in the north. Working further to the north, menacing various outlying French detachments were various divisions under General Girón. To the south were Sánchez's cavalry and the Navarrese partisans under Pinto. By the 20th Wellington's and Hill's men were strung out along the valley of the Bayas, the next valley to the west of the Zadorra's, on the other side of the Sierra de Arrato. I am not sure entirely where Morillo's division was, except somewhere to the south of Hill; Morillo had detached his light companies to besiege the fortress of Pancorbo, to the west of Miranda on the Royal Highway. Graham's men worked their way across to

Murguia, a village to nearly 15km to the north-west of Vitoria. Longa led and covered Graham's move, concealing it from French scouts. Girón had been menacing Bilbao to the north, but made his way down to Orduña, still some way from Vitoria. Wellington had left Pakenham's 6th Division at Medina de Poma, supposedly to cover his rear and baggage, though from what threat it is not clear; he was trying to catch up with the main army. All these dispositions are shown on the accompanying map. Wellington's job was to concentrate as many as possible of these troops on the basin of Vitoria before Clauzel and any reinforcements from the north might arrive. He spent the 20th, a day of bad weather, finalising his plans and getting the men into position.

The shortest route into the basin was directly across the Sierra de Morillas up to the village of Nanclares de la Oca, where two bridges across the Zadorra were available. The road was good enough, but it led through rough ground that was not suitable for the massing of an attack, and the Zadorra was quite an obstacle here. This was still the route he was to take himself, spearheaded by Alten's Light Division (two brigades) and Cole's 4th (three brigades) with four brigades of cavalry (including two of heavies) and a considerable body of reserve artillery under Colonel Dickson. This was nearly 18,000.

Wellington's attack was to be led by Hill, who was to work his way down to the south, link up with Morillo, and cross the Zadorra at the village of Puebla de Arganzon, where there was a bridge and several fords, and which was too far from the main basin for the French to defend in strength. He was to attack the French left flank by taking the Montes de la Puebla. Apart from Morillo's two brigades of Spanish regulars, Hill had Stewart's 2nd Division with four brigades, Silveira's Portuguese division of two brigades, and somewhat over 2,000 cavalry; altogether nearly 23,000 men.

To his left Wellington sent Picton's 3rd Division and Dalhousie's 7th, of three brigades and about 7,500 men each, to work their way across Monte Arrato, the northern extension of the Sierra de Morillas, and approach the Zadorra from the north, through the village of Mendoza. Supposing that Hill had drawn the French to the south, these stood a good chance of getting across the river, and opening the way for Wellington's force in the centre. Quite a bit of ink has spilt on Wellington's choice of the inexperienced Dalhousie to lead this joint column over the veteran Picton. But Dalhousie had been promoted to Lieutenant-General first (according to Oman – I have been unable to verify, as they were both promoted in the same year), and Wellington was a stickler for that sort of detail. He may also have been worried about Picton launching the attack prematurely, perhaps without waiting for the 7th Division, whose approach was by a separate route. Once over the Zadorra the two divisions were given separate missions, Wellington would take direct control himself.



Finally there was Graham's column. This was to work its way in from the north to menace Vitoria directly and threaten the French rear. For this he had Longa's Spaniards (a weak division that had been recently reinforced by about 1,000 regularised partisans from Álava), Howard's 1st Division (the Guards and KGL brigades), Oswald's 5th (3 brigades) and Pack's and Bradford's independent Portuguese brigades, supported by two brigades of cavalry – about 21,500 men altogether. Graham's precise mission was to depend upon the circumstances, with its core objective being to cut the Royal Highway and the French line of retreat. Graham's orders were accordingly rather vague. He was supposed to be led from the right, i.e. not to do much until Dalhousie's column had got going.

To support this enterprise Wellington had 96 guns, more than half 9pdrs – more artillery than he had ever had before, though still less than the French. Also in the area, to the south of the Puebla were Julián Sánchez's cavalry and some Álavese under Dos Pelos operating independently to south without being part of Wellington's plan.

HILL TAKES THE STRAIN

Wellington's attack got going at about 8am, though his men had been marching to position for hours before then. Morillo stormed across the Zadorra and then climbed the Montes de la Puebla, brushing aside the French skirmishers. Gazan hastily sent up his leading brigade, Maransin's, to stop him. Maransin managed to get onto the ridge in time to block the advance, but he was outnumbered. Yet he performed valiantly. Over the next four hours or so he was forced back over two to three kilometres. Hill soon sent Cadogan's brigade to assist, along with the light companies from his two other British brigades, and the 6th Caçadores from Ashworth's Portuguese brigade. The fighting on the ridge does not seem to have

been the quick crash-bang-wallop encounter that many popularly imagine infantry fighting of the era to be, but to have involved a lot of skirmishing. Cadogan was killed and Morillo wounded, as the French were forced out of successive positions.

