

Marmont was mistaken. Wellington actually had most of his divisions hidden behind the ridge. His 3rd and 5th Divisions would soon arrive from Salamanca. Wellington had planned to retreat if outflanked, but he was watching warily to see if Marmont made a blunder.

Marmont planned to move along an L-shaped ridge, with its angle near a steep height known as the Greater Arapile. That morning, the French occupied only the short, north-pointing part of the L. For his flanking move, Marmont sent his divisions marching west along the long side of the L. The Anglo-Allied army lay behind another L-shaped ridge, inside and parallel to the French L, and separated from it by a valley. Unseen by the French, Wellington assembled a powerful striking force along the long side of the British L.

As Marmont reached to the west, the French became strung out along the long side of the L. Thomières's division led the way, supported by Curto's cavalry. After that came Maucune, Brenier and Clausel. Bonet, Sarrut and Boyer were near the Greater Arapile. Foy and Freyre still held the short side of the L.

Wellington strikes

When the 3rd Division and D'Urban's brigade reached the top of the French L, they attacked Thomières. At the same time, Wellington launched the 5th and 4th Divisions, backed by the 7th and 6th Divisions, at the long side of the French L.

The 3rd Division came at the head of Thomières's division in two-deep line. Formed in columns, the French charged and were routed by superior British tactics and firepower. Thomières was killed. Seeing British cavalry in the area, Maucune formed his division into squares. This was the standard formation to receive a mounted attack, but a poor one to defend against infantry. Deployed in two-deep line, Leith's 5th Division easily defeated Maucune in a musketry duel. As the French foot soldiers began falling back, Cotton hurled Le Marchant's brigade (5th Dragoon Guards, 3rd and 4th Dragoons) at them. Maucune's men were cut to pieces by the heavy cavalrymen's sabres. Many of the survivors surrendered.

Le Marchant hurriedly reformed his troopers and sent them at the next French division, which was winded from a rapid march. The heavy dragoons mauled Brenier's hastily-formed first line, but Le Marchant pressed his luck too far. He was killed trying to break a French square in Brenier's second line. William Personby succeeded to command of the brigade.

During this crisis, the French army lost its commander. As Pakenham's 3rd Division prepared to attack Thomières, Marmont finally woke up to his army's peril. He dashed for his horse, but was caught in a British shellburst which broke his arm and two ribs. His second-in-command, Bonet was wounded very soon after. Marmont claimed he was wounded as his wing became overextended, and his incapacitation led to the error not being corrected before Wellington attacked. His enemies placed his wounding during Wellington's attack. Records conflict. For somewhere between 20 minutes^[4] and over an hour^[5], the Army of Portugal remained leaderless.

Cole's 4th Division attacked Bonet's division and Pack's Portuguese assaulted the Greater Arapile. With the help of a 40-gun battery firing from the Greater Arapile, both attacks were repulsed by the French.

When the third-in-command, Clausel was finally located, he did his best to salvage a bad situation. He committed Sarrut's division to shore up the wrecked left flank. Clausel then launched a dangerous counterattack at Cole's 4th Division using his own and Bonet's divisions, supported by Boyer's dragoons. This

attack brushed aside Cole's survivors and struck the 6th Division in Wellington's second line. Marshal William Beresford reacted promptly to this developing threat and immediately sent William Spey's Portuguese brigade of the 5th Division to engage the French infantry, while Wellington moved the 1st and 7th Divisions to assist. After bitter resistance, the divisions of Clausel and Bonet were defeated. A general retreat began.

As the rest of the French army streamed away, Freyre formed his division in a single three-deep line, with each flank covered by a battalion in square. Led by Clinton's victorious 6th Division, the British came up to this formation and were initially repulsed. After ordering his artillery to crossfire through the centre of the French line, Wellington ordered a second assault. This attack broke Freyre's division and killed its commander.

Foy's division covered the French retreat toward Alba de Tormes where there was a bridge they could use to escape. Wellington, believing that the Alba de Tormes crossing was blocked by a Spanish battalion in a fortified castle, directed his pursuit along a different road. However, Maj-Gen D'España had withdrawn the unit without informing Wellington, so the French got away. The Army of Portugal suffered 7,000 killed and wounded and 7,000 captured. Besides Marmont's severe wounding, two divisional commanders were killed and another wounded. Half of the 5,214 Anglo-Allied losses came from the 4th and 6th Divisions. Cotton, Cole and Leith were wounded.

Outcome

The battle established Wellington as an offensive general. It was said that Wellington "defeated an army of 40,000 men in 40 minutes."^[6] Six days after the battle, Foy wrote in his diary,

This battle is the most cleverly fought, the largest in scale, the most important in results, of any that the English have won in recent times. It brings up Lord Wellington's reputation almost to the level of that of Marlborough. Up to this day we know his prudence, his eye for choosing good positions, and the skill with which he used them. But at Salamanca he has shown himself a great and able master of manoeuvring. He kept his dispositions hidden nearly the whole day: he allowed us to develop our movement before he pronounced his own: he played a close game; he utilised the oblique order in the style of Frederick the Great.^[7]

The Battle of Salamanca was a damaging defeat to the French. As the French regrouped, the Anglo-Portuguese entered Madrid on August 6 and attempted the Siege of Burgos, before retreating all the way back to Portugal in the autumn when renewed French concentrations threatened to trap them.

The victory was flawed by the failure of Spanish troops to guard a crucial escape route over the bridge at Alba de Tormes, possibly by a misunderstanding between Spanish and British commanders. The pursuit was ineffective at capturing the fleeing French.

Action at Garcia Hernandez

The following day, Wellington's King's German Legion (KGL) heavy dragoons performed the astounding feat of "breaking a square" and overrunning a portion of the French rear guard in the Battle of Garcia Hernandez. Moreover, they accomplished this twice within a few minutes.

Imperial Eagle

The Imperial Eagle of the French 62nd Line (Thomières) was captured by Lieutenant Pearce of the 2/44th East Essex Regiment, a part of Lieutenant General Leith's 5th Division. Additionally, the Eagle of the 22nd Line regiment was found among a pile of French dead by a Portuguese caçador.