

Battle of Salamanca

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The **Battle of Salamanca** saw an Anglo-Hispano-Portuguese army under Viscount Wellington defeat Marshal Auguste Marmont's French forces among the hills around Arapiles south of Salamanca, Spain on July 22, 1812 during the Peninsular War.

The battle was a succession of strokes in oblique order, initiated by the Portuguese cavalry brigade and Pakenham's 3rd division, and continued by the British heavy cavalry and the 4th, 5th and 6th divisions. The French left wing was routed.

By chance, both Marmont and his deputy commander General Bonet were wounded by shrapnel in the first few minutes of firing. The French command confusion may have been decisive in creating the opportunity, which Wellington successfully seized and exploited.

Claudel, third in seniority, asserted command and ordered a counterattack by the French reserve toward the depleted Allied center. It had some success but Wellington had sent his reinforcements to the centre, and they decided the fight in his favour.

The losses were 3,129 British, 6 Spanish and 2,038 Portuguese against about 13,000 French. As a consequence of Wellington's victory, his army was able to advance to and liberate Madrid for two months, but then retreated back to Portugal. The French were forced to abandon Andalusia permanently, and the loss of Madrid irreparably damaged King Joseph's pro-French government.

Contents

- 1 Background
- 2 Forces
- 3 Maneuvers
- 4 Wellington strikes
- 5 Outcome
- 6 Action at Garcia Hernandez
- 7 Imperial Eagle
- 8 Cultural References
- 9 Notes

- 10 References
- 11 Further reading
- 12 External links

Background

The battle followed a frustrating period of six weeks for Wellington. His foray into central Spain in the spring of 1812 had been blocked by Marmont's army. As Wellington advanced, Marmont's strength grew as he received reinforcements. Wellington withdrew as the odds turned against him, with the armies often marching close together and Marmont repeatedly threatening Wellington's supply line. By this day, Wellington had finally decided to withdraw his army all the way back to Portugal. Suddenly, he observed that Marmont had made the tactical error of separating his left flank from his main body. (Wellington's reaction has been differently reported, with little emphasis that both he and Marmont had been looking for an opening for weeks.) He immediately ordered the major part of his army to attack the over-extended French left wing.

Forces

Marshal Marmont's 50,000-man Army of Portugal contained 8 infantry and 2 cavalry divisions, plus 78 artillery pieces. The infantry divisions were Maximilien Foy's 1st (4,900), Bertrand Clausel's 2nd (6,300), **Claude Fery's 3rd (5,400)**, Sarrat's 4th (5,000), Antoine Mascoux's 5th (5,000), Arnoize Brenier's 6th (4,300), Jean Thomières's 7th (4,300) and Jean Bonet's 8th (6,400). Pierre Boyer led 1,500 dragoons and Curto commanded 1,900 light cavalry. Louis Tirlot directed 3,300 artillerymen and there were also 1,300 engineers, military police and wagon drivers.

Wellington's 48,500-man army included 8 infantry divisions and 2 independent brigades, 5 cavalry brigades and 54 cannons. The infantry divisions were Henry Campbell's 1st (6,200), Edward Pakenham's 3rd (5,800), Lowry Cole's 4th (5,191), James Leith's 5th (6,700), Henry Clinton's 6th (5,500), John Hope's 7th (5,100) and Charles Alten's Light (3,500). Carlos D'España commanded a 3,400-man Spanish division, while Denis Pack (2,600) and Thomas Bradford (1,900) led Portuguese brigades.

Stapleton Cotton supervised the cavalry brigades. These included 1,000 British heavy dragoons led by John Le Marchant, 1,000 British light dragoons under George Anson, 700 Anglo-German light horse under Victor Alten, 800 King's German Legion (KGL) heavy dragoons led by George Hock and 500 Portuguese dragoons under Benjamin D'Urban. Hoylet Framingham commanded eight British (RHA: Ross, Bull, Macdonald; RA: Lawson, Gardiner, Greene, Douglas, May) and one Portuguese (Arriaga) six-gun artillery batteries.

Maneuvers

Early on July 22, Marmont's army was moving south, with its leading elements southeast of Salamanca. To the west, the Marshal could see Wellington's 7th Division deployed on a ridge. Spotting a dust cloud in the distance, Marmont surmised that most of the British army was in retreat and that he faced only a rearguard. He planned to move his French army south, then west to turn the British right flank.

Battle of Salamanca Part of the Peninsular War	
	
<i>Battle of Salamanca, etched by J. Clark, coloured by M. Dibourg.</i>	
Date	July 22, 1812
Location	Arapiles, Salamanca, Spain
Result	Decisive Allied victory
Belligerents	
 United Kingdom	 French Empire
 Portugal	
 Spain	
Commanders	
Earl of Wellington	Auguste Marmont
Strength	
51,949 ^[1]	49,647 ^[2]
Casualties and losses	
4,800 dead or wounded	6,000 dead or wounded
	7,000 captured ^[3]