Joseph and the now recovered Jourdan meanwhile had risen early and reached the action. Jourdan claimed that he immediately realised that he should have pulled his men back to a more cohesive perimeter – but that Gazan refused to cooperate because the attack had already started. Be that as it may, the French command soon decided that the attack along the Puebla had to be stopped. At first they sent two brigades, Rey's from Conroux's division and Baille St Pol's from Darricau's, up the mountain to take the Allies in the flank. These were the most convenient units to hand, but from separate divisions their attack was not coordinated. The exact circumstances aren't clear, but both were badly beaten in what were perhaps the only classic line versus column encounters of the day; the French would have been trying to scramble up a steep slope. British accounts aren't very clear as to who was responsible for this, but I am sure that the two left hand battalions of Cadogan's brigade (the 1/92nd Gordon Highlanders and 1/50th) were behind the defeat of at least one and maybe both of these brigades (Sarramon says both, but their casualties were not heavy enough to suggest such a level of engagement). It is possible that Morillo's men were involved too, and we can't rule out O'Callaghan's and Byng's British brigades either. At any rate these latter two brigades from the 2nd Division moved up on Morillo's left to take the village of Subijana de Álava. There was some fierce fighting here, which drew in the remaining two French brigades from Conroux's and Darricau's divisions and a highly effective battery or two of reserve artillery. The British took the village but could not progress beyond it.

This was a critical moment, after 11am. Hill's attack had drawn in five of Gazan's brigades (though it had taken five or six Allied brigades to do so), but the attack along the peaks had not been stopped. Jourdan and his colleagues decided that this attack was the main deal – and might even be covering an advance beyond the mountains to take Vitoria from the south – which, incidentally, was a perfectly feasible option for Wellington. They couldn't see the advance of Dalhousie's column, which had been held up – or if they could, they dismissed it as a feint. They decided to commit one of Gazan's two remaining divisions to retake the initiative on the mountains, Villatte's. Villatte was sent back eastwards via the hamlet of Esquivel so as to get ahead of the Allied advance, and reinforce Maransin's men from behind.

In its own terms, Villatte's intervention was a success. The Allied advance had halted at what is often described as a gorge, carved out along the mountainside, but which Google Earth reveals to be a somewhat less dramatic feature. Maransin's men were exhausted, but Morillo's were out of ammunition. However the commander of the British 71st, the Highland Light Infantry, thought he saw his chance. He led his regiment up the slope against the exhausted French. But Villatte's men had arrived unseen, and ambushed the unfortunate 71st, and it was decimated

in a reversal of the classic Peninsula reverse-slope encounter. What happened next is less clear. The French claim that Villatte swept the Allies back; British accounts claim that Villatte's men were beaten off with heavy casualties in three separate attacks. But Villatte's casualty returns, while suggesting the heavy engagement of one his regiments, don't really bear this out. Almost certainly the British accounts are confusing this episode with the earlier defeats of Rey and Baille, about which they record little. At any rate any success that Villatte achieved was cut short by events on the plain below.

GRAHAM HESITATES

But before dealing with the main attack in the centre, we should look at what happened at the other end of the battlefield, where Graham was advancing. The French had taken a little while to wake up to Graham's presence, assuming that Longa's advance guard was all there was. But by the evening of the 20th they realised it was serious. Sarrut's division from Reille's Army of Portugal was pulled back from its position to the west of Vitoria to face this threat, along with some cavalry, moving across the Zadorra overnight. But Reille had only four infantry brigades (12,000 men including attached cavalry) plus one of Josefinos in support, to Graham's seven plus Longa.

Graham remained cautious. Dalhousie's column was not in sight, and the only fighting he could see was Hill's along the mountains to the south. He did not know how many enemy he faced. He did seem to know that he was up against the Army of Portugal, but as far as he knew this might well include Maucune's and Foy's divisions. Halkett's KGL brigade led along the main road from Bilbao, but halted in front of Sarrut's division at Aranguiz, about 2km from the Zadorra. Graham then decided to send some men out to his left, across the rough Alto de Araca, to where the Zadorra bent back and the Royal Highway was within striking distance. Longa was sent out to the far left to make for the bridge at Durana, where the highway ran alongside the river. Oswald, with Pack's Portuguese, made for the village of Gamarra Mayor, where there was a bridge less than 1km from the great road.

Longa came up against Casapalacio's Josefinos, supported by the battalion of the French 3rd Line. It was Spaniard against Spaniard. Longa had the better of it: he quickly drove his opponents out of the village of Gamarra Menor and then up to the bridge at Durana. He was now within musket range of the Royal Highway. After a pause, at about 1pm, he then stormed across the bridge into the village of Durana and cut the route good and proper. He then worked his way up the highway towards Vitoria for a kilometre or two, before some of Reille's light cavalry stiffened Casapalacio's defence. When trying to make sense of this encounter it is worth noting that while the normally published orders of battle put Longa's strength at about 3,000 to Casapalacio's 2,000 infantry, further research shows that the odds were more like 4,000 to 1,300, with the 400 from 3rd Line not

working in close cooperation until after Durana had fallen. It nevertheless remains a curiosity that both sides left this critical encounter to relatively weak formations.

It was altogether different at Gamarra Mayor, which saw some of the fiercest fighting of the day. It was defended by Lamartinière, who had been brought up in the morning after Graham's first advance, with one brigade in the village and one in support on the opposite bank. Howard's brigade stormed in, went through the town and took the bridge, but was soon thrown back in a counterattack. The fighting continued for the rest of the afternoon, until the British seem to have decided that there was no point expending more blood, as the battle was to be decided elsewhere.

Graham, meanwhile, had received further orders from Wellington's chief of staff, Murray, urging him to be more aggressive, but still leaving matters up to his discretion. He moved forward along the main road, Halkett to the fore and Bradford's Portuguese to the right. Sarrut quickly withdrew his men, Menne's brigade, first to Arriaga, and then to the opposite bank at the bridge nearby, abandoning four guns. Graham stopped there, while the two sides engaged in a bit of skirmishing and an artillery duel. If he had managed to get across the Zadorra and on to Vitoria, surely many less French would have escaped to fight another day.

THE FRENCH CENTRE COLLAPSES

The decisive encounter occurred in the centre, and hinged on the intervention of Dalhousie's column. It was late. The two divisions had to pick their way across mountain tracks, each with an artillery battery, from their separate starting points, to a rendezvous at Hueto, 5km north of the Zadorra. Picton and his division, which had about 6km to cover, reached the spot by 8am, but Dalhousie, who had more like 8km to cover and probably a more difficult route, was late. And when he arrived he had only one brigade, Grant's, and his battery with him. After waiting in vain further, they moved forward, not reaching Mendoza, within striking distance of the Zadorra, until after midday. One of Wellington's aides told them to press ahead with the attack straightaway, the impatient Picton intercepting the order before it reached his nominal senior. Dalhousie's missing two brigades arrived too late to take part in the battle.

Dalhousie's arrival may have been later than Wellington had planned, but its timing was perfect in the greater scheme of things. His lateness persuaded the French to draw off Villatte's division, and send d'Erlon's men on a wild goose chase. And they were in splendid time to support the Light Division's latest escapade.

Wellington's main advance on the road to Nanclares had been obvious enough to the French. But Wellington had taken care to smuggle the Light Division through the broken ground to the north up to the hamlet of Villodas, along with a supporting regiment of hussars, so that the French could not see it, or at any rate

guess its strength. It was then that a local told Wellington that the bridge to the north at Tres Puentes, concealed from view by the Iruña, was unguarded. Wellington sent Kempt's brigade and some hussars in stealth to reach it and get across. They did so at about midday; having crossed, they imagined their bridgehead to be quite precarious. But the French only had Leval's two brigades to cover this intervention, the bridge at Villodas, and Picton's advancing men. It was hopeless. Kempt's men then saw Picton, and quickly broke out to cover his taking of the bridge to the south of Mendoza. Picton got three brigades across (including Dalhousie's Grant), while the fourth brigade (Colville's) sought out a ford upstream.

Gazan's forward positions were outflanked, and he had to release the forces holding the Villodas and Nanclares bridges as his men scurried back to around the village of Ariñez. Meanwhile the rest of the Light Division, Vandeleur's brigade, now crossed at Villodas, while Cole crossed at Nanclares, to be followed by the reserve artillery and cavalry. Picton took two of his brigades, Brisbane's and Power's directly south towards Ariñez, along with Kempt. Wellington personally directed an attack by these formations on that village, and after a sharp fight, with quantities of French artillery doing some damage, drove Leval's men out. Gazan's men fell back to the next defensive position around Gomecha, followed by both Picton's men and Hill's. The Allies paused to regroup.

In the early phase of the battle d'Erlon had been posted to the east of Gazan, as a sort of general reserve. Some of his light cavalry and skirmishers patrolled the otherwise undefended line of the Zadorra to the north. Then, as Jourdan started to worry about stopping Morillo's advance along the crests, a small Spanish force appeared coming down the mountain road from Treviño. This was Sánchez's famous brigade of lancers, supported by Dos Pelos. This fitted in to Jourdan's general idea of a threat from south of the Montes de la Puebla, and he ordered d'Erlon to cover it. First a unit of dragoons (all the threat actually required) and then a division of his infantry. D'Erlon was alarmed about the vulnerability of the northern flank, and made haste slowly. Then as Picton and Kempt appeared he immediately realised that he had to rush to that front. His nearest division, Darmagnac's, sped towards the threat. He was too late to stop Picton's crossing, but he managed to reach the hamlet of Margarita before the British with his first brigade, Chassé's (the same Chassé who led a Netherlands division against the French Guard at Waterloo – this battle is full of men who were to play a role in that battle two years and 600 miles away, a number changing sides). The Baden artillery accompanying them even managed to cause Picton some hesitation at the Mendoza bridge, before being hustled away by Kempt's riflemen.

While Picton moved south to Ariñez, three British brigades moved eastwards from the crossing, along the Zadorra. Their mission was to take the two hamlets of Margarita and Lermenda (also called La Hermandad in some accounts), which Darmagnac had now reached. The attacks of these brigades (Grant's, Colville's and

Vandeleur's), from three different divisions, probably wasn't all that well coordinated. The fighting was fierce, and the casualties on both sides were heavy. Darmagnac's second brigade, Neuenstein's Germans (mainly Baden and Nassau troops) fought particularly well in Lermenda. But especially with the loss of Ariñez to the south, there could only be one outcome. Darmagnac fell back to join Cassagne, d'Erlon's other division, by the villages of Crispijana and Zuazo in the final French line of resistance.

The most effective thing about this last stand, at about 5pm, on the line from Crispijana to Zuazo and Gomecha was the French use of artillery. The energetic General Tirlet, who had already used a substantial battery of artillery to prolong the defence of Ariñez, had formed up 76 guns, including six reserve batteries of 8 and 12pdrs. This caused the Allied infantry considerable trouble, making the northern part of the line impenetrable. But the Allies had a response, deploying probably over 70 guns themselves in a unique moment for the British led forces in the Peninsular. Both sides in this exchange apparently went for infantry targets rather than counterbattery fire, though the French had the better cover, including a reverse slope.

But there was a gap in the middle of the French line, between Zuazo and the highway. Gazan's men had not linked up with d'Erlon's to the north. And there was a further problem. Gazan appears to have made up his mind that it was a better idea to retreat than fight. As Wellington's men launched forward, after getting through the artillery barrage, they had little opposition in the south and centre. Gazan's men fled for the exit. D'Erlon and Tirlet put up some firm resistance between Crispijana and Zuazo, before being outflanked at both ends of the front (Vandeleur infiltrating along the river), with a brief further stand near the village of Ali. The battle was over.

AFTERMATH

The aftermath of a battle is usually of little interest to wargamers; by this time we are packing up and thinking of beer. I'll be brief – but in this case it was the most famous episode of the battle. An interesting scenario or two could be made out of it. Jourdan and Joseph had been heavily engaged at the front, and given little thought to a retreat. They don't even seem to have taken in that the Royal Highway was blocked. So all the valuables and *matériel* stayed firmly in place outside Vitoria. Then the civilians took fright. Perhaps a thousand vehicles headed for the only road out, the rough one to Salvatierra and Pamplona, and it became completely blocked in scenes of chaos. The hardware and treasure could not get out. Discipline broke and looting started. And then the British hussars arrived, and then more British to take part in an orgy of looting. Joseph and Jourdan barely escaped, but had to leave behind all their valuables, including Jourdan's marshal's baton. Almost all the guns were lost, and all the treasure, and all the trappings of the Joseph's state. The haul was breathtaking. Not for the first or last time British discipline was almost

completely lost. Many soldiers made their fortunes. A pursuit using Wellington's virtually unused cavalry was out of the question.

The French military losses, apart from equipment, were surprisingly light: nearly 5,000 killed and wounded and 2,800 prisoners. While Gazan's men got out by leaving early, if prematurely, Reille and d'Erlon showed some real discipline and skill in extracting their men from the mayhem. The Allies lost virtually the same in killed and wounded, as well as 80 prisoners, mainly from the unfortunate 71st. Marshal Soult, who took charge of the reorganised army in France, soon licked the French army back into shape, and there was to be some further hard fighting in the Pyrenees later that year.

But Napoleon's Spanish state was finished, and his loss of prestige immense. The non-military trophies were the most humiliating of all. And Wellington cemented his reputation as one the great generals of the era